

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, October 21, 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 resume.

**Mr. Young:** Good Morning, Madam Chair. Sorry I was just informing you that the Minister of Public Utilities is on his way back to his seat.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities.

*Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, \$2,791,253,400.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Public Utilities to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Good morning, Minister.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Good morning. As always it is indeed an honour to address this Standing Finance Committee of Parliament this morning. Since being appointed the Minister of Public Utilities just over two years ago, I have set my hands as you could say on the “wheel” in attempting to transform the public utilities service that falls under my preview. As our Mission Statement clearly states, our mandate is to facilitate the effective delivery of efficient, affordable and quality public utilities services through a committed, resourceful team of professionals in close collaboration with all stakeholders.

The journey to achieving this mandate has been challenging as it has been stimulating and in some cases rewarding. Despite the growth and the positive

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change that we have effected, there is still a lot of work to be done that will seriously—because we have a lot of things that were outstanding that needed to be fixed.

Madam Chairman, our understanding and anticipation of the facts has led us to a prolonged and multi-layered approach to many of the challenges facing the utilities sector. Over the past year, for example, we have continued with our strategy of promoting conservation as sustainable living, not just with regard to water, but also electricity and waste management. This, of course, is in keeping with our national development strategy of *Vision 2030* which deals with the important issues of climate change, the use renewable resources, water, food and energy security, among others.

With regard to the water sector we continue to aggressively address the imbalance of demand and supply through the establishment and rehabilitation of the necessary infrastructure. As it relates to electricity, we continue to build modern climate resilient infrastructure that will meet the growing electricity needs of Trinidad and Tobago for decades to come.

It must be noted, Madam Chairman, that even as we improve the reliability and the quality of our service, we have also focused our efforts on extending this service to the under-served groups within our societies. These programmes which will facilitate this include the community work improvement programme, the rewiring and electrification programme and the utility assistance programme. Over the fiscal, all these efforts, particularly those related to the reliability of our service and their sustainable use, will be accelerated and intensified.

Madam Chairman, we at the Ministry of Public Utilities look forward to the year ahead with all of its challenges. As you are aware, we are facing intense challenges coming forward as a result of climate change. We have a lot of work to

do especially in the water sector, because there are lots of things that need to be done; infrastructural work, et cetera. But we continue our mantra in trying to do more with less, with the limited resources that we have, we try to make sure as much as possible that as I have been the analogy “we try to fix the plane while it is in the air”, and try to ensure that this service that the population is provided—all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are provided with a reliable supply of water. That is our goal and that is our mission. I thank you.

*Question proposed:* That Head 39 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,791,253,400 for Head 39, Ministry of Public Utilities 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*. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Under the Item, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I see there is an increase by some \$200,000, marginal increase. What is that for?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The increase would be used for the payment of increments, arrears for acting appointment and promotions. The 2020 Estimates would cover the Ministry's 110 staff. We do have acting and promotions, we have the PS and we have the Deputy PS, et cetera, and other acting appointments.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002: Meteorological Services; Item 005: Electrical Inspectorate. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, just a quick question on 01, under

Electrical Inspectorate. Could you say how many employees there are at that department? And how many vacant positions?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** With regard to Electrical Inspectorate, we have 41 substantive holders, we have seven vacancies.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Good morning to all. Good morning, Madam Chair.

**Hon. Members:** Good morning.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 42, hon. Minister, Street Lighting. You had 121 million allocated in 2019 as your estimate and the revised is 31 million. Could have you give an understanding of what happened when you were allocated 121 and you basically spent 31 according to the Revised Estimate?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Again, if you would repeat, you said we had 100 and—?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** One twenty-one million for 2019, allocated under the budgetary allocation.

**Madam Chairman:** And we are on page 249.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 249, thank you, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** You are welcome.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And the Revised Estimate was 31 million.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You just want to give us an appreciation of the difference in what was given to you and what was to be spent according to the Revised Estimate?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** All right. Okay. Well, the 121 that was given to me was really for street lighting programme.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, we understand that.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Okay. The payment in 2018, fiscal payment in 2018 covered 15 months and the payment for fiscal 2019 payment covered September 2018 to January. So really what you have been really is really a sort of run over of the payments. All right. So it is not a true reflection of what happened in 2018 was the amount. The figure in 2018 represented some figures in 2019. And therefore, the amounts that happened, the Revised Estimate is really what the actual amount that was going to be spent in 2019 and therefore, 2020 figure of 50 million is in keeping with making those payments.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So you would have spent about 31million in 2018/2019?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes. The Revised Estimate for 2019 is 31 million.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So you said that there was a carryover from '18 to '19. What was the carry over that enabled you to get a budgetary allocation of 121 million?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** All right. In fiscal 2018, as I said, the arrears of 66 million is estimated 110—All right, I will get back to you with the correct explanation.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And perhaps just give us an appreciation of the necessity for moving from 31 million to 50 million if that is an increase work that you think you have.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes. Well in the case of that, I mean, there are a lot of increased requests for street lighting that we have based on our Estimates that I have from a number of individuals. And therefore, we have anticipated that we will have to do a little bit more street lighting to satisfy the needs in 2020. Hence, the reason for the increase.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Ganga, you have—

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to line Item 34: University Graduate Recruitment Programme, there is an allocation in 2019 of a million. Was

that allocation utilized, because there is another allocation of a million in 2020?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, that allocation for \$1 million for the university programme that was not utilized.

**Mr. Singh:** Is there any specific reason as to why, given the unemployment rate amongst university graduates?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** There are some procedures as regard to what it is the criteria to be used and so forth and those things were not worked. And we expect that it will be worked out this year for us to be able to utilize it.

**Mr. Singh:** So this was a significant programme by the Minister in the Budget of 2019 for the recruitment of university graduates. So you are saying that the procedures were not worked out and that therefore there was no—what you are telling us there was no employment of graduates as a result of procedural hindrances?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, there was no employment of graduates under this particular programme, utilizing this particular funding, and this particular allocation.

**Mr. Singh:** Okay, Madam Chair. Line Item 53, Refunds to WASA Re: Water Improvement Rate. There is a significant increase of \$65 million for the 2020 Estimates from 231 in 2019, the Revised Estimates. For purposes of the population, hon. Minister, perhaps you should explain what is the Water Improvement Rate and justify the significant increase of 65million?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, the Water Improvement Rate is really the additional rate that is charged, additional tax that is put on the Point Lisas and those are funds that are paid and comes back to WASA as recurrent. It is paid and then it goes into the Consolidated Fund and comes back to WASA. In this case, there has been some arrears payments for the amounts for last year that were not paid to WASA that is going to be taken up in this year's funding and hence, the reason for the increase.

It is just really an allocation of moneys that comes to WASA, paid to the Consolidated Fund, comes back to WASA and that is one quarter of a payment that is being estimated in 2020.

**Mr. Singh:** So I take it then therefore, this 65million is arrears of moneys due to WASA as a result of the collection of the Water Improvement Rate by the Government and the non-payment to the Water and Sewerage Authority? There is no significant—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** There is no.

**Mr. Singh:**—utilization by Point Lisas.

**10.15 a.m.**

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, there is no significant utilization. It is just that arrears—

**Mr. Singh:**—[*Inaudible*]—the average.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** It is just the amount being estimated in 2020.

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

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yeah. A couple of questions, Chair. On the Street Lighting, 42, how is that 50 million split? You mentioned that they are based on requests. Is there a programme that is set and then to that you add the request or is it based on a universal set of requests from the different constituencies and they are allocated on that basis?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, you know, we get a lot of requests from different Ministries, all right. We get a lot of requests that come in and the request is allocated accordingly. Now, this is also the line on which you pay. Remember, at the Ministry, we pay all of our bills for electricity, for all of this lighting. So this is really the payment of the bills for street lighting.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Oh, it is for the bills incurred.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** So it is no new street lighting?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, this is not for new street lighting per se. We have that under another allocation.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Another allocation. Okay. And 46, Natural Disasters, you have a \$50,000 there. What would this be used for? Preparation for what?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The amount was an estimate in the event of a natural disaster.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I know, but what would it focus on?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I mean, it is fairly broad-based in the case of, if you do have—we do have climate change. We have a lot of things that are coming on board and, therefore, should there be a natural disaster, we would need to be able to have some funding to deal with that, and it really is just dealing with anything that you could anticipate—whether it is flooding, whether it is wind—whatever it is with regard to a natural disaster. You know, part of this is continuity planning in dealing with disaster preparedness.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay, all right. So, I get the impression that it might be actually for that, business continuity. Is it for that?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** And the final thing—you will get a chance to clarify—is there any chance—53, through you, Madam Chairman—that there will be any increase in water rate over the next year?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** That again, for sure, no. There is not going to be any increase. So that increase is not to be as a result of water rate increases next year.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Chair, my question was addressed. Thank you.

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



**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, in your explanation to the Member for Chaguanas West in relation to item 53, you explained that there is the WASA issue in Point Lisas, and I see you have water improvement rate. I am a little—I lack the knowledge in terms of what it really means, so if you could be kind enough to explain it to us.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Okay. When the RIC passes rate, so there is a rate that we all pay. With regard to the water in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate—again, that water was provided by Desalcott at a very high rate—those individuals in the Industrial Estate itself, they do not—well, the rate is the rate by the RIC. What was decided to deal with allowing them to pay a little bit more, per as industrial customers, because we put the desalination plant to give them a reliability of supply and they had no problem in paying more to get that reliability of supply. So what was done was a tax that was charged to these individuals, and that is what makes up this water improvement rate. So a special tax is charged to them, but all taxes need to find themselves back into the Consolidated Fund and, therefore, it finds its way back into the Consolidate Fund and then it comes back to WASA and then WASA pays the bill to the desalination company under the materials and supplies. So it is that rate, that additional amount that is paid to the individuals, paid by the industrial customers for water.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you for the clarity, Minister, but just one more area on that. You would have a number of companies under public utilities for which you are offering that payment to WASA and so on for. What are some of these companies within the Point Lisas grouping under public utilities?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** All the companies in Point Lisas will be—well, it used to be the iron and steel company. It will be the methanol company. It will be the urea company. It will be those types of industrial customers who require a certain type

of upgrade water. I mean, I do not think you want me to provide a whole list.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no, no. You have done very well, I appreciate it. Thank you.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a matter of clarification for those who are listening in. The water improvement rate is charged under the Waterworks and Water Conversation Act and, therefore, it is by way of legislation, and that is why there is this circular requirement of it goes into the Consolidated Fund and then comes out back to pay, and it is really for Point Lisas, and the justification has always been you take three tonnes of water to make a tonne of methanol or urea or ammonia. So that is processed water. It is part of their industrial thrust.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002, Metrological Services, on page 250. Item 005, Electrical Inspectorate. Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001, General Administration; Item 002, Metrological Services; Item 005, Electrical Inspectorate. Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001, Regional Bodies; Item 003, United Nations Organizations; Item 007, Households. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, the Utilities Assistance Programme has an increase from 3.4 million to 4 million in 2020 Estimates. Could you tell us how many recipients are within this programme and the geographical spread of the recipients?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** All right. In fiscal 2020 funds will be utilized for the Utilities Assistance Programme. The projected beneficiaries for fiscal 2020 is 13,800. There is also the Water Tank Assistance Programme, the projected beneficiaries for fiscal 2020 is about 70 households; and the Solar Assistance Programme, the projected beneficiaries of five households. All right? For 2019, we had the water tank assistance. They had 32 beneficiaries. The Solar Panel Assistance, we had

two beneficiaries and the Utilities Assistance Programme, we had about 132 beneficiaries in T&TEC and 12,272 beneficiaries with regard to WASA. So that is a kind of idea of the programme. The increase is relatively small. We kind of looking at continuing to provide—we have a lot of back-up requests—and, therefore, our projections are a lil bit based on the estimates that we have seen for requests coming into the programme.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, line Item 08—

**Madam Chairman:** 0, excuse?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Under 007, line Item 08.

**Madam Chairman:** 08.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Refunds to T&TEC with respect to rebate on electricity bills, 50 million allocated in 2019. According to the Revised Estimates, 13 million utilized, so 37 million not utilized, and in 2020 your Estimates is 40 million. Could you give a little explanation on that nomenclature of rebate on electricity bills? What it signifies? Is it money paid back to T&TEC?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, all right. So the estimate for 2020, we are looking again to pick up on some arrears payments that needs to be paid in 2020.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** To T&TEC?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And that will be as a result of what?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, this is, again—this particular programme is a programme where we assist individuals where their bills are up to \$300, then you get a rebate of 25 per cent.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I think I know where you are going there. So that is fine. You have answered it.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Okay, thank you.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Minister, I did not quite understand something you said just now. Under the Utilities Assistance Programme, when you were outlining the beneficiaries, you said solar heating, five. Is that correct?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Not solar heating, solar panel assistance.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. This programme is not connected to the incentives provided by the Minister of Finance in the budget this year for solar panel?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No.

**Dr. Tewarie:** This is something that existed before?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes. This is something that existed before. This is for people who are outside of the grid and you could be able to get a solar panel if required to help in providing electricity.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. I understand. Thank you for the clarification.

**Mr. Singh:** Under line Item 40, Gratuities to Contract Officers. Hon. Minister, I see that there is an allocation of 3.7 million and this is a new Sub-Item. Prior to this allocation, were there not gratuities paid to contract officers?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** This is the amount that is going to be paid this year. There are 52 people through this line Item. Prior to that, they were paid by the Comptroller of Accounts. So, it is just an allocation now to this particular line Item for them to be paid.

**Mr. Imbert:** Can I just say that this is the same point I made before, that we have decentralized the gratuities throughout the Ministries and agencies.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009, Other Transfers. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, line Item 04, which is the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (TTPost). Is this an expenditure incurred from TTPost which the Ministry of Public Utilities has to pay for?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** This is really the subvention that is given to TTPost to run their

operations, the additional subvention that is given to them to run their operations.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thanks. Does TTPost generate an income for itself? Because you said if this subvention—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, yes. This is the supplemental income that is given to them to run their operations.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Would it be possible to give the national community an appreciation of what income TTPost generates so that you, the State and us—all of us, taxpayers, have to pay 70 million to TTPost? Why can it not be self-sufficient and you do not have to pay 70 million to them?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, okay, for example, the revenue for TTPost and TTPost, we have been trying as much as possible to increase the revenue. As you will realize, the postal system, the actual post from the mail is actually decreasing, but we have been working with TTPost over the years in increasing revenue in other areas, especially areas like courier systems. So, for example, in 2018, the revenue for TTPost was \$66 million, but the expenditure is 141. All right? In 2019, the revenue is 68 million, but the expenditure is 147. In 2020, the expenditure is 77 million.

**10.30 a.m.**

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And that is the major expenditure? Is it as—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Sorry, not the expenditure, my apologies, the revenue. I am giving you revenue figures as you asked.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Your proposed revenue, yeah. But the expenditure, is it as a result of, a major part, is it personnel or is it—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No. Well, the expenditure side of TTPost. You know, TTPost is, again, getting more into new business to be able to generate the revenue, like the courier side of the business. So what we have been trying to do is to, you

know, transform TTPost and try to see if they could get into new items, new lines of business which is increasing their expenditure but it is also giving them increased revenue. Because that is an organization that needs to reposition itself, as you will understand, revenue for mail, which is a bulk of the operation, is actually reducing. So we have to do something to try to reduce that level of subvention over time, and how do we go about getting into new lines of business in TTPost to increase the revenue, that is the challenge, and that is the transformation that needs to happen in TTPost, because right now it is a drain on the Treasury.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you. Madam Chair, may I be privileged to, while I am on this line Item, could I ask some questions on a few, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23, which basically revolve around almost the same thing—

**Madam Chairman:** Once you are on 009?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, I am on—

**Madam Chairman:** Once you are on 009 you can proceed.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah. Hon. Minister, line Item 14 first. Let us take that. That is the T&TEC Repayment of Loan to Cove Power Station. That is a loan taken when and what was the amount of the loan and how much has been paid so far?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The actual details of the loan, the loan was taken in 2010, right, and it is due to end in 2021.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is 11 years.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** It is a US \$76 million Government loan and it was used really to upgrade the Cove Power Station and to increase the power supply there. We needed to increase Cove in Tobago to make them more resilient and more reliant on themselves so we have put in new power supplies in Tobago that has now taken them up. I think power in Tobago is now up. If I am not mistaken it is over 100 megawatts.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Right. Okay. I understand the significance of the Cove Power, but I just wanted to have an appreciation when the loan will end and you gave that answer.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Okay.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Could you similarly indicate, you have two large loans, T&TEC of \$812 million that covers line Item 18 and 19 with principal and interest, and then another \$800 million in 20 and 21 which covers principal and interest. In the same manner could you indicate when the loans were taken, how much and when it ends? That is the monthly payment, yearly payment towards the principal and interest. If you do not have it there we—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** All right, so in 2015 the Government agreed to the conversion of T&TEC's debt to TGU, which was at the time about a \$1.6 billion loan. All right. So that was for 18, that is that loan. So as a result of the arrangements with TGU and the taking of electricity, and so forth, from TGU which is the power supplier to T&TEC, there was an outstanding loan there and that was that loan. The other loan that you are talking about was which one?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, when does the loan end for number 18, the same one you are speaking about, TGU?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The TGU loan ends, from my records, in 2026.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** In 2026, so that is seven more years, probably, at about \$90 million a year. So we still owe approximately \$630 million on that loan?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I will give way to your matter at this point in time. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** “Doh worry.” And then the other one on line Item 20—well, this one is 800million not 812 million, that is a separate loan. Could you give the explanations on that one, when was it taken, for how long and with respect to what?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** That particular loan, I am being advised, was done in two tranches, all right. One was eight years and one was 14 years. So the one for eight years that is going to be due in 2026 and the one for 14 years is due in 2032.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Wow. And that is the one here that you are paying approximately 40 million per year?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So 13 more years you still owe 420 million there? So with both loans we owe approximately one billion, 420 plus 630?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** What, I beg your pardon?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I said with both loans we still possibly owe close to one billion maturing in 2026 and 2032. The Minister of Finance has a good mathematical brain so let us hear him.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes. I just was enquiring if you are asking about the loan of \$1.6 billion the UNC took one week before the general election in 2015 for T&TEC. Are you talking about that loan?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You have two loans—

**Mr. Imbert:** Are you speaking about that one?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I am not knowledgeable about—

**Mr. Imbert:** The one you all took one week before the general election, \$1.6 billion with a short-term, with a six months repayment. Are you speaking about that one? We had to refinance that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, I am speaking about the one that is on—

**Mr. Imbert:** No, we had to refinance that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no, no, no.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are saying, no?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Your colleague said that there is a loan taken that is expiring in



2026 and one taken that is expiring in 2032. Those are the two loans that I am asking—

**Mr. Imbert:** There was one for 1.6 billion which expired in February of 2016 which we had to refinance. This could be it, 1.6 billion.

**Mr. Hinds:** One of many like that.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** You see, we had to refinance it. When the loan was taken, it was a short-term facility and then it needed to be refinanced, and what we have done is to refinance it over a longer term facility between eight years and a 14-year loan. So the two loans was really that short-term loan that was there that needed to then be extended.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But in effect was to pay TGU?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And that was a necessity?

**Mr. Imbert:** They took it out one week before the general election with a six months repayment. You could believe that, \$1.6 billion?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But it was to pay TGU?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** To be repaid in six months.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. Okay. But you still owe \$1 billion on it. After four years you owe \$1 billion.

**Mr. Hinds:** Madam Chair—

**Madam Chairman:** Just a minute.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, I mean, when it matured we could not find the 1.6 billion and therefore you needed to spread it out over a long period, and now this is just the repayments now that we are servicing the loan. So these are the servicing payments of the loan over that period, and those were the types of terms that we

felt the cash flow could have afforded the country to pay?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Could you give an appreciation of what the interest rate is like? Was it a 5 per cent, 8 per cent, 10 per cent, as this Government is prone to do, loans that are .5 per cent?

**Mr. Imbert:** We negotiated better interest rates than what you negotiated.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The rates on the eight-year is about 4.3, 2.23 and the rate on the 14-year is about 5.28, so the rates are not that bad.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But it could have been better. [*Laughter*]

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance, one minute, I am recognizing the Acting Attorney General. You wanted to make an intervention?

**Mr. Hinds:** Just for clarification I just wanted to find out from this Committee if that was part of the horrific bed of thorns that they had left for us, Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, it was. Yes, it was. Oil at \$26 and we had to pay back 1.6 billion.

**Mr. Hinds:** Oh, how—

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

**Dr. Tewarie:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Water Resource Management Unit. Okay, I saw that in 2019 the money was not spent, and I see it is here again. What are you trying to do with that? Are you establishing something new?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Let me just go back to page 254.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Page 254. It is the same page actually.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, that is the Water Resource Management Unit.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** That is a unit that we allocated some money. It was not done, as

you say—

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yeah, I realize.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** It was not—

**Dr. Tewarie:** I am not trying to find out anything except is that a new unit that you are sort of establishing in the Ministry to deal with the question of water resource? I would imagine things like water capture and stuff like that, I do not know if— Or is it managing the existing resources? I just need to understand it clearer.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, it is a project that we are looking at probably to improve the management at the Ministry in dealing with this particular water resource management. It is something that we are exploring.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** And therefore hence the allocation for 2020.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. And I noticed the next one, 03: Waste Recycling Management Authority, it was not established and there is no allocation. What has happened to that?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The recycling business is now being handled at SWMCOL.

**Dr. Tewarie:** SWMCOL?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** By SWMCOL.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** And therefore all of the whole recycling agency, we have decided to deal with all of that as a unit in SWMCOL. So funding for that is under SWMCOL.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. And 04: Postal Corporation, this allocation here, does it include the completion of this zip code exercise?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** And when is that likely to be completed?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** We are expecting that this should be done—this 42 exercises—we are targeting to have it completed by the end of the year; this year meaning December calendar year.

**Dr. Tewarie:** This year?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** All right. Okay. And is the zip code system—I mean, I am just asking you this as a general question. I know that the specificity of it is not your responsibility, but is this zip code system going to be aligned with the capacity of the EBC to send out notices for elections, for instance, both for the local and the general, or will it be ready only for the general? You know, they send out notices to people to say, this is your polling station, this is your number, et cetera.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, again, the zip code system, as you know, it is a long outstanding project.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I know that.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Linking it with whether or not it would be aligned with the EBC and those issues surrounding there—I mean, you are right, I mean, the zip code system is an upgrade of a particular project to allow Trinidadians and Tobagonians to have a proper zip code. That project will be completed, hopefully, by December, give or take a few months into January. How that system is then going to be utilized thereafter, and it is operational even as we speak as one area is fixed, the individuals utilize their zip code even now. So there are people who are utilizing their new zip code address and we hope to have that project completed by December, January. How it is utilized thereafter, I cannot speak to that.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. And one final question. It is a general question, Minister, about T&TEC and it is up to you to answer it. Recently there was a problem of

electricity generation on supply involving TGU that resulted in, basically, loss of electricity in different parts of the country. I just wondered if there was a particular problem that needed to be addressed or is it something that simply happened and it was addressed already and it is done for?

**10.45 a.m.**

**Hon. Le Hunte:** To the best of my knowledge there is no permanent issue. So it would have had to be a temporary one that would have happened between TGU and T&TEC, that resulted in something, mechanical problems, but there is no problems per se or no ongoing outstanding problem between generation in supply that is offset.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay, thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister. With respect to the Water Resource Management Unit, I am a bit puzzled, because I was of the opinion that the Government had taken a policy position to separate the Water Resources Agency from under the aegis of the Water and Sewerage Authority, and I thought that this allocation was in fact consistent with that. But the explanation you gave was not consistent with what was in my mind, so perhaps I need to get some clarity on that issue.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** It is still a government. It is still something that the Government has been contemplating. We continue to look at that, and I agree that is best practice. We need to determine the execution of it, and if we do that, to one extent one of the models that is being contemplated in that separation is to bring that aspect of the unit within the Ministry, to help to facilitate that separation as an interim measure. This particular funding will be really, as we explore the different models, to set it up. This is one of the options that we have catered for in this

budget to facilitate that separation.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you. I think it is kind of late in the day at this stage. But nevertheless, Item 04: Postal Corporation. Could you indicate how many vacancies there exist in the postal corporation? I know that you have quite a challenge in getting a full-time CEO in the corporation. So could you indicate how many vacancies, how many acting positions? And if you do not have that, you could provide it subsequently.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, I definitely would have to provide that later.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, on line Item 02, I am just asking if this unit that is established here will be addressing outstanding issues in particular. I have two outstanding issues in my constituency which is the laying of pipes from Fishing Pondthrough Caigual, as well as the booster that requires three-phase electricity. Would this unit address situations like this?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No.

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

**Madam Chairman:** Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 06: Water and Sewerage Authority. Minister, there is a decrease of 311,236,000.

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute, sorry. We are not at Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and other Bodies. The Item, Member for Chaguanas West, is limited to 254. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under 011: Transfers to State Enterprise, line Item 02: Solid Waste Management Company Limited. Could you give us an understanding about what is the complement of personnel within

Solid Waste? That is one.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I will have to get back to you with those figures.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And similarly what I asked previously on the Postal Corporation, do they generate revenue and how much do they generate on an annual basis?

**Madam Chairman:** So you have gone back?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, it is the same line Item 02, same question, but a second question on it.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I will get back to you on that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** On that, how much they generate.

**Mr. Singh:** Hon. Minister, with respect to the Solid Waste Management Company Limited, has a CEO been appointed to that enterprise?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, one was identified, and I think, if I am not mistaken, the person should be taking up the offer November 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so we move on Members. Sub-Head 01: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and other Similar Bodies. We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue*—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, the MP for Chaguanas West had asked a question on 51.

**Madam Chairman:** We are now getting there.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You are now getting there.

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah. Okay? Thank you.

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*. 51, Water and Sewerage Authority. Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Is that where you are, Chaguanas

West?

**Mr. Singh:** No, I was at the global figure in which there is a reduction of \$300million to the Water and Sewerage Authority in the previous book, Madam Chair. I wanted to find out, how can the Minister expect the Water and Sewerage Authority to function with that significant reduction in expenditure?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The major reduction really centres around materials and supplies, and bills and the payment of money in that particular area for desalinated water which is approximately—about \$6 million a year? US \$6 million a month. So that particular area was dealt with. The payment on that bill which is no longer catered for in there, and that will be dealt with from other sources of funding. So it is really then a reduction in an allocation to pay that water bill for Desalcott in that line item.

**Mr. Singh:** Just for purposes of my clarity, Madam Chair, it means that therefore because there is less purchase of water from Desalcott you have that reduction?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, no, no. I said there is a payment of water to Desalcott—will not be done through materials and supplies which it was previously done and therefore hence the reduction of 300million. It is not that it will be taken. It just will be paid for from a different process.

**Mr. Singh:** So then where is the payment going to come from now for Desalcott water?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The payment for that water will be done via a loan that will then be taken to pay for them.

**Mr. Singh:** Now, Minister, you indicated in your answer that it is not coming from materials and supplies.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No.

**Mr. Singh:** Is this going to in any way, this reduction, impact upon your capital



programme?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, it will not have any impact on my capital programme.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, you indicated just a while ago that you intend to take a loan to pay for the Desalcott water.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** What is your proposed loan that you are looking for, and in terms of payment of close to 500 million per year for Desalcott water?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** That loan is presently being negotiated and it will be funded. So Desalcott water will be funded from that proceeds of that loan.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So not from the 1.6 billion that you allocate to WASA now?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Minister, is there a reason why you are using loan financing to finance basically what is a recurrent expenditure for water?

**Mr. Imbert:** The Desalcott project has cost this country between five and \$10 billion since inception—billion.

**Dr. Rambachan:** TT?

**Mr. Imbert:** Billion, yes TT. And when you think about it, it might have been a better idea to build some dams. I am sure you could have built adequate dams for \$10 billion. It has become impossible to finance the Desalcott expenditure out of recurrent revenues—impossible, so that we have to go by way of loan financing. We simply do not have the cash flow.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Minister, through you Chair, the water from the Desalcott plant, was it not really supposed to be used by the industries mainly in Point Lisas, and therefore they should have been a charged a rate of return that would have returned the expenditure?

**Mr. Imbert:** That is a fact, but the Point Lisas industries were the profit centre of WASA. You understand?

**Dr. Rambachan:** I do not know if I am hearing you.

**Mr. Imbert:** Do you understand what I am saying?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, I do not.

**Mr. Imbert:** By purchasing expensive water from Desalcott, it reduced the free cash flow of WASA because the water sold to the industrial estate was a profit centre for WASA. By using expensive desalinated water, the profitability of the operation went down, reducing the free cash flow to WASA.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So what you did, you took the Desalcott water and distributed it to residential?

**Mr. Imbert:** We did not do that. You did that. UNC did that. UNC sent the desalinated water into the—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay, so it is distributed to residential, and you are saying it was a bad decision?

**Mr. Imbert:** You did that; ask yourself.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Whether we did it or who did it—

**Mr. Imbert:** You are asking me whether your decision was a good decision? Ask yourself; come on.

**Dr. Rambachan:** If it was a bad decision, why did you not reverse the decision and do what you thought was right?

**Dr. Rowley:** We could not reverse it, you all expanded it.

**Mr. Imbert:** There is a contract in place, a long-term contract for the purchase of desalinated water. Did you want us to cancel that?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Are you paying for the desal water in US dollars?

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, and that is another problem.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So you are paying for water, you are paying \$72 million a year—

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—if I heard the Minister right, which is about TT \$500 million a year to Desalcott.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Why are you paying them in US dollars?

**Mr. Imbert:** That is the contract that you entered into. You contracted the country.

**Dr. Rambachan:** In a similar manner, Minister, when you went and you renegotiated other contracts, what prevented you from going and renegotiating the contract with Desalcott to pay in TT dollars since the water is low? If you have a foreign exchange problem and you have US \$72 million being paid for basically what are local raw materials—

**Mr. Imbert:** Not able. You negotiated a US dollar contract and telling us to go and break it?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** And these individuals, these companies would have then probably, because of that contract, borrowed money in US dollars based on the fact that they had a contract for a US dollar inflow, and as such it is not that easy to just change the contract on them like that.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Diego Martin West.

**Dr. Rowley:** Madam Chair, I just want to put on the record, out of fear that this conversation might be misunderstood, that when we went into desalinated water, this problem that we are now experiencing was raised as a potential, and the question is on the *Hansard* as to whether this desalinated water will enter the domestic supply, and the answer was no. We entered into the contract and then the

water entered the domestic system, and has been there and it was expanded. And as a result of that, that project has bankrupted WASA permanently, and we now have to borrow money, because where we were earning money in Point Lisas, we now have to find money to pay, and that has put WASA into a permanent bankruptcy. So I do not want anybody on the other side to come here and misrepresent that, because I prosecuted that case in the Opposition when we went into desalinated water, and that is a fact. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So I will take the hands in this order, Member for Laventille West, then Member for Caroni East.

**Mr. Hinds:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just in following on the very powerful submission just made by the Member for Diego Martin West, if I not mistaken that contract takes us to 2036.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** It was renegotiated.

**Mr. Hinds:** Yes, renegotiated to 2036.

**Dr. Rowley:** The volume was expanded, and the cost was increased.

**Madam Chairman:** So I now recognize Member for Chaguanas West and then Caroni East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think I need to bring some veracity to the conversation here. [*Desk thumping*]

In 1999, the contract was for 24 million gallons of water to serve the Point Lisas estate. Subsequently, the Manning administration entered into negotiation to increase the quantum of water to 45 and 60-something million gallons of water per day from Desalcott. In the meantime, in that interregnum, the Manning administration, the PNM, entered into an arrangement with Seven Seas for a desalination plant in Point Fortin at twice the cost of the water produced at Point Lisas.

So when I hear this born-again approach, evangelical approach, that they deny the existence of their decision-making, you would recall, Members would recall that in 2010 Prime Minister Manning had plans to build five desalination plants throughout this country.

There was a desalination plant in La Lune, Moruga by the Korean company that did not bring out one pint of clear water, but was abandoned.

**11.00 a.m.**

So what was happening and the rationale then, and the rationale for provision of water, public water supply was being utilized to fund big business, and that is what the Member for Diego Martin West was supporting then, and the deprivation of the people. At the time it was affordable, now circumstances have changed, and like a lot of people who now get in trouble with the “me too movement”, the reality today is quite different.

**Madam Chairman:** So—

**Mr. Imbert:** No. I would like to come, if there is nobody else.

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. I will allow you. I believe Caroni East's hand was up before yours.

**Mr. Imbert:** Sure. Sure.

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

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** In the same the way the hon. Prime Minister and a team went to renegotiate contracts in the energy sector, four years in government, if the Prime Minister felt that this was an onerous issue, why could he not have gone to renegotiate this, bearing in mind previously, contracts could be renegotiated. Did he seek to renegotiate any of those contracts?

**Madam Chairman:** I will allow the Minister of Finance to answer. And after this, we are going to go in the particular order, because this is going to come back

again, when we deal with WASA under Transfers. Okay? Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just want to set the record straight. This discussion is about the Point Lisas Desalination Plant. This line Item deals with payment by WASA for water produced by the Point Lisas Desalination Plant. This line Item is about nothing else. And that US \$72 million is the cause of WASA's very tenuous financial situation. WASA cannot afford to pay US \$72 million a year for that desalinated water. It accepts that water from Desalcott at a loss. If WASA was not burdened with that huge expenditure, that expensive water, WASA might very well be breaking even or in the black. I just want the public to know that that desalinated water, that decision of the Panday administration of 1995 to 2001—yeah—1995 to 2001, that decision to enter into a contract to construct and purchase water from a desalination plant has bankrupted WASA.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, what I suggested is that, I took a question under the global issue. It has now narrowed down to a particular issue which will we deal with in its turn. Okay? All right. So we are at Item 001: General Administration, page 189. Sub-Head 02: Good and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head—sorry.

**Dr. Rambachan:** We have gone from 01 totally?—General Administration.

**Madam Chairman:** I called 01, Item 001: General Administration, I paused.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Right. Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** I saw no one—

**Dr. Rambachan:** No. Well—

**Madam Chairman:**—so I went onto Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well, maybe you missed my hand.

**Madam Chairman:** Excuse me.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I need to put my hand higher.

**Madam Chairman:** Sorry. Where are you?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Because I am on salaries and cost of living.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So we are at—I am recalling and I ask everybody to kindly pay attention because—

**Dr. Rambachan:** I am paying attention.

**Madam Chairman:** No. No. I am not making any personal judgment. I am saying I would ask everybody to pay attention because we are breaching the rules that we have set for ourselves. Sub-Head, 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Right. 2019 the Revised Estimates was \$350 million, but I noticed that in 2020 the Estimate is \$213.9 million which is cut of \$136 million. How are you going to support this cut? Or what is the nature of this cut without cutting personnel in the organization? Because salaries and cost of living, in my view, supports personnel. So if you are cutting from 350 million to 214million, does that represent a cut in personnel?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No. It is just a reclassification of contract workers to contract employees rather than it being carried here, so it is a reclassification. No cutting of workers, no increase in water rates, no cutting of workers.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Can we move on? Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Under the same heading Good and Services, line Item 16.

**Madam Chairman:** No. No. No. Just now.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You are not there yet?

**Madam Chairman:** I went back. No. Are we finished with Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure? Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Madam Chair, thank you. Item 06: Remuneration to Board Members. What is the justification for this increase from 500,000 Revised Estimates in 2019 to 627,000, an increase of 127,000 for board members?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** We had three vacancies that we have put on the board this year, and therefore we are catering for it to be carried forward.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** We needed some additional skills on the board.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Yeah. Item—I noticed, Madam Chair, that the Overtime for Daily-Rated Workers has decreased significantly on line Item 29—

**Madam Chairman:** 29. Yes.

**Mr. Singh:**—by some \$17 million, but the line Item Overtime for Monthly Paid Officers has increased by \$2.4 million. What is the justification for the increase for monthly-paid officers and the decrease for daily paid?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** You know, I mean, generally eh, and again, generally we have been tightening and trying to manage the overtime. So I think when you look at between daily paid and the increase in daily paid and the increase in monthly paid, the net result is going to be a reduction in overtime payments. Right? And generally we have been putting systems in place to deal with the reduction in overtime in the organization in the labour force. So there might have been some slight increase in the monthly paid based on what we have projected, but we are also looking at trying to manage the overtime in putting a number of systems trying to get some flex time, trying to put some shift systems in place and therefore, we are reducing the amount of workers—not workers, we are reducing



the amount payments to these workers in overtime.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South, did I see your hand?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I just heard your response to my colleague the Member for Chaguanas West. I am a bit puzzled in terms of the rationale that you are providing. You are increasing overtime for monthly paid, you are reducing overtime for daily paid. So if you are reducing daily-paid overtime, who the monthly paid will be—what the monthly paid will be doing? Will they not be supervising some personnel from a monthly paid point of view?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes. But you see, if for example you work—if you are able to get the job done without, as I said before, using some bit of flex time and some bit of shift systems and so forth, you are then being able, a large volume of workers which were then being paid overtime to do the work and you have a shift system, then you are getting them to do the work at normal time, so the impact will be different. Yes, you might then have to have a monthly-paid person to help supervise, right, but the impact, the overall impact on the organization will be a reduction in overtime in the organization. So it might have—to facilitate that increased efficiency, you might have to have some improvement in the monthly paid, but to the daily-paid workers where you have a lot of workers, you might be able to then, with tighter management, you could reduce that particular overtime.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Well, Minister, the amount of leaks I see in the constituency of Couva South, for example, I do not buy your rationale that what you are providing to this meeting.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Ma'am, we have not gone to Good and Services yet? Right?

**Madam Chairman:** No. We have not.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. I will wait.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, I am not sure whether the pink pen—*[Interruption]* Okay. Good. Fine. So we can move on. Sub-Head 02: Good and Services. Item 001: General Administration. We are on pages 189 and 190. Member for Tabaquite, that is where you are?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, you said that there will be no cut in personnel. Now, if you look at Contract Employment, line Item 16, you originally said that you consolidated salaries and cost of living into Contract Employment and therefore, that is why you had a reduction of \$136 million. However, I am noting now that in 2019 your Contract Employment went up to 370 million and although your salaries had gone up by a further 44 million, and now it is coming down, in 2020 Estimates to 306 million which is a drop of approximately \$64 million, 63.323. So if you say, if you are now cutting Contract Employment also, it means that somebody is going to suffer in the long run. So that it appears to me that if you add the salaries and cost of living for 2019 revised, you get 720 million and add you add the same figures for 2020 you get 519million, so you have a \$200 million difference. Somebody is going to suffer, because if you are saving \$200 million under salaries and so on, you have to be cutting resources in terms of people who are working.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** All right. So the process in managing WASA throughout has been a whole idea of looking at when we have contracts that have actually come up, when individuals contracts have come up, and in some cases where we do not need these contracts anymore, we have been going through that rationalization exercise. And therefore, over the period where we are able, we are not terminating any particular contracts, but when these contracts have come up for renewal, and where we feel that we are able to then bring efficiency to the organization, we have

been utilizing that process in trying to ensure that the overall number of moneys that we pay between recurrent expenditure in WASA, as you know we have to then try to take some of that money and put it in some of the developmental work. So it has been that whole process in managing the employees, trying to manage the overtime, again, all with a view of trying your best to keep the recurrent expenditure tight and channel the money into capital expenditure

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, I appreciate you would not want to say that you are cutting personnel, but let us face it, the reality is here that people are going to lose their jobs whether they are on contract or not. Nothing is wrong with you saying that. You did it at Petrotrin and you gave a rationale for it. If there is a rationale to give for it at WASA, give the rationale. If you are saying, "Look it is by policy decision that I am going to have to cut expenditure by cutting the number of workers in WASA", say that.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No. Well I am not saying that, you know. I am saying that you deal with these matters. If you look at situations and if you recognize on a case-by-case basis, where there is a contract that is valid, that is, the person is needed, then you will deal with it. If it is not at that point in time, then you will deal with it. You will make the decision on a case-by-case basis. As you are attempting, as you have recognized, there is a lot of work, and there is a lot of work that needs to happen with regard to changing out pipelines; there is a lot of capital expenditure work that needs to happen in WASA, and you cannot take the money from both sides. So you have to try to manage overtime, have discussions with the workers. We have been working with the members of the union and trying to get into new ways, shift systems and so forth so that you could keep that organization's operating expenses tight, so as to allow you to take money and use in other forms. That is all.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, what is the ratio between permanent employees and contracted employees at WASA?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** How much permanent? How much contract?

**11.15 a.m.**

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The total current operating at WASA is now about 4,922 workers. All right. And do you want me to go down and give you an idea of daily paid, monthly paid—

**Dr. Rambachan:** The split between contracted and permanent?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** So you have current, you have monthly-paid permanent of 1,052; you have monthly-paid temporary of 1,139; you have current operating monthly-paid contract, casual, part-time trainees contingent inside there, under the monthly paid, about 825; you have daily-rated permanent, 120; you have daily-paid temporary, 984; and then you have daily-rated workers, another category of worker that is casual, part-time contingent, about 809. That comes up, if my maths is correct, to about 4,900.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Have you done an efficiency study, Mr. Minister, to see whether WASA needs these numbers of workers to carry out its function? And is that efficiency study what caused you to make this decision to cut the contract employment, as you have indicated it is going to be cut? Because, I cannot conclude otherwise that people are going to lose their jobs.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** So, the question is whether I have done an efficiency study?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yeah.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, you know, I think you do not need to go into a severe efficiency study. What we have been trying to do at WASA is try to use the amount of staff that we have to help in fixing the system, the problems that we have out there with regard to reducing leaks and so forth. That being said, you are

trying to do that as good as that is possible with regard to also managing your expenditure and keeping it tight. I mean, when you look and you try to benchmark WASA versus any other agency, all the agencies around, the number of workers in WASA, they do have a fair amount of workers. What we have decided to do was to use those workers to help to fix the problem. But while you are fixing the problem you are also trying to rationalize and trying to increase the efficiency of the organization.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But you cannot benchmark WASA, Mr. Minister, against other agencies. You have to benchmark WASA against another water authority.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, of course. I mean, when I benchmark WASA—again, it is not against other agencies, it is against other water authorities. But, we have been utilizing the operations—the whole idea is to try to make WASA as efficient as possible whilst utilizing the staff that we have to deal with the existing problems. So it is a work in progress.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, line Item 09: Rent / Lease - Vehicles and Equipment of approximately 60 to 70 million. Minister, have you done a business plan to see whether that is cost effective, or whether—you altered it?—you purchase your own equipment and vehicles, whether that will reduce the cost of 60 to 70 million annually? Has there ever been a business plan?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** What?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 09, in terms of rental and lease of vehicles and equipment.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Again—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Have you ever considered it?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, I mean, WASA—and you would see there is a particular line that we are looking down where we are looking to purchase some backhoes

and purchase some equipment to be able to execute some of our repairs in our leak programmes. You will, to the idea of purchasing all this equipment then you have running cost, you have a tremendous amount of maintenance cost, you have to put systems and procedures in place to ensure—I am not too sure that being able to run its own fleet at WASA would be cost effective in being able to have those equipment operating, and therefore over time the organization has used this model, and although I feel we could improve in some areas in buying some equipment, I feel this model of leasing some equipment is the most cost effective model to use.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, just as I am here, could you allow me to ask on 16, Contract Employment?

**Madam Chairman:** Proceed.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You have a Revised Estimate of 370 million on Contract Employment in 2019, and of course you have about 306 million in 2020. The Contract Employment here, is that included in the 4,922 workers you just mentioned a while ago in terms of your total amount, because you said monthly contract workers is about 825?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The answer is yes. Yes. Those workers, that payment there is included in the four thousand, nine.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So, this pays for the monthly contract?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair, line Item 22, Short-Term Employment, there was an allocation in 2019, the Estimates of 600,000. It has increased in 2020 to 5.870 million, an increase of that amount. What is the nature of this Short-Term Employment, and what is generating the necessity for this employment in 2020?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** This particular line Item was used really—you know, we have been having a lot of problems in our call centre. There have been a lot of calls, people making a lot of complaints about calling in to the centre, and it takes a lot of time to actually make your required calls. And therefore we went around employing—expanding that particular centre, bringing in about 25 to 30 young people to try to improve the efficiency of that particular call centre, and that has worked to some extent. It is not perfect. And that is where that Short-Term Employment is handled in that particular area.

**Mr. Singh:** Just to follow up, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, you know that there is nothing short-term in WASA. If you have a call centre then they will eventually after two years become permanent employees, in accordance with the Industrial Relations Act. Have you considered the outsourcing of the call centre?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Am, yes, it is an evaluation. It is something—let me also add, during that particular we also took in some trainees, so that figure is also dealing with some trainees there. But, the decision to—we have looked at that, it was outsourced before, we brought it back again inside, and there is a back-and-forth conversation on whether it should be back, whether it should be outsourced. It is an evaluation that is presently under way with regard to making some type of decision, but we felt that we did see some improvement. It is a very expensive proposition with regard to outsourcing, and it is one that we always have to weigh in WASA. How do we take money, if we go into it, in recurrent expenditure, right, versus the limited funds that we have in using for capital expenditure? So, it might work, it might be a “lil” bit more efficient. I agree with that, but it is a very expensive proposition.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Chair, my colleague from Chaguanas West focused on

it.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Toco/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair, I have three lime Items. The first one I want to ask on, hon. Minister, is on line Item 16, Contract Employment. It really deals with all the employment, eh. And I am asking, Minister, why is it that the Government is of the opinion that when you reduce staff that there will be greater efficiency in the service? It does not add up. And how really would the efficiency of the Ministry be guaranteed when you are reducing staff? That is the first one.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, again, you know, first to begin as I said before, we are constantly evaluating and utilizing the amount. We are convinced that the figure that we have estimated is 306, bearing in mind also, based on the efficiencies that we are doing, and bearing in mind also some of the estimates for 307, 317 million, we still have some of that allocation that we will then be able to pay. We are convinced that we should be able to run the organization fairly from a contract employee perspective on the 306 million, without—yes, there are some employees whose contracts that we feel as part of the efficiency process, that we no longer need, but, by and large we are not reducing any massive reductions of staff, and we think, therefore, that we will be able to utilize the existing—to have the staff, most of the staff that we need to run the organization effectively.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And line Item 68, hon. Minister, that is on page 190. It is part of Goods and Services.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Under?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Line Item 68, page 190.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** I see there is an increase for Water Trucking. Is this for



arrears, or is this to supplement the much needed water supply?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, again, you know, we are expecting and we have been talking about it a lot, we are expecting a very, based on where our dams are, we feel we needed to plan in anticipation of our dry season next year, of us not having the type of levels starting the year where we want to be.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** So this does not include arrears?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, this is not arrears. This is just an anticipation. This increase for 2020 is basically—the major part of this is really to deal with some of our anticipation in increasing Water Trucking as part of our contingency going forward.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Minister, there are two areas, huge areas in my constituency that they depend on water trucking.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** “Hm mm.”

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And if simply you would put the booster in Tamana hill, which requires—it is the booster, but it requires three-phase electricity, this would alleviate the need for water trucking. And the same would apply for the area of Fishing Pond and Caigual.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** “Hm mm.”

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** If simply you continue the pipe laying project, it would alleviate this and it would also bring in income for the public utilities. So, I do not understand, you know, in taking all these moneys to put into Water Trucking and applying when you could simply resolve the situation by putting in certain simple mechanisms in place. And the last Item I would like to raise is on line Item 69, if the hon. Minister could indicate within my constituency, any of the road reinstatement that you plan to undertake, please?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, again, I do not have this by constituency by constituency.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** No, no, no.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** But yet, you see, we do have some money allocated for road reinstatement.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** If when your staff could probably provide?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** But, again, it is—we as the Minister, and I am sure WASA will love to be able to have a bigger allocation there to reinstate all the roads when they are fixed with regard to the leaks. It is not something that is possible at this point in time, because we have a budget that we are working with, and therefore we have to fix the leaks. We have done a good job in bringing the leaks down to the present level. And I agree, we would like to have more money in reinstatement, but if we have the money in reinstatement, right, then we will have to then cut the money from other areas. It is not because we do not want to, it a challenge of managing your limited resources and trying to utilize them as effectively as you can.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** I do agree, Minister, and there is an area in Cumuto that is really, really affected because of a leak, and the road is really in a deplorable condition, and that is one of the roads I would probably be hoping that you would be able to address, and that is why I am asking. Thank you.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, as you know you communicate with me a lot, including a lot of the Members, and I am sure if you send it to me we will definitely take a look at it, as I do with all requests that come forward.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, I am on Goods and Services, and I am still looking at No. 09, 09, Rent / Lease - Vehicles and Equipment. Now, yes, you are going down by \$6.6 million for this year, but you still have \$63.4 million that you are going to be spending on vehicles and equipment lease. But, side by side with that, you have 01, you have \$52 million you are spending in travelling and subsistence. Now I want to do a “lil” calculation to really establish how many

vehicles are you leasing? Let us take a popular vehicle that you have to use to repair roads—repair leaks, which is a backhoe. If you take a backhoe on the market now, backhoes are being rented for between \$1,600 and \$1,800 a day, which means that \$63,401,000 will give you 35,000 days; 35,000 days at \$1,800; I give you the higher amount.

**11.30 a.m.**

If you use 250 days per year, means to say that that is an equivalent of 140 backhoes that you will have available with this \$63 million. My question is this, what kind of equipment are you renting for this \$63 million between, let us say, vehicles that people drive and come to work or what have you and what supervisors use, and productive equipment, those used actually in the repairs like trucks, backhoes, mini excavators, 320 and so on. What kind of equipment are you using? Because I am concerned that your \$51.9 million in travelling and subsistence people are also collecting that within the organization? So we are looking really about \$122 million between travelling and subsistence and the lease of equipment.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Two separate things.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yeah, I know it is two separate. But you see if it is that you are leasing vehicles and then paying people also a travelling allowance to use their own vehicles but then they are using vehicles that you are leasing, then that is not proper management.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, no. Totally no.

**Dr. Rambachan:** All right, so I come back to my original question, what is the list of vehicles that you have leased out for this \$63 million which represents in my view if you use only backhoes as an example, 35,000 days for the year or 140 backhoes?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Let me start. You are talking about excavators, trucks, you are talking about backhoes, you are talking about dump trucks, you are talking about lighted plants, you are talking about trash pumps, you are talking about a number of different equipment that you need to lease to fix, to help to repair the high number of leaks that we also have. I mean, if you are talking—remember I have given the figures before, you are talking about an organization that deals with anything about 100 to 150 leaks a day. So if you are looking at 100 to 150 leaks a day in the organization and you are talking about what you talked about, renting equipment, you understand the amount of equipment that is required to mobilize those things. And when you are moving your leaks from 3,000 down to 1,000 you get an idea of the volume that we are talking about with regard to leaks.

So as I said, that is why sometimes I am high in praise with WASA and sometimes, of course, I sympathize with the population who continue to see leaks and say, well, why is it not being fixed. Because there are a lot of leaks that are being fixed but there is still much more work to do. So this particular Item is dealing with rental of equipment for the running of the organization if there is a main that is burst that you need emergency work.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I just want to get a list of the equipment that you rent.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** So you would like to get a list?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Of the types of equipment?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yeah.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Sure, I can provide for you.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Because I put that against number 28, \$100 million in Other Contracted Services which I also believe is contracts being given out to repair leaks also. So you understand why I am concerned now about the amount of

money you lease vehicles as well as the contracted services.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, I hear you.

**Dr. Rambachan:** That is all, Minister. Thank you.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 28: Other Contracted Services.

Hon. Minister, I see that you have an increase from the 2019 Estimate of 80 million to 100 million plus; an increase of \$20.3million. What are these contracted services for and what is the impact of this increase?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The 20.4million increase in Other Contracted Services is primarily as a result of increased expenditure in the repairs and maintenance to the authority's plants and pipelines, right. We are looking at—some of the improvements that we have scheduled is the: Arena Damp, Valsayn Waterworks, Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant, Hollis Reservoir, Caroni/Arena Water Treatment Plant, Richmond Water Treatment Plant in Tobago, North Oropouche Water Treatment Plant. So those are the types of the jobs that are being done that will take care of this increase—well, it will take care of the expenditure for 2020. And again, we are looking at upgrading the infrastructure and trying to get those work done as early as possible to try to increase the reliability of water to the citizens.

**Mr. Singh:** So notwithstanding your claim that you are utilizing as much as is possible of the water and sewerage employees, there are some jobs that you have to contract out.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, yes, of course. I mean, we have to—the running of WASA requires a certain amount of contracting out some and we have cut that back tremendously. This figure was a lot more and it has probably come back, it has been coming down by about 100 to 200million over the period as we are try to do some more work internally with the WASA employees. All right. So there is a

combination of using in-house staff and external staff. And as I said this is one of the areas that we have been focusing on in actually reducing in using less contract services and using more of the internal staff.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 43: Security Services, an increase of \$9 million for 2020. But I understand that there is a huge outstanding security services bill in arrears. Could you state what is to date, what is that arrears or is that arrears catered for in this line Item?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No. That arrears is not catered for in this line Item. This line Item, this 9.2 increase is due largely to increased security requirements at a number of our WASA facilities. As you would recognize, water is a very important product, security is something that we have been beefing up in ensuring so we have had incidents of theft and vandalism on a number of our locations. And the locations requiring manning that we use this money for is: Clarke Road, Penal, El Socorro Water Works, Guanapo Water Treatment, Tucker Valley Booster. I mean, I have a list of all that is required and the new ones that we are adding as we try to increase security services at these strategic locations of WASA, because we have been getting increased vandalism.

**Mr. Lee:** But Minister, the arrears that is outstanding in the Security Services line Item, which you said there is an outstanding, could you state how much is outstanding and where that amount will be allocated?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, if you would like me to, and you are asking about a particular security company that was not paid. If you give me that question, I would be able to advise what is the extent of that arrears.

**Mr. Lee:** I understand it is several, not only one, several security companies that are owed arrears.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, again, WASA continues to be— I mean, the paying of

services and the paying of those institutions, security companies are not the only ones that are in arrears. But, yes, they do have and if you would like me to provide you a list of the companies that are in arrears with regard to Security Services, I will provide.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, may I return to line Item 69? This seems to be a vexatious issue with many persons.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** 69?

**Mr. Karim:** Road Reinstatement.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Mr. Karim:** And therefore, I have a few matters I would just like to ask you. First of all, this appears to be vexatious for road users because when it is not properly done, the reinstatement, it causes a lot of unnecessary traffic jam.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** “Hm mm.”

**Mr. Karim:** Could you tell us what is the protocol?—if you have one existing, for when people connections or have to pay for connections in terms of Road Reinstatement. That is my first question.

The second question is, are you satisfied, maybe it is a rhetorical question, with the allocation? And with respect to the Road Reinstatement, are you also satisfied with respect to the quality of the Road Reinstatement which seems to disintegrate very quickly after certain whether conditions? Protocol really.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The protocol with regard to when somebody gets a connection, who pays for the reinstatement of the particular connection? I will need to get, I mean, the actual protocol as it relates to that I could probably get that back to you. I cannot seem to get an appropriate answer. The reality of Road—what I could say with regard to Road Reinstatement, I understand that has been an issue. A big part of that issue really has come about because—to an extent WASA is a victim of

some of the improvement in work that is done in moving the leaks from 3,000 close to 4,000, to 1,000.

So they have done a good job. If you do the math it is not just 2,000, because if you have 150 leaks a day and you are doing those leaks and still reducing the number. So there have been a heightened awareness and trying to deal with the leaks in a lot more responsive manner. As a result of that, there has been a lot of reinstatement work that needs to be done. And therefore the allocations, of course, we would like to get more to be able to do more. At this point in time, however, we are struggling to try to deal with what we have and if you decide to get more here where are you going to take it from.

So it is something that we are working on. It is something that we are trying to stretch as much as possible to try to see how we can improve because I have heard the cries of a number of individuals, but again, the focus over the last year has really been on trying to attack the number of leaks. We want to bring the number of leaks—we have brought the leaks in South, the Central and South Trinidad actually at one time went below 100 leaks on record. I think they are back up to about 120. So South and Central I think we have broken the back of it and we have a lot of those. That is not saying that there is not leaks that are showing up, but there has been a lot of work. The North-West of Trinidad is where we have a big problem and we have to focus there because there are about 800 leaks—750 leaks in that area alone.

So there has been a problem, I have acknowledged that and we are—whether this will work, whether this will solve, this allocation of 20 million, I do not think it will rectify all the reinstatement that needs to happen, but we will try as much as possible to get as much done with the resources that are being allocated to us.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Minister. Just a final question on Road Reinstatement.



Are you satisfied with the level of liaison relationship between your Ministry and the Ministry of Works and Transport? Because some of the constituents say you just wait for the Barber-Greene to roll and then WASA come and dig up.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well you know, there are a lot of jokes, fun jokes that have been put up on WASA.

**Mr. Karim:** My question is really this, are you satisfied with the relationship in terms of that liaison?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes. Over the last year we have done a lot of work in improving that relationship and we have a protocol in place with regard to when roads are going to be resurfaced. There is a timeline that is given by the Ministry of Works and Transport and we know where they are going. We monitor the roads, we fix the roads, we fix the leaks as best as possible.

In some cases, however, it would be nice to change all the pipes, but money does not always permit you to be able to do that. So you try to fix the leaks as best as you can. We have a timeline that we leave the leaks for before they start to fix the road. Unfortunately sometimes when you bring that heavy equipment to actually fix the road, that heavy equipment also contributes. You put that heavy equipment and you are grading and that heavy equipment on the road contributes sometimes to some leaks coming up. And that is why right after you pave the road you end up with leaks, because there were no leaks before but the heavy equipment on the road then facilitates pressure on the pipes and that causes it to leak also.

**Mr. Karim:** Will the protocol say the period of time after which you make the connection the road should be repaired? Because we have had instances of reports—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Woodland.

**Mr. Karim:**—where like in Woodland, for example, my colleague is indicating,

that over three months after the connection, road has not been reinstated. So if the protocol will say that we will be happy to—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Okay, I will get that information to you. I am not 100 per cent sure at this point in time of the actual protocol, but again, you know, we have been trying as much as possible and I agree, we have been trying as much as possible to meet customer demands. We have been trying as much as possible, as I said, to fix the leaks. And therefore, the Road Reinstatement and the backup facilities associated is about money and we do not always have the resources to be able to do that. So we could then decide, listen, I have to hold back on my connection because I know I do not have the money afterwards to reinstate it but we have taken the decision let us get the connection going, because I have been putting a drive in that area also to improve.

This has been the lag, and hopefully we will try to use this money as best as we can to fix some of the problems.

**11.45 a.m.**

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I have listened to you extensively on 68 and 69 with respect to Water Trucking and Road Reinstatement. Just for the records—and, again, I heard you told one of my colleagues with respect to Water Trucking, you do not go by constituency, and so on. I know of people, for example, with the shutdown of the desal plant recently, who were waiting for three and four days to even get an acknowledgment from WASA when they called in to get a work, what they call, ID number, to get water, and up until today they have not gotten any sort of relief from WASA. So I do not know what is the protocol or how they go about, in terms of this truck-borne water supply.

And additionally, this question of Road Reinstatement—and, again, this issue of not going by constituency and so on, if you drive on the Calcutta No. 1, 2

and 3 Roads, there are potholes there as a result of what WASA created for the last three and four years. On the Balmain Main Road, extensively, up till this morning, people called me because of the inconvenience. People are contemplating a class action suit on WASA, you know, because of the amount of potholes and wear and tear on their vehicles, burst tyres, you name it. That is the track record. And in addition to that, I mean I do not want to tell you what the constituents dub you, as the “Minister for Water for None”, but this is the reality and we are continuing to plead and beg when we cannot get, what we would call, equality of treatment in terms of Road Reinstatement and Water Trucking. That is the reality, you know.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, again, I mean, I am not sure. One thing I could assure you is that WASA does not discriminate as to where they have lines or roads that they need to be reinstated. I think if you talk—you mentioned some roads there, and I am sure if you go—I could go up the East-West Corridor; I could go in the west and I could call a number of roads are like that.

We do have a challenge, because we do have challenges at WASA which we are attempting to deal with. We have challenges that the previous—that we inherited and I am sure there were challenges that other Ministers also inherited with dealing. Fixing WASA is a work in progress. I think we have been able to make some dramatic improvements in certain areas, but this whole idea of road reinstatement is a challenge, but it is about resources. It is about money. It is about how much money you have to put in that particular area and trying to use that money as best as you can. At this point in time, the allocation that we have, 20 million, we will attempt to use it as effectively as possible.

With regard to Water Trucking, again, you heard me talking about the improvements that we have done so far in the call centre, because we have had

problems there. It has gotten better. Based on what you are saying, I might have to look at expanding it even more, because I do not like those levels of service that you are speaking about, and I would like, when people call in, that they are able to get water. Hence the reason why we are putting a little more money in that particular allocation, not because we feel this is a permanent solution, but in recognition of what people have been saying and what we intend to happen next year, we have decided to beef up that particular area.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that, hon. Minister, whilst you are dealing with the whole question of leak, repair and road restoration, we have inherited a situation from time immemorial in which there is no utility grid. All the pipelines generally fall under the roadways, so that, therefore, road reinstatement, pipeline repair, is always going to be a problem with us until we reach the stage of a utility grid. What I have noticed in line Item 68— and perhaps it is an indicator of how the non-maintenance of the production plants of WASA is impacting upon water trucking positively. You had 8.9 million in 2018; 10 million in 2019; 16 million Revised Estimate in 2019 and projected 48 million in 2020, an increase of 32 million. So to a large extent, Minister, your tenure is being marked by a massive and significant increase in Water Trucking.

The second issue I want to raise with you is under the question of Road Reinstatement—having said with respect to the utility grid and the need for that in the future—that a study was carried out by the then operations manager at WASA, Steve Joseph, and they pointed out the nature of the pipelines, the number of leaks per annum on each pipeline and the need for the replacement. As a result of that, over 1,000 kilometres of pipeline—transmission pipelines—were replaced. And I want to suggest to you, notwithstanding the paucity of funding, that that is a programme that you ought to return to in order to deal with this question, because

the pipelines, when you repair them, they are very porous. They are going to break again, and that therefore, you would continuously have this problem.

**Madam Chairman:** Right. So, Members, if you just permit me, if we can just take a very short break and be back here in the next five minutes, and we will start back with you. Okay? Thank you very much.

**11.52 a.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*

**11.57 a.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee resumed.*

**Madam Chairman:** This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is now resumed. Okay. So I will take the Member for Fyzabad because he is here.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, I understand your concerns about the Road Reinstatement but I just want to ask one specific question, and I will tell you why I am asking these questions, because sometimes you may have an issue that could impact otherwise. I call it double jeopardy. I will give you an example. I am talking about the whole—between Light Pole 63 and 65 in La Fortune Road, which is still to be repaired definitively—and the example I will give you is, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, going down to Fyzabad, as you often do, and the Creek had water—no fault of anyone—the tides and so on. But the alternate route, of course, is to go through Woodland. So I turned around, attempted to go through Woodland Friday evening and there is a huge traffic jam, and the cause of the traffic jam is that when the vehicles reach that single hole in the road, everyone had to stop. It became literally a one-way. So the question, really, is whether there is any sort of prioritization in terms of these repairs. I am just drawing the example of what could happen; just with one single hole creating, you know, so much trauma for residents going to Fyzabad, La Brea and Point Fortin that evening.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** And, again, you know, and I want the listening public, the Members, to understand the whole issue of restoration. And I agree, there needs to

be, WASA and the WASA management needs to be a little bit more focused on that and making those types of decisions. We do have a CEO of WASA and we run an organization of WASA and, I mean, as the Minister, I am responsible to give direction. And they have that type of direction and focus. Because I agree with you, there are times when you could fix a road and there is a particular one that you should be able to have a judgment, "I need to fix immediately. It is on a high, busy roadway." There was one particular area that they left overnight. You had traffic going in the morning; on the Maraval Road, you had a backup of traffic. Children got to school late. So there is a prioritization and a sensitivity that I am continuing to bring to the people at WASA, that they are serving individuals. It is a work in progress. Have I solved all the problems? Am I 100 per cent comfortable that they are responding as fast as they should, and putting that level of priority? I do not think so, but it continues to be a work in progress and I continue to work on trying to improve that level of sensitivity and getting the job done as best as they can.

**12.00 noon**

**Dr. Bodoë:** So, Minister, can the public have the assurance that that particular piece of work will be done as a matter of priority now?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** On that particular piece of work, again, like all Members of the Opposition, all members of the public, where you have things in your particular constituency that you would like to bring to my personal attention then feel free as you all do, and you know when you bring them you are rest assured that I try my best to put them on a priority and get it done. So continue to do that, and I continue to press WASA to try to make life and to be a little bit more sensitive to what they are doing and the impact that it is having. So bring it across to me, send it to me and I will try.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, I will consider this intervention as having brought it across to you now.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** You need to then—

**Dr. Bodoë:** Give you more details.

**Hon. Le Hunte:**—give me more details, and so forth. I am not in a note taking mode.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West, we revert to you.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to line Item 68, Water Trucking, Minister, could you indicate whether or not there are any arrears owed to water trucking contractors?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I am sure that they are.

**Mr. Singh:** Could you provide a listing of those contractors and the arrears owed to them?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, I will gladly be able to provide some of the arrears, and I am sure of that 48 million, some of that—as I said, I think there is an increased allocation this year for the payment. There is an increased allocation because we do expect, based on where we are seeing with the level of dams—and as much I appreciate the advice with regard to changing the lines, again, it all comes down to money and I understand that, and we do have those lines earmarked to be changed. So part of this 48 is to pay some of that arrears, and part is also to increase the water trucking, the efficiency of the water trucking system, so that we could cater for the impending problem that might be coming up in 2020, but I will provide the information to you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Madam Chair, thank you. With respect to the impending problem, hon. Minister, is there a dry season management plan in place currently for that

impending dry season? I notice that you keep on speaking of it, but I just want to know what is the plan, if there is a plan in place, because I see somewhere in the documentation whereas there was about 269,000 for a dry season management plan, there is currently no allocation.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, that is because the dry season management plan that was being worked on, there is no need for payment for it anymore. So it has been paid for, and therefore, it should be delivered. That being said, there is, we as you know, we do expect based on the severe dry season that we went through last year, and where we are projecting the levels of the dams this year, we might not be starting the year at the level we should be with regard to the dams. So we have been heightening the awareness on conservation, and we do have a plan with regard to increasing ground water. We are busy drilling some wells; we will see some work in our development programme; we have been working in our booster stations. Because as you know, part of the problem in Trinidad and Tobago is not so much that we do not have enough water. We do produce a lot of water. The problem is we have been able to move that water around the country as effectively as we should because we do not need to be drilling.

So the plan deals with certain isolated communities trying to get some increased ground water; trying to increase the production of the wells by reinstatement of the wells; trying to increase our booster stations to move water that we have now to different areas and also water trucking; also trying to encourage individuals to conserve. I mean, you know that one of the problems, the levels of consumption, and I always say that. Levels of consumption of water in Trinidad is way, way, way above anywhere else in the Caribbean, or where a lot of the countries in the world. There is nowhere else in the world where people use the level of consumption that we do and there is 24/7 water. So the fixing of the



problem is multifaceted and we are working on a plan to deal with all aspects of it.

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

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, thank you. I wanted to ask this question on No. 12. It takes up a significant percentage of your budget; it is about \$650 million. That is Materials and Supplies.

**Madam Chairman:** Page what?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Page 189. Just give a little idea of the major components of that expenditure; what the money is being bought for, what materials—

**Madam Chairman:** The estimate for this year is 319,000.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, 319 million.

**Madam Chairman:** Million, yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But last year 649 million was spent.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** In that area, what you do there, that is where—The reduction of the 300 million, the Minister of Finance spoke—not sure we want to go back on that debate—but that really, that 300 million is really—it is on that the line Item that we pay approximately US 72 million for water for desalination, and that reduction there is partly as a result of utilizing to pay desalinated water via another process and not through Materials and Supplies. So one of your major expenditure previously that was done in that line, is not going to be done there anymore.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But what constitutes the other aspect of it to make up the 319 million? Pipe lines and so on.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Chemicals, there is another desalination plant, water that you pay, pipeline materials, chemicals for the chlorinating of the water, et cetera.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good morning to

colleagues and Minister.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Good morning and welcome.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much. We had a bit of traffic, you will be happy to know it was not WASA related. But focusing on page 190, 68 and 69, and, Minister, you would agree that this would take up some time given the problems that Members of Parliament face on a daily basis. I just wanted to use an example. During the exercise this morning, a constituent, Mr. Khanai from Mohess Road sent a note to me to remind me, but to also raise in the meeting that in Mohess Road in my constituency of Oropouche East we have had several leaks along that road for almost six months and it has made the situation extremely horrible for motorists and villagers in that area when the roads are not repaired and the cars are passing there, and so on, it becomes like an obstacle course and increasing, you know, the cost of living and the amount of money people spend on repairing cars, and so on.

Now, it is a problem you will have right through. I wanted to ask you, Minister—you clearly have the right talk, and the right management speak, and understand the issue—if you would focus along with WASA—and this is not to complain about WASA because the officials of WASA by and large respond, you know, very positive in a positive way to myself at least and other colleagues, and so on, but when you hear complaints from residents about leaks, and road, and water, and so on, they generally are not satisfied with the responsiveness of the WASA, and you, because of your background and professional work in the past and so on, more than probably others, could understand the importance of feedback, communication and engagement. The issue is really engagement because there are some problems that you will be able to fix, there are some you will not be able to fix in the short-term and so on, but I think the community

engagement, this ability to relate to people and hear from them is very important.

Now, I am not inviting you to put out 684-HUNT, 4868, and ask everybody to call you. I mean, you may not have that wherewithal. But if you could look and work with WASA from the Ministry and WASA to come up with new innovative novel, low cost ways, of keeping in touch with people who have their problems. Sometimes people complain and they complain yes, is that the leak and so on, but they complain more because they feel that nobody is hearing, nobody is responding, and effectively nobody cares. I think state agencies like WASA and others to—and the Ministry has a central role to play—should really come up with new strategies for community engagement to ensure that people who are facing problems, and conflict oriented in particular, you engage with them so that as you work towards solutions they are kept informed. A simple thing, somebody complains about no water, you call them back; you back call a day or two after to assure that look we may not be able to deal with it today, but in two days we will deal with it. You do not have water for two weeks; you are on the Congo Village on the hill, you do not have water two, three weeks. We know that. We are hoping by Saturday you will have a supply of a four hours. That is what I am talking about, and on the ground I think that is missing.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** And I agree 100 per cent. And again, we have been in partly recognition of that, one of the things that I am glad that your resident is saying that, yes, but he is indirectly saying what he would have talked about two or three months ago, or two, three years ago, that there were six or eight leaks that have not been attended to, and therefore, now he is saying, as you heard it, the leaks are probably fixed but the road has not been reinstated. So I agree that is part of the new issue that we have to deal with.

The idea of sensitizing WASA to that aspect of being a little more bit more

sensitive to the public needs and getting out, what we have started in the Ministry to partly deal with that, we had something called a utility outreach programme. Because I agree, what we need to do is to get some of these CEOs of these utilities out there facing the public and letting them hear from the public directly what is the nature of their problems and let them feel the public's pain. So we have actually gone—we have some more areas to do—where we go to the communities with the CEOs themselves and let the public tell the CEOs exactly what is going on and what it is, and that I have seen a certain increase as we put them more on the spot with all their managers because I think there is a little disconnect and it is one of the things that we have been working on, or I have been working on, in trying to improve that level of service and connection because that is what the public wants, a little bit, a better feedback.

And I did not have to put out 62-HUNT because you know your colleague, Devant Maharaj, kind “ah” did that for me. So now everyone, they already call me and I am called upon to have to deal with all of these issues. So it is not a problem. He saved me actually having to get a number.

**Hon. Member:** You should give him an award for public service, helping.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. You have moved into Current Transfers and Subsidies?

**Madam Chairman:** No, not as yet.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Hon. Minister, before I proceed with my substantive question, I would like to piggyback on Oropouche East and to just inform you that many constituents in San Francique, in

Doorbassa Trace, Woodland, for 21 continuous days they do not have water. Apparently the schedule that is prescribed does not work. So I just need to put that on record.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** For 21 continuous days and that is totally unacceptable.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I am not sure if any question was line 23, Madam Chair, with Fees. 2-3.

**Madam Chairman:** You could proceed.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I could proceed?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, when we look at the Revised Estimates for 2019 we are seeing it is 15 million, and 2020 Estimates it is over 21 million. So there is an increase of over 6 million. What does that represent and to whom those fees are paid to?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Part of running WASA, there is a lot of litigation; and increased litigations for some payment not made. We have inherited a number of work that was done that are now under review as to allocations, as why this work was done. We cannot seem to—there is verification of that particular work that sometimes we are not satisfied that the appropriate documentations were put in place, and therefore, these are legal fees for litigation and dealing with some of the claims that WASA has determined in a number of areas that contracts were given, payments were made or contracts were given, and there are differences between our view of the contracts and whether or not they should have been given, or what was the process, and whether the work was actually done, and, of course, you have the other side of that story. So this is really dealing with those legal matters.

**12.15 p.m.**

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, do you not have in-house attorneys

to deal with this or is it that they are outsourced, the attorneys?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, as you would recognize the amount of these litigations, sometimes you are not justified to deal with them internally. You could try to deal with some of them internally and you have different types of lawyers and some of them require you to get external counsel.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I just wanted to follow up on my colleague from Oropouche East in terms of the interaction between WASA and the public. Now, the regional health authorities, for example, they are mandated by law to have a public board meeting every year which is interactive, the authority accounts to the public and likewise the public can ask direct questions. Is WASA mandated to do the same?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** No, they are not but what I am saying is that what we have done within the Ministry is to have this outreach programme and I am sure that this programme will come to some of your constituencies but really it is where the utilities, we actually go out with not only WASA, we go with the CEO of T&TEC, WASA, TTPost and we try to ascertain from the public their complaints with the service to our utility sector.

I will also say that one of the projects that we are also launching very soon is a very innovative programme called “Tell Us”, digital feedback programme, again, with the utilities because customer service to me is critical. And again, I am going to be launching a programme whereby we hope we will be able to get better feedback to the utilities on the levels of service. We have set standards as to what is the level we consider that a utility should be providing and the programme will allow for, by the end of the day, based on feedback from the public, I would be

able to know as the Minister what was the level of service in all of my utilities at the end of the day and whether or not they have met the targeted score and which particular utility is faulting and therefore what particular branch is actually not performing. It is actually going to be good programme that I hope will help to revolutionize the levels of service and give the population an opportunity to provide direct feedback on the service that they are getting. So we are going to be doing that and hopefully we will be launching that programme before the end of the year.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. We are at page 190. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households. Couva South, this is where you are at?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes, please.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007: Households. Member for Couva South

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, under 01: Contribution to the Daily-Paid Pension Plan, could you just elaborate why there is an increased allocation of \$3,405,000 to that plan? And in terms of Way Leave and in the 2020 Estimates, it has moved from \$100,000 to \$4 million and just for the benefit of the listening public or viewing public and so on what Way Leave is?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I mean, basically the allocation is—the 14.4 million that is estimated for 2020 is based on a total of 1,550 daily-rated employees and the contribution that is needed for them, so we have used the actual number of 1,550 employees and worked out the contribution, the mathematical contribution. So that is what that figure is.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So this was determined by the actuaries to the plan or this is WASA's contribution?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** This is WASA's contribution to the plan.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And it was based on an actuarial valuation report?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, it is based on their estimate of what needs to be paid towards the plan. I do not think—they have contributed to this plan annually? So the number of employees vary from time and this is the actual estimate that is felt, that is paid towards the plan based on WASA's contracted contribution.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So the plan—there is no deficit to the plan?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Based on my, I am not aware of that. I am being advised no. There is no deficit.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay, thank you very much. And the other question under 05 Way Leave.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** This increase is related to an anticipated 11 acquisitions, namely Scott Road, Penal Water Well, Lobin Road, Brothers Road Water Well, Claude Noel Highway, Caratal Water Well. So it is works that will be done on some water wells.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** As I said, just for the benefit of the—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** It is the purchase of land that we need to do to facilitate these water wells.

**Madam Chairman:** Finished, Member for Couva South?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Just a general question on the debt here. Minister, I do not know if you would know it in your head or maybe you can give it to us in writing, which is do you know what the total WASA debt is.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so we are under Current Transfers and Subsidies. Maybe you might want to take that under 009, we are under 007?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay, sorry, Madam Chairman.



**Madam Chairman:** So I will call it back then. That is all right. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** No, I am under 009.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so then we will go on. 009: Other Transfers. Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Well, I will just re-ask the question if the Minister can answer.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The total WASA debt. Honestly, I will probably need to—to give you an accurate figure, I would get it to you. I would not want to haggle it. I have it in my mind but I want to make sure.

**Dr. Tewarie:** If you can indicate, I will be grateful.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** All right, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 02: Settlement of Claims. There is an increase of 3 million from the allocation in—Revised Estimates in 2019 of 3 million, it is now 6 million. What is the nature of this settlement? Is it the damage to properties or is it contractor claims?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** It is a combination. This provides for litigation for outstanding moneys owed by contractors, public liability claims resulting from damage to properties, and industrial relations matters such as claims made against the authority by the public and include claims for personal injury, claims damage to property, crops, vehicle, wrongful disconnections and excessive billing and industrial relations matters also result in claims. So there are varied items that could result in claims and they vary from industrial relations claims to overpayment or overcharging of bills to damage to properties. So that is an allocation and then one anticipates based on the claims that you have, you look at

the year before, look at what is in the pipeline and you make a determination.

**Mr. Singh:** Hon. Minister, could you provide a listing in writing of the litigation claims against the Water and Sewerage Authority?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Okay, sure. That could be provided.

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

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, line Item 01: Depreciation. It is a very significant amount. This year, it is \$327 million. Is that a depreciation on what asset and what your accounting principles would allow for what percentage depreciation on your assets? What are the assets that you—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, you know as we bring in new assets, I mean, a big part is that water treatment plant at Malabar so therefore, while it is in progress, waste treatment plant—sorry, not water, waste treatment plant. So whilst it is being built, it is one thing; when it is completed, then you have to start to depreciate it and therefore, we just commissioned it, it is now complete so you will have an increased charge for depreciation on that. That is why that increase is going because it is now moved from a work-in-progress to a completed project and now it is completed, you start to depreciate and that figure will go up as we do the waste treatment plant in San Fernando gets completed. All right. That will also go up. The work that we have done in Tobago. As those plants are being completed, you will see depreciation on those plants which is the wear and tear, the non-cash items will continue to go up.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Your accounting firm, what period of time these assets will be depreciated and—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** And depreciated over, I cannot say. The accounting firm is what? Who are we using? Ernst & Young? Yes, our accounting firm is Ernst & Young and I cannot say. I mean, if you really need it, I could probably give you an

idea.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no, I just want to have an appreciation of it, not the details of it. But, Madam Chair, just further to the Member for Caroni Central, I see that another major component of the Ministry's expenditure on WASA is interest payments and from what I summarize here, it is approximately \$250 million. So I remember Prime Minister Manning saying that WASA is "ah 28 billion headache". So we empathize with all Ministers with WASA but we really would like from a population point of view, a national point of view, to really have an extent where we are with loans that WASA has to repay and so on over a period of time, so we could know where we are as a country.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** So yes, Sir. I mean, I have gotten a figure calculated on the debt. WASA's debt is in the vicinity about 3 billion that is being paid. You are right, the country over the years has spent significant amount of money in fixing or trying to fix WASA. I think it was said actually. The figure that was used in the budget was as much as 10 billion over a period. So there is a lot of money that way of recurrent expenditure and capital expenditure that has gone to where we are so a lot of the citizens of this country who complain about the service, this is where we are after spending that amount of money and therefore, we really need to look at dealing with WASA in a number of different areas.

I mean, WASA's problem is centred around the aspect of conservation and demand management is one of the areas that we have not spent as much money as I think we should have. So, for example, we still run as a country with only 5 per cent of the country metered. So that is an area that not much money was spent. We have done some work in putting down some bulk meters this year but the country needs to be metered and by the country being metered, then you will find that the amount of water that individuals use by virtue of being a little bit more

conscious and having to pay for it will actually reduce. There are too many individuals and I mean, I am not saying that they do it deliberately, there are leaks in their own homes, drips and they do not fix it. As a result of that, you keep having to produce water to solve the shortage problem because a lot of water is wasted or a lot of water goes unaccounted for and not paid for.

So yes, we have 3 billion and we probably will need to spend, if you want to meter the country, you probably need to spend another 1.5 billion, but I think to solve the problem, that is one area that we have not spent money in and we need to spend money in that particular area because spending money in production and putting the water through the porous lines, that is not the solution. So the solution to me centres around trying to fix the lines and also trying to demand management issues, focusing on metering the country and I feel therefore, you will then go a long way in making sure that the water that we presently have will be able to satisfy our needs. So that is the plan going forward.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. I will probably go later on. Thank you very much, Minister.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So we go on to 55, Regulated Industries Commission. This is on page 209. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration.

**12.30 p.m.**

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration, on page 210. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, page 90. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund.

Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Hon. Members, Item 003 spans five pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. A: Electricity, which you will find on page 90 to 91. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, under line Item 586, could the Minister, I do not need it now, but, could the Minister indicate whether there is any intention to light any recreation ground in my constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla please. Thank you.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Now—

**Madam Chairman:** Now, or you do not need it now.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Now, you said you do not need it now. That is fine.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** If you do—well, yeah.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 599, could you give us a little bit of information with respect to that line Item? And based on what you say, then I will ask subsequent questions if necessary.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Five nine—

**Mr. Karim:** Nine, it is the last Item on page 90. It is a new project.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Five million for skills.

**Mr. Karim:** Five million.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** As he said, I mean, and my colleague, you know SDG 12 speaks to sustainable consumption, and we are looking at developing and we need no words to say about consumption in this particular area, we are looking at using graduates and training them in an outreach programme and activity to meet Government's mandate to increase the level of conservation throughout the utility sector, in keeping with our energy efficiency and energy conservation policy development.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. How many graduates are we thinking

about here?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Again, the programme we are probably thinking about trying to see if we need about 100 in the first case, and see how the programme develops and developing them in this whole area of energy. As I said, energy efficiency, energy conservation and trying to utilize those skills, because we recognize that that is an area, that whole idea of conservation in all our utilities, both in the electricity side and also the water side, we need to spend some focus there because we cannot continue producing, all right. It costs a lot to produce and therefore the whole idea of conservation and demand management issues are important.

**Mr. Karim:** Will this be done in-house or will it be done through a TLI— an institution of tertiary education? It is an in-house skill training or?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, it is in-house—

**Mr. Karim:** In-house skill training.

**Hon. Le Hunte:**—skill training.

**Mr. Karim:** And can you give us a sense that we can at least be advised as Members of Parliament when you propose that this might start?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I will definitely do so.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay. You have any sense of the duration of it, how long it might take?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Am—

**Mr. Karim:** You do not have to give it to me today if you do not have it. If you could send me the training design, I will be able to make some sense of it.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Right, Member for Caroni Central, I am not sure if I saw your hand.

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, I am fine.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. With respect to Lighting of Parks and Recreational Grounds, 586, there is an increased allocation of \$10 million, and I hope that in this \$10 million the Minister can find some moneys for the Beaucarro Recreation Ground, and the Esperanza Recreation Ground. In addition to that, Minister, I do not know if in—with respect to the National Street Lighting Programme, the estimate is to spend \$10 million. From time to time I have observed that, for example a number of the, for example, the Couva/Preysal interchange, the cremation site road in Caroni and a number of areas you drive around from time to time. The Rivulet Road, and there are wide expanses where sometime you see 10, 20 street lights that are out, and in this high crime environment and so on, I would really ask of you to use your office to continue to press upon T&TEC the importance of street lighting repairs and so on.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Okay, I will pass the sentiments over to T&TEC, and again, if they are in the areas, continue to let me know so that we could then look at them, and we could then we could see how we could fact them in the programme. Of course, we have limited cash, and we are trying to again as keeping with our mantra, trying to do more with less, you know.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Normally when my office contacts the office of the general manager of T&TEC and so on, there is a positive response, but I am just pressing the case because I have observed it and I continue to call for that.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, I am grateful and I am glad to hear that the T&TEC manager responds to you in a very prompt manner.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Well, his secretary and so on passes on the appropriate messages from time to time.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I am glad to hear that you are happy with the service that you get

from T&TEC.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 590: Illumination of Grounds of Police Stations. I see that this is a reactivated project and you have allocated for 2020, 400,000. Can you say how many police stations and where you intend to implement this project?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** We normally do this upon request. That is why there is a small allocation there. We anticipate that we might have to and it is upon request.

**Ms. Ramdial:** So can you say now, how many police stations and where, or?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Right now—that—right.

**Ms. Ramdial:** If not you can let me know in writing. Let us know in writing.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The amount that you—

**Ms. Ramdial:** Where and how many.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** So the allocation that we have will handle about up to five.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Right.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Right, We do not—as I said it is upon request—

**Ms. Ramdial:** Okay.

**Hon. Le Hunte—**we have catered for five, and therefore we wait for the request—

**Ms. Ramdial:** Of course.

**Hon. Le Hunte:**—to deal with it because we recognize it is important.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Okay, thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 596, hon. Minister—

**Hon. Le Hunte:** 596.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—which is Replacement of Aging Transmission Infrastructure. It is a parallel to the transmission but generation. There is the former generation plant on Wrightson Road which has been closed for reasons that I think is beneficial because it is not efficient. What has happened to that in terms—is it going to just



sit there, and what are the plans of T&TEC as far as that compound is concerned?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, I think that—as you said that plant is closed. I think that plant is under PowerGen, and they have a responsibility to dismantle it. T&TEC is not taking any power from the plant. It is a power plant, and therefore it is being dismantled, and an appropriate contract is being put in place to make sure that happens.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So you have had discussions with PowerGen?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, and based on my understanding the dismantling of that will start in 2020.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You come late.

**Mr. Imbert:** Just let me make the point here, Madam Chairman. In the period of the UNC Government the agreement for the decommissioning of that plant was changed to put the burden of risk on the Government, and the cost of environmental remediation on the Government. That was previously to be shared by the parties. Your Government put the entire cost and the entire burden of environmental remediation on the Government which has posed a significant challenge in terms of dismantling that plant.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But, I can tell you that—

**Mr. Imbert:** It is a huge cost in millions of dollars.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I can tell you the movement of that plant under the PNM administration to PowerGen was a loss for T&TEC, and where PowerGen now had been distributing—generating the power, T&TEC suffered major losses as a result of having lost that plant and that occurred in the late 1990s. It occurred when a decision was taken by a PNM administration to remove that—PowerGen—that T&TEC generating plant and give it over to PowerGen. So you must be reminded of that as well.

**Mr. Imbert:** We are in 2019.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, I want to echo the sentiments of my colleague, your CEO has been very helpful, but may I make a plug for a more effective communication system when there is downtime in electricity, when there are outages, people find difficulty in understanding an approximate time for when the electricity can come back. There is a weakness in that area, and perhaps this needs to be looked at very carefully.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** All right, definitely, but the uptime efficiency of T&TEC has actually—I monitor it from that perspective and it has actually been very good. However, I agreed with you, even if it comes back fairly quickly, people when they call they need to know beforehand how long it is going to take, and that is always something that we continue to push. But I am sure also, and that is why as I mentioned before that our “Tell Us” programme whereby we will be interfacing, and getting better feedback to be able to provide all the utilities, WASA, T&TEC, TSTT, TTPost, with a little bit more updated information. That is why I am anxious to put that programme out there in the system.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right, okay.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes, Madam Chairman. Minister, 599: Special Skills Training for Energy Conservation, now \$5 million allocation, it is a new project. Can you give details of this particular project, what it will entail, who are the consultants and so on? I do not know.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** We answered that already—I passed that information—was asked by Tabaquite.

**Madam Chairman:** By the Member for Chaguanas East.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Yes, Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Item 597, obviously this is the

expansion of the Cove generating capacity, 94 million. Was that a loan, or was the money out of the Consolidated Fund? 597.

**Madam Chairman:** Page 90.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** 597, Expansion of Generating Capacity, that particular project is now—

**Mr. Singh:** It is completed, but was it a loan, the moneys, or moneys from the Consolidated Fund, or from the PSIP?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, there was a loan that was done to take out that project, but I suspect there was some money and there was some from the Consolidated Fund. Because we did talk about a loan to T&TEC for that particular project.

**Mr. Singh:** Yeah, thank you. So it just demonstrates whenever you want to have any major capital programme in order to fund the utilities you have to take out loans.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Madam Chair, I want to move on to Water Sources, I do not know if you are going to be highlighting the Sub-Heads.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, yes.

**Ms. Ramdial:** So I will hold on then.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, good, thank you. Member for Caroni Central, we are still on A: Electricity.

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, I want to go to Water Sources as well.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so we will call that. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 593: Electrification Programme, I see that you are in 2019 you had estimated 3 million, but you did not utilize any, and now you have 5 million in 2020. Can you identify the projects that you plan in 2019 that did not happen and you plan now in 2020?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** All right, so the question is what are the plans—what did we do in 2019, the projects that were done?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** That you were planning to do, because in effect I do not see any revised estimate in 2019. So is it that you are going to have the—

**1.00 p.m.**

Item: 005; Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans two pages, therefore, I will announce the project in groups. A. Administrative Services. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Madam Chair, if I can crave your indulgence. I did not hear you call Welfare Services, C., and I wanted a question under that, which is on page 94.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so that is Item 004: Social Infrastructure?

**Mr. Karim:** On line Item: 002. If you passed it, it is okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, all right. So we are at Item 005: Multi-Sectoral, which I said spans two pages so we are at A. Administrative Services. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Two questions, Chair. 055: Adopt and Implement Integrated Water Resources Management. What is that project? \$500,000 is allocated.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** It is the adoption of—it is the Integrated Water Resource Policy which is the development and implementation of our annual programme of works based on the difference between the revised—It is the whole idea of—we have developed an action plan, or we are going to develop an action plan to implement the policy with regard to integrated water supply management. The whole integrated water supply management which is what we spoke about, the whole bringing together of managing and the separation of the water, from the water resource agency, from WASA. That, together with after the consultations that were done, there are a number of other small initiatives that we feel that we could

implement coming out of that consultation.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas—

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, I have another.

**Madam Chairman:** I am sorry.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Community Water Improvement Programme. What is that one?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** That is a programme whereby we recognize that there are a number of communities, small communities. All right, those are communities where you are receiving less than 24/3 supply, you know 24/1, lots of communities where there is no water at all, and there is just small work that needs to be done in expanding the grids, and in trying to get—first to begin, there is close-by water, but there needs to expand the grid to get water to them.

So we have identified a number of these small projects, a number of these small areas, and we have been attempting to get water to these particular areas. We have a list of projects that we have looked at in 2019, and then we have a list of projects of areas that are not getting water at all, or areas that are getting water 24/1, 24/2, and therefore, we just need to do some tweaking to the system to be able to improve. So, it might be just to change the pipes that are small and you need to expand the pipes to get more flow of water to the area.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair, thank you. Hon. Minister, there are three such projects in my constituency, and you do not need to give it to me now, but if it is possible for you to identify to me if those three projects are already in fact, would be one on your listing please? In my constituency.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Meet with me after.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 063: 5 million again. Is that the similar projects that we would have seen so far?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** So, yes—no. This now, again within the Ministry as you know, we have also developed the whole energy efficiency and energy conservation action plan. Now, there are a number of items to roll out, not at the utilities, but there is the action plan, there is the public relations that needs to happen. We realize that there is a lot of misinformation that you all—I thought, you know, the whole bulb initiative. I recognize that there is a lot of work that needs to be done in educating the population on the LED lighting systems, and how they could enhance to reduce their own bills. And therefore, there is that whole series of programmes that came out of the energy efficiency and energy conservation programme that we also need to roll out educational programmes. That is part of that work. And the setting up of an appropriate unit within the Ministry itself, again to be supervised by our Parliamentary Secretary to have that work executed.

**Mr. Karim:** How many persons you contemplate might be involved in a project of this nature?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** With again, we have budgeted—in this particular year we have taken an allocation of five because we hope to get this programme going. I mean, we are now staffing that particular department, doing those type of resources. And should we need, as we roll it out, should we need additional money I think we will probably have to come for a greater expansion come the mid-year review.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West, I do not know if you have anything on this. Administrative Services? I believe your hand was up?

**Mr. Singh:** Okay, I just wanted to talk to the Minister about 049: the drought management, the Development of a Water Supply Drought Management Plan, and whether or not that when he rolls out that plan, that we get it prior to the dry season, or early in the dry season so that therefore, the necessary adjustment and

education can be made. Because you already have the plan in place. It is completed.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** As I said, the project, the plan itself but I mean, even in the absence of that written document, which we feel that is important, that you must have a written document so someone could then use. But there is an action plan and we have been rolling out elements of that action plan without an actual manual in place then.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, H. Meteorological Services. Member for Couva North.

**Mrs. Ramdial:** No, it is G. not H. Sorry.

**Mr. Singh:** What is this “Procurement of a Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite Receiving System?”

**Hon. Le Hunte:** That is part of an upgrade. That is a fancy word to upgrading your meteorological system to bring it in line, because there was some, if I recall, there was the alignment of it with the international standards and to be able to get information, readily information. We needed to do some upgrades and this is what this is attempting to do.

**Mr. Singh:** As you are on that, hon. Minister, there has been a perennial problem with the road to the Doppler System in the central area. I take it that that is that problem from the meteorological department has been cured? Accessing there, check on it.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** You know, the meteorological department has not complained.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, we go on now to G. Sanitary Services. Member for Couva North.

**Mrs. Ramdial:** Thank you, Ma'am. Minister, line Item 013: Upgrade of Recovery and Recycling Facilities Plant and Equipment. I see that as a new

project, and 5 million allocated for that. Can you say where these recycling facilities are and what type of plant and equipment you will be upgrading?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** Well, there is the whole NAMDEVCO plant. We are looking to bring the beverage container Bill. We have spoken about it, and therefore, we are hoping that when that plant is brought up we will need to upgrade the facilities, because the plant will then have to take on an increased volume. So that money is catering for the upgrade of that particular plant to deal with the increased volumes anticipated under the beverage container Bill.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West. So, we can now go on to the Infrastructure Development Fund. This is at page 197. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure.

Hon Members, this Item spans two pages and therefore I will call it according to the project groups. B. Local Water Resources. F. Other Water Projects. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to the Wastewater Expansion under F., Item 006 and 002, both Items were funded by the IDB. Based on the Public Sector Investment Programme, the Malabar project is completed, but the San Fernando waste water programme is 68 per cent complete and they both started at the same time. What are the problems being encountered at the San Fernando waste water treatment project?

**Hon. Member:** You brave to ask “dat”.

**Mr. Singh:** No.

**Hon. Member:** You brave to ask “dat”.

**Mr. Singh:** No, after—and I want to complete that because I heard the utterance of the Minister of Health. The current administration increased the contract by US \$19 million, because of—the excuse they gave, or the rationale they gave to put it



differently, is that the contractor under-bid for certain equipment and as a result, because he said he did not envisage the cost to be that. So that, there was an increase of US 19 million, and your mantra is value for money. But other than that, with the increase to US 19 million additional to the fixed-price contract which was internationally and competitively bid, what is the reason for the delay beyond that?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I want to endorse the sentiments that were just mentioned by the Member, it was a bad contractor. This particular contractor has had problems. We have been working with this contractor, the IDB and ourselves have been working with this contractor, and the contractor is a bad—I mean to say the contractor has had severe challenges in executing this particular project. We have been trying to keep it as tight as possible. You alluded to one of the issues. That has gone into arbitration to deal with the issue, all right, and our hands are in the lion's mouth as they say. It is already in place. There is going to be tremendous uproar in trying to stop a project like this in the mid-stream and trying, so you want to get it completed.

We have worked—when I took office two years ago we were like about 35 per cent, talking, we have gotten it up now to about six—right, and I think it has actually—it is up close to about 78 per cent now. So, it has actually gotten a lot better, and we are looking to have the project completed very early next year.

**Mr. Singh:** I just want to respond, Madam Chair, that this contractor was selected using IDB procurement rules, and that therefore when the hon. Minister of Finance says that “you get a bad contractor”, or “you chose a bad contractor”, it was done in accordance with multilateral guidelines.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** And I recognize that. That does not mean it was not—

**Mr. Imbert:** Just let me come in here. One of the problems with those

procurement processes is that quite often you end up with the wrong contractor because you have to follow a particular approach, and quite often the necessary due diligence is not done. And in this particular case, I am certain that sufficient due diligence was not done and this is why you picked a bad contractor.

**Mr. Singh:** I just want to respond to that because it seems to me that the Minister of Finance has a level of relativity in the context of due diligence. Because this contractor, Acciona Agua, was the same contractor who bid on the waste water project at half—what they said was half the price, and that therefore it was not the lowest contractor who won that project. So then, he was a good contractor, and now you are saying that we chose a bad contractor. Thank you.

**1.15 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** You did choose a bad contractor. It is your fault. You stuck us with it, and we are struggling with your bad decision now.

**Mr. Singh:** I will suggest that you take it to the IDB.

**Mr. Imbert:** I will. I will.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** You did pick a good contractor in the other one. If I have to give credit in the case of Malabar and the other one; that was a good contractor. This one is a challenge.

**Mr. Singh:** I just want for clarity, Madam Chair, that the Minister at that time, and I do not want to speak in the third person, but we had nothing to do with the procurement of the contractor. It was a process managed and carried out by the IDB in conjunction with WASA.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Chairman, just let me say that since then we have raised concerns with the IDB, but because of the process they have still insisted that we continue along these lines. But we have raised our concerns, and it has caused some sleepless nights for us. Because this is a contract that really should

have been completed already.

**Madam Chairman:** Right, we move on, G. Sanitary Services; I. Water and Sewerage; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

**Mr. Singh:** I have a question on page 198, Madam Chair, please indulge me.

**Madam Chairman:** That is provided that you tell me you have no questions on Item 005.

**Mr. Singh:** No, no, no, I have none there. Rehabilitation of the Scarborough Wastewater Treatment Plant, what is the status of this project? I see that it has been completed. How many persons or homes are now connected to this plant?

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The Rehabilitation of the Scarborough Wastewater Plant?

**Mr. Singh:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** I could get that number to you. I do not have it offhand.

**Mr. Singh:** I will just, by way of explanation. When this plant was built in the 1980s, only about five homes were connected. Subsequently, we got an IDB grant to refurbish the homes in the area, to connect. So I just wanted to know if that project is completed, because there was leaching and bleaching taking place as a result of persons not connected in the shoreline areas.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** The answer to your question, there are a number of people that are connected, I will provide. But the project is completed.

**Mr. Singh:** Very good.

**Hon. Le Hunte:** It is working well, and it is providing the necessary benefit with regard to the outflow to the Buccoo area, and so forth, and that, it is achieving its objectives.

**Mr. Singh:** Good.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 39 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Parliamentary Secretary. Thank you, Ms. PS. You all are excused, thank you very much.

*Head 43:* Ministry of Works and Transport, \$2,548,280,000.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Works and Transport to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Works and Transport is one of the largest Ministries in Trinidad and Tobago with responsibility for the provision of high quality infrastructure and the management of an integrated transportation system which meets the needs of the public. In particular, the Ministry undertakes drainage, road and highway construction, bridge construction, traffic management, provision of public transport, infrastructure and services, port construction and coastal protection work. The Ministry has 12 technical units, 11 support units and 11 statutory bodies and agencies under its remit.

In financial year 2019, the Ministry executed capital works on approximately 200 projects to the public and continued and started work on another 100 projects valued at \$881 million. These works represent approximately 70 per cent of its budgetary allocation in the financial year of \$1.259 billion. Under our recurrent programme, we initiated over 500 projects.

In fiscal 2020, the Ministry has been allocated \$3.55 billion, which amounts to approximately 7 per cent of the total national budget of 53.036 billion. In respect of the total capital budget of 3.23 billion, the Ministry received 23 per cent of the total or \$1.249 billion for its 2020 capital programme of works. With this significant allocation, the Ministry will undertake 72 capital projects and implement work intended to improve its service delivery via the purchase of new buses, the inter-island vessels, commissioning of a new technology such as the spot speed and red-light enforcement camera system, introduction of a demerit point

system and a new number plate system, as well as the upgrade of the marine infrastructure, among others.

Via its Highway Division, the Ministry is responsible for the upgrade and maintenance of 2,130 kilometres of roadway and 1,084 bridges throughout Trinidad. The ongoing major highway upgrade projects such as the Solomon Hochoy Highway extension to Point Fortin, the extension of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to Sangre Grande, the upgrade of the Moruga Road and the construction of the first-class road to Valencia to Toco will add an additional 70 kilometres and over 15 bridges to its inventory.

A direct benefit of infrastructure upgrade and expansion includes employment over the last four years of over 4,750 jobs have been generated by the Ministry capital projects. Other indirect benefits improve productivity as a result of better access to jobs, health care, education and social services.

The improved infrastructure has also increased safety on our national roads, which is illustrated in the decline in fatal road traffic accidents from a high of 128 in 2015 to 109 in 2018 and 72 to date, for 2019. In examining the Ministry's budgetary allocation, I urge my colleagues to keep in mind that the figures in the Estimates of expenditure are based on projections which the Ministry of Finance utilized when it commenced the difficult task of preparing the national budget. Therefore, the revised allocation for 2019, and the resulting increase and decrease in the 2020 allocation generally does not reflect those in the records of the Ministry and its agencies. In fact, the Ministry's revised allocation for 2019 is \$3.7 billion and not \$2.92 billion, as stated in the estimate of expenditure.

Further, while we recognize that our national economy is still in a period of recovery and proper financial management is an essential practice, be assured that we will continue to closely monitor and manage the Ministry's budgetary allocation

in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance to ensure the efficiency and effective utilization of these funds. In particular, we will seek to confirm that adequate fundings are available for the Ministry's ongoing and planned work during the financial year and also to identify savings as they become available for transfer to critical areas in deficit.

Further, during the annual mid-year review exercise we will again seek the assistance of the Ministry of Finance to allocate supplementary funding for the various programmes and projects where absolutely necessary. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I look forward to your questions.

*Question proposed:* That Head 43 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,548,280,000 for Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport 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 268.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Highways. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, under 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., there is an increase of \$9 million in your 2020 estimates. Could you just elaborate, why the increase?

**Hon. Sinanan:** For payment of arrears of wages for the past two financial years 2018 and 2019, and current wages, as well as to meet wages for new staff being hired for ongoing recruitment exercises.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** How much new staff will be recruited and what will they be

doing?

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is approximately 36 new staff.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And in terms of job classification.

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is for various classifications under the Highways Division.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And you said arrears of wages. Right? For what period?

**Hon. Sinanan:** 2018, and some in 2019.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So, in terms of—so employees at the Ministry of Works and Transport, are they up to par, in terms of their collective bargaining process? Because I heard you said there was an agreement for '18 and '19?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, I did not say any agreement. And if you look at the allocation, we actually got an estimate in 2019 of 105. And what we are getting now is really 100.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No, I—

**Hon. Sinanan:** So it is not really an increase.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No, I heard you say—and I stand to be corrected, in terms of arrears for 2018 and 2019. So that will point me in a direction that there was an agreement in terms, or a collective agreement that was signed.

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, no. Remember at the opening I did indicate that the figures that you pick up like the 191 would be a projected at the time.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** “Um-hmm.”

**Hon. Sinanan:** And if you look, at it, we got really 100 as the Estimate. You go back to 2019, where we got 105. So although you are seeing an actual increase of \$9 million here, it is not necessarily an increase. But we do have some outstanding arrears for 2019, which will come out of this.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And again, I ask, the arrears is in relation to what period for collective bargaining then?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Right. So, it is not in terms of any negotiation. It is just a follow-on from the previous years. It is not any negotiation for the arrears with the bargaining unions.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And you said it is not any follow-on from a—

**Hon. Sinanan:** From any negotiation with any unions.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And if you are saying it is arrears, so you are just giving workers increases there?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, and that is why I had a long opening statement which suggested that the figures that the Ministry of Finance will pick up is really a projected figure. So when you have here \$91 million as the revised estimate, it is just an estimate.

The Estimate for 2020 is 100 million, the Estimate from 2019 was 105 million, so we actually got—but because of the timing, because of the timing it looks like that.

**1.30p.m.**

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Again Minister, I have to ask you this. So the wages and salaries projection that is stated page on 268 from a Highways point of view, what period does this reflect, 2012 to '14, 2016 to '19, what it is?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Okay. So, there are no arrears in terms of—if I get what you are trying to find out, it is if this is in arrears of any back pay or any negotiations that took place before. The answer to that is no. Because when they took up the figures, the difference here would have been from the time they took up the figures to when the actual financial year ended. If that is more clear.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, I rest my case.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah, better we go on from that.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Minister, my concern is a little different. Under Highways here, you have the Wages and C.O.L.A., whether it is 91 million or 100 million it is new



to my view. But my concern is what number of workers does this represent? Are these workers located in different divisions of the country? And how efficiently are they being used when you look at materials later on and you see only \$3 million in Materials and Supplies to this division? That is my concern, efficiency of use.

**Hon. Sinanan:** We do work with the money allocated to us and as I did indicate, again at the opening, we do transfer money into different Votes and I can assure you that in terms of material we will be transferring into other areas, because we do a lot of work now in-house as compared to contracting out some of the smaller services. So yes, this is one area that we will be transferring funding into.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chairman, you know, I know you are going Item by Item but some of this will make much more sense if you could have related it to, for example, the section on Materials and Supplies, where, like the Minister just said, the contractual services and Other Contracted Services there is \$60 million. So if we knew what that other \$60 million represents, we would know how efficient, you know, these number of workers, whether it is highways, maintenance, construction or what, are being utilized. Because I was the Minister of Works and Transport and I am very concerned about the number of people who just sit down doing nothing in those locations; with the number of pieces of equipment that are down and not being repaired.

**Hon. Sinanan:** And I share your concerns on that and—

**Dr. Rambachan:** How do you make the system more efficient? That is my concern with this.

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is something that we are looking at. Yes, there is a challenge there, some of the teams, as we call them, they are supposed to have a certain amount of members and once you have some shortfall there, you find that the amount of work that you are supposed to get done, you do not normally get it done.

So we are looking at filling all these vacancies to ensure that, one, we have the appropriate staff for the job, and two, where we have funding that may not be utilized, we transfer it to ensure that we have goods and services.

**Dr. Rambachan:** There will be evidence where a lot of money was transferred to Highways Division in the last budget?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Not necessarily, but this is what we are looking at, at this point in time. What we are trying to make sure is that even places like the Agua Santa plant, where we actually produce our own mix, that we have sufficient funding for things like that, because we would have saved significantly on the—actually, the in-house road patching.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So, Minister, very quickly, Wages and C.O.L.A. represent this 100 million, or 91million will represent how many workers?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Okay. Right. So under the Highways Division, we have 1,755 staff, permanent. Then you have the casual, the regular which gives you a total of 1,899 staff.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. And Minister, I make the point just one more time. That this 1,899 persons in Highways Division just have \$3million in terms of purchase of materials and supplies. And I cannot see how you could effectively utilize 1,899 persons with \$3million in supplies, because your Other Contracted Services is 60 million.

**Hon. Sinanan:** There are two ways I can account for that. A lot of the labour does not require material, a lot of it is cutting, highway, the verges and cleaning and so. And the challenge we have is that if we want to increase, that is where we take it from.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And I understand that. But, Minister if I may say, if you drive through as you live in that area on the Manzanilla/Mayaro Road, you will see for

how long the grass has not been cut and it is actually coming on the road. If you drive through Claxton Bay, you will see the same thing in Macaulay where the grass is coming—where are these people, why are they not there on the job with some, you know, periodic maintenance programme? These same very Highway Division people. Two thousand people, we are talking about a lot of persons here.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Those are the establishments and we do have a lot of vacancies which we are in the process of filling. But that in my opinion is not necessarily an excuse, because we do have the complement of CEPEP, we try to use URP, and I agree with you that some of the roadways should be in a better condition.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So, Minister, I give you one example so that you would understand the concern, I mean, I speak here for all my colleagues. From Forres Park going into Tortuga, right, that road, I wrote you several times about all the trees that are on the road and everything else. Eventually, after four months of pleading, the residents themselves had to find overhead trucks and find equipment and so on to clear their own road to go there, which was not done by the Ministry.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. So there are two reasons for that. We do have a significant amount of vacancies which affects the teams. And one of the areas that I had identified as a major challenge is the fact that the cadre of workers in the Ministry would have been the same when the amount of roadways that the highway had under them was probably about half.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So you do not have 1,899 then?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No. That is the establishment.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So, about how much do you have?

**Hon. Sinanan:** We have probably less than about 1,400.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Fourteen hundred, Minister. That is quite a substantial amount.

**Hon. Sinanan:** But then that is divided throughout Trinidad, and if you look at the

amount of—when this 1,899 was developed, the Highways Division probably had half the amount of responsibility that they have right now. So what we are doing right now is reorganizing that department because we are working with a cadre of staff that was established probably about 30 years ago when we had significantly less highways and responsibility.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Is it the same Highways people you are training now to put back up the cable barriers?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, the people from the Highways Division, yes. And it seems to be working for us, because the cost of maintenance through the contractor that was hired, when I came in we were owing him, I think, \$18 million, and although that is a very good system, it is very, very expensive to maintain.

**Dr. Rambachan:** You would recognize, Minister, that half of the cable barriers are down now, you know, for those of us who go everyday down that highway?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The reason for that is that if you fix it tonight and somebody touches it tomorrow, it does not just fall in that one spot. It falls—

**Dr. Rambachan:** A length.

**Hon. Sinanan:**—a distance. So, and I have seen that happening where I went one day to see what they do and maybe two days after you go back and you see it down, it is because somebody touched it lower down. Unfortunately, we were not able to recover that money from any insurance so far. But the cable barriers, yes it is a good system, but it is very, very expensive to maintain. And so we have decided to buy some of the equipment, we are renting equipment now, and we should be doing it in-house.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, if I am not mistaken, I heard you mention that what we are examining here is really not a true reflection of—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, it is—go ahead.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—the Revised Estimates and Estimates for 2020. And you said, in fact, what is down here at 2.9 is in fact, 3.7. I think when you read it out this is what I got from it. So I am just wondering how does—

**Hon. Sinanan:** 3.2. Let me just get that exact figure here.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** From what you read.

**Hon. Sinanan:** 3.7.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah. So what is reflected here in the Ministry of Finance budget document is really not a true picture of what—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Because these are estimated figures at the point in time.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** We are getting that here when—I think Madam Chair, will back me up on this. That we are getting figures and every Ministry is coming saying that these are not the true figures for Revised Estimates because bills are coming in and bills are coming in. So I wonder, when does the Ministry of Finance do their reconciliation with the various Ministries?

**Madam Chairman:** Closing of—[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, let me deal with this again because members of the public who have not seen the response to this issue before, which I have done three times, now I am doing for the fourth time.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Fifth time.

**Hon. Imbert:** Fifth according to the Member for Tabaquite. The Ministry of Finance will do a projection for the month of September, because it starts to close off all of its calculations in the first week in September. So it does a projection, and we have an annual exercise which you, Member, have participated in 19 times, because I heard you say the other day that you have been an MP for 20 years. The annual closing of the accounts in December—[*Interruption*]—you said you have been here for a while. Okay, for a while, fine. So you have been an MP for 10

years—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Whatever.

**Hon. Imbert:**—and you know that there is an annual exercise at the end of the calendar year, where we close the accounts in December at which time all of the actual numbers are presented to this Parliament. You know very well these are just estimates. I do not know why you have to keep going over and over the same thing.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, I am seeing a variation of 2.9 to 3.7.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not significant.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So, \$800 million in one month.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not significant.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So 2.9 to 3.7, that is \$800 million is not significant?

**Hon. Imbert:** We have \$1 billion outside in uncashed cheques right now as we speak.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, you are making flimsy excuses for your inefficiency.

**Hon. Imbert:** Flimsy excuses. You have been in government.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So why are you are bringing us—[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Imbert:** You are just making up stories.

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. You will answer. Minister of Finance, you will answer.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Eight hundred million not accounted for and you are bringing—

**Hon. Imbert:** Eight hundred million?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** This is an exercise in futility.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, if I may. The Member knows that this is how it is always done. This is not the first time, as he rightly said, he has been in Parliament for quite some time. And the way these books are published is how it

has always been done.

**Hon. Imbert:** Under your administration too.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** So I do not know where—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** This is the first year that I am seeing—

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not true.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** That is not true, that is not true. Madam Chairman—

**Hon. Imbert:** You are making up stories.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** That is not true. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Imbert:** You are “gallerying” for the camera.

**Madam Chairman:** So, okay. If all the crosstalk could be completed now—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:**—I know people might be getting a little hungry. But, I would like us to really focus for another 15 minutes, another very productive 15 minutes so that we could make a little inroad into here. Okay? Let us go.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister of Finance, you heard that?

**Madam Chairman:** So we are now at 003: Traffic Management; 004: Central Planning Unit. [*Crosstalk*]

Member for Caroni East, Member for Caroni East, I am calling your aid because of your seniority and something you mentioned last week that happens at that lower half of the room that sometimes, you know, impedes your hearing. I am asking you to help control whatever happens at that lower part of the room so that we can get through.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** [*Inaudible*] responsibility?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, please. Thank you very much.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is an onerous responsibility.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 004: Central Planning Unit; Item 005: Drainage.

Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under 16, Contract Employment, could you tell us how you plan to—

**Madam Chairman:** Where are we? Okay. So 005: Drainage. That is page 270.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Sorry, sorry.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I am looking at, again Wages and C.O.L.A., 46 million projected, 44 million revised. Now, again, if you have, let us say, 1,400 workers under Drainage as you may have, where are we getting the resources to effectively use these persons because when you look Drainage again, Materials and Supplies, and repairs, it is very, very negligible; very, very. Maybe \$2million.

**1.45 p.m.**

**Hon. Sinanan:** Again, Madam Chair, the actual revised is 52. So it is really the same figure that we got in—

**Dr. Rambachan:** And that is okay.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Right. And, again, I would love to have more money, but you need to tell me where to take it from. I leave the Minister of Finance to decide on the allocation. What we do at the Ministry is that we look in terms of, especially drainage—because it may present itself somewhere along here where we would have transferred funding to areas like these which we deem critical. So we would go back to our allocations and if funding is required for materials or goods and services in critical areas like this, then we do our transfers.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Let us agree that drainage is critical.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Right? We agree that drainage is critical. So you have \$46 million paying a number of workers. Do you have the equipment available to support the employment of these people or, if not, what are they doing?



**Hon. Sinanan:** All right. Most of these will do river cleaning and so.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Right.

**Hon. Sinanan:** All right? So the Ministry does have its equipment. Most of these salaries here are for the manual labour which does not really require the heavy equipment. We do a lot of desilting under another Vote where we would actually rent equipment. So most of this here is for labour intensive cleaning. But there are a lot of watercourses that you really cannot put heavy equipment in.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well, I probably disagree, because you can put small equipment also to deal with some of the smaller watercourses.

**Hon. Sinanan:** And we do that under another Vote.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yeah. And what I am saying is the time has come—because I was trying to do it when I was there—to revise how we operate with all this labour, because I believe there is about a 40 per cent wastage in terms of the employment of people and what they are producing. Not only here, but in local government also, and the number of hours people just work or do not go to work or just go and do nothing and we cannot afford—if we are talking about saving money—to continue to have this massive drain on productivity. We cannot afford it, and I am advocating that you review this system to make people more productive, and if that means investing in smaller equipment to clean those drains and so on, it has to be done.

Mr. Minister, for example, you are still putting people sometimes with cutlasses to cut along the highway—like CEPEP is putting people with wackers to cut big areas on the highway, which they could take one piece of equipment and two persons and cut it where they have more than 10 people or 20 people employed now. Right? And I am saying if it is to keep people employed that is one thing, but if it is to make sure that we save money that we can utilize to finish

the schools, to fund the hospitals, to do this and that, I think we need to look carefully at how we are utilizing these people. If it means retraining them, I think we ought to retrain them also in the use of equipment. I believe and I take responsibility also maybe when I was a Minister that we did not go far enough, that there is a need to revamp the utilization of labour on a more productive basis.

**Hon. Sinanan:** All right. I have heard what you said and just to give you the assurance, that is exactly what we are doing. And if you look at the amount of work that the Drainage Division was able to achieve, this year is significantly more, bearing in mind that post-2015, the Drainage Division went across to water resource. When it came back, it came back basically with a very skeleton staff in terms of the administrative level. We are rebuilding that capacity now, and we are trying our best to utilize the staff in such a way that we could actually get more with less, and we have been able to achieve significant improvements in the Drainage Division, I would say within the last year or so. But I take everything that you say into context.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Very concerning.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Item 006, Mechanical Services; Item 007, Maintenance. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Again, Madam Chair. Minister, we have Wages and C.O.L.A. an increase of, what? \$13 million in your allocation for 2020. Could you tell us what would be done with this?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. So the actual revised was 58 million. So it is—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The revised will be 45?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Right. So the 45 is basically when it was a projected and picked up—I think this was sometime at the end of March, whenever they would have picked it up, but the actual revised was 58,732,000, which is almost the estimate

that we got, and we are getting 58 million this year. So, really, there is no increase.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So what you are saying?

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is the same figure, basically. It is the same figure. There is no increase. You see, that is why my opening statement was a bit long, but really what I tried to put across is exactly that, that these are estimates, and at the point in time when you pick them up, there could be a variance. So, at that point in time, it was 45, but the actual expenditure was actually 58, which is exactly what we got now. So there is no increase really. **Mr. Indarsingh:** No, but I mean, you are forcing me to go back to 2018, where there was 51.9 million. So what? You hired additional staff or something?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Not necessarily.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So you just increased cost in terms of Wages and C.O.L.A. by \$8 million and you did not increase the staff.

**Hon. Sinanan:** I could check what would have caused the increase and give it to you in writing, but the 2019—and it is 2020 we are looking at—there is no increase from 2019 to 2020 allocation.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 008, Construction.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Chair, I am forced to ask the Minister, again, under Wages and C.O.L.A., there is an increase of 3.2 million. He might tell me the same thing.

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is actually the same thing. You see, I tried to simplify it at the beginning, but maybe it did not—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I mean, Minister, you have—the actual cost in terms of what is being spent is increasing, and you are saying that you have not hired additional staff. There is no increased wages based on no new collective agreement was signed. So I am forced to ask the question, unless something is happening at the Ministry of Works and Transport where we are not being told really, because you

are actually spending more money and you are saying that your staff complement remains the same. So I am a bit puzzled how this is happening.

**Hon. Sinanan:** I tried to help you at beginning by reading the opening statement.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No, you are not helping us, you know.

**Hon. Sinanan:** In 2019, the actual was 11,800,000 and in 2019, my actual revised is 11,335,000. So contrary to what you are saying is that there was an increase, there was not an increase. The challenge we have is that at the point in time when the estimate was taken, it showed 8.6 million and the explanation for that is that it was an estimate at that time. The actual—because you would not have the actual, but I have the actual here. It is 11,335,000 which is a little less than the 8,800,000 for 2019.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And that is what I am asking, and this is where we are being forced to probe you and we may conclude here that the Minister of Finance needs to send back these books to the Printery. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** If you have 11 million and you have recorded here 8.6 million, how are we to know that? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** You are gallerying.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** This is not gallerying. The Minister has—[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Sinanan:** Madam Chair—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister of Finance, this is asking. This is not gallerying.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** These books are false, because they do not reflect what is really happening. They are useless.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You are putting out fraudulent positions on the establishment. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** You are gallerying for the camera. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You are incompetent man. You have the job to do.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Minister of Finance, Member for Caroni East and Member for Couva South, okay. [*Interruption*] Minister of Finance. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance, please.

**Mr. Imbert:** And you do not care about that. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Please.

**Mr. Imbert:** Every figure in—

**Madam Chairman:** Both of us cannot be speaking at the same time.

**Mr. Imbert:** Sorry. [*Crosstalk*] Always get figures wrong.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Minister of Finance, but you keep saying sorry, but you—

**Mr. Imbert:** He is attacking me.

**Madam Chairman:** No, he is not attacking you.

**Mr. Imbert:** He said I am incompetent. He said that, is me.

**Madam Chairman:** And you defended it already. You defended it.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am not taking that from him.

**Madam Chairman:** You will settle it with him when you all meet over lunch. [*Crosstalk*] Okay, so we are going on.

Item 012, Unemployment Relief Programme. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** He is telling lies.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, there are certain words we cannot say here. We know that. [*Crosstalk*] I know it is lunch. I really know it is lunch, but five more minutes and we will all be okay. So, Item 012, Unemployment Relief Programme. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Just for information, Mr. Minister. Your Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance of 5,600,000, that takes care of the full complement of the URP staff at the management level and so on?

**Hon. Sinanan:** That is for the public servants.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** For public servants?

**Hon. Sinanan:** For public servants, yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 014, Transport; Item 015, Maritime Services. “All yuh prepared to go ahead in a productive manner?”

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Five more minutes.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. We are at page 274. Item 001, General Administration; Item 002, Highways. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** This is the point I am making, Mr. Minister. Materials and Supplies, 3 million. Right? For approximately 1,400 workers. Right? But then under “Other Contracted Services” you have \$60 million allocated, right. But, firstly, you had allocated 106 million in 2019, how come you only use—well, if this is not the correct figure you will tell me—\$10 million? What happened there? Now, what would be included under that “Other Contracted Services”? But it was not used, 90 million, well, according to this.

**Hon. Sinanan:** So, Madam Chair, we would have transferred some of that funding to other areas and some of this funding would have been utilized. We would have issued contracts, however, not all the bills would have come in at that point in time.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But what would be the composition of these Other Contracted Services under Highways? Because you are allocated 50 million more, 60 million

this year.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Right. To pay outstanding bills. In 2019, Madam Chair, 84 projects were completed at a cost of 33 million and another 24 projects are ongoing. The division also undertook 17 emergency projects in the wake of Tropical Storm Karen at a cost of \$10 million. In total, the division has 61 million in outstanding bills for 2019. So the answer to that is that we do have outstanding bills and that is what the increase is for.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, if I may suggest, I think that we have to look at the relationship between the number of people employed and the materials they have to work with. You know, you might not believe me—

**2.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** Member for Tabaquite, this Item has nothing to do with that. Other Contracted Services is contracts.

**Dr. Rambachan:** You know what I am talking about?

**Mr. Imbert:** Other Contracted Services.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Do you know what I am talking about?

**Mr. Imbert:** Do you know what you are talking about?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, I know what I am talking about.

**Mr. Imbert:** Item 28 is for contracts.

**Dr. Rambachan:** You were a Minister of Works and Transport also—

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, I was.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—and I was a Minister of Works and Transport—

**Mr. Imbert:** And I know it is for contracts.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—and I know what I am talking about.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is not for materials.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Did you hear me refer to the \$3 million just now or do you have

selective hearing?

**Madam Chairman:** So, Member for Tabaquite, please make your point.  
[*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Rambachan:** No, I have made my point. I think the Minister understands what I am trying to say. [*Crosstalk*] I am trying to say, let us provide—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South and Caroni East, let me just hear the Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Sorry.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Let us provide enough material so that people are usefully employed. Mr. Minister, it would be good if you do an audit, a physical audit of people who are supposed to be on their jobs and see that they come to work, maybe 7.00, and they are gone, and some of them are there 4.30 in the morning, by 5.30 you are driving up the highway, they are packing up and they gone home, whatever they are doing. This is happening. This hurts me as a taxpayer of this country, let me tell you that. It really, really hurts me, and it has hurt me all my life.

**Mr. Imbert:** You never did an audit.

**Dr. Rambachan:** That is what you think. That is why I used to go out there in the field in the mornings, my dear friend, and see that people are doing what they are supposed to do whether I was in local government, whether I was the Mayor and whether I was in Works. I was out there. [*Desk thumping*]

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

**Mr. Imbert:** Everything you are talking about occurred under your stewardship.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South, you have no other questions?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You are on Contract Employment?

**Madam Chairman:** No, I thought your hand was up again.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes, yes, certainly. So we are on 276, Madam Chair?



**Madam Chairman:** Yes, we are.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Contract Employment, Minister, how do you intend to spend or how many people do you intend to recruit in this fiscal year with this allocation?

**Hon. Sinanan:** A recruitment of 53 contract positions.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Fifty-three contract positions. What duration will these people be hired for?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The normal contract period in the Ministry is three years.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Three years?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And your advertisements will be in the newspapers, and so on?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. Most of them are already in the newspaper.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** In the newspaper?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Already.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, you have a question?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, just a short one. Hon. Minister, under Other Contracted Services, it is reflected here that your Revised Estimates for 2019 is 10.2 million, but did I just hear you say that the real figure is \$62 million? You are adding up something to show that it was \$62 million, the outstanding amount.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Actually it is more than that, it is actually \$94,216,652.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You see, that is the point I am making, here it is we have something telling us it is \$10.2 million and you have a figure of \$94 million for 2019.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East—[*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—let me emphasize my point.

**Mr. Imbert:** Let me deal with this, Madam Chairman, this is an important point.

We operate the budget on a cash basis. At the end of the financial year, which is the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, any invoices for work done in the prior year carry forward into the next fiscal year and therefore there will be work that would have been done in fiscal 2019 which is not yet paid for and will have to be paid for in fiscal 2020. What you are seeing here is the estimate based on actual payments made in 2019. It does not take account of commitments because projects transcend financial years, and you know that, you are just playing to the gallery.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** What I am saying, if there is reflected here \$10 million and the Minister is saying it is 90 million—

**Mr. Imbert:** What the Minister is saying he has bills in hand of 90 million, you carry forward—we were saddled with \$4.5 billion in VAT arrears from you.  
[*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—we are examining this. We do not know, we are unaware of what we are dealing with on examination of this.

**Mr. Imbert:** This is the actual expenditure and not the commitments.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It throws this whole book out of alignment.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, it does not. You were in Government for five years, you know what the procedure is.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You can make your point, I have made my point.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are playing to the gallery.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no, it is not a matter of gallery—

**Mr. Imbert:** You are trying to get a sound bite for the camera.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—it is a matter of facts.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are just pretending.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is a matter of facts.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are pretending you do not understand.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** This is what you gave to us and this is not a true fact.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are playing to the gallery.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So can we move on? I think this particular issue has been flogged.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Could I just ask the Member for Caroni Central, who was a Minister of Planning and Development, to explain to his colleagues what these books represent because they do not seem to want to take it from us. He understands. As Minister of Planning and Development I know exactly what these books represent. [*Crosstalk*] the Member for Caroni Central also knows, so could he please explain—[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Could he please explain to his colleagues because they are pretending?

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, all of us cannot speak at the same time. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** They are pretending—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Because you are bringing bogus figures—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** And, Madam Chairman, we will not sit here and allow the Member for Caroni East to say these are bogus figures. Since when these are bogus figures? That is not true.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Because it is not the true reflection.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** The Member for Caroni Central knows exactly what these books represent and we will not sit here and allow the Member for Caroni East to try and pretend that he does not know. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** I now recognize—Member for Caroni Central, you have a question to ask?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, just one simple question on 96: Fuel and Lubricants. I see that there is a significant increase there, I just want an explanation.

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is for outstanding payments and the fleet card. It is for outstanding payments.

**Dr. Tewarie:** And from the year before?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Item 003: Traffic Management; Item 004: Central Planning Unit; Item 004: Central Planning Unit. Member for Tabaquite, Item 005: Drainage.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yeah, I am just keeping my hand up high up in the air. [Laughter] Madam Chair, Item 09, so here we have a case where we are renting and leases vehicles and equipment to the extent of \$30million next year, and we had allocated \$1 million in 2019 but we rented 41.3, so it means to say we exceeded the budget there by about \$40 million. Was that part of your unplanned drainage programme?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, that was a major part of the desilting programme.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Desilting programme, okay. And the Other Contracted Services now, you had \$110 million allocated in 2019, is it that you only spent, paid out 6.6 and what amount would you have paid out under Other Contracted Services since you work on a cash basis? In other words, how much is owed under Other Contracted Services as a liability?

**Hon. Sinanan:** That is 28—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, 28, sorry.

**Hon. Sinanan:** We have approximately 45 desilting and construction projects proposed. We have 26million in bills brought forward.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Of the \$110 million?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. And you now propose 35 million for the next year?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Why it is that these moneys are not being paid, or most of it paid in the financial year? Is it that the Government does not have the money and that they are really utilizing credit to run the Government, like they utilize the VAT, people's credit to run the Government?

**Hon. Sinanan:** It depends on when the bills are produced because we cannot pay without bills. So if the bills have to be submitted and then we apply to the Ministry of Finance. So if, for some reason or the other, the bills are not submitted on time, and there could be several reasons for that, then we cannot apply for the money and pay the bills.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. So contractors complain, Mr. Minister, that they cannot get paid and they have difficulty and the Government is not paying, and three and four. Are you suggesting or in any way implying that it is the contractors who are failing to submit their bills on time to give you sufficient time within the financial year to process?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, I cannot say that, but I can tell you that I had a contractor come to me last week for outstanding bills from 2014 and there were 26 contracts issued and when it went through the audit we could not find out 15 of the contracts. So there are several reasons why contractors may complain and it does not have to be only that the releases from the Ministry of Finance. Bills, as you will know, from previous years have to be audited and sometimes in the auditing process a lot of questions come up, but we do have a policy that the first call on the allocation is really the previous year's commitments. However, that can only take place if there are authentic—

**Dr. Rambachan:** And those 26 contracts you are referring to are under drainage?

**Hon. Sinanan:** You would be surprised, some was under highways and URP.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South, you still have a question?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes, Madam Chair. With respect to your drainage and contract employment, Minister, as we speak there is some heavy flooding on Wrightson Road and in the Barataria area, and so on, you are planning to hire how many people with this increased allocation, Contract Employment?

**Hon. Sinanan:** We are seeking to rebuild the capacity of the drainage via employment of staff on contract to complement the existing staff. What we are looking at in this area here are four drainage supervisors, 16 drainage work supervisors, nine drainage engineers, technical, one drainage foreman.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And you are hiring them not within the permanent establishment, on contract?

**Hon. Sinanan:** They would be hired on contract.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Any particular reason why not on the permanent establishment?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Because of the time it takes to have these people in place. And I want to remind Members again, when this Division came back to the Ministry post 2015, it came back with a very depleted staff, and that is a major challenge with the Drainage Division, why it cannot, you know, get some of the work done in a shorter time span. So what we are trying to do is to build back the capacity, not only in the Drainage Division but in all the areas in the Ministry that have been lacking for years.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** When you say depleted, people retired, people contract came to an end, and so on?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Some of them would have stayed on and went to Public Utilities. It was a situation that I really, you know, do not want to go back too much to

because we are actually trying to take the Division forward. And I want to use the opportunity to compliment the Drainage staff for the fantastic work they did this year, 2019, in terms of assisting us to minimize the flooding. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Indarsingh:** All right, well, there is some flooding currently taking place.

**Hon. Sinanan:** And I can assure you that the run-off is taking place very fast.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 006: Mechanical Services; Item 007: Maintenance; Item 008: Construction; Item 009: Environmental Health and Safety Unit. We are at page 282. Item 010: Traffic Warden Unit; Item 011: Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Unit; Item 012: Unemployment Relief Programme; Item 014: Transport Division; Item 015: Maritime Services; Item 016: Procurement Unit.

Would now be a convenient time for us to take the break for lunch? All right. So that we will resume at Sub-Head 03 and we will resume at—I want to say 2.45, can we do that? All right, threeo'clock. So we would take the suspension now and we will resume at threeo'clock.

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

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

**Madam Chairman:** This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is resumed. We are at Sub-Head 03 of Head 43. This is at page 287. So Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Highways; Item 003: Traffic Management; Item 004: Central Planning Unit; Item 005: Drainage; Item 006: Mechanical Services; Item 007: Maintenance; Item 008: Construction; Item 009: Environmental Health and Safety Unit; Item 010: Traffic Warden Unit.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Page 290, 010, 01.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, what is the question there?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, 850,000. How many vehicles do you contemplate buying?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I will have to get back that figure to you.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I will tell you the reason I ask. On several occasions traffic wardens could not have been transported from San Fernando to Gasparillo simply because the vehicles were unavailable. So it would be important to know if you are buying tax-free, you can buy at least five vehicles with that money.

**Hon. Sinanan:** But we are planning to expand the traffic wardens as well, so other areas would require new vehicles.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 011: Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Unit; Item 012: Unemployment Relief Programme; Item 014: Transport; Item 015: Maritime Services; Item 016: Procurement unit. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organization; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, I see assistance for emergency repairs to the St. Joseph RC Church and Holy Trinity Cathedral. Is this as a result of the earthquake, this four million allocation?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes it was.

**Dr. Rambachan:** It is? There are several other religious houses that were also damaged, have they applied for any assistance, or is this the only one that has applied?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, to my knowledge this is the one that would have applied, and we would have dealt with it.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But this does not include any payment for the reinstallation of the clock, right?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, this is work that we would have assisted them with.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Because that was done by Jusamco I believe.

**Madam Chairman:** Are you finished, Member for Tabaquite?



**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** When you go on to Households.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007: Households. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, you have under 40, Gratuities to Contract Officers, what particular period and how many officers will benefit from this?

**Hon. Sinanan:** This is a new line Item. Each Ministry is now required to process gratuity payments for its contracted staff.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes. So will this be for just the 2019 year, or will it go back to 20-whatever?

**Hon. Sinanan:** If you permit me, if you would allow me to present that to you in writing?

**Madam Chairman:** Item 008: Subsidies.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, line Item 01, Port Authority - Contr. towards deficit on Operation of Coastal Steamers. Could you enlighten us about that?

**Hon. Sinanan:** This Vote is used to facilitate payment to TTIT, which is the Trinidad and Tobago Inter-Island Transportation Company for the inter-island ferry service, which is the Government Shipping Services.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So that is the subvention you give for the transportation—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—for the sea bridge, 327 million?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** There is an increase from last year. Last year, according to the Revised Estimate is 278, and this 2020 Estimate is 48 million more. Is that also for invoices or so, that have not come in as yet?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is for invoices?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And so the cost of the transportation remains at around 327?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I see you had estimated in 2019 at 327.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And that is for all the coastal steamers, the four?

**Hon. Sinanan:** That is the Trinidad and Tobago Inter-Island Transportation. They control the—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So that is for the *Jean de La Valette* and the others?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, the *Jean de La Valette* would have been under NIDCO, so that cost will be taken up.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Could you give us a little understanding of which ones it covers?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The TTIT will have the *Cabo Star*, the *T&T Spirit* and the *T&T Express*.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So those three?

**Hon. Sinanan:** And NIDCO would control the *Galleons Passage* and the *Jean de La Valette*.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Which one is controlled by whom?

**Hon. Sinanan:** NIDCO will control the *Galleons Passage* and the *Jean de La Valette* and the *Cabo Star*. The *T&T Spirit* and the *T&T Express*, they are controlled by the Port Authority.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And those two, what value are we looking for?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, when we get to the Estimates, we should get that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So this 327 does not really include the *Cabo Star*?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, it does.

**Dr. Rambachan:** This is all the coastal steamers?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, this includes the steamers that are associated with the TTIT, which is the Trinidad and Tobago Inter-Island Transportation, that is the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And that would be passengers and cargo or passengers?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, some vessels that do have passengers and cargo.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So if we just take on a passenger basis, how many passengers were transported for 2019?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I do not have the figures, but we must remember that these figures here, the TTIT service is a subsidized service to Tobago.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, I am trying to establish what is the subsidy per passenger really, when you look at what is the real—

**Hon. Sinanan:** I do not think I could do that at this time.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I know, I know, but I am just saying I would like to know, because if the 278 million, again, that might not be the entire cost for the year, because you still have bills outstanding.

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, right.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So if you divide it by the number of passengers, maybe we could get a written reply as to what it is really costing to subsidize per person transported to Tobago.

**Hon. Sinanan:** I think when you consider all that, then you get a more appreciation—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes.

**Hon. Sinanan:**—as to the extent of care that this Government has for the people of

Tobago.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Extent of care or overcompensation?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, I want to get your attention. You said the *Jean de La Valette* and—the other one, is it the *Cabo Star*?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The *Galleons Passage*.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—the *Galleons Passage* are being paid for by NIDCO? So you give NIDCO—

**Hon. Sinanan:** They are being managed by NIDCO.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, I am sorry, I will not allow that here, because what the Minister made quite clear is that this Vote should only cover *Cabo Star*, *Spirit* and *Express*.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay, well, when we come to the others.

**Madam Chairman:** So can we move on? Item 009: Other Transfers.

**Dr. Rambachan:** The Water Taxi Service, this is Port of Spain/San Fernando right?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So it is costing us \$1 million a week, as reflected here, to run that Water Taxi Service? So passengers on the Water Taxi Service are being subsidized by \$1 million per week on this service. I just want to put the level of subsidy.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, because this is the cost to operate the service for the year. So however you put it there, it is again another subsidized service.

**Dr. Rambachan:** The Agua Santa, 02, Operation of Agua Santa. Now, I see \$1.9 million, again, that is the cash you spend? Are there outstanding bills at Agua Santa?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, there could be some outstanding bills.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, Agua Santa is producing for your Ministry only?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, for our Ministry only, and we do assist sometimes if we have extra capacity. But the plant is not really a large plant so we cannot produce for, say, all the regional corporations as well. From time to time we do assist by giving, once we have the capacity, by giving materials to some of the regional corporations. They would send their trucks. As a matter of fact, last year we started a programme where we actually asked the regional corporations to purchase the bitumen for us. We had the additional materials and they would come and collect the value of the purchase in material from us. So yes we do assist them, however, our first priority will definitely be the Ministry of Works and Transport requirements

**Dr. Rambachan:** And it is producing every day?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, once it is up we operate every day. We did have a down time I think, for the last two weeks, but the plant should be back up again this week. So we produce and all our patching is done in-house. From time to time we may go out to private contractors. If we want to go out, let us say, for a one-month blitz we may include some private contractors, but most of the patching is done in-house using the material from Agua Santa.

**Dr. Rambachan:** The aggregate that you use, you produce it in your own quarries or you buy it?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Ministry of Works and Transport does not have quarries. We would get material from National Quarries if required.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Do you offset your aggregate from National Quarries with moneys that National Quarries might be owing to the Government as part of their subsidies and losses?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Would it not be a good idea to begin to offset against National Quarries the money they owe you, so that you can produce more and therefore we can get a lot more work done?

**Hon. Sinanan:** National Quarries does not owe the Ministry of Works and Transport. Maybe the Ministry of Finance may make that arrangement.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Wherever the money is owed.

**Hon. Sinanan:** But that is above my pay grade. That is the Ministry of Finance has to make that arrangement.

**Dr. Rambachan:** It is not above your pay grade, I think—

**Hon. Sinanan:** You see, the Ministry of Works and Transport cannot go into another state agency and say let us offset.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But you can take a Note to Cabinet.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, no. That is the Ministry of Finance would have to do that, not the Ministry of Works and Transport. The Ministry of Works and Transport cannot take a Ministry of Finance Note.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I am sorry the Minister of Finance is not here, it would be very nice to hear what he has to say on that.

**Hon. Sinanan:** You see, the Ministry of Works and Transport, we do not trade with National Quarries.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, I do not mean anything bad. All I want to say is that there is a tremendous number of potholes in the country that really need to be addressed. You know, someone asked this morning about Woodland. Woodland Road now is being use as a thoroughfare because of the situation on the Creek morning and evening, and it is almost like two miles of traffic. But there are several big potholes on Woodland Road that are also slowing down the traffic, and nothing is being done.

**Hon. Sinanan:** That was brought to my attention I think by yourself, and I have brought it to the Director of Highways.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Minister, you know what they did?

**Hon. Sinanan:** But we have some good news for you. The first phase of the Creek we are hoping that we would have it open on Wednesday. So the problem on the Creek will be something of the past. After 50, 60 years, from Wednesday that should something of the past. So just bear with us a little week, within a week and we will have the first phase of the Mosquito Creek being opened after 50 years.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Through you, Madam Chair, I must take the opportunity to respond to the Minister. Minister, yes you are going to put people on the higher lane, but you have five lanes of traffic coming into one or two by Paria Suites. You have the collapse of the southern end of the bridge that was built; not the bridge itself, but the ramp. It has collapsed, and nothing has been done for the last four months to address that. So you are not going to reduce the traffic and the frustrations people are feeling there. All that is going to happen is that traffic is still going to come into one, and unless you place policemen there or traffic wardens to help regulate that—Mr. Minister, I am there every morning religiously at 6.15, and I can tell you that that is what is happening.

**Hon. Sinanan:** I take your point and we will do what we have to do to bring some sort of relief to the residents. If wardens are required, once we open that lane, we will put the wardens. So rest assured that we will do what is required to bring some sort of relief, because I think the residents of that area, the commuters, would have waited over 50 years for this Creek to bring some relief, and I am very happy to say that by Wednesday of this week we should be opening the first phase of that package on the Creek.

**3.15 p.m.**

**Dr. Rambachan:** So you are closing off the lower lane altogether?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. We are closing off the lower lane, we will move the traffic to the embanked area and then we will raise the lower lane. I mean, we have waited generations for that to happen and it is finally happening.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And do you have any word from the contractor as to what is happening with the ramp that has collapsed?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I have faith in the engineers at NIDCO, we do have ACOM, a very experienced consultant on that highway, and I am sure they will do whatever has to be done to ensure that, when it is completed, that we have some sort of stability.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, just to follow up, can we get an indication of how long it will take for the lower part to be completed?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, really I know all of this is of extreme interest especially to the listening public and the commuters. I have allowed a certain amount of discussion, but remember the line Item we are on is Other Transfers, it sprung out of a discussion about the Agua Santa plant. I really would like to leave that discussion, and I am sure it is important and Members would find another way to engage the Minister of Works and Transport on it. Thank you. 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, I am at 07. Minister, there is no provision in 2020 for this line Item. Is it that we have paid off the loan for the rapid rail?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Therefore, can you give us—well then, in the future, I imagine that this line Item will be removed. But could you give an undertaking to provide for us



a statement on the amount of money in total that has been paid on this loan when it started to now.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Sure.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 04, hon. Minister, Term Loan Facility (4 New Fast Ferries). Nothing has been allocated for 2020, and so, could you just give us a little appreciation of this?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Again, this loan was fully repaid—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is for what?

**Hon. Sinanan:**—in 2019. This was the four new—the water taxis.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Oh, the water taxis. All right. Okay. Madam Chair, can I be?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Please continue.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 18, hon. Minister, the National Helicopter Services Limited (NHSL), you have a decrease of \$30 million. What was being spent was at an average 40 million, and this year you have 11 million as the estimate. Could you just give some explanation on that? What is happening there that you have a reduction of 30 million?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. We would have provided funding for NHCL last year on their loan payments. In terms of the amount for this year, NHCL, this was not budgeted. The full amount was not required and a smaller amount was required from the Government this year.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And this is for the management of the National Helicopter Services?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. NHCL.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Including payment to pilots—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—and aircraft maintenance and all of that.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. Last one, number 20, the Charter of an Inter-Island Passenger Vessel.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Which one is that?

**Madam Chairman:** Number 20.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Number 20. You have an estimate in 2020 of 72 million as against a Revised Estimate of 21 million in 2019, so an increase of 51 million. Is that the one that you were speaking of?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. That is the *Jean de la Valette*.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The *Jean de la Valette*.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But you mentioned there was another one that NIDCO was paying for. Where is that located?

**Hon. Sinanan:** That is the *Galleons Passage*, but that was paid, remember the Government would have purchased that vessel.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The *Galleons Passage*?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The *Galleons Passage*, that belongs to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So this is for the *Jean de la Valette*?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So in total we looked as though we—327 plus 51, is about 388 we are paying for four per year now?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 388 million. All right. Thanks.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much. I was reading something—I am on Item 20: Transfers to State Enterprises. Minister, this Item, Charter of Inter-Island Passenger Vessel, could you just tell us which vessel is this, please?

**Madam Chairman:** We were just told that.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Okay. Fine. Let us move on because I was contemplating on—

**Madam Chairman:** The *Jean de la Valette*.

**Hon. Sinanan:** The *Jean de la Valette*.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Okay. Member for Tabaquite, I am not sure if your hand was up?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes. Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, please.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago, Item 01: VMCOTT. Now I see you have allocated approximately \$10 million every year to VMCOTT. That is to support what at VMCOTT?

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is a subvention that VMCOTT would have been getting for the last couple of years.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, is VMCOTT not supposed to be repairing and maintaining police vehicles and other vehicles from the Government at a cost that should cause them, at least, to break even rather than require subsidy?

**Hon. Sinanan:** My information is that that would have been the original plan for VMCOTT however, a long time ago unfortunately that plan did not work out the way it was supposed to. I can say at this point in time, VMCOTT is getting back to its moorings. They are working now with a lot of the state agencies, getting back in the vehicles, and the bottom line at VMCOTT has started to improve. VMCOTT has gone into things like inspection of vehicles, they have different avenues that they are looking at to improve their balance sheet, their bottom line, and getting

back to the moorings of repairing state vehicles is something that—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rambachan:** So, Mr. Minister, if that is the case, why is there a graveyard of police vehicles?—outside of VMCOTT on the whole top, and if you travel down to the CEPEP compound you will see about another 100-plus vehicles, police vehicles, there.

**Hon. Sinanan:** I cannot answer for the police.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Because if VMCOTT is supposed, when they get a vehicle, to properly assess the vehicle to repair them and they are not doing that, or is it because the police are not paying them the maintenance cost, what is happening?

**Hon. Sinanan:** There have been some challenges with payments, but I cannot really speak for the police vehicles.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But have you by chance seen that graveyard?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, we are working with VMCOTT of actually, as I said, to get back to the moorings of being able to attract the government fleet, and so far they have been doing a pretty good job of actually getting back to the moorings of actually getting, not only the government vehicles, but actually getting a lot of private jobs at well.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So one question, Mr. Minister, my final question. Do you have an idea of what is the gap now between the revenue collected by VMCOTT and the expenses of VMCOTT without this \$10 million subsidy?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I can furnish you with that.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Because you are saying that they are getting very close.

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is something that we are working on to get VMCOTT back on track where VMCOTT could, at least, break even and be of assistance to the State in terms of reducing the cost of maintaining the state vehicles.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Every private garage making money in this country except

VMCOTT.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. And that has been so probably for quite a long time, but I can tell you they are now in the right direction, and it is probably a matter of time before we can see the books in black at VMCOTT.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, I am not sure if that is—because I know you use various devices to catch my attention. [*Crosstalk*] Okay. Good. So we can now go onto—

**Hon. Member:** Next page.

**Madam Chairman:** No. When you mean next page, we are finishing 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Oh, sorry. Well, I have one on 22 principle on NIDCO US \$61.5 million for the purchase of two catamaran ferries, of \$51 million you are paying in 2020.

**Madam Chairman:** That is on 22 on page 294.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. 22

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Number 22, the cost.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. Those are principle interest from NIDCO on the loan to purchase the two catamaran ferries in fiscal 2019.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is the one from Australia?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And who they took the loan from?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I will have to furnish you with that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Would you be kind enough to give us that in writing?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. It is FCB, but I will just confirm that for you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So that 420 million approximate TT, is that for the purchase one or two?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The two catamaran ferries.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And NIDCO is the one who took the loan?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. Well, in all it is principal and interest on a NIDCO loan. It is the Ministry of Finance, but it is for the NIDCO loans.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** How much have you paid down so far and how much do we owe?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Okay. I do not have those figures offhand, but we can furnish you with that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And could you give us that in writing?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Sure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Sure. Thanks.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. We are going to the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, page 365. 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*. 39: Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration, we are at page 365. I believe that is the summary.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. That is the summary. You want to go to the summary?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well, I just want to clarify one thing here.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Government subvention, does the Government subvention for 2019—is the correct amount there or are there other bills that will be added to the 129.3million?

**Madam Chairman:** That is the details of income on page 364.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah. What is the question? If that is the total subvention?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. We are going on the principal of cash. Right? But are there outstanding bills that the Government will still have to add to the total?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No. This is the total subvention.

**Dr. Rambachan:** This is the total subvention. And how are you cutting that down by half in 2020? What is the reason that you have such a drastic drop?—50 per cent in 2020.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Because of the loan payments, because of the amount we would have paid out, the interest has gone down significantly.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. So we will see that later on. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So we are at page 365.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No. Madam Chair, I wanted to ask on 320—

**Madam Chairman:** On 3 what?—20.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 364. Hon. Minister, on line Item 04, you have income of approximately 445 million and you believe that you have 45 million less this year, but yet still you are giving a government subvention to the Airports Authority when they have an income of 400 million. It is a little confusing to me. Why should you be giving a subvention when they have an income of 400 million?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Because the subvention was for the loans.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Which loan? Airports Authority has a loan?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Has several loans.

**Madam Chairman:** And therefore when we go into the details of the Airports Authority, I guess, Member for Caroni East, you will be able to interrogate those. Okay?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you for allowing me to ask that question.

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah. We are at page 365, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, the increased allocation of \$4.5 million covers what?

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is a minimal increase in salaries. This was budgeted to cater for any possible agreements, any agreement on wage negotiations.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay. And historically when there is an agreement, what allocation will you need to cover the entire cost for wage increases?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I cannot anticipate that.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You cannot?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Based on past agreements?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No. Because we are in total a different economic time, so I do not think what happened in the past will be allowed to happen in the future.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** All right. And with remuneration to board members, you have decreased the allocation. Has there been any resignations and so on from the board?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Just now. It is just a realistic estimate.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No resignation.

**Hon. Sinanan:** No.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You have your full complement of board members?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. Yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay.

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

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No. No.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.



**Dr. Rambachan:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002: Passenger and Cargo Terminals; Item 003: Airports Operations; Item 004: Runways, Taxiways, Grounds and Car-Parks; Item 005: Security. Member for Couva South.

**3.30 p.m.**

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, are there any outstanding Salaries and Cost of Living for security officers at the Airports Authority?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Absolutely none?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Passenger and Cargo Terminals; Item 003: Airports Operations; Item 004: Runways, Taxis, Grounds and Car Parks; Item 005: Security. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. We are at page 368. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 0—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Chair. Chair. Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 04, that is where we are?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so Item 007: Households.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Under Pension Contribution, Minister, you have increased the allocation or the Estimate by \$3.5 million. Why this increase to the pension plan?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Because this is a Pension Contribution increase by 2 per cent effective January 2019, as per the actuarial advice.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The actuarial?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, the actuarial advice.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So, there is no deficit to the pension plan?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No. No.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Item 009: Other Transfers; 50—

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam.

**Madam Chairman:** Sorry. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Minister, on 09, just a quick clarification. We are seeing in the—I am looking at, let us say, 24/25 principal interest, interest principal, and so on, but it is not notified to any particular loan Item, so could you just explain it for us?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, I will have to put that into details. There are several loans.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes, but I know it must be several loans, but in the one before you had it set out nicely with NIDCO but I am not seeing it set out here. Is there a reason for that, in terms of the structure of accounting?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, it is just how it is in the—

**Dr. Moonilal:** But could you give an undertaking that you will give us the detail of these various loan items, particularly?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Sure.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so we are going on to 50, Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, we are at page 380. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Engineering Division; Item 004: Marine Division; Item 005: Wharves Division; Items 006: Cruise Ship Complex. Sub-Head 02: Good and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Engineering Division; Item 004: Wharves Division—sorry, Item 004: Marine Division; Item 005: Wharves Division; Item 006: Cruise Ship Complex. We are at

page 383. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Engineering; Item 005: Wharves Division; Item 006: Cruise Ship Complex. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. We are at page 384. Item 007: Households. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Item 02: Contribution - Daily-paid Pensions, General Administration. Does it mean that some of the daily-paid workers are already in receipt of pensions? I am asking this in the context of the arrangement where daily-paid workers will now be getting pensions?

**Madam Chairman:** No.

**Mr. Charles:** This is suggesting that this sum already—

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, this is the Port.

**Mr. Charles:** Yes, but daily paid? Oh, it is different to the public service.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, it is different to public service. This is the Port workers.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under Gratuities, General Administration, I see there is an increase of \$21,268,400. Just enlighten the meeting?

**Hon. Sinanan:** This is provision for the payment of gratuities for 66 persons in 2020.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Sixty-six, and have their contracts been renewed and so on, these 66 persons?

**Hon. Sinanan:** But this is permanent workers.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** They are permanent?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Permanent workers?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, this is their gratuity payment.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay. All right.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, the same question I asked before, if you would give undertaking between Item 32 to 39 to indicate the nature of the loan?

**Hon. Sinanan:** All these loans would have been paid in full in the year 2019.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Could we still have an indication of the loans that you have paid off in the last fiscal?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I will send that.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Sure. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, 52: Public Transport Service Corporation. We are at page 400. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration—[*Interruption*]—well, all in between there is details of the establishment, so we have not jumped. Okay?

**Dr. Rambachan:** That is why when I see a figure like Government loans, \$259 million, I wonder if that is PTSC subvention. Because, I am just trying to show what it is costing to run these organizations.

**Madam Chairman:** So what you want to be on, page 399?

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Dr. Moonilal:** That is loans.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Loans?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, that is loans.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But it is marked Government loans. How does it become a Government loan? Is it on behalf of PTSC, or does this reflect the subvention you give to PTSC as a loan?

**Hon. Sinanan:** This is loans.

**Dr. Rambachan:** For what, buying vehicle, buying buses?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Buses, all going back. All of this would have been loans.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. But you know it is categorized as income, a summary of income?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. Because the Government pays the loans.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, so it is a subsidy?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** It is a subsidy.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I will pass, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002" Vehicles and Equipment Maintenance; Item 007: Property Development Services; Item 008: Transit Express Commuter Services. We are at page 401. Sub-Head 02: Good and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I am looking at line 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, and I am seeing it is almost a 10-fold increase from 200,000 to 2.4 million. Is the Ministry looking at alternative medium like using social media or online brochures and so, so you could save on cost instead of using only print media?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I am sure the PTSC would consider all the available aspects, and I am sure they would have considered everything in preparing this.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So it means there is nothing alternative then? It means that you are going with this printing and not online, because it is 10 time folds?

**Hon. Sinanan:** They would do a study to see where they can reach the actual client that they are trying to target, and that is how they would come up. Because online, yes, but will online reach the people that they are targeting? They would

have done that research.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 16: Contract Employment. In 2019 Revised Estimate you had 4.8 million allocated, 2020 you have 7.3 million allocated, a huge increase by 2.4. Would you care to explain this increase?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Salaries for management and contract staff which consist of 25 persons currently. Further, it is anticipated that 12 more contract positions will be recruited in 2020, including the M&E unit.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002: Vehicles and Equipment Maintenance.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair.

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

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you. Minister, you have increased your spending or your projected spending under Materials and Supplies by \$9,064,338. Could you explain what you are doing here?

**Hon. Sinanan:** All right. At this time 11 million is what would have been spent. There is an increased payment for outstanding bills, increase in the fuel cost due to increase in the number of buses, and number of buses on the road expected to be 275 of which 65 will be CNG. So, there is an increase in the number of buses on the road, and we do have outstanding bills.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So you have said you have 275 buses on the road and you have increased the buses by—

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, we expect—no, we have less than 275. We intend to bring it up to 275 immediately. So we have more buses, we do have outstanding bills, so there is some level of increase. However, if I am to go back to the Estimates in

2019 it was 18.6 million, and in 2020 it is just 20 million, 20.9 million.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** All right.

**Hon. Sinanan:** So it is an increase of just \$1 million.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay, well you know with the passage of time and probably when you consult your people and so on, if you could give us an insight into how these buses are assigned, along what routes and so on? Because, I know for a fact that PTSC has removed some routes from some very remote areas such as Indian Trail, and Carolina, and so on, where poor people utilize these services and so on.

**Hon. Sinanan:** And I can tell you it is not only in those areas. There are several areas.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Give us the information so that we could analyse it.

**Hon. Sinanan:** And that is because of the fact that we do not have the amount of buses, and that is why we took a decision to bring in 300 additional buses.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** That is probably your interpretation. We would like to analyse it too.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, Maintenance of Vehicles, line Item 13, under 002, Vehicles and Equipment Maintenance.

**Madam Chairman:** Page 401.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Page 401, line Item 13. Well, approximately in 2019 and 2020 were the same amount, 48 million versus 51 million. That is the maintenance where? With VMCOTT or you have a private company? Is there a private company repairing these buses?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, all these are done by PTSC staff.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** PTSC repairmen?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So no longer it is under VMCOTT?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No, PTSC does their own repairs.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Right, okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005: Port of Spain Transit Centre; Item 006: Para-Transit Unit; Item 007: Property Development Services. Member for Chaguanas East, did I see your hand? No?

**Mr. Karim:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 008, Transit Express Commuter Services. We are now at page 403. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers. We move on to 57: the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority, at page 413. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Could the Minister just explain this 8 million increase under Salaries and cost of living?

**Hon. Sinanan:** That is 001?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes.

**Hon. Sinanan:** This is a provision for each employee using an additional increment point, and for the full approved staff structure.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay, and this was agreed with the recognized majority union?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. Well they do not have a union. That matter is in the court right now. So, that matter is in the court, they do not have a recognized union.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You are still trying to keep them out?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, let the courts decide.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** In keeping with your decent work agenda.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 02: Good and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Chaguanas East.



**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 15.

**Hon. Sinanan:** 1-5?

**Mr. Karim:** What is intended in terms of that substantial increase of 8.7 million?

**Hon. Sinanan:** What is that? Oh, 15, sorry.

**Mr. Karim:** Line Item 15.

**3.45 p.m.**

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is the contractual expenditure relating to the maintenance of the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Equipment, which was moved from 28, Other Contracted Services, in 2020. So it is a move of the expenditure. It is a re-classification of the expenditure. It was moved from 28.

**Mr. Karim:** Can you give us a little idea as to the equipment that is in question?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I will have to furnish you with that information.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, is it that your mike is on?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Oh, sorry. No.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 01: Regional Bodies; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are at page 111. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 001: Pre-investment; Item 003, which is at page 113, we are now at Economic Infrastructure. That is where you are? Item 003 spans six pages.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Are you past it or could I ask a question on the page?

**Madam Chairman:** Where are you?

**Dr. Tewarie:** The page before, 112.

**Madam Chairman:** Go ahead. That is what, Drainage?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. The Coastal Studies, these are—the money assigned here, allocated here, they are for studies and what are the areas of those studies?

**Hon. Sinanan:** There is no money assigned to that.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Eight hundred and forty-eight? No?

**Madam Chairman:** That was in 2019.

**Dr. Tewarie:** 2019; nothing this year? Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. As I said, it spans six pages. So I will call the project groups, A. Drainage and Irrigation. That is where you are, Member for Oropouche East?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Ma'am. In 001: Major River Clearing Programme, you had a Revised Estimate downwards of 7.1 million and you have an 8 million Estimate. Could you give an undertaking because you may not have here the nature of the works done in 2019, the areas where the money was spent?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Sure, 001?

**Madam Chairman:** Anybody else under Drainage and Irrigation?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes.

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

**Dr. Tewarie:** Out of the \$8 million assigned for Clearing, I want to know if there is any further work because I know you did some that will take this in the Caparo River.

**Hon. Sinanan:** From the 8 million. So when I provide the details I will give you the details of the work that is to be done and where it will be done.

**Dr. Tewarie:** All right. So the projects have not been identified yet?

**Hon. Sinanan:** They have been, but remember under this Major River Cleaning Programme, which is 001, the projects here are the Felicity—under the 001, are the Felicity—two projects ongoing, the Felicity Pump House, Phase II and the Caroni

River Rehabilitation Improvement Works. Those are two projects. The projects that you are speaking about will be done under a different Vote.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay, is it under 13?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Under 13—

**Dr. Tewarie:** Sorry, sorry, 003, sorry.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Under the 003 we have the walling and paving of the Diana River Improvement Work, the Marie Dulay, Guaracara River and the Soledad River.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay, when we get to the one where Caparo is included, would you let me know please so I will be aware.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I noted that you keep pressing the point of the River Clearing Programme and so on, which is fine. But in the context of outfall leading to these rivers and so on, is that in your Flood Alleviation and Drainage Programme?

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is. It is a major component of it because if the outfall is not clear, you create a bottleneck and it backs all the way up. So, yes, that is part of it and that is why we depend on the experts at the Drainage Division to identify the projects in the different areas.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Based on the fact, Minister, that you have indicated, under which line Item or Vote will you deal with clearing of outfall?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Under 09 and 28, Recurrent.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Could you give us an idea in the areas that you intend to focus on?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, but that would have been in the Recurrent Expenditure.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay, all right. And with respect to your Programme of Upgrade to Existing Drainage Pumps and Gate Inventory and so on, have you

taken into consideration the need to focus on the Caroni community sluice gate and so on?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. We would have a comprehensive programme that was approved by Cabinet, which is basically a three-year programme and this entails all the pumps and gates throughout Trinidad.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** In that regard too, with flood mitigation, I know that we all have to be responsible to the farming community and so on, but I would ask you to pay particular attention to what the farmers are doing or are engaged in in relation to the, what was formerly the Caroni rice project area and so on, where farmers have been deliberately blocking the flow of water into what I would call the outfall drains that go into the Guayamare River and so on. It really impacts upon certain communities, especially Caroni, Frederick Settlement, La Paille and so on. So keep a very close eye in your Flood Alleviation Programme.

**Hon. Sinanan:** We will and that is why when we have complaints from farmers that they got flooded out, and when you really investigate you recognize that a lot of them would have tried to pond the water to utilize it and when you have the excess amount and they get flooded out then they actually come and say, “Well, who is compensating me”. But the problem is really a problem that most instances we create for ourselves.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item, hon. Minister, 009: Programme of Upgrade to Existing Drainage Pumps and Gate Inventory, 14million was allocated in 2019, but under the Revised Estimate you do not see anything spent. Was there work done on any—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah, a lot of work was done, it is just the timing of the contracts because this project, we did have a little delay but, yes, the contracts were awarded, work started, it is just that payments were not made.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Do you know whether the pumps in the Caroni River and then in—near to Bamboo, any work was done on those?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, it is in the programme and as I said, we did identify all the pumps in Trinidad. We have pumps coming in shortly, we have some more pumps coming in later on in the year and we actually have, tomorrow, we will be commissioning some pumps in Port of Spain. So, yes, it is in the programme and the idea is to upgrade all the pumps in Trinidad and Tobago. I think it was identified between 14 and 18 pumps to be changed out. Because most of the pumps that we have are probably 30/40 years old.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You think you would be kind enough to consider giving us a listing because our constituents always keep telling us, “Did you make representation for us on the pump”, well, me, in Caroni River and so on.

**Hon. Sinanan:** We can make that—there is a programme of works and I can tell you that it is being executed and very soon we will start to see new pumps coming in to Trinidad to replace these old pumps.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right, okay.

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to ask a question related to 003 and 005. Minister, I mean, it is really a sad irony that we are dealing with this flooding now where a couple hours ago some rain fell and areas in Port of Spain flooded and so on, and there is a lot of water outside. I am doubly concerned because I am not seeing the Minister of Finance. I hope he is dry and safe.

I noticed in 003 you had a reduction from between 2019 reduced in your Revised to 487, and for 005 you actually had \$2 million, no revision but nothing in 2020. Now, you would think given the reality we face you would want to, forgive the pun, but pump up here with resources to help you. There must be an

explanation for this because I cannot believe the Ministry would have only spent half a million when you provided 8 million in such a critical area as flood mitigation. So give us that explanation.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Again, that would have been—let me go to 03 first. In 03 the work was commenced in the paving. Unfortunately we did not have the bills at the time. Yes, the contracts were awarded and work is being done.

In terms of the 005, we did not get any money because that project would have been the project that was initiated under the IDB in 2013 which was a failed project to deal with the downtown flooding. Yes there was a loan of US \$135 million, which is almost a billion dollars, and the drawdown would have started in 2014 to pay the staff to do the study. When the IDB came in 2016/2017 they failed the study. So that project would have been cancelled and that is why the Ministry is working now with the Andean Development Bank to get a grant so that we can create a work programme. This 005, \$2 million, was just part of the money that was extended for a failed study that took place between 2013 and 2016.

**Dr. Moonilal:** What was the need—why did the study fail?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The study failed because after the study was presented to the IDB, the IDB indicated that that study and the proposal will not solve the problem of flooding in downtown Port of Spain.

**Dr. Moonilal:** So you have another plan you are putting in place to prevent what happened today?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes. We actually put boots on the ground and what you find happening in Port of Spain with the flash flooding, if you look at the time it takes for the water to run off, it is significantly different. We have cleaned all the underground drains, we have put in a sump and as I said tomorrow we will be commissioning two brand new pumps that we feel will help us with a quick run off

in Port of Spain. And if that works then we will extend that in the short term while we wait for the experts to come up with a programme of work to be funded by them going forward.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Minister, just to remind you that we also have some works in my constituency, the Debe area, which we have written several letters about in the Gandhi Village area and Debe area that causes flooding to residents and I do not want to say more importantly, but importantly equally to a school in that area, the Debe Hindu School that is repeatedly flooded out.

**Hon. Sinanan:** I am aware of the issue—

**Dr. Moonilal:** If you could put some attention—

**Hon. Sinanan:** I am aware of the issue and there are some challenges, but I can tell you we will attend to the issues. I have been in touch, at least the Division has been in touch with the principal and so and I do get pictures every time the school floods out.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Planning and Development.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much. I just wanted to indicate that when we examined this project with the IDB, and I am talking about the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Works and Transport in 2016, what we found is that the designs that had been done were totally inadequate for the work that had to be done and there had been absolutely no leadership between the—or among the then Ministry of Environment and Water Resources and the Ministry of Works and Transport as it then was. And as a consequence of that we felt that that loan of US \$120 million, we could not proceed with that because the designs were inadequate and there was nothing that we really could use. So we had to re-scope that loan that the Minister is talking about. So there was no point

to carrying it any further. And both the IDB and the Ministry of Planning and Development agreed and as did the Ministry of Works and Transport. So we had to move in a different direction.

**4.00 p.m.**

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, I just want to go back to 001: Major River Clearing Programme, where you have \$8 million allocated for 2020. I know you said—and on many occasions you we would have said—that citizens are also part of the problem in terms of contributing to the flooding issue. Do you have any sort of monitoring capacity within the drainage division, especially for major water courses, to monitor and to check and to see what is going on there so these kinds of blockages do not happen and do to the cause flooding to the extent where you have to spend millions of dollars afterwards cleaning up?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, we do have the different divisions who have the responsibility to monitor the water courses and so. Unfortunately, a lot of the queries are things that would have happened maybe 10/15 years and they still continue to happen in some instances. We have people—just recently I had the Member for Tabaquite calling me about an excavator that went down in a river and was damaging people's walls somewhere in Chaguanas. The reason for that is simple. Everybody built on the bank. The operator was trying to operate his heavy equipment on a little piece of embankment, slipped into the river, and it was a catastrophe. So yes, we monitor.

The enforcement is something that a lot of emphasis has to be placed on. If you look in terms of the San Juan—all these areas, we have a lot of encroachment. I recently took a boat up the Caroni River and I saw a steel structure going up on the river banks. So they have moved from wooden structures, concrete structures,



now they have gone to steel structures. Unfortunately, by the time this comes to the Ministry it is really too late, and then you have to use the law enforcement agencies to assist.

**Ms. Ramdial:** So I guess, moving forward, your Ministry will be a little more proactive to engage—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Very much.

**Ms. Ramdial:**—into monitoring of these areas?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Very much so.

**Ms. Ramdial:** One more question, Minister. The desilting and dredging of the river mouths, any plans for that in this upcoming fiscal year?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, as I—

**Ms. Ramdial:** Can you give us a list of those rivers you intend to dredge and desilt, the river mouths especially?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Sure. Once we have with programme we will make it available.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Okay, great. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, Line Item—I have two questions. Line Item 001. This \$8 million that you have allocated, does this include arrears at all?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No. This is for ongoing contracts that we have.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** All right. So you have cleared off your arrears from—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, these are ongoing contracts.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay. And 009, can you identify how many rivers would require these drainage pumps that you are looking at?

**Hon. Sinanan:** All right. Let me give you—five projects were awarded in 2019—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Is this 009?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes—to commence in 2020 and eight additional projects to be tendered and executed in 2020: Upgrade to the Bamboo No. 2 pump house and gates; upgrade to the gate structure in St. Augustine area; upgrade of the gate structure in the St. Helena area; upgrade of the Bamboo No. 1 pump house; upgrade of the Sea Lots pump house and gates; construction of a Morugo pump house and installation of gates; construction of the William Street pump house and upgrade to the gate structure in the Caroni irrigation area. So those are some of the projects that would be—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And this would take into consideration the 18 pumps that you hope to—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, it is a programme, so all would not happen in one year.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** I understand that, Minister.

**Hon. Sinanan:** So this is the programme. But obviously it is being done on a phased basis and we cannot just do all the different areas. We would have identified all the pumps, all the gates in Trinidad and we created a programme to work on them over a three-year period.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And what is given priority?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, priority is determined by the different engineers and they will determine which one we should prioritize based on the urgency and the nature of the job.

**Madam Chairman:** We go on to P. Coastal Protection, A. Air Transport. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, 003: Airfield Pavement Rehabilitation for the ANR Robinson International Airport. \$30 million allocated, 2019, and there is a dash under Revised Estimate. Anything was done?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The pavement of the runway and taxiway, expected completion by

January 2020. Yes, it was started but no payments were made.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So the \$25 million will help to pay for that?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. And the Piarco International, 15 million allocated. You have bidding for 1.5 million.

**Hon. Sinanan:** That is the same thing. That is “0” what?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Same thing. Work was done.

**Hon. Sinanan:** 005, yes. Phase 1 of the repairs to the ramp gates will be undertaken at a total cost of 22.5 million.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay, but only 1.5 is given. But if those bills come in, you only have \$15 million to pay for this year.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, as I said at the opening, we will—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You could vire.

**Hon. Sinanan:**—vire money or go back in the mid-year review for any money that is needed.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. 009: Construction of a Terminal and Associated Facilities of the ANR Robinson International; 25 million was given. Work was started?

**Hon. Sinanan:** This project has been transferred to the Ministry of Finance.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Oh, it has gone to Finance?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yeah.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Who will supervise it?

**Hon. Sinanan:** NIDCO is the agency that is—the implementing agency.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. Right. Thanks.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, 011: Repairs to Perimeter Fence at the Piarco International Airport. I see that you have—this being new projects, and so on, is it that this has started in the 2019 fiscal?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, it has.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Why no allocation for it in the 2019 fiscal?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Because it was a new project.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** A new project. So this \$4 million that you have allocated will completely repair the perimeter fence?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, if money is required, we will vire money, or we go in the mid-year review. However, yes, we are repairing the entire fence.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Well, I mean by now you should have the scope of the project, and so on, and I am sure that you would have the projected final cost. Could you tell us what is the final cost for that particular project?

**Hon. Sinanan:** The project will be done in phases. I cannot give you the exact cost. At the end of the day, we have an allocation. If we need further funding, we have the mechanisms to get it. But the answer is whether we are going to repair the entire fence. Yes, on a phased basis.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** How many phases are there to this project?

**Hon. Sinanan:** It is four phases.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Four phases. And Phase 1 is projected to cost how much?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Phase 1—I “doh” have the exact figures with me now, so I do not want to call a figure that will be—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** But, I mean, just as you have been saying projected and projected, you must have the projected cost of Phase 1 in your possession.

**Hon. Sinanan:** The entire project is, I think, 15 million. Yes. The entire project is 15 million—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** 15 million?

**Hon. Sinanan:** And we are actually doing it in four phases. So if you divide that across the board then you will get a fair idea as to—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So that 15 million projection, that has been allocated to one contractor?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Again, it is phased, so they will actually advertise each phase and it is public tender where, I think the Airport Authority has their rules. But it is a public tender. So it was in the newspaper and anybody could have applied.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** HDC had their own rules too, eh.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Well, I could only comment on the Ministry of Works and Transport.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes. Okay. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** B. Bus Transport. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, you have an allocation of 16 million to purchase 100 new buses. Could you tell us when these buses will arrive in Trinidad and how they will be allocated?

**Hon. Sinanan:** All right. It is 16 million—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yeah, “um-hm”.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Right. And this project was a project that was done in phases. So we have the final 25 new buses in 2020 and this 16 million is the final payment for the last 25.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No problem, Minister. Could you give us now, probably in writing, a breakdown of how you have deployed these 100 buses, the 75 and the 25 which are to come? [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Are you finished with—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes, yes, yes, just to remind you that I think some of these buses would have been deployed in your time.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You give us, because we want to know why certain buses have been pulled from certain routes, and so on.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Sure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I was just wondering, Minister, are these buses procured by PTSC or is there a procurement process?

**Hon. Sinanan:** This is a procurement process where the CTB was involved, but it is under the PTSC rules and regulations.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The Central Tenders Board?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Central Tenders Board. They are involved in the process.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. How many were purchased already so that the \$56 million allocated under 2019—

**Hon. Sinanan:** Seventy-five were purchased before. This is the last 25 that we expect by January.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And so the 100 will actually cost how much?

**Hon. Sinanan:** I would have to get that figure for you because this would have started some time ago. This approval for 100 buses would have started a long time ago. This is the last 25. So I cannot use the last 25, which was four years after, probably it started, or five years after it started.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay, understandable.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. D. Roads and Bridges, page 115. G. Road Systems, Operations and Services. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Minister, 155. This is Supply and Installation of New Jersey-type Barriers, is that—and I see nothing was spent in the Revised Estimate. Does this deal with the barriers on the north/south highway?

**Hon. Sinanan:** No. These are the Jersey barriers. These are not the cable barriers. What you have on the north/south is the cable barriers, and these are Jersey barriers.

**Madam Chairman:** H. Sea Transport; I. Administration. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral

and Other Services. Hon. Members, you will observe that Item 005 spans two pages. I therefore will announce the project groups. We are at page 118. P. VMCOTT; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings.

We now go on to the Infrastructure Development Fund. We are at page 207. Item 001: Pre-Investment; Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Hon. Members, you will observe that Item 003 spans three pages which are 208 to 210. I therefore will also announce the project groups. A. Drainage and Irrigation; N. Other Services; P. Coastal Protection; D. Roads and Bridges. Member for Cumuto-Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, under Line Item 276, can the hon. Minister indicate what landslips repair work will be undertaken in my constituency, please? I am looking particularly at Bramble Alexander where there are four landslips. There are others, but I—[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Sinanan:** We do have—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Charles:** “All yuh cyar shut up, boy.”

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Madam Chair—

**Madam Chairman:** I believe the person who has my ear is the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Hon. Sinanan:** Madam Chair, 276, this is an ongoing programme in financial 2020; work to be completed on seven landslips, designed to commence on 68. Designs have commenced on 68 landslips. [*Interruption*]

**4.15 p.m.**

Madam Chair, this is an ongoing programme and we would have identified 68 landslips, and these would have been the most critical landslips identified in Trinidad. I cannot give you a detailed location of these 68 landslips that are in state of designs, but they would be most critical landslips identified by that

Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport. But if the Minister wants—sorry, if the Member of Parliament wants a detail on the landslip in Cumuto/Manzanilla we can make that available to you, but there is no guarantee that—I cannot guarantee you now that the engineers would have identified those as the most critical landslips in Trinidad.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Thank you. No. 260, the Port of Spain - East/West Corridor Transportation Project, 150 million has been allocated—

**Hon. Member:** Sorry, what is it—

**Dr. Khan:** 260—just indicate what is going on.

**Hon. Sinanan:** 260? Madam Chair, this is the Curepe interchange and this project would have been—[*Crosstalk*] This is the removal of all the traffic lights from Port of Spain to—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Chair, I am having some difficulty in hearing the Minister of Works and Transport.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So let us have some order. I believe Minister that the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West also have some questions to pose to you. So I will take them in their turn. [*Laughter*] Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Hon. Sinanan:** So, Madam Chairman, this project is the Curepe interchange and this is money that will be allocated for the continuation of the project.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Naparima, you had a question? No? Member for Diego Martin North/East, you have a question for the Minister of Works and Transport?

**Mr. Imbert:** Asked and answered.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.



**Hon. Sinanan:** Madam Chair, yes, we will be doing the Diego Martin interchange shortly.

**Mr. Imbert:** You will?

**Hon. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** G. Road Systems Operations and Services; H. Sea Transport. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. We are at page 211.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 43 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, PS. Thank you, other representatives from the Ministry of Works and Transport.

*Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, \$758,916,840.*

**Madam Chairman:** For the information of Members, while the Minister settles, we are at page 378. I will now invite the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thanks to my colleagues. Madam Chair, I just want to highlight five areas which should be of interest to all the Members of this committee. The first is something I have pointed out in previous years. On the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* you would see approximately 72 per cent of the allocation is for Wages and Salaries, and that continues to be the trend. You will find that on page 36. You would also see that we have had to engage in debt management and we continue to engage in paying off billings, in particular bills we have inherited in relation to Internet, phone and security. We are currently dealing with a debt to Flow of 8 million, much of which was brought to us from Forestry Division, which became part of this Ministry in 2015.

On the revenue side, the second area I want to highlight is what I call an

abysmal revenue collation particularly in the lands area and I refer to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue*, pages 18 and 19, and it has to do with low collections, no billings, no invoices, no rent reviews, and poor and defective valuations. We have been dealing with that since 2015. We recently recruited new staff with a mandate to focus on billing collection and dealing with money that has been left uncollected.

The third area I would highlight, Madam Chair, is in relation to transfers, and you would see increases for ASTT, for example, 2.2 million, and that increase is the case of all the funds allocated to the ASTT is to be managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, with the advice of the Ministry of Finance, it has to do with debts incurred by the ASTT; an audit report which points us to serious concerns in the operation of that entity and the need to clean things up once and for all in the next fiscal, and that is what the increase is for.

You would also see increases for NAMDEVCO, 5.1 increase in subvention, it has to do with what we project to do in the next fiscal year in relation to recruitment and managing our farmers market. You would see other increases under that Head to deal with gratuities that have to be paid, bills that have to be paid, and so on. Those are my submissions, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much.

*Question proposed:* That Head 77 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$758,916,840 for Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, 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* and we are on page 378. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, under line 01: Salaries and Cost of Living, we are seeing there is a decrease of over \$2.3 million, but yet at the side for explanation we are seeing it includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents. How do you reconcile that if you have decrease in allocation and yet you are going to have positions to be filled?

**Hon. Rambharat:** That is because the posts are already filled and provision would have been made in the last fiscal for one-off expenditure which would be increases which had been granted before, increases in cost of living allowances, and so on, and it reflects the fact that you do not have to pay for some of those increases in this year.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And how many positions?

**Hon. Rambharat:** The bodies are already in the posts. Excuse me?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I asked how many?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I would have to provide you that information.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South, are you on 001?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No, no.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002: Agriculture. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, under 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., you would have had an allocation of 77,271,469 in 2019. It was revised downwards to 73,167,000 and you have now an increase of \$7,254,100. Could you just explain this for us?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Madam Chair, I believe the Member has moved way ahead. We are on 01, 02, and I think he is referring to 002, 02. I am correct?

**Madam Chairman:** But we are on 002. We have moved on to 002: Agriculture—

**Hon. Rambharat:** Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:**—and I believe he is on 02 of that.

**Hon. Rambharat:** I am happy to hear that.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I think the Minister—

**Hon. Rambharat:** I gave you the opportunity to go through 01. Can I ask you to repeat the question, Member for Couva South?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, under 02, Wages and C.O.L.A., you would have had an allocation in 2019 of 77,271,469. It was revised downwards to 73,167,000 and now you have an increase for 2020 of 7,254,100, if you could just explain the increase for us?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well as you understand, Member, these are estimates. The 77 reflects an estimates based on history and projections; the 73 Revised Estimates represents the closest we can get to an actual without dealing with things that happen in the final days of the fiscal, and 80 represents a projection for this fiscal. We may get to 80, we may go beyond the 80, but that is the way the budgetary process works.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yeah, I am listening to you but you have what, you have increased staffing?

**Hon. Rambharat:** It would project promotions; it would project positions which are going to be filled. Vacant position as you know that is a process, people are retiring, people are leaving, people are promoted, people are put in to act. This is a Ministry with a significant number of daily-paid workers, so you would find that, that movement throughout the year and we have to make projections for it.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No problem, but I am saying, or I am asking of you, whether it

is based on—and I am sure that your Permanent Secretary or some of your heads of division would have guided you whether you need to fill or you need to promote one person, you need to fill 100 vacant posts and so.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, we have had—since 2017 we have had extensive meetings with the recognized union, the daily paid unions, recognizing that some of these issues of promotions, and acting, and so on, have not been addressed, and we have reached to the point now where some of these matters could be dealt with and that represents what looks like a significant increase in what we project for this fiscal.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 003: Animal Production and Health; Item 004: Horticulture; Item 006: Surveys and Mapping. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 01, hon. Minister, how many vacant posts are to be filled with this allocation?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Madam Chair, I will have to provide that information in writing.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Do you know how many land surveyors exist right now at Surveys and Mapping?

**Hon. Rambharat:** No, I do not. I could provide that information. I will tell you that there are vacant positions that we require to be filled by the Public Service Commission.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And, hon. Minister, I think that is one of the deterrents of land not being surveyed on time because of the whole issue of land tenure, and so that we have existing right now. That is one of the main problems.

**Hon. Rambharat:** I would say it is one of many, but as I say, we all rely on the Public Service Commission to fill vacancies, and like everybody else, every Minister before and after me, we have to wait until they do their work.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007: Land Management; Item 008: Fisheries; Item 010: Forestry.

**4.30 p.m.**

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration.  
Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I am on page 383 of the same Sub-Head. I just want to get some information with respect to line Items 16 and 17. The substantial increase in the Contract Employment, what may have accounted for it and again, comparatively the substantial increase in Training, what might be responsible?

**Hon. Rambharat:** In relation to Training, what I have found and what the Ministry, the Permanent Secretary has found is that forestry is one area where we were not doing some specific training relating to some of the risks that officers are exposed to and we have been doing that training over the last few years so there is a projection to do additional training so that we could develop that capacity. The other issue in relation to Contract Employment, this is where people have been on short-term employment for long periods and because the Cabinet has renewed contracts and we are able to fill those positions by contract appointment, we have made provision to fill those.

**Mr. Karim:** Might you be able to tell us how many?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I will be able to tell you in writing.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you. Hon. Minister, I will piggy-back on

Chaguanas East's question. Line Items 16 and 17, the same Contract Employment. As you are aware, I believe, hon. Minister, there are thousands of ECIAF and UWI graduates who are unemployed. This Contract Employment, is there any way these persons can be employed maybe short-term or long-term and also be given some additional training?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, the positions that ECIAF graduates will fill are generally public service positions. So the Public Service Commission will tell you that they have done interviews. It is their process. They create a merit list and for example, Game Wardens. We would like to have all our Game Warden positions filled. When I came in as Minister, there were three or four filled, we are up to 16 and in Forestry Officer I, II and III, we have about 30 per cent of the positions filled.

There is always a temptation to suppress public service positions and fill it by contract but the danger in that is you create a lot of problems in the long term in terms of succession planning, in terms of people being able to be promoted in the public service position and we have been working. The Permanent Secretary and other technical officers have been working with the Public Service Commission to fill the forestry positions. That is where ECIAF graduates would go. But you also have to understand that there are only so many positions that could be filled and it is based on the needs of the Ministry, and when it comes to contract employment, our positions have been filled in the critical areas of IT, GIS and land management because land tenure remains the priority of this Ministry.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** But, hon. Minister, ECIAF graduates also qualify as what you call agricultural training officers. They could be agricultural officers, they could be technical officers. And right now, ECIAF, there are vacant positions for those so I am not seeing the rationale because those are positions that have to be filled.

**Hon. Rambharat:** You are not seeing the rationale, Member, because you have just listed a series of public service positions.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** They have to be filled by the Ministry of Agriculture.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Public Service Commission fills positions in the public service. The Ministry has a role—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Rambharat:** We have asked the Public Service Commission to allow us to assist in the recruitment. Some of that is being done—assist in the sense of going through the applications and assisting in shortlisting and so on but it is a process and it is a process that has hampered and hurt every Ministry in this country.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

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

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Items 22 and 28, could you give us an idea as to what is responsible for that large decrease of 5-plus million?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, as I explained earlier, Member, when you have a high dependence on short term, you find that your short-term employment bill will be high, but as I have said, when you look at 16, the increase in 16 by 6 million is offset by the decrease of 5 million because you have less reliance on contract.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan. Oh, do you have more questions? I am so sorry. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Just a follow-up, Madam Chair. In terms of the Other Contracted Services, what will constitute that in your Ministry?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, I had spoken about it in the opening. That has to do to with those services like Internet services, security services, that we have



outstanding bills inherited that we are paying off.

**Mr. Karim:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan. No? Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, 62, Minister, there is an increase of 600,000. What are you going to do differently or more of?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, because of regulatory changes, for example, in wild life management, regulatory changes that have been made and the identification of this risk, for example, of rotted imported wild meat entering the market and being masked as local-caught wild meat, some of those things require education and promotion and publicity in order to protect our public.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so we move on. Item 002: Agriculture. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you very much. Item 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation. Minister, in the context of the fact that my colleague left you a very excellent head office, to what buildings does this refer to? To what specific locations does this refer to? [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, I am sure the Minister of Agriculture can answer his question. [*Interruption*] Minister of Finance, please allow the Minister of Agriculture to answer the question. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Agriculture.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member for Naparima, I would tell you that you almost saddled me with 168,000 a month expense to have to move fisheries from Cipriani Boulevard to rented premises in Curepe. I avoided that and saved that. You left me with a number of questionable rented buildings through the former land Ministry. I was able to deal with that. In the first year, we reduced our exposure to

rent by more than \$3 million. So this represents in some parts of the country, in some part, particularly in the city, we still have small offices that we have not been able to consolidate into one place so we continue to pay some rent but not as much as we were exposed to before.

**Mr. Charles:** Yeah, Minister, in that context, if you look here, historically, nowhere are we seeing a figure of 3 million to accommodate that figure that you talked about, that increase. I am looking at Actual 2018 estimates, Actual revised expenditure.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Right, I just told you I dealt with it in the 2015. In fact, because three or four of those buildings were not rented via the PRES process which is the well-established process, they were not budgeted for and in fact one of those, maybe two out of those three files are still engaging the attention of the lawyers. Because when a process is not followed, to saddle the taxpayer with expenses, you know that the Auditor General, the Permanent Secretary would not sign off on it. They have no authority to do that.

**Mr. Charles:** Follow-up question. I just note he was unthankful for the excellent offices that were left for you by my colleague. Thank you. [*Crosstalk*] We go on, go on. I just wanted to place that on record.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, no, no. I know you do not really mean that and I know—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute.

**Mr. Charles:** Mean what?

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. I know you really do not mean that.

**Mr. Charles:** “Oh-hor”, sorry. Go on.

**Madam Chairman:** And I know you are accustomed being in charge. Okay?

**Mr. Charles:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** But I do not think that is appropriate.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, may I intervene on that?

**Mr. Charles:** No, I do not—

**Madam Chairman:** I know you did not mean it.

**Mr. Charles:** I do not wish to be a boss here.

**Madam Chairman:** I know you did not mean it. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** May I intervene on that intervention?

**Mr. Charles:** I am a lonely MP here, Madam.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, that building in Chaguanas which is now the Ministry of Agriculture was built without proper approvals—

**Hon. Rambharat:** Without any.

**Mr. Imbert:** Without proper engineering. It took two years for the Minister to retrofit that building. It was not built to code. It was ridiculous. Typical UNC behaviour. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Item 003: Animal Production and Health; Item 004: Horticulture; Item 006: Surveys and Mapping. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you. Hon. Minister, line 23, I am seeing Fees but it is a new Sub-Item, 300,000. Is it to outsource surveyors and so, land surveyors, that fee?

**Madam Chairman:** Item 23.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, I would have to advise you of that in writing. I do not want to mislead you.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The Minister of Finance is doing a fine job at that. [*Laughter*]

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007: Land Management. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you. Hon. Minister, I am looking at 10, 11 and 12 collectively and it is more than embarrassing to see the allocation to Land Management, 5,900, 92,000. These subsectors, they are really starved for resources, especially Land Management. How is it that they are going to deal with thousands of acres of land to survey, to do schedules, especially if you are looking at books, materials and supplies? To do leases, you need paper. And 5,000?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, first let me tell you this. Leases are prepared at the Chief State Solicitor's Office so there is no danger to us running out of paper.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay, but what will you do with 5,900?

**Hon. Rambharat:** In the normal budgeting process, these allocations, if you go back to 2018, you will see Actual, 2019 Estimates, 2019 Revised Estimates. In other words, the Revised Estimate brings us as close to the actual expenditure on these items and the allocation is in line with what was incurred. So, for example, if you look at 13, Maintenance of Vehicles, there is an allocation of 95,000 against an Actual of 40 in the last fiscal, it is a 55,000 increase. And if it is that in pursuit of the business of the farmers in relation to land tenure, there are increases in the expenditure, the process of virement within an allocation is a power that the Permanent Secretary and the Minister have.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, respectfully, I am seeing here 20,000, Materials and Supplies, the 2020 Estimates, 16, and you decrease it by 4,000. So what I am saying, even as you are saying Chief Solicitor does the lease, we need to have original application forms to be filled which you need to print, so that is my point. What are you doing with 15,000 and \$4,000?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, as a Minister, if the Minister of Finance gives me a \$1.6 million increase in the Sub-Head as you can see, I would not quarrel with him over 4,000 decrease in materials.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I am trying to support you for this, Minister, so your Minister of Finance could help you out.

**Hon. Rambharat:** I deeply appreciate your support and I am happy for the \$1.6 million increase.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 01, how many persons actually benefit from the Travelling and Subsistence allowance?

**Hon. Rambharat:** All those who are entitled to it, Member.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Would the Commissioner of State Lands benefit from this?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Yes.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Is there a Commissioner of State Lands?

**Hon. Rambharat:** There is a Commissioner of State Lands who is on suspension on half pay and there is an Acting Commissioner of State Lands.

**4.45 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Item 008: Fisheries; Item 010: Forestry. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. We are at page 390. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Agriculture; Item 003: Animal Production and Health; Item 004: Horticulture; Item 007: Land Management; Item 008: Fisheries.

We are now at page 392. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organizations; Item 005—Member for Oropouche West, you are at 003 or 005? Item 005: Non-profit Institutions. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I am on line 04, Sugarcane Feed Centre, and I am seeing an increase of \$500,000. I just

need to know what is the status of the floating raft case culture project that was implemented in 2015? That is one, and two, with respect to the production of the fingerlings and the five hatcheries, what is the status of that at SFC?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, I am on record as saying that the State should not be involved in these ventures. And we have been able, notwithstanding my views, we have tried to sustain SFC without making significant changes to it. But those two projects, in terms of production of fingerlings, that was a policy that could not be sustained, the cost of production of fingerlings in the hands of the State is maybe 10 times the cost of production of it in the private sector. And the Government policy, in relation aquaculture, is that if there is interest in investment, it should be driven by the private sector, the Government will support it in the number one way we do, which is to provide state land for agriculture at \$500 an acre and to provide technical services where we could go. But in relation to SFC, SFC requires a significant transformation if it is to make an impact on agriculture.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And what about the pasteurization unit there? What has happened to that?

**Hon. Rambharat:** It was put there. I do not know where the supply of milk was intended to come from. It is a facility that is essentially on a compound that is not accessible to farmers in anyway. It is a secured compound. It is not accessible. The regulatory changes which were required to put a pasteurized milk on the market was not done. The price analysis, because milk remains the subject of certain price controls, it is not something that was well thought out and I have said previously that if there are dairy farmers in the country, or there are associations of dairy farmers, who wish to operate it, then the Ministry will happily give consideration to that.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So, hon. Minister, how was it working effectively

several years ago, that same SFC and now it is inefficient?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I assure you that that pasteurization plant has never functioned. It has never functioned. It was built. It was commissioned just before, maybe in 2015, sometime it was commissioned. You know the philosophy, the underlying philosophy, was absolutely defective. It was linked to buffalypso, which we know is a brucellosis positive herd. The PAHO has frowned on us even selling meat from infected buffalypso. And the grand plan was that we become like Italy and we take our brucellosis infected herd and produce milk and turn that milk into cheese. And that is an absolute disaster of a plan. I am surprised that your administration was so misled, and I am thankful that I came in as a Minister with experience in that buffalypso herd—[*Desk thumping*]*—*and I am very, very conscious of the fact that if we were—my predecessor Vasant Bharath stood up in the Senate and talked about killing off the herd. I do not remember the word he used. In fact, he has even denied that, but it is on the *Hansard*. [*Interruption*] It was not culling. It was bringing the herd to zero. But I recognize that if we did that, we would hurt Mora Valley. Some people would be out of jobs. But more importantly, the land will just be there a thousand acres with nothing to do with it. So, I have been very careful to sustain the herd, to manage it down and to continue to explore ways in which we could get the private sector interested in farms like that.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So then can I infer that there is plan to shut down SFC and send home those workers?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I do not know your powers of inference, but I will tell you, you do not move after "four and something" years to shut down something by providing a 20 per cent increase in the allocation. I do not think that is how my mind works.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** But you are saying, hon. Minister, my powers of inference is very good, and if we were to extrapolate what you are saying, you are saying that the State is not supposed to be into milking and what have you. This is a European Union policy that you are trying to implement in Trinidad. This policy is for economies of scale. We need help here from the State with the small farmers who want to mind their cows and sell their cows to pasteurization units. So that policy you are saying that the State not supposed to mind cow and clean pens and so, that is not applicable for Trinidad and Tobago. That is where you have large economies of scale.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, here is where we have demonstrated how things could work. In offering Aripo livestock station for a partnership with the private sector, 1,146 acres; not a single worker has been sent home. We are talking about 150 daily-paid workers and several monthly-paid workers. And all that has happened is that those vacant positions which were languishing in the Ministry, in areas which are critical to forestry or food production, have been filled by these workers.

And those workers in SFC, this Government has no desire. The work that is being done in structuring agriculture has nothing to do with sending people home. We did that with Caroni Green. But, in terms of the Ministry and places like SFC where we have, we have university graduates who are capable, motivated and given a task in an area where they are required, they will do well. And the idea is not to send people home. The idea is to position assets of the State where they serve the longest-term interest of private farmers.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay. From what you said there, one, the Aripo farmers. You have leased the land to some private person? You would like to tell us who is that person, and what was the tendering process? I am just following up on what you are saying.



**Hon. Rambharat:** I am not sure, is that a line item, Madam Chair. I do not want to be—*[Interruption]*

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** You said it and I am following through with what you are saying.

**Madam Chairman:** So I have allowed leeway in the general conversation and therefore, we return to where we are, which is at—

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** The Aripo—

**Madam Chairman:** We are at 005: Non-Profit—

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** The hon. Minister was talking about the Aripo—

**Madam Chairman:** We are at 005: Not-Profit Institutions. Do you have a further question on that, Member for Oropouche West?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** The 4H Young Farmers' Club; that is 06. Hon. Minister, I recall that this 4H Young Farmers' Club at one point in time they went into their own little agro-processing thing making local curry from saffron and ginger. Do you think this allocation here would suffice to see if we could stimulate these young persons to get involved in agriculture and agro-processing?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well Member, when you consider they accessed \$16,000 in the last fiscal, this represents, in this case we have not allocated close to what they spent. We allocated beyond what we allocated in 2019, recognizing the importance of 4H. And we will continue to motivate them to access the funding that is available to develop their programmes.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Mr. Charles:** On the same point, 06. Could the Minister indicate how many clubs exist in the country?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I would have to give you that in writing, Member.

**Mr. Charles:** Is this the group that the clubs exist, linked to schools?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Yes, they are all in primary and secondary schools and it is a significant number. It is not as significant as it used to be, but it is significant and they do excellent work.

**Mr. Charles:** Given, and I have an interest in young people and, you know, in terms of giving alternatives for at-risk youth, cadets and Servol and police youth clubs, and what not, and I am a bit disturbed about the low level of financial involvement; 250,000 allocated in 2019, only 16,000 spent. Is there an active programme to encourage the formation of these groups so that we could—

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, 4H, they have a board. They run their own affairs, but they are supported by the county offices across the country. And I will tell you this, it has to do with the enthusiasm of the teachers and the time allocation, and so on. What I have found, two things, is that in schools where you have highly motivated Agri-Science teachers; teachers who may not be in Agri-Science, the clubs do well. But remember teachers have a lot of demands on their time. And in schools where you do not have the teachers, you find that you do not have the 4H Club being vibrant.

The other thing is that they struggled in the school environment on school vacation. For example, that is why they cannot—I discourage them from keeping livestock. Because during the school vacation you have nobody there to look after them. So what we have done is, as far as possible across the country, they have access to Government and private farms because in the primary and secondary school curriculum, starting from Standard 3 in the primary school curriculum, you need access to rabbits and you need access to animals and they have access to both the State and private farmers to do that.

**Mr. Charles:** Would the Minister commit to become involved in the promotion or this for the growth of these clubs? I know at Cowen Hamilton we had it and we

had a farm attendant. So it requires, given the importance of things like these, in terms of changing orientation of a whole generation of students, I think it is important for us to be more proactively involved in promoting it. That is all.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, when my colleague and I visited St. Anthony's College last week for World Food Day, it was the 109<sup>th</sup> school in this country we had gone to in four years, and it has been from Matelot, in Marac, in Moruga across the country. And that is only because we understand how important it is to engage young people; not only in agriculture. And that has been 109 schools that we have been able to have a relationship with.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, I am happy to hear that, but have you spoken to your colleague, the Minister of Education? Because, as far as I understand now, Agri-Science has been removed from the curriculum in the primary schools. So on one hand you are trying to encourage it, which is noteworthy, but an important aspect of Agri-Science has been removed from the primary school curriculum. What is not examinable is not taught. So, I would ask you very kindly to have some discussions with him and restructure the primary school curriculum so you can get what you desire from an early age, to get children interested in Agri-Science, to move on to secondary schools. So it is something that we did, and we would like to see you do it.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007: Households. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**5.00 p.m.**

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 01, Severance Benefits. I see in 2019 you had a 5million and Revised Estimates indicated by all means that you utilized all and then you have a 1.5 million increase for 2020. Can you identify how many persons were severed in terms of employment in 2019 and is it that you have intentions of severing more

employment contracts?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I can assure you, I can assure you that there has been no retrenchment in this Ministry that would attract severance benefits in the context of the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act. You have, through different employment arrangements, for example, short-term employment or contract employment, you have different obligations arising. So, for example, when you have somebody who has worked on a continuous short-term contract, continuous periods of three months, and you now convert that person to a contract worker, you still have obligations which are not long-term benefits because they are not public officers, which are not strictly speaking contractual benefits. But there have been decisions of the Industrial Court which tell us that notwithstanding the short-term employment relationship, there are benefits to pay when the person ceases to be a short-term contractor.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Can the hon. Minister indicate how many persons are—?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I can give you that in writing, Member.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

**Dr. Tewarie:** A couple of questions, Minister. The Agricultural Incentive Programme, there is an increase there—

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. We are still in Households.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Oh. I thought—all right, I am going on to 008, sorry.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. All right. So we will move on. You are still in Households? Item 008: Subsidies. That is where you are, Member for Caroni Central?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, sorry, Chair. That programme, you have increased it and you have had a jump from 7-1-4-3, does that mean that the programme is working and the incentives are being taken up and what is happening with that programme?

**Hon. Rambharat:** There are different incentive programmes and you will see three there; 01, 02 and 03, and there is one that is provided for separately. But in this programme, the Agricultural Incentive Programme, we deal with claims as they arise. And in 2018, because in previous years we have been clearing the backlog, and I did say last year in the midterm review, the Minister of Finance allocated, I am trying to remember, but it could be something like 26million for us to deal with the backlog for both the incentive and the flood assistance.

So we have basically brought the incentives up in terms of the backlog we are dealing with, with those received in real time, but we have also made provision for an increase in the next year, again recognizing some of the policy measures that we have been talking about.

**Dr. Tewarie:** This is separate and distinct from any incentives?

**Hon. Rambharat:** There is something, the Agri-incentive which the Minister of Finance announced and launched last year. We invited applications for that incentive, we received about 1,000 applications. What we found with that was that many of the applicants applied for things which were not covered by the incentive. We went through a process of having to work with the Ministry of Finance in terms of this is a grant so you have a lot of conditions in place and contractual arrangements, and in fact we are about to pay out the first set of that grant.

But if you go to the Ministry of Finance allocation you will see Head 18, 009, Item 42, on page 106 of the same book, you would see we have gone beyond the 20 million allocated last year and we have gone to 25 million this year—

**Dr. Tewarie:** I remember that.

**Hon. Rambharat:**—and that would help us to make a significant dent in those applications.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. And one more, 0—oh, we are not there yet—9. Sorry, I will

wait.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, is it 01 or 02 that you have, which one is it for the newly incentive programme that was announced last year by the Minister?

**Hon. Rambharat:** It is in the Ministry of Finance allocation, Head 18.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay. So let me ask you a question. A number of persons who have applied, farmers, have been told that in November that they will have the grants available. How many persons will be benefiting? How many farmers will benefit from this incentive programme?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, we got, as I said, we got over 1,000 applications. I would say of those applications, fewer than 100 were found to have met the criteria. I have asked the committee to review those which did not meet the criteria. Give them an opportunity to improve their applications, and all those including your constituents would have the opportunity to access the grant.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Line Item 04, Relief of Flood Damage. Hon. Minister, there are a number of persons who are still awaiting relief of flood damage, particularly in my constituency. And there are some who still cannot access because of land tenure, and as you indicated earlier, you have a part-time Commissioner. What is being done to alleviate the pain that the farmers are experiencing as a result of this inability to access? Under us, we had a Commissioner of State Lands.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, I celebrated my birthday last week.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Happy birthday.

**Hon. Rambharat:** I do not think I have short-term memory loss. I said that we have an acting Commissioner, who is going above and beyond the call, and is

working hard, but you understand the backlog. And we have to be—in relation to the Relief of Flood Damage, I do not know if you are doing the math, if you are doing the math, between the incentive that is housed in the Ministry of Finance, 25 million, the incentive that is provided for now, and the other two incentives, we have actually made provision this year for close to 60 million in incentives. You are talking about—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** How many farmers are there, Sir, Minister?

**Hon. Rambharat:**—you are talking about moving from 7 million when I came in as Minister, to over 60 million in incentive allocations. In relation to the flood damage, or flood assistance, there must be a criteria for qualification because you would have everybody, anybody planting anywhere wanting to make a claim on the taxpayers for this. So it is meant to be for a category called registered farmers. Now, there is an issue with land tenure, but people who have expired leases, they still qualify. It is people who do not have any form of land tenure, including persons who farm on private land, that do not have the opportunity to be registered. And the Government has worked aggressively to deal with those persons so that they can come into the fold.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Minister, I am doing the math, on 01, you had 24million allocated of which in the Revised Estimates 7.1 was in fact utilized. And for the incentive programme you had 500,000 which in 2019 the Revised Estimates, there was, according to the books. So I am doing the math. Thank you.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Just a follow-up question, Minister. For those incentives that had already been granted, is there an oversight mechanism in place, so that the moneys that are granted and given to these farmers, they are used for the purpose?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, that is the point I made. The first thing is that this new

incentive which has very strict criteria is housed in the Ministry of Finance. The Minister of Finance and his team they have been very careful to ensure that the grants, there is a way of tracking the work that has been done and the people are tied to a commitment to do what they have to do and it would be managed on that basis. Of course, it takes an additional time to do that. But for this incentive to work, people have to do what we would like them to do and that is the purpose of this specific incentive which is not a line Item here, it is in the Ministry of Finance but I am happy to answer your question.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Line Item 04, the Relief of Flood Damage. It is just a follow-up and I need some clarification whether it is true or not, if livestock farmers benefit under this flood damage? Because it is my understanding some persons in Oropouche West who are livestock farmers and lost their animals to floods, did not benefit and when they went to the Ministry they said they do not pay for livestock. Is that so?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, it is a fact that livestock farmers historically, this particular incentive programme was created by your administration and livestock farmers were excluded, and that recognizes—part of that has to do with the fact that many of those contract broiler farmers have their own insurance arrangements with the people who they supply the chicken for.

And we have said to the other types of livestock farmers that they have an obligation, just as I have said to fishermen across the country, if you have a bad weather bulletin and you have a rough seas bulletin, you have an obligation to bring your boats in and to safely store your equipment, because this is an exposure that the taxpayer faces with no potential limit.

What we try to do here is we try to deal with the people who need, who need some sort of assistance to get back on their feet when there is critical damage.



**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** But, hon. Minister, you know we have to be realistic, where is a poultry farmer going to house 2,000 chickens, if the weather, you are saying is inclement weather? You know we have to be practical, and is it that some point in time you might want to change that policy so you could assist the livestock farmers? That is what I am asking.

**Hon. Rambharat:** But in the design—when you have livestock, when you have poultry, the pens ought to be designed in a way that flood waters would not take away your birds. And flood is not the only risk to poultry farmers; cats are the number one risk to poultry farmers in the country.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** No, we are dealing with floods here.

**Hon. Rambharat:** I am just telling you—

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I am dealing with floods, I am not talking about cats.

**Hon. Rambharat:**—so that they have an obligation to provide for risks that are known to them.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So we go on, Item 009: Other Transfers.

**Mr. Charles:** Again, Item 02, Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA). Nothing spent although 500,000 was allocated, and everywhere I look I see the same example particularly when it relates to young people, that nothing is spent. Could the Minister indicate what this programme is about and why it is no money was spent?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, in previous years no money was spent simply because as Minister I conducted a review when I came in. I found that significant sums were being spent and the output was not significant. We were offering short-term training to these apprentices, there was no opportunity for them to access land or to

be able to continue to farm. It was a good project, but it was not yielding the results that we needed.

I felt that UTT was the place for young people and UTT should expand their programmes and, in fact, UTT took up the challenge and launched new training programmes in Tobago, for example, and I continue to encourage UTT to do that, likewise in the youth camps. In the youth camps similarly there was a time when the youth camps would have been the only place where a young person could do an agriculture programme, but when you look at the one in Freeport, for example, for over a period of six years, previous six years, there was only one trainee there who drowned in the pond on the first week of being an apprentice.

So it is something as a country we have to relook and we have to put our young people into programmes that are layered up where they can reach up. Particularly the area where we really need the support are those technical skills that UTT offers, particularly in the area of livestock farming, because that is where the gaps are on the private farms.

**5.15 p.m.**

**Mr. Charles:** Yeah. Minister, UTT is more of a teaching institution than an apprenticeship organization, and I think one of the problems I have heard is that people graduate from university in agriculture, they graduate from UTT, they graduate from ECIAF, and then there is no way that they could go into actual planting or actual rearing of animals or whatnot. So there seems to be a gap that this apprenticeship programme—all I am suggesting is that you relook at this programme with a view to ensuring that we could so reengineer our society that we have farmers who are qualified and who have avenues to become productive citizens.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, I could assure you, if you go up to ECIAF Campus

early in the morning, maybe 5 o'clock in the morning—I know you are on the road early—if you go up to ECIAF, you would see young people milking cows and in the livestock farms. You would see young people engaged in agriculture, practical agriculture. I had the opportunity to spend some time with a young man from the Minister of Finance, his constituency. He is a UTT student and you have UTT students—UTT, we have been encouraging them and supporting them to deal with the practical aspects of agriculture and we are seeing the results of them doing that.

**Mr. Garcia:** Madam Chair, just a short intervention.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Garcia:** ECIAF is a part of the UTT—the University of Trinidad and Tobago—has UTT as one of its arms. So it is not true to separate UTT from ECIAF. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, a short question, Chair. This 05, Tourism Development Facilities. Could you remind me, Minister, what project that is? What facilities those are?

**Hon. Rambharat:** There are a few of those: Lopinot, the Lopinot Visitor Centre, the Water Wheel in Diego Martin. Those are sites, and that has to do with the movement of Ministries and so on, and some of the things which are maybe tourism oriented sites, but remaining in the Ministry on account of the history.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. Is there any allocation at all intended for the fish fry project in central Trinidad?

**Madam Chairman:** That is under here?

**Hon. Rambharat:** MP, that fish fry project is news to me. [*Interruption*] Yeah, there is one in Carenage.

**Madam Chairman:** But it is not under this Head, is it?

**Hon. Rambharat:** It is not under here. I cannot—

**Dr. Tewarie:** You are familiar with the Carli Bay fishing?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Well, that is the one I am asking.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you. 01, Livestock and Livestock Products Board. Hon. Minister, this has been disbanded, I am not sure if I could gently remind you or if it is indeed so, you were given a court order to appoint this board? I am not sure.

**Hon. Rambharat:** I was, the Ministry was, and a board was appointed.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay. When?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Before the date fixed by the court to do so.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So you did comply with the court order? Thank you.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Very much so.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The rule of law.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

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*. We are at page 503. 08 - Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago. 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.

Members, we now go on to page 508. 09 - National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001:

General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I am just looking at line Item 43, hon. Minister, Security Services, and I just need to know this increase in security, who is the firm that has been procured and why is that increased?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, I would have to give you in writing the firm, but the increase has to do with the fact that we have brought on stream now, the Woodford Lodge Wholesale Market and, in fact, on the second day the trading started, when I went down to speak with the farmers, I indicated that that could cost us as much as a million dollars in security costs for the year. I was explaining why, even though we would like to bring all the facilities on stream at the same time, money does not grow on trees, and now that we believe that we are in a financial position to do so. So I will give you the name of—but the contractor may not have even been procured as yet, but the reason for the increase is because we have additional facilities and we need to secure those facilities.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

We now go on to page 516, 11 - Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago. 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.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are at page 155. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 001: Pre-Investment; Item 002: Productive Sectors. This

is Productive Sectors?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Line Item, Minister, 141, La Reunion. Could you tell us what is the status of this what we call propagation station?

**Hon. Rambharat:** La Reunion is essentially a station devoted to cocoa. La Reunion beans were among the finalists for the world award in cocoa in terms of cocoa quality. So, we continue, as you see, we made a provision there for additional work to be done in this fiscal. So, La Reunion remains a flagship facility in relation to cocoa in the world.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** At one time it used to have avocado and coffee seedlings and so. Is it that you are propagating these also or it is just solely cocoa?

**Hon. Rambharat:** No, it is a propagation station, so you would find whatever the Ministry offers, you would find the opportunity to get those plants there, but it is primarily focused on cocoa.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Members shall note that Item 003 spans four pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. D. Fishing. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 287, Upgrade of Fish Landing Sites. In 2019, 713,600,000 was spent as a Revised Estimate. Could you state where those landing sites were upgraded and what is in the pipeline for 2020 of \$1 million—the landing sites that are to be upgraded in 2020?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, in terms of the expense of 713, I would have to give you that in writing, but in 2020 one of the projects we want to go into the design stage is the fishing facility on Alcan Bay to service our fisherfolk in that part of the

country.

**Mr. Lee:** That is in Carenage, right?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Yes.

**Mr. Lee:** Are there any designs or intentions for the upgrade of Claxton Bay Fishing Landing Site?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, Claxton Bay is in relatively good shape. The issue with the Claxton Bay fisherfolk is that there is a NAMDEVCO facility that they would like to have access to and CFTDI, the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute has been working with the fisherfolk in that area to give them access to it. As I have said so many times, the challenge is in giving fisherfolk access to beautiful facilities, it does not take them very long to damage and, in some cases, destroy. But that is a facility we would like to give the Claxton Bay fisherfolk to use and Claxton Bay happens to have very good leadership in their fishing community.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** E. Forestry. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you. Hon. Minister, line Item 011, Production of Pine Seedlings and Teak Nursery. I am seeing just an allocation of 20,000. If we are really to put a thrust there in our own local lumber industry, do you think 20,000 is sufficient to stimulate the teak industry?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, what you would not see in these documents is the allocation to the National Reforestation Programme, which in this last fiscal year cost us about \$98 million, and that is where the drive towards reforestation is. And in this fiscal the focus will be on replanting, particularly in the Northern Range and parts of Central and Southern Ranges, those areas which were affected by the fires from the harsh conditions we had this year. So these allocations under E. are really

small allocations to keep limited activities going, because a lot of the work in reforestation is driven by the national programme.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay. And line Item 014, Commercial Repository. Can you elucidate as to what is this?

**Hon. Rambharat:** That is the programme to replant commercial areas where commercial areas, those are the areas where you have teak and pine which are available for commercial harvesting, where the extraction over a period of time is selective extraction, but you get to the point where you have clear-fells, so you end up with a vacant parcel of land and the Commercial Repository is the replanting of commercial sites. **Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And 023, Forestry Access Roads, which areas have been identified?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, this is an ongoing—this line Item has been there. Different roads are identified. Once we come through the budgeting process, we then select those roads which have—and the policy of the Ministry in relation to forestry and agriculture is to select roads to repair where we have the highest impact to farmers or, in this case, the highest impact to the logging industry.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay. Thanks.

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

**Ms. Ramdial:** The question was asked.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So we move on to F. Land Management. H. Research and Development. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Yeah, Land Management.

**Madam Chairman:** Land Management, okay.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I am seeing, hon. Minister, line Item 069, Establishment of a Land Management Authority, and I am trying to reason why we need this when we have LSA, we have EMBD and we have the Commissioner of



State Lands. What exactly would be this purpose for the Land Management Authority?

**5.30 p.m.**

**Hon. Rambharat:** Because we have those things I—this came on to the PSIP; I was at first reluctant, since 2000, and from 2000, but maybe before 2000, but definitely from 2000 we have had consultant reports which advocate the creation of a single authority to deal with the issue of state land management in this country. And it has to do with the fact that you have so many state entities dealing with land, you have Petrotrin and their landholdings, you still have some aspects of it under what remains of Caroni, you have HDC, you have LSA, and because of that you have the application of different policies, you have inconsistencies. You have land that has been lost, the State has lost land.

So I have accepted that there is need to create a single authority. However, to do that, you create a single authority and you still have chaos in our Land Management Division and elsewhere. So we have been focusing on cleaning up and straightening out what we have while we move to the creation. And in this fiscal year we would make the steps toward the engagement of a consultant that would define the work that has to be done for the creation of this land management authority, but it would not happen without some level of consultation, some technical work and other things as we move towards doing it. But a single point of authority for land management in the country is something that has to be done.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And do you have like a time frame, like within one year, two years, or something to work on this because it is a lot?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I think I will await the report of a consultant who would be engaged in this fiscal.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** So H. Research and Development; I. Production and Marketing—

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Item 552, hon. Minister, Development of Forage Farms at Mon Jaloux and La Gloria. What is the status of that right now because my understanding is just the forage is growing and they are just being cut and given to farmers for the animals?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, that is the purpose of a forage farm. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] A forage farm is where you—

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, what I am saying is that Mon Jaloux is not being resourced. So that is all that is happening, the grass is just growing and it is not resourced, and the workers are also disenchanting.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Wild grass.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Yeah, it is just growing. Yes. They are not resourced. Mon Jaloux is not resourced. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Could the Minister be given an opportunity to answer?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So nothing is happening. [*Crosstalk*] Yeah.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, I can assure you, if nothing was happening the Members for Caroni East, Caroni Central—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** “I give up on allyuh.” [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

**Hon. Rambharat:**—would have alerted me. And in fact when I was in the House speaking last week the Member for Caroni East was nodding in agreement. There are two areas of activity there, during the wet season when the grass is growing and there is no issue with availability, the grass grows and it is cut, and you have sections that would be cut and allowed to regrow and there are sections that are available for cutting. And that is the activity, it is unscientific. But in preparation for the dry season when you have challenges with the growth of the grass, we have

water access. And in our first year we regenerated a massive pond there to deal with the water supply, but we do baling. We bale the grass in preparation for the dry season so that the farmers continue to access the grass. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Line Item 553, Minister, the Cocoa Rehabilitation and Replanting Programme in the East Coast of Trinidad. This allocation forms part of the allocation to procure the tissue culture or tissue material from these people?

**Hon. Rambharat:** This is the allocation because we have moved away from this for—under your administration and under ours the plan initially—the plan has always been, until the issue of the tissue culture came in, has been to plant, to find seeds and plant and hope that it is a variety that we need, and with the tissue culture we know that we have predictability in terms of the variety and we are able to replicate the planting material. And I have said that we have placed our first order ever for tissue from Mexico, and this allocation is meant to pay for this during the fiscal year because the issue will come in six different shipments.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** I. Production and Marketing; J. Other Services. Under J. Other Services, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 426, I see you have something for Rehabilitation of Cocoa Industry. We had \$800,000 in the 2019, in the revised nothing was spent and you have \$800,000 again for 2020. Minister, I do not understand how you could have any rehabilitation of the cocoa industry when many of my cocoa farmers lost hundreds of thousands of tonnes of cocoa as a result of no board being in place as who acts as an intermediary.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, I understand how you feel, your administration destroyed the board, and I do not want to belabour the point—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Dear Minister, you have been there for four years.

**Hon. Rambharat:**—but you did so without transitioning the industry. You created a—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** I did not put the 800,000, you did.

**Hon. Rambharat:** You created a Cocoa Development Company. You would see in these books an allocation of 3 million for the Cocoa Development Company. The Cocoa Development Company has been doing excellent work even with your farmers. That is the vehicle for the development of the industry. That is the only reason earlier this year we were able to maintain our Fine Flavour cocoa status. This allocation is an allocation for work within the Ministry; La Reunion, for example, where we have our cocoa assets, and every year we must do work to sustain the cocoa assets that we have mainly because, apart from the international gene bank which is housed in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry maintains its own gene bank and we must continue to sustain it with these allocations. But the provision for farmers and the development of the industry is to be found in the Cocoa Development Company.

**Madam Chairman:** Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Minister, I would like to correct you. Doves of Tobago has maintained their own industry and has had it on the market because they do their own sourcing of purchaser. They actually do that, so it is not as a result of your work.

**Hon. Rambharat:** You would be surprised, Member, to know that Tobago estate purchases beans from La Reunion Estate, which belongs to the citizens of this country. Dove Tobago estate has its own estate. They have been plagued with the parrots. I am in the sometimes unfortunate position to be the Minister for cocoa and the Minister for parrots, [*Laughter*] and I have to strike the balance. And in

times when they do not have the production, they access their beans through the Ministry at La Reunion Estate.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Minister, on an annual basis over the last two years, how many plants are propagated in terms of cocoa and how much acres have been replanted in the country? Do you have an idea?

**Hon. Rambharat:** I would have to get that from the Cocoa Development Company, but there are, the same Duane Dove as an excellent project called Tamana Estates where he is leasing abandoned farms and bringing it back into production. So a significant amount of work is being done by the private sector which is the way it should be, and in fact in the first year cocoa from Tamana Estates, chocolate produced from cocoa in Tamana Estates were in the international awards for cocoa.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Does the Cocoa Development board have any intention of expanding the production of chocolates in Trinidad by engaging foreign company, expert company to come and work with the chocolatiers here so we can expand the industry and get the value added from the exports here rather than sending the cocoa overseas?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, two weeks ago we hosted the World Cocoa and Chocolate Expo at the Hyatt, and if you were there you would see the significant local and international interest. It is private-sector driven largely because that is the way it should be, supported by the Cocoa Development Company. And I cannot overemphasize that a critical aspect of—you know, you could produce the best labels and the best packaging, but if we had not retained our Fine Flavour cocoa status we were out of the game, and that is why we invested so much time, energy and expertise in defending that status, because, you know, as a small-island

country the rest of the world would like to see us out of the running.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yeah, but, Minister, with due respect, what is the good of just protecting your fine quality when you are not turning that fine quality asset you have into foreign exchange, into a bigger market? You know, what is really being done to expand this chocolate industry because I believe that we have a goldmine sitting there in terms of chocolates?

**Hon. Rambharat:** You are talking about two—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Remember in my constituency in Gran Couva we have small chocolatiers so I have a deep interest in this.

**Hon. Rambharat:** We are talking about two different industries, we have to be very careful. We have cocoa beans, which is our traditional way of running this industry, and we still command a very good price for our cocoa. So we have like Monserrat Cocoa Farmers and other individual farmers who go to that market. We have Duane Dove, for example, using local beans but doing his chocolate production in Europe, and then we have local producers of all levels of quality, but the work of the Cocoa Research Centre, the work of the CDC is geared towards assisting them in developing, first, the quality of the chocolate. And we have seen consistently—in fact, Rio Claro has just started to produce a chocolate that one of the international judges said to me in the World Expo that for a first production it was high quality, but there are issues in terms of taste and flavours that they need to refine.

And, again, we are very lucky in Trinidad and Tobago that we have international judges who are Trinidadians and other people who are able to lend their expertise, but this is not—unless the private farmers come on stream with production, or unless we are able to attract a private sector, maybe an external investor who wants to invest then there will be challenges towards the sort of

growth that you want to see.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So, Minister, do you have an idea of how many acres of abandoned cocoa estates there are in Trinidad?

**Hon. Rambharat:** They are significant and they are in private hands, and the reason for that has to do with historic reasons, but the most recent reason would have been labour and the fact that the owners, for example, in south-east Trinidad, in Matelot and those areas, the owners came to the city to live, and land was cheap and there was lack of interest. And it is only now, maybe the second and third generation are turning their eyes back to those abandoned estates. Labour is a challenge. The Government policy on allowing the Venezuelans to be able to work here has had some impact. They are finally signing on for the movement of agricultural workers in the region. It may have some impact, but I still see the need to have workers from Africa come to Trinidad so that we could really develop some of the capacity.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But you have never done a study, an audit?

**Hon. Rambharat:** The Cocoa Development Company has done that. They had extensive work with farmers across the country. They have collated the data and they have the numbers, and I will be happy to provide.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And is the Cocoa Development board prepared, for example, to provide some incentives to those farmers or owners of abandoned estates to bring them back into production?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, the agricultural incentives which I now have said, they are now \$60million up from seven. It is intended for all farmers and cocoa farmers are included in that.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** K. Drainage and Irrigation, Land Acquisition. Member for

Oropouche West, you are on Land Acquisition.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Land Acquisition, line Item 001, hon. Minister, I am seeing Acquisition of Sites for Non-Agricultural Development Purposes, I just want to find out whether those lands would be compulsorily acquired from private owners or would it be state lands?

**Hon. Rambharat:** No, this Item has to do with the Commissioner of State Lands under the law having responsibility for the acquisition of private lands for public purposes.

**5.45 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** So you are finished, Oropouche West?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I just want to clarify, hon. Minister, what is the non-agricultural land?

**Hon. Rambharat:** So, if you are building a health centre for example and you need a site and the site is privately owned, the Commissioner of State Lands under the law will acquire on behalf of the State, the land, and compensation would be paid, when it is determined, to the private landowner.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** So we move on to Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Hon. Members, we are now at page 161. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, this Item 005 spans three pages, therefore I will also announce the project groups. L. Agricultural Youth Apprenticeship Programme, page 162. A—Member for Tabaquite, where are you, L? I am going on to it. Yes, please.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I would like to find out from the Minister, you put \$1.5 million in 2019 and you did not spend anything and now you are putting \$1 million. Where is the evidence that there is a programme in place to do this, that this is actually going to happen? I think it is a good idea, but where is the evidence?



**Hon. Rambharat:** Well in 2018, we actually trained young people in horticulture because we see there is—if you go to the Eastern Horticultural Club Flower Show, for example, it is over two days, it is massive. All the shows relating to horticulture are well attended and well supported, particularly with young people, and the Ministry sees the need for it. The challenge is that many of our young people are in search of a job. They want to do something and they want a Government job at the end of it. So it is always a challenge, but I think we should persist with it, and we should continue to target those communities where we see the opportunity for them to be trained, and convert it into a business.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, would it not be a more exciting idea, possibly a greater feasible idea, if you were to take this same money and use it with the graduates who are at the University of the West Indies pursuing a degree in agriculture, that after their second year this money is used to help them set up horticultural farms, and that they get into business, and the Government promotes therefore a strong entrepreneurial spirit in an area that has a great export potential, which is horticulture? What would it take to reorient this programme with students who can become entrepreneurs, spend the time out there, Government allocates two or three acres of land per student team or group, they earn money for it and then they come back and finish their degree, but they have a business that could also be of benefit to the country? Change the model.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Member, you taught me Business Management and you would be very disappointed if I advocated an idea like that.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Why?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Because realistically we have tinkered with a lot of these things. The first thing, the graduate of the University of the West Indies now does not come out with an orientation to be entrepreneurial or to be creative. They

come out with a determination to find a Government job and a state sector job.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But then that is the problem in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. Everybody wants to come in as a researcher or paper writer. Is that not what happened to you Minister with respect to the coconut industry, where people wrote papers and travelled around the world, but they never sought to get the coconut tissue in the country? Is that not true, Minister?

**Hon. Rambharat:** It is true. I agree, so, that is why we have not—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Is that not true, Mr. Minister?

**Hon. Rambharat:** It is true.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Is it not also true therefore that it is the same people who went and destroyed your first shipment that was supposed to come from Mexico, because they wanted to pick up coconut all about and go and plant it, rather than let the tissue come in the country? Is that true or not?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, there is a—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** He is under cross examination?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Minister, I am making a very important point, that some of the most destructive elements to agriculture reside in people who call themselves researchers in the Ministry, but they are not doing what they are supposed to do, which is transferring their research into farms and what have you.

**Hon. Rambharat:** There is an orientation, which I have spoken about, and successive Ministers most likely spoke about it. An orientation towards sitting in the Ministry and being an academic and pursuing masters and PhD. programmes, and not really connecting with the farmers in a way that is practical. That is why this particular allocation is geared towards young people in communities where they may not have access to jobs or entrepreneurial opportunities, but there is a market. The plant market in this country, Trinidadians and Tobagonians love

plants, and the opportunity to learn how to propagate and to replicate and create these plants is important for young people. We had success in one year, and we continue to persist with the programme.

**Dr. Rambachan:** The success was what, just in training them, or did they actually set up horticultural farms?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well, the success is in training them. There are other entities in the State that we expose them to. There are other parts of the State that do grant funding. We ourselves have a grant for horticulture that is accessible to university students or anybody else. There are other parts of the State that provide support for entrepreneurs in the country.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mr. Minister, you said I taught business, but I just want you to know, when I taught at Roytec I also taught a small business entrepreneurial programme, and the one year I taught the programme I launched six businesses directly out of that classroom into the environment, and students set up their companies and set up their businesses. So it can be done—five.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Thanks.

**Madam Chairman:** So we move on. A. Administrative Services. F. Public Buildings.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Administrative Services, Madam Chair?

**Madam Chairman:** No, we are at F. Public Buildings.

**Mrs. Guyadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** K. Lands and Surveys. Infrastructure Development Fund, page 234. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure; Item 004: Social Infrastructure.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 77 ordered to stand part of the schedule. [Interruption]*

**Madam Chairman:** I have not called Ministry of Health as yet. Caroni East and

Member for St. Joseph, we are going to call Ministry of Health shortly. Thank you very much, Minister, Parliamentary Secretary, Permanent Secretary.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

*Head 28:* Ministry of Health, \$5, 233,898,812.

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

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you very much, Chair. The Ministry of Health is responsible for both health, and now as we change the conversation to the concept of wellness, for everything from vector control to the provision of quaternary services such as kidney transplants. This concept of wellness is an overarching one, and this change as we move from health to wellness will encourage us all to be even more patient-oriented in the public health sector.

Chair, this change programme has manifested itself in our precipitous decline in maternal and infant mortality rates, as we now rank with the best in our class. We continue with a long overdue strategic focus on primary health care, as evidenced by our NCD plan, which has a strategic objective of achieving a 25 per cent decrease in premature deaths before the age of 70 due to NCDs, by 2025.

Along this path, the first data coming out of this plan is a significant decline of 20 per cent in the use of soft drinks by school-aged children, as envisaged by the last school survey of 2017. What we intend to do at the Ministry of Health moving forward is to reverse the old paradigm where we treat, and now we are going for prevention, as we encourage people to engage in more health seeking behaviour.

The issue of mental health has been on the focus of Ministry of Health for the past two years, as we move to a behavioural wellness model. We have already in the debate spoken about the new decentralization of mental health. In the future, in the next few years, medium term, the focus on being more patient-centric will be

realized for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago the introduction of electronic medical records, an IT platform, registries and new hospital infrastructure, as we continue to monitor and deliver the best possible health care interactions, which we estimate each year to be between 1.5 to two million patient interactions per year, the vast majority of which meet the satisfaction of our patients.

Madam Chair, with those opening remarks, I now subject myself to the questioning of this Committee. Thank you very much.

*Question proposed:* That Head 28 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,233,898,812 for Head 28 Ministry of Health, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, 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 192. Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair. Hon. Minister—

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

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Sorry I did not wait for your recognition. Sorry about that. Minister, the issue of General Administration at the Ministry of Health, the regional health authorities were brought about for a decentralization model to keep a minimal amount of personnel at the Ministry of Health. Would these Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance here, would that be the salaries for personnel who are still within the Ministry of Health, under the umbrella of Ministry of Health, but have not moved to the regional health authorities?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you. This 01: Salaries and COLA is, this is for head office staff, yes, for administration.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** From 1994 to 1997 there was a move to move almost all personnel across to the regional health authorities, except those who would be working with you to set policy direction and so on. So how many people would you say that you have there with you at the Ministry of Health?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Member, that does not consider the fact that since 1994 under the RHA Act, 21 services were retained under the auspices of the Ministry called “Vertical Services”. So all of this encompasses those 21 vertical services. Right?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You answered it. [*Interruption*] You were a Minister there for two short years.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Medical Services, the next line Item.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Which one, 02?

**Dr. Bodoë:** At the top of page 193, 004.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We are on page 191.

**Madam Chairman:** We have not roached “Vertical Services” as yet.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right, when you get there, Madam.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, sure. So Item 004: Vertical Services.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, with regard to the Vertical Services and that \$47 million, can I ask you to provide in writing, because I know you may not have the information?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I have it.

**Dr. Bodoë:** The number of staff in each of these divisions.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I have it and I could provide it for you in writing.

**Dr. Bodoë:** That would be fine.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you.

**6.00 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005: North West Regional Health Authority. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, I want to use 01: Salaries and Cost Of Living Allowance for the North-West Regional Health Authority just to make a point, and just to follow up on my colleague the Member for Caroni East. This payment here of 215,550 would relate to those officers who now work in the RHA—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct.

**Dr. Bodoë:**—but are paid by the Ministry. These would have been officers who were either seconded but remained in the public service. That expenditure when you add it up for all the RHAs comes close to about \$50 million.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** How much?

**Dr. Bodoë:** About 50 million. So the question would really be and, again, I would ask you to provide this in writing, the number of these positions.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** 87 for north-west.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I have it here now, 87.

**Dr. Bodoë:**—and the category of workers.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I can get that for you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Okay.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And whether these positions that are being made redundant when the incumbents retire—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Bodoë:**—or whether are we keeping those positions.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We will provide that for you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All that is in the aim of making sure that the Ministry of Health does not continue to pay workers—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct.

**Dr. Bodoë:**—towards the RHA. And the issue there is really in terms of who these workers report to, because there is the issue of whether they report to the—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** RHA or the Ministry.

**Dr. Bodoë:**—RHA or the Permanent Secretary. That is the issue I am—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We will provide that for you.

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

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, on that issue, are there any litigation matters still outstanding with the Ministry of Health workers saying that the authority—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Which line Item, Member, are you referring to?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The same North-West Regional Health Authority Salaries, Cost of Living Allowance.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** This line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance has nothing to do with litigation.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No. No. There were personnel from the Ministry of Health who refused to go to the regional health authorities and there were litigation matters which preceded your time, so perhaps your Permanent Secretary could help you answer if there are any litigation matters outstanding as far as what my colleague from Fyzabad asked in relation to this.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Madam Chair, with the deepest of respect, 01 under North-West Regional Health Authority deals with salary and COLA, it bears no relationship, has nothing to do with litigation, I will not be drawn down that rabbit hole.

**Madam Chairman:** And maybe, Member for Caroni East—



**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I can give him two examples.

**Madam Chairman:**—Member for Caroni East, I do not think that it is being denied that there is such a thing. All the Minister is saying is, that it does not arise under this, maybe if you re-craft your question you may come under this, or maybe you could find another Head that is applicable.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. I will find the area for it.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Thank you very much. 006, North Central Regional Health Authority; 007: Eastern Regional Health Authority; 008: South West Regional Health Authority; 009: National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 16, hon. Minister, Contract Employment.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Could you give us a breakdown? If you do not have it now of how many officers or how many personnel you have employed under Contract Employment?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The total contract positions is 315.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And their role generally will be?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** In terms of medical services and so on, project management unit, epidemiology, GIS officers, blood bank, quality department, ICT and so on.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Right. Thank you.

**Dr. Khan:** Right. Minister—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, Sir.

**Dr. Khan:** Number 21, Repairs Maintenance - Buildings. 2018 was 18,500,000 and then it went to 280,000, it has gone back to 18 million, an increase of \$18 million. Could you just elaborate on that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. So this Vote is for continued maintenance on Ministry of Health buildings, head office, housing of staff facility at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. You may be familiar with the old French village, and the Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility. That is where this Vote will be applied.

**Dr. Khan:** Thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, line Item, 23.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** 23, Fees.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Could you give us appreciation of fees?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So these fees will include legal costs, licences, technical support, anti-virus agreements and so on.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So how much will be under litigation?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** These fees will not be, from what I understand, in fiscal 2020 the legal fees estimated to be incurred by the Ministry of Health is \$5 million. These legal fees will be incurred in respect of payment of attorneys in matters that have progressed to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, and matters that are expected to progress to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal and the Industrial Court.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. 004: Vertical Services; 00—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** This is 004, Member?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Page 197.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 39, hon. Minister, Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sorry. What line Item?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 39.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So in 2019 you estimates for Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies to be \$60 million. The Revised Estimate is 575, and the 2020 Estimates is 144 with a marked decrease of \$413million for Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And that will, of course, work negatively for the management of health care. Could we get your comments?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So the Minister of Finance will take this particular line Item.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** What page?

**Madam Chairman:** 197, 004, 39.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Why is there a decrease of 430 million?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The Minister of Finance will give you the answer.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—for the purchase of Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies.

**Mr. Imbert:** 37?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 39, drugs.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is being funded separately.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Pardon? You cannot treat this House with the contempt that you show on a day-to-day basis.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I answered him. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** In a belligerent manner—

**Mr. Imbert:** You are constantly trying to get sound bites for the camera. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And he continues to be exemplified—

**Mr. Imbert:** He is constantly playing to the gallery.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I am not—

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance—

**Mr. Imbert:** —sound bites for the camera.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, if you could speak in your mike and answer the question, please.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I answered it already—

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah but you—

**Mr. Imbert:** I will answer it, again. Look he is screaming at me.

**Madam Chairman:** No. It is because he is speaking into his mike. If you could speak into your mike, please.

**Mr. Imbert:** He is screaming at me.

**Madam Chairman:** He is not. Speak into your mike.

**Mr. Imbert:** He wants to make sound bites for the camera.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No. No. I do not need that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yeah. Sure you do not, that is why you are screaming.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 39, the answer, please, in the mike.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I already answered. I answered in English in a complete sentence. That Item is being funded separately.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Under what Vote? And where?

**Mr. Imbert:** If it is being funded separately, certainly it will not be funded under that line Item.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, tell us where.

**Mr. Imbert:** It will be funded under another line Item.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, what is the other line Item? You have to have respect for

the House.

**Mr. Imbert:** When we reach there, we will deal with that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No. No. No. No. You tell us that it is not funded there, so how are we going to search through all these books to find it where we could find it? Come on, Minister, have some respect for the House.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am sorry, the Member is playing to the gallery. [*Crosstalk*] You are playing for the TV.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—lives of thousands of people. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** You are playing for the TV. Madam Chairman, I want to give an assurance to all those who are not disturbed by the theatrics of the Member, that all necessary funding will be provided for the purchase of pharmaceuticals in 2020.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So why have you decided not to answer where it will be? From what Vote? Where is it coming from?—because you have not put a Vote because you are trying to balance your budget. So you have not put the Vote of 450 million, you are going to tinker somewhere along the line and then find a way to get the four, but it is not budgeted at the moment, I can assure you of that, that is the reason why you cannot tell us where it is located.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, do you intend to answer that statement?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, he is wrong. The pharmaceuticals will be funded in 2020.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Madam, I just wanted clarification because we have an Item here, 144,200 million and we have a difference, a decrease, so is that a separate Item?

**Madam Chairman:** You are under 39 still?

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yes. Or is the Minister indicating that the difference will be funded under a different Item?

**Mr. Imbert:** Whatever we need or—you know pharmaceuticals are provided through NIPDEC. You know that. Right? And I am not hearing you. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Bodoë:** So that is your answer? Yes? That is your answer, Minister?

**Mr. Imbert:** I am not hearing you. I just want to know if you know that pharmaceuticals are provided through NIPDEC?

**Dr. Bodoë:** I know what I know, Minister.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are saying, yes?

**Dr. Bodoë:** I know what I know.

**Mr. Imbert:** Well, I cannot help you then. [*Crosstalk*] I cannot help you. Pharmaceuticals are provided through NIPDEC. NIPDEC will be provided with appropriate funding to procure all necessary pharmaceuticals in good time, in good order in fiscal 2020 without any problems, without any delay, without any issues, without any corruption, [*Crosstalk*] as is a feature of our administration. We do not have corruption in the purchase of pharmaceuticals, I cannot speak for your administration. [*Crosstalk*] We do not have waste either, we have saved millions of dollars.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005: North-West Regional Health Authority.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No. Madam Chair, I just have one other question at 39.

**Madam Chairman:** Well, I did not think so.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** I am sorry. Where are we?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Same line Item: 39. \$660 million was allocated for expenditure on pharmaceuticals and related materials and supplies, and 575 is on the Revised Estimates. Could you tell us, hon. Minister, if there are suppliers who are being owed still, based on the 660 allocated and 575 spent? If there are outstanding bills for suppliers?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** There was a backlog, and I am happy to report that almost all of that backlog, if not all, has in fact been cleared off. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005: North West Regional Health Authority. Item 006: North Central Regional Health Authority; Item 007: Eastern Regional Health Authority; Item 008: South West Regional Health Authority; Item 009: National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. We are on page 199. Item 004: Vertical Services, we are on page 200; Item 009: National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. Sub-Head 04, we are still on page 200, Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 003; United National Organizations; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you. Minister, with regard to Item 20: Contribution to Non Profits Organisation, I see you propose an increase of 5,616,900. Can you perhaps indicate how you propose to spend that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. So there are 21 non-profit organizations that currently receive subventions ranging from Christ Child Convalescent Home, the Diabetes Association, Cancer Society, 21 Mamatoto, and we give each one a subvention commensurate with their needs and so on.

**Dr. Bodoë:** So you will increase the amount to each one?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** If that is possible, yes, because they do excellent work and they are to be congratulated.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Okay. Can you confirm whether the Friends of the Blood Bank have received their—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I can tell you that now, yes, Friends of the Blood Bank is here. Yes.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And they have received their allocation for 2019?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** They have been paid their full subvention of \$500,000.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Okay. Thank you, Minister. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Item 00—Member for Caroni East, you are still under Non-Profit Institutions?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, could you just let us know whether the Cancer Society has been paid their allotment?

**6.15 p.m.**

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society, their full subvention is 1.5 million. They have been paid a partial subvention of \$1,363,260, so they have received the lion's share of it.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Up to, that is 2019?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007: Households. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, could you give us a little appreciation of that issue of medical treatment of nationals in institutions of 55 million?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So, this has to do with the External Patient Programme as you know.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It also has to do with giving assistance to about 2,400 patients; eye surgeries, prosthesis, external radiation, other services that are deemed urgent and necessary. So, yes, so it is enough.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Good, thank you. I appreciate that.



**Dr. Khan:** Minister, I have been told that the joint replacement surgery in the EPP has not been going on. Is that true or not?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No, that is not true. It has been going on.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009: Other Transfers.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, Madam Chair.

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

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item, hon. Minister, 06, Children's Life Fund Authority.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Line Item 06, hold on.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 06 on page 203.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Right, yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That funding is for the payment to the authority itself?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** This is for administrative expenses.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Right, thank you.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, 01, Regional Health Authority; 01- (v) Vacant Posts, 20 million.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** This is on page 202?

**Dr. Khan:** 202.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, right.

**Dr. Khan:** Look across.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Khan:** The Vacant Posts at 20 million, I understand we do put money into that, but there are quite a lot of doctors and nurses not employed.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Khan:** Will that be utilized for that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. A lot of this has to go towards Vacant Posts, and I think we have about 20 million allocated for Vacant Posts.

**Dr. Khan:** Yes?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. So your answer in short is, yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I just want to take you back to page 203, Item 09, the School Health Programme (Audio test, hearing aid service and eyeglasses).

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Can you indicate how the schools are selected, and if you have an idea of how many children would have benefited in 2019?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So, we did hearing tests for 201 children. Of those 201, 19 were given hearing aids.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And their eyeglasses?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Eyeglasses, the figure I am seeing here is zero.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Would there have been reason for that? I am just trying to understand how the programme is administered.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That, I would have to find out for and get back to you on that.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Can you perhaps provide something in writing?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Chair, I crave your indulgence just to go back to page 202, if Minister would allow?

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute, I cannot hear. Member?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** What?

**Madam Chairman:** Where do you want to go?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I just want to just go back to the page under—before 203, 202.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, once you are within 009, we could go anywhere.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you for the privilege. Hon. Minister, I know you said you are trying to—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Which line Item?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 04, North Central Regional Health Authority.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, right. Okay.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And under 04, you have National Cancer Registry, 0.7 million.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I know you said you are trying to make sure that the Cancer Registry is going to work.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You think that is sufficient funding to kick start that Cancer Registry and make it a legally constituted authority so that everybody has to report all cancer cases and so on?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The Cancer Registry is being, and I will use the word loosely, co-funded, both under this Vote and under the IDB loan for US \$50-odd million, so this would just be part of the funding. The major part of the funding to set up the registries for NCDs comes under the IDB loan, which would not be reflected here.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Right. And would there be a determination by the Ministry of Health to move quickly to ensure the Cancer Registry becomes active and legal?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, yes. That is a high priority Item under the IDB loan, because we have the five major cancers that we need to understand what is the burden and prevalence in this country. So, for men it is prostate and lungs, for women breast, cervical, and then for both sexes colorectal. So, we want to focus

on those first five.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, the important thing is that they must be compulsorily registered.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So that we would look forward to your legislation, which we will support.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Member:** What! [*Laughter*]

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, we support. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Sub-Head 01—Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, Sub-Head 011, 01, National Health Service Company Limited.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Khan:** It is decreased by about \$60,000. What is the status of that company?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** This company has been closed down by the Ministry of Finance on the advice of the Ministry of Health.

**Dr. Khan:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay? Barataria/San Juan is that all right? You are finished? So, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies.

Members, we are at page 167. 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*. Page 167, 14 - Princess Elizabeth Home for Handicapped Children. Sub-Head 01, page 167, Personnel

Expenditure. Item 001. Sub-Head 02: Good and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are at page 70. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 70. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Hon. Members, Item 004 spans two pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups: E. Special Education; A. Hospitals. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Yes, Minister, 07, A. 001, Medical Equipment Upgrade Programme, \$55 million, would the MRI for Port of Spain be included in that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No. The MRI for Port of Spain actually is part of the gift to the nation from Phoenix Park Gas Processors that was supposed to go to the National Oncology Centre, so that MRI is part of that gift, so it would not be reflected here.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, the Linear Accelerator at St. James, has that been paid, or is that part of this—?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That was funded—that would not be under this Vote, but I could tell you the project has been completed on time, on budget.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Right. What was the value of the cost of that—?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The entire project cost, I think, around \$79 million, building and equipment.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And so that funding would have come from where?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That would have come from here, but lower down you will see—we will come to it lower down.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** D. Other Services; F. Health Facilities. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Design of CARPHA, 001, Minister. The design briefs for the CARPHA National Public Health Lab and Blood Transfusion, is that finished?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Right. So, the design phase is about 65 per cent completed and submitted for a review. The draft specification document for the tender has been completed, and we have also successfully completed, by law, the two stakeholder engagement meetings. So, all the back end has been done and we hope to get cracking on it in calendar 2020.

**Madam Chairman:** F. Health Facilities. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, A. 001, Review of the National Health Insurance System. I see there is \$200,000 being placed on that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Khan:** Could you give me an indication about where that has reached and where it is going?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So, what I will ask you to do, Member, is to let us take 001 and 003 together, because they are linked. As you know before you can launch any National Health Insurance System we must have EMR, Electronic Medical Records with the unique identifiers. So, what we are doing is right now, Cabinet has approved an initial TT 15 million to start off the project to move this country once and for all, after decades, to EMR, Electronic Medical Records, so we can track patients throughout the system. That is a building block towards moving to a National Health Insurance System. What we are also doing in tandem, is determining the basket of goods and services to be offered and the financing mechanism. So, we are doing the groundwork for it, and hopefully within the medium term we will have something more definite to say about it.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, I am happy to hear that, but it is something that

you all promised in your manifesto, why has it taken so long to reach the fifth year when you are now really beginning to do some real active work for that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will answer that. On becoming Minister of Health, as Minister, to fix the health sector, unfortunately, the Minister has to get involved in everything. Unfortunately. So, my first priority, which I got intimately involved with, assuming the role of Director of Women's Health from 2015, was to focus on maternal and infant mortality. I did that. That required me to spend literally every day doing that. Then I had to fix drug supply, then I had to fix infrastructure. Unless a Minister gets involved in these things with the nitty-gritty, it does not get done. I set up a team about a year ago, a year and a half ago, to do that. And that is why we have reached the stage now where Cabinet has approved, for the first time, to engage iGovTT in this \$15 million-programme to finally move Trinidad and Tobago from the Stone Age into the modern age with Electronic Medical Records. So that when patients move from hospital to hospital you can track them. Without that, you cannot launch a National Health Insurance System. So, it has been a steep learning curve for me. Yes, it has been four years, but we have reached very far in four years, and it is something that this Government will tackle more seriously after I leave a platform under the astute leadership of Dr. Keith Rowley in the second term.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So we go on now to the Infrastructure Development Fund—sorry, Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** I thought you were calling each Head separately, Ma'am. Minister, Item 250 on page 72.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What page?

**Dr. Bodoë:** Page 72, 2-5-0, the Health Services Support Programme. Can you give us an idea of where we are with that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, Health Services Support Programme. So, this is what I was speaking about earlier when Caroni East had asked me about the registries. A lot of the funding will come under this Health Services Support Programme. So, what we have done so far, the National Health Promotion and Mental Health Policy Consultation, which has been now formulated in our new mental health policy, that consultation cost \$171,389. So, some funds were expended there. The NCCC Cancer Guidelines, \$529,000; the TTMoves Campaign, Childhood Obesity Camp, \$99,000; prostate cancer seminars, \$20,583. We contracted the Chief Medical Physicist to be part of the team that will run the LINAC at St. James. That funding comes under here. Emergency Public Health Flood Relief, under here. Training on big data, under here. So, those are some of the highlights. So the money has been well spent.

**6.30 p.m.**

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Infrastructure Development Fund, page 188. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** 004, 07, 003: Construction of the National Oncology Centre, Minister, \$1.6 million. Is that still going to happen?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No. Under this administration, well Member you would know, you had your own challenges with that. This project was fraught with difficulty from day one. The architects went into bankruptcy, there was legal wrangling as to who owned the intellectual property. The project was just doomed to failure from day one. Three administrations, the Patrick Manning administration for a couple of years, your administration for five years, we brought this project to an end. It was simply costing the taxpayer too much to hold on to this dream. However, what we have done is integrate St. James more with the LINAC, with the



brachytherapy. So St. James is in fact a mini NOC. And this money was the payment of the contractors final settlement claims to take this burden off the taxpayer once and for all.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well Minister, I appreciate what you are trying to do. Is there any way of settling this issue with WEBATHMA and restarting a process for a National Oncology Centre. Well as you would know that the process of management for cancer patients is an integrated process where everything is done in one centre. And is there any consideration by your administration or with your support to restart the thinking of the need for a National Oncology Centre, rather than an abandonment altogether?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So, let me go back to the first part of your question. Your first part of the question inferred that the matter has yet to be settled. The matter has been settled.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Has been settled legally—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** How am I to know that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** And they have agreed to the cost. We brought in a QC from England, negotiated a settlement in favour of the Trinidad and Tobago taxpayer. So that is done. The second part of your question, is that dream still alive? As I indicated under this administration the St. James facility will now be equipped with brachytherapy services, has been. You will now have the LINAC accelerator and what I would tell you, for PET, P-E-T now, the private sector has brought in a PET machine. Because of the granting of tax free status for that we are now entitled to a certain number of free interactions with that agency. So as I said before we are integrating and having in fact the dream of an NOC but using St. James and partnering with the private sector. Is the dream of a national NOC still alive?

When the Prime Minister had to answer a question he said, if we get a value for money proposition it is something that we could look at and I think it is something we could look at if we get a value for money proposition.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I will ask you too, as the Minister of Health, to begin to initiate processes of a public sector/private sector partnership with international hospitals and universities which may be able to give you major support, both technical and human—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And they are all over, Baptist Hospital in Miami, Johns Hopkins University, Sloan Kettering, MD Anderson—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I know them all. Yeah, thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So we would like to see—

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 28 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you Minister, thank you PS and all the representatives from the Ministry of Health.

*[Mr. Forde in the Chair]*

*Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$646,872,290.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Welcome to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, welcome Madam PS and your senior technocrats from the Ministry. Welcome to the Parliament Chamber.

Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$646,872,290. I will now invite the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Khan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the energy

sector has been the mainstay of Trinidad and Tobago's economy for decades and will continue to be in the short to medium term, in terms of its contribution to revenue, its contribution to GDP and direct foreign investment.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is the regulator of the industry under the Petroleum Act and Regulations. We have responsibility to optimize oil and gas production, refining capabilities and petrochemical production. In addition, we have line responsibility for power generation. The Ministry has responsibility also for the execution and supervision of exploration and production licences and production sharing contracts. And to ensure that investment levels are maintained in the industry. Together with the Ministry of Finance we ensure that the State receives optimum economic rent for what is a wasting asset.

Additionally, the Ministry has responsibility for mining and quarrying. However, both in terms of the Development Programme and the Recurrent budget the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has a very small budget. On the Development Programme it is mere 159 million, nine from the Consolidated Fund and six from the IDF. On the Recurrent side is 649million, most of which is for subsidy payments. The capital investment as big as it is in the energy sector comes solely from the private sector, be it state private or multi-nationals.

Mr. Chairman, it is also important to note that the entire operating cost of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is recoverable from the petroleum impost. And with those few remarks, I thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

*Question proposed:* That Head 40 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$646,872,290 for Head 40, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of*

*Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We will now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. And Members we are in the Recurrent Expenditure booklet, we are on page 257. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 257. Item 001: General Administration, page 257. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** We are on Goods and Services or we are still on—

**Mr. Chairman:** No, not on Goods and Services yet.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central, you are waiting for Goods and Services?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yeah, I thought you had passed on, so that is why I intervene. Are you on 257?

**Mr. Chairman:** 257 and we are on Item 001: General Administration.

**Dr. Tewarie:** The Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there is an increase there of just over 5 million. I understand the explanation on the side, “Includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents”. But are there any new hiring in this or—

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, a new organizational structure was approved earlier this year.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yeah, that is why I am asking.

**Hon. Khan:** And it included contract positions which we have all filled but the public service positions has to be filled by the Service Commission and there is a lot of vacancies there. It is 45 technical positions especially entry level positions and 14 on technical positions which we hope, we are working closely with the Service Commission to fill it in the shortest order.

**Dr. Tewarie:** So these are all sort of strengthening attempts?

**Hon. Khan:** Most definitely. Geologist, geophysicist, chemical engineers,

petroleum engineers, reservoir engineers, mining inspectors, petroleum inspectors and the works.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I understand.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 258. Item 001: General Administration, page 258 and page 259. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Chair. Minister line Items 08: Rent/Lease—Office Accommodation and Storage, an increase at 3.8 million. Could you explain, is there any new offices plan?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, there is an acquisition of a building in south and this will be used as an energy data centre. And that will be controlled, conditions. What is happening is that we have extremely poor storage conditions for a cause, full hole cause, especially seismic data and seismic tapes. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is the custodian for a voluminous amount of seismic data and it is not stored in the proper environment as we speak. We have to move with haste before the data is destroyed. And we are very advanced in this process.

**Mr. Lee:** Is there any particular reason why in south and have you all acquired that building already.

**Hon. Khan:** We are in the process of negotiating the building and it is in south because the industry is really based in the south so all the core samples, all the seismic data and everything is logged at the south office with some of the headquarters here.

**Mr. Lee:** And what will be the cost of that acquisition?

**Hon. Khan:** The actual rental cost?

**Mr. Lee:** It is a rental or an acquisition?

**Hon. Khan:** No, a rental.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay, no problem. Line Item 10: Office Stationery and Supplies. You

have a hefty increase of 1.7 for 2020 in Office Stationery and Supplies compared to the Revised Estimate of 233.

**Hon. Khan:** Yeah, I mean, those are minor costs when you consider the type of work we are doing when we have to deal with data. Let me just make the point that seismic data is the world's largest user of computer power outside of the US military. So it is no joking matter, if I should say so.

**Mr. Lee:** Line Item 16: Contract Employment, of 17 million estimated in 2020, an increase of 2.7. Now in 2019 the Revised Estimate is 14.9 close to 15 million that was spent in Contract Employment as opposed to a budgeted amount of 8.8. What would have caused that steep increase?

**Hon. Khan:** The new structure that was approved by PMCD and approved by the Cabinet includes contract positions, plus public service positions. So this is the filling of 42 contract positions that most of these vacancies have been filled and then this year we will be taking on renewal of 10 mining resource officers which we used to call "mining inspectors".

**6.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Lee:** And these contract periods are for what, one year, two years, three years?

**Hon. Khan:** Three years. And I just want to make the point that unlike other ministries, the operating cost of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is paid for by the Petroleum Impost.

**Mr. Imbert:** We "tell him" that already.

**Hon. Khan:** Like it did not resonate, so these minor figures "and thing", the cost is covered by the energy companies.

**Mr. Lee:** Yeah. It still has to go through the Minister. Line Item 34, the University Graduate Recruitment Programme, I see no allocation this year, but other Ministries have the allocation, some of them. Is there any reason why no

allocation?

**Hon. Khan:** But I think the Minister of Finance has already explained what had stymied that programme. But we have, in the Ministry of—

**Mr. Chairman:** One second. I have two mikes. Who is taking it? Minister of Energy and Energy Industries or Minister of Finance?

**Mr. Imbert:** I am supporting him.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, but you cannot speak at the same time, Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Imbert:** That does not apply to the UNC. Three of them “does” speak at the same time.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

**Hon. Khan:** The Minister of Finance has given an explanation as to why that project was sort of delayed or stymied, for want of a better word, but we at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries have initiated, what is a very innovative programme called the Mentorship Programme for scholars to build the next generation of energy experts to negotiate on behalf of the country. I just want to applaud the Prime Minister for that initiative.

**Mr. Imbert:** I would just like to come in here.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** That programme, in fact, follows the framework that we had developed for the rest of the public service where we select scholarship winners and first-call honours graduates as the brightest and best and train them to take leadership roles in the public service, and Energy has, in fact, taken the lead with this, with those 30—Is it 32? How much is it?

**Hon. Khan:** Thirty-five.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thirty-five mentees.

**Mr. Lee:** Just a follow-up, Minister of Finance—

**Mr. Imbert:** That is really what the graduate programme was supposed to be.

**Mr. Lee:** And where would that Vote have come from, or that line Item?

**Mr. Imbert:** As the Minister has said twice, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries budget is paid for by the oil companies, so they develop it and they have the flexibility to include programmes like this within their budget.

**Hon. Khan:** And we also have Treasury Deposit Accounts that come out of the production-sharing contracts, which we can use.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, they have access to a number of resources.

**Mr. Chairman:** This tag team; the two mikes are on.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am supporting him.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Okay.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am not contradicting him.

**Mr. Lee:** Minister, line Item 36: Extraordinary Expenditure of \$6.8 million estimated for this year is a new Sub-Item. What is that for?

**Hon. Khan:** Since the closure, or the temporary closure of the Petrotrin refinery, we have had to purchase LPG from PPGPL, some of which is imported. PPGPL will be going on a 17-day turnaround shutdown. They do not have enough storage capacity, so this is to rent a floating storage capacity so the country will have the stock to LPG to survive over that period.

**Mr. Lee:** Is that rental already in place, Minister?

**Hon. Khan:** No, not as yet, but that would be coming through PPGPL.

**Mr. Lee:** Would that be out for tender, or it is just one—

**Hon. Khan:** PPGPL has their sourcing protocols and I presume that it will go out for tender.

**Mr. Chairman:** Pointe-a-Pierre, you okay?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes.



**Dr. Tewarie:** There are a couple of questions, a small one at first. The short-term procurement, it is a small amount—

**Mr. Chairman:** Give the line Item, please.

**Dr. Tewarie:** 22. It is a small amount, but I just wanted to know how this employment—what I am really looking at, who is employed in terms of qualifications. That is what I am looking at, because the others were very technical people.

**Hon. Khan:** I am seeing here 10 summer students at \$4,000 per month.

**Dr. Tewarie:** All right, so—

**Hon. Khan:** Because, you see, we have to keep motivating the young people, and everybody wants to get into the energy sector and we want to provide as much opportunity as possible for them.

**Dr. Tewarie:** So it is a recruitment and incentivization programme.

**Hon. Khan:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** The Other Contracted Services—no, you answered that. They were mostly technical people as well. And the Extraordinary Expenditure, I had that flagged here but you explained it. Is this a risk that has emerged because of the closure of the refinery?

**Hon. Khan:** It is not a risk. PPGPL has not gone down for a total shutdown for about three years, so it is overdue. So it is just the storage capacity is limited compared to the daily usage in Trinidad and Tobago. So that is just a temporary facility so that we can rent a floating storage facility to store the LPG for use over that period.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. So the risk is being managed?

**Hon. Khan:** Very much so.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Right, Member? Fine. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment

Purchases, page 259. Item 001, General Administration, page 259. Sub-Head, 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 259. Item 001: Regional Bodies, page 259. Item 004: International Bodies, page 260. Item 007: Households, page 260. And I recognize the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item 01, under Households, Shortfall in Subsidy, Resale of Petroleum Products, I notice in 2018 there was no subsidy, actually zero. Is that to be taken that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, all the subsidies were—did not have to pay any subsidy on behalf of the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago? Because I got the impression that there were some products, like diesel, that still had a subsidy on it.

**Hon. Khan:** A subsidy, but that was rolled over into 2019.

**Mr. Lee:** So what was the subsidy that was paid in 2018? Zero? Help me to understand.

**Hon. Khan:** It was due but it was not paid, because remember the subsidy is paid to NP. So that debt was rolled over to 2019.

**Mr. Lee:** So it was rolled over to the 2019 estimates? Okay, so—

**Hon. Khan:** And just bear in mind also that the subsidy that is shown here is the subsidy in excess of the petroleum levy. Because remember, oil companies pay part of the subsidy, which is 4 per cent of the gross revenue from oil. So in the days when we had very high oil production, in the '70s and '80s, that subsidy used to cover the entire subsidy. But now, because of declining oil production, it no longer does that. So this subsidy here is the difference between the total subsidy and the petroleum levy that comes from the oil companies.

**Mr. Lee:** I just seek your clarification, Minister. You said the subsidy is paid by NP. When we had Petrotrin, did a subsidy not used to be paid to Petrotrin also? No? I am asking.

**Hon. Khan:** No. The subsidy that Petrotrin absorbed—and a lot of people have said things about Petrotrin, and one of the things they did, and to their expense and to their account, was to absorb the subsidy on LPG, which is close to \$300 million to \$400 million. But, again, they were owing much more than that. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Lee:** As a follow up, in that same subsidy, is Paria presently—the trading company Paria—in charge of fuel security for the country. Are they absorbing any sort of subsidy for the country?

**Hon. Khan:** No.

**Mr. Imbert:** Why should they?

**Mr. Lee:** Well, I am just asking.

**Mr. Imbert:** Well, I am just telling—

**Hon. Khan:** So the State is now paying the full subsidy for LPG and the subsidy for liquid fuels remains as is.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you are okay?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, just an observation. This issue of the subsidy which we are now seeing here, became an issue in the 2018 budget. I remember that, because we had raised that particular issue of what would happen to the subsidy. Anyway—

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, just speak in the mike a little more, please.

**Dr. Tewarie:** It became an issue in the 2018 budget presented by the Minister of Finance because we had raised that issue, but we were not clear at the time. It is becoming clear here what is happening and the State has absorbed the full subsidy in the absence of Petrotrin. Just one more issue, 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers. I just wanted to know if these were workers who were terminated or retired.

**Mr. Imbert:** I have answered that 10 times.

**Hon. Khan:** Every Ministry that comes here, answers the question.

**Mr. Imbert:** We decentralized gratuity payments.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I did not ask about decentralization.

**Mr. Imbert:** What “you” talking about?

**Dr. Tewarie:** I asked if they represented terminated workers or whether they represented workers that were due—

**Mr. Imbert:** Let me answer that, Minister. With the permission of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in every Ministry—I “doh” know how many more we have left; how much we doing tomorrow, about five more? We have decentralized the allocation for gratuity payments. Gratuity is due at the end of a contract. It is not relevant whether the person continues to another contract or does not. The contract comes to an end and gratuity is due. So the allocation is for contracts where gratuity is due. So the question of termination is irrelevant.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Well, I mean, you think so. I think it is an important question—

**Mr. Imbert:** I know so.

**Dr. Tewarie:**—to determine why it is being paid and whether people lost their jobs.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, no. There is no relationship. Gratuity is a contractual entitlement.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I understand that.

**Mr. Imbert:** And therefore there is no relationship between gratuity and whether somebody continues in contract employment or not. There is no nexus between the two.

**Dr. Tewarie:** You could get another gratuity, do you not?

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, but you do not allocate for it until the end of the contract.

**Dr. Tewarie:** So why are you arguing with me? I did not ask you any question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, Members. Okay. One second, Members—

**Mr. Imbert:** Because I made the allocation.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance, Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** You just interfere in everything.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, I have said 10 times about gratuity—

**Dr. Tewarie:** It does not matter. We are here to ask the questions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Point made. Point taken.

**Mr. Imbert:** And the Member for Caroni Central is saying I am interfering.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance—Member for Caroni Central, do you have another question?

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, I “doh” have anything—I want to tell the Minister of Finance, he is here to answer questions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, he answered. We are going to move on, Members. Item 009, Other Transfers, page 260. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, we are going? [*Crosstalk*] Okay, Member for Caroni Central. [*Crosstalk*] Item 011: Transfers and State Enterprises, page 261. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Minister, 03: Environmental Indemnity to the Power Generation Company. In 2019 you had allocated \$2.2 million.

**Mr. Chairman:** Excuse. Minister of Finance. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance, please, we have moved on. We have moved on.

**Mr. Imbert:** “Yuh sure?”

**Mr. Chairman:** We have moved on.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am sure gratuity “coming” again, “yuh know”. I am sure. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, proceed. Okay, Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, 03: Environmental Indemnity Fee. In 2018

we paid 3.7, in 2019, 2.2 was estimated but there was no Revised Estimate in 2019. So I am asking, was anything paid for this indemnity in 2019? Because it is the same amount that is budgeted for in 2020. So I am assuming every year there is some sort of indemnity had to be paid.

**Hon. Khan:** Yeah. Actually, the notes I have here is that that was an omission. 2.93 was the actual expenditure for 2019.

**Mr. Lee:** 2.93—

**Hon. Khan:** And, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you should stay far from this.

**Mr. Lee:** No, I am just asking—

**Hon. Khan:** No, no, no. Hold on. This—

**Mr. Lee:** No, you cannot tell me—

**Hon. Khan:** No, no, no.

**Mr. Lee:** What is going on here?

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on. Hold on.

**Hon. Khan:** This is a making—

**Mr. Lee:** You cannot tell me to stay far from that.

**Hon. Khan:**—of the UNC.

**Mr. Lee:** I just asked you a question. You have responded. I have asked you a question.

**Hon. Khan:** I am continuing my response, Sir.

**Mr. Lee:** No, you cannot. I have asked you a question.

**Hon. Khan:** This is a making—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, proceed with answering the question.

**Hon. Khan:** The election, you all went and signed a clear and unambiguous agreement with PowerGen to pay all environmental liability both at Penal and at

Point Lisas.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay. Thank you, Minister. Next line Item, 05—

**Hon. Khan:** Clear and unambiguous—

**Mr. Lee:** 05, Minister—

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** 05: Trinidad and Tobago Upstream and Downstream Energy Company Limited. Could you tell us the state of that company? Because you estimated or budgeted it \$1.5 in 2019. Nothing as a Revised Estimate in 2019 and in 2020 it is the same amount budgeted. Could you give us a status of that company?

**Hon. Khan:** We are operationalizing the company because that is the company that will be delivering gas to NiQuan.

**Mr. Lee:** Is there a board in place, presently?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, there is a board.

**Mr. Lee:** Are they being paid board fees?

**Hon. Khan:** Well, the board comprises of public servants from the Ministry of Finance.

**7.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Lee:** So no operating expenses to date?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** The members of the board would qualify for fees under the scale of fees for minor companies. There is a different scale depending on responsibilities.

**Mr. Lee:** So the company is still being operational?

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes. They would have to apply to be classified, and they would receive a stipend in accordance with their classification.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay. Line Item 06, Minister, National Quarries Company, a \$3 million—well, I guess it was expensed in 2019 at \$3 million, a new Sub-Item

which was not catered for.

**Mr. Chairman:** 06, Minister?

**Hon. Khan:** The National Quarries required urgently, and their cash flow could not permit it, a rock drill; that after you do the blasting in the Limestone Quarry at Blanchisseuse, that is Scott's Quarry—which is by the way the best quarry in Trinidad in terms of the quality of limestones, and after it is blast it is in big junks. So you needed a rock drill to break it into manageable sizes to put through the crusher, and that is critical with all the highway construction that is going on.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, Members, we are moving on. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, different book, *Development Programme*, and we are going to page 98. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme—Consolidated Fund—page 98. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 98. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Can we go down to Administrative Services, or you are still under Multi-Sectoral? Is it okay to ask a question under Renewable Energy?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, one second. Let me just go to the next—okay. Proceed.

**Mr. Lee:** Minister, under Renewable Energy, which you would have talked about year-on-year, in 2019 you estimated \$9 million to be spent on initiatives. The Revised Estimate was \$14,000 as at a certain date—so I am assuming it is still close to—and we have now budgeted \$2 million in Renewable Energy in which, every year you have talked about, could you tell us why the expenditure has decreased and what projects you had identified in 2019 that you did not achieve but you only spent \$14,000?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Khan:** We had planned a solar LED lighting programme on basketball courts and on children's play park. That had some glitches in the administration,



but we have now overcome that and we have already actually forwarded money in the amount of \$6 million to National Energy who will be the executing arm of this project, and we hope the project will start within a month.

**Mr. Lee:** So these projects are, to repeat, basketball courts, LED—

**Hon. Khan:** Well, sporting facilities and children's play park.

**Mr. Lee:** And who is responsible for that, NEC?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, National Energy Corporation.

**Mr. Lee:** Could you identify in writing, may be—

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, the list of projects that we plan to do.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I am okay. I have just one question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** This equipment for National Quarries, can you say what it is?

**Hon. Khan:** A rock drill.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Oh, that is what it is?

**Hon. Khan:** Yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni East, you have—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Just one question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed, Caroni East.

**Dr. Tewarie:** 005, Minister, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiatives. You had allocated 1.6 in 2018. What is your relationship with them in terms of—that was for what, support for what; and is there a discontinuation of the support?

**Hon. Khan:** No, no, no. The EITI has now come under the recurrent budget. Normally it used to be budgeted under capital. We continue to support the EITI in the best possible way.

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni Central, Member.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yeah. The SAR for the detection of oil spills, the amount of money allocated here would take care of that?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes. It is approximately 2 million per unit, and the first one we will put it down at Chaguaramas.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay.

**Hon. Khan:** It is a nice piece of technology because it detects—on the surface there are micro ripples all the time based on wind, and when you have an oil spill there are no ripples. So this way that system picks areas of no ripples very quickly, almost real time, then you can send out somebody or the coast guard immediately to see.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** And how much does it cover? You have an idea?

**Hon. Khan:** Yes, it covers a fairly large area, but we plan to put one down at Chaguaramas—

**Dr. Tewarie:** So it could spread out.

**Hon. Khan:** Yes—and then one at the Towers in Port of Spain, and that should cover the peninsula and hopefully it will go down south in due course.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay. Good.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, sorry.

**Mr. Lee:** Minister, just a follow-up with that line-up question from Dr. Tewarie. Last year you had budgeted 1 million, question is: Has any piece of equipment been purchased to date?

**Hon. Khan:** No, we have sourced—it was an underestimation. When we went out to tender all the tenders came in just under \$2 million, and we interrogated the figure and we found out that the \$2 million was not such an atrocious figure.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay. Because I remember last year you were saying the same thing.

**Mr. Chairman:** I recognize the Leader of the House, Arouca/Maloney.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to add to what the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said about the oil spill detector. The IMA also immersed an oil spill detector in the Carli Bay area. Well, not oil spills alone, a spill detector in the Carli Bay area. So that will also add to the information that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries gets on spills, and oil spills, and so on. So a fair area of the Trinidad coast is covered.

**Mr. Chairman:** Follow-up, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre?

**Mr. Lee:** No. Well, when you go to line Item 002, Acquisition of Equipment for National Quarries—

**Mr. Chairman:** Sure.

**Mr. Lee:**—which is \$5 million estimated for 2020, a new project, could you identify what that is?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, could you elaborate there?

**Hon. Khan:** We do not need the \$5 million anymore because we bought it in 2019.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Yeah, I am good.

**Mr. Chairman:** Infrastructure Development Fund. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, page 201.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 40 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Permanent Secretary and all the senior executives from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. Thank you.

Hon. Members, we will now go to Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration,

and we will just give the Minister and her team to assembly. Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration, and for Members we will be in the *Recurrent Expenditure* booklet and we will be going to page 217. Page 217 of the *Recurrent Expenditure* booklet when we get there. Minister, you are ready with us? Welcome, Madam Minister.

**Hon. West:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Welcome, Permanent Secretary and also to the senior executives from the Ministry of Public Administration. Welcome to the Parliament Chamber. *Head 31:* Ministry of Public Administration, \$1,207,203,293.

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Public Administration to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Madam Minister.

**Hon. West:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Ministry of Public Administration in keeping with its mandate for national information and communication technology will in fiscal 2020 be advancing the usage of available ICTs within the national community, particularly so within Government. The digitization of Government's operations and services promises to serve as a catalyst for realizing the development goals and objectives as presented in the National Development Plan, *Vision 2030*, a vehicle for significantly enhancing the operational effectiveness of systems and processes within Ministries, Departments, and agencies, and the mechanism for improving the ease of doing business with Government for citizens, businesses, and other groups and stakeholders.

National ITC is aligned with the strategic theme three of *Vision 2030*, improving productivity through quality infrastructure, and the Ministry's work here is guided by the Cabinet approved Third National ICT Plan for the period 2018—2022, branded ICT blueprint. The plan outlines the strategies for improving connectivity, increasing our ICT human capital, use of ICT to transform

the delivery of public goods and services and strengthen service delivery, fostering economic development, and positively impacting our environment.

The Ministry provides ICT training, computers, and a Wi-Fi pavilion via five operational access centres in Cumana, Guayaguayare, Marac, Penal, and effective May 2019, Todd's Road. Operational expenditure for these centres are reflected under Goods and Services, 003, National ICT. Also within the National ICT component is the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago which regulates the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors. I note here that TATT is a net earner of revenue for the State and contributor to the Consolidated Fund. A portion of its revenue is used to offset its operational cost, and therefore, there is no subvention under Head 31.

The Government's ICT execution agencies, iGovTT, which manages the Government's IT network, GovNet, which connects Government Ministries and Departments, and provides shared software for their use. iGovTT is also responsible for the ttconnect suite of services which thousands of citizens access via the website and portal, kiosk centres, hotline, and buses through earlier this year, and from early this year GovChat. The 2020 Estimates reflects subventions for both the operations of iGovTT and ttconnect. Over 150 million of the Ministry's allocation for fiscal 2020 is dedicated to the National ICT thrust of the Ministry and covers among various items: payment for software with international suppliers, operational costs relating to Government's ICT network, and implementation of e-government services.

Public service modernization: There are four technical divisions that are the forefront of the Ministry's public service modernization thrust: the Public Management Consulting Division, the Public Service Academy, the Modernization and Service Improvement Division, and the Property and Real Estate Services

Division. These divisions work all Ministries and Departments of the public service in alignment with and in pursuance of the *Vision 2030* strategic theme: Good Governance and Service Excellence. Together, these divisions provide Government Ministries, Departments, and agencies, with a holistic suite of services to improve their institutional capacity to better deliver to citizens and to achieve better value for money.

Major recurrent expenditure is allocated for payments related to the International Waterfront Complex, and the Government Campus Plaza, and for the maintenance of several state-owned properties. Members will note that the total allocation to the Ministry increased from 639 million to 1.113 billion, an increase of approximately \$553 million.

The major contributor to this increase is 440 million in five different payments in respect of the Government Campus Plaza.

**7.15 p.m.**

Mr. Chair, in closing, both arms of the Ministry are complementary. We work to build a digital economy through the national ICT arm and we work to build a digital Government through the public service modernization arm. We stand ready to respond to all questions, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Madam Minister. I must say you stuck close to your five minutes. [*Laughter*]

*Question proposed:* That Head 31 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$1,207,203,293 for Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration, 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 proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of the Recurrent Expenditure.*

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Page 217 of the recurrent expenditure booklet. I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, with regard to line Item 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I note your increase of 1,250,000. Last year, at this Standing Finance Committee, your predecessor indicated that there were 97 vacancies in the establishment of the Ministry of Public Administration. Can you indicate how many of these vacancies would have been filled during the past year and how many are expected to be filled in the coming year?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. West:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Of the 110 positions on the establishment, 39 are filled posts. There are 48 vacant posts with bodies and 23 vacant posts without bodies.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 004: Government Printery, page 217. Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services, page 218. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Again, Minister, with regard to 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I note there is a decrease of 269,000 but there were some vacancies that was noted by your predecessor, again, to the Standing Finance Committee last year. Can you indicate how this decreased allowance of 269,000 will affect the services provided by the PRES D?

**Mr. Chairman:** Madam Minister.

**Hon. West:** Yes, Chair. We have 21 posts on the establishment, six are filled. There are five vacant posts with no bodies. We do not expect any appointments or promotions in this financial year and so the amount that has been allocated, we see

as adequate.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, are you satisfied that the staff complement at PRES D in view of its important role is sufficient to carry out the mandate of that department?

**Hon. West:** It is an important role, I agree with you but we are working with the staff complement we have and have been trying to increase the efficiency. One of the ways we have done that is to computerize the records of the division so that we can more efficiently manage the property that the Government owns.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, Member?

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 006: Public Management Consulting Division, page 218. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you. Similar question here, Minister, with regard to Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance and I note the increase of 1.2 million. Can you indicate how many positions you expect to fill again from what you indicate an important division?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. West:** Number of established posts, 72; number of filled posts, 14; number of vacant posts with bodies, 13; number of vacant posts without bodies, 19.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 007: Public Service Academy, page 219. Item 008: National Archives, page 219. Item 013: Information Division, page 220. Item 015: Strategic Services Division, page 220.

We now go to Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 221. Item 001: General Administration, pages 221 to 222. I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you. Madam Minister, Item 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage, you are paying \$2 million a month for rent and office accommodation and storage, how much of this is really for storage and how



much of this is for accommodation? And why is the Ministry paying this amount of money every month for this? What is the real need for this?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. West:** Yes, Mr. Chair. We have a bi-annual loan payment for the NALIS building so that is not rental. But we do rent building on Mary Street and Park Plaza and some of the funds in here are allocated in respect of arrears. So the majority of the payment relates to the loan payment for the NALIS building.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And Mary Street, what is that building used for?

**Hon. West:** That is where PRES D is located. Is that correct? CTO.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Number 16: Contract Employment. You just spoke about a number of vacancies and so on and so forth. Is that the reason why you are using so much contract employment? Although I see in 2019, it went down from what you allocated in 12.3 to 8.5. Is 8.591 the correct figure or are there outstanding amounts for contract employment that you have add to that?

**Hon. West:** 8.591 was the revised allocation, our allocation for 2019. Our allocation for 2020 is 9.375. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Rambachan:** Nine million is not significant? [*Crosstalk*] Nine million to a taxpayer is not significant, Minister?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance, you are entering the—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Come on. Every dollar is significant.

**Mr. Chairman:** We on page 221 and we are on recurrent expenditure.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Minister is being facetious at times. Nine million in any—

**Mr. Chairman:** Members, no, no.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am not taking that from the other side. Stop saying these things. You are too insulting.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, Minister of Finance. Again, Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** “And yuh very accommodating eh”?

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite, please.

**Mr. Imbert:** What line Item?

**Dr. Rambachan:** No, but I am serious.

**Mr. Imbert:** What line Item is this?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance. On both sides.

**Dr. Rambachan:** A Minister is saying that \$9 million is not significant.

**Mr. Chairman:** Again, but that does not give you the permission to use the various adjectives that are being put on the table.

**Dr. Rambachan:** It does not give him the permission also.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, but he has answered the question.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, are we on line Item—

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, in all fairness, Member—

**Dr. Rambachan:** When it happens to this side, you all do not hear but you do not hear what happens on the other side.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, one second. So we are on line Item 16: Contract Employment, the significant increase.

**Mr. Imbert:** The point I was making is that it is not a \$9 million increase.

**Hon. West:** No, it is not.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is a fiction on the part of the Member for Tabaquite. It is an increase of \$783,000 which is less than 10 per cent of the entire allocation.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But you are spending \$9 million in Contract Employment.

**Mr. Imbert:** You said it was \$9 million difference.

**Dr. Rambachan:** What I am asking is how is this justified?

**Mr. Chairman:** One at a time.

**Dr. Rambachan:** How is this justified?

**Mr. Imbert:** And, Mr. Chairman, the allocation for 2019 original was \$12.3 million and therefore, the 2020 at 9.3 is \$3 million less than the original allocation for 2019. So everything the Member has put into the system is wrong. You are just playing for the camera.

**Dr. Rambachan:** “When the lady in Palo Seco could not put food on her table for two children, she hata beg. Ah sure \$50—”

**Mr. Chairman:** Tabaquite, I would like to move on now. Fyzabad, you have a question? Proceed.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yes. Madam Minister, if I can just remain on this same line Item 16. Can you indicate the number of persons on contract employment to the Ministry?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Public Admin, you with us? Right, proceed.

**Hon. West:** Yes. Number of positions, 135; number of positions filled, 39; number of positions vacant, 96.

**Dr. Bodoë:** How many do you expect to fill in this year?

**Hon. West:** We are hoping to fill—I cannot tell you the number but we are looking to increase it closer to the target and this is why we requested and got an increase in the allocation for this year.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yeah. Minister, is any move towards decreasing contract employment in the Ministry of Public Administration with regard to—

**Hon. West:** We fill the gap with contract employment when we cannot get permanent positions filled and in addition to that, the Ministry as part of its overall review of the public service is looking at its own structure to determine what is the optimal structure going forward. So until we make a decision on that, we will maintain the structure as is and we will continue to rely to some extent on contract employment.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you. Item 34, Madam Minister. Yes, thank you, Mr.

Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** University Graduate Recruitment Programme.

**Dr. Bodoë:** University Graduate Recruitment Programme. Now, I am happy to see this back on the books. Can you indicate, Minister, whether you have identified any particular areas in your Ministry that would be of benefit where you can see graduates?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. West:** The areas that I would like to focus on under this Item would be in ICT space. iGovTT recently held a hackathon involving the tertiary educations and we have identified some talent. It would be nice to bring them on board once the process behind who we hire and how we hire them is sorted out so that would be the focus of the Ministry.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Can you say how many bodies you expect to bring on-board?

**Hon. West:** No, until we get clear guidance on how we move forward with this programme, we have not narrowed that down yet.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Sure. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 003: National Information and Communication Technology Centre (ICT) Secretariat, page 222. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, line Item 23, would you be kind enough to indicate what the \$62 million for Fees, fees for what and to whom?

**Hon. West:** The Fees under line 23 include Government Interoperability Solution Phase 2 through a MoU with Estonia. It is a suite of software payments by and large that we pay for, so we have the web presence where the fee for that is 20 million, support for the current Government Enterprise Wide Portal which is 3 million, estimated RAM annual support and licence fees, 30.6 million, GoRTT Endpoint security which is 400 million—4 million, I am sorry. Oracle Annual

Software, there are three contracts under that so that would represent the—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So these are contracted services with various—

**Hon. West:** Mainly licences and some services in respect of ICT for Government support for the entire GoRTT platform.

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni East, you again? Go ahead, proceed.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah. 28, what is the Other Contracted Services for?

**Hon. West:** In?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Other Contracted Services, line Item 28 which is 95 million for 2020.

**Hon. West:** That will be monthly payments to TSTT and Fujitsu. Cost, 7.9 million. We also had the initial acquisition and monthly common service operations and support including data centre hosting and other related services.

**Mr. Chairman:** You are okay, Member?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, sure.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. I move now to Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Asked and answered.

**Mr. Chairman:** Asked and answered. So we are moving on Item 004: Government Printery, page 223; Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services, page 223 and page 224. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. Madam Minister, line Item 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage.

**Hon. West:** Sorry, under 005?

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yes, 005. Can you indicate whether part of that—one of the buildings rented would be the building at 13-15 St. Clair Avenue, Office of the Prime Minister? Is that one of the rentals?

**7.30 p.m.**

**Hon. West:** The Office of the Prime Minister, I believe I saw a reference to a loan for payment to that building. I do not know if it is the outfitting of that building. The buildings I have here that are covered by this line would be the CIC building, where PRES D is housed; the International Waterfront Project; Ministry of Education Tower; OPM Building in St. Clair, so yes, it includes that; Trinidad Crescent, Federation Park.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Okay, in view of the recent move of the Prime Minister to the new building, is this building still going to be engaged by the Ministry of Public Administration?

**Hon. West:** That is my understanding, yes.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And for what purpose?

**Hon. West:** There are other departments in the Ministry that will continue to reside or move into that building, because some of the units in the Ministry were housed at the waterfront, and they will move to the building in St. Clair.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Sure, thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** We are on National Information and Communication Technology. That is right, Chair?

**Mr. Chairman:** We passed that really, you know, Member.

**Dr. Tewarie:** “We pass dat?”

**Mr. Chairman:** “Yeah, we pass dat.”

**Dr. Tewarie:** All right.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let me hear you, Member. Proceed, proceed. Go ahead.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Thank you. I was just going to ask a general question, Minister, and you can choose to answer it or not.

**Hon. West:** Under which Item, sorry?

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 003: National Information and Communication Technology Centre (ICT) Secretariat. Go ahead.

**Dr. Tewarie:** When you closed your initial presentation you talked about digitizing the public service, and you also talked about, through the—

**Hon. West:** The access centres?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, you also talked about digitizing basically, the economy. I think you referred to that. And one of the things about the last Auditor General's Report is that they indicated that the Public Administration Ministry and planning, which were collaborating to coordinate this, was pretty weak in terms of what it had been able to achieve. Have you been able to make progress towards the goal that you have, which is digitalization?

**Hon. West:** We have made progress. We have identified service providers and we do have a plan to ramp up activities during this financial year, which is why the allocation has been adjusted, especially under PSIP to treat with that.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay, thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Following up on that, Minister—

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, Member, no. I just gave Caroni Central the opportunity to go back there. I want to continue.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is just a small addition to that.

**Mr. Imbert:** No man.

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed, proceed, proceed, Member. Okay, proceed.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I just want to ask—“Bhoe, yuh finish?”

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed, yeah.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Right. Minister, would that be the technology to do the entire public service, in terms of a digital representation of the public service?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. West:** We will not be able to convert the entire public service within the space of the next year, so we are prioritizing Ministries. So you would already have heard of projects that started at the Attorney General's office, at the Ministry of Works and Transport and in Ministry of Health and we also—Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries as well, and we are also targeting some of the divisions under the Ministry of Finance.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Is there any consideration for the Ministry of Education which has about 15,000 employees?

**Hon. West:** The Ministry of Education does have its own programme yes, because we are moving towards preparing the Ministry and its stakeholders for exams in the not too distant future. So there are programmes involving the Ministry of Education.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But for the digitization of the staff.

**Mr. Chairman:** Last point, eh, Member.

**Hon. West:** Yes, that is part of it, yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** We now go back to Item 006: Public Management Consultant Division, pages 224 and 225.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Chairman, sorry, line 21; 005 went from page 223 to 224. So we are on page 224, line 21, Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings, if I may ask a question.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, you are sending me back again, Member. I did it on two occasions. I need to move on. We passed there already. [*Interruption*] Yes, we did.

**Dr. Bodoë:** No, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** No.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** We passed there already, Member. [*Interruption*] Okay, Minister



of Finance, fine. Item 007: Public Service Academy, page 225. This is where we are Members. Item 007: Public Service Academy, page 225. We now move on to Item—okay, Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. Minister, Public Service Academy with the Item regarding Training. Now, I noted that again in a submission to this Committee last year, a list was provided of almost 125 training programmes for 2019. Can you indicate how many persons would have benefitted from that training?

**Hon. West:** In 2019, officers trained, 1,575; courses completed, 88; courses planned, 105; completion, 84 per cent.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right, and I see you have an increased allocation for 2020. Can you give me comparable figures expected for 2020?

**Hon. West:** For 2019/2020, the courses planned, 118; officers to be trained, 2,596.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Item 008: National Archives, page 226; Item 009: Public Service Transformation Division, page 226; Item 012: Freedom of Information Unit, page 227; Item 013: Information Division, page 227; Item 015: Strategic Services Division, page 228; Item 018: Strategic Human Resource and Management Division, page 228; Item 019: Diamond Division, page 228; Item 020: Modernization—Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. Madam Minister, with regard to line Item 16, Contract Employment, in your opening presentation you indicated that the Modernization and Service Improvement was very important. Can you indicate the 4million that is allocated there, how far will that take you in terms of this process?

**Hon. West:** We do have a plan to complete the initial stage of this project in 2020, and so we are pushing ahead with that. We do have some vacant positions and we

are hoping to fill some of those to assist us in completing that process, which is one of the reasons why we have an increase in the allocation.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 019: Diamond Division, page 228; Item 020: Modernization and Service Improvement, page 228.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 229. Item 001: General Administration, page 229; Item 003: National Information and Communication Technology, page 229; Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services, page 229; Item 007: Public Service Academy, page 229; Item 015: Strategic Services Division, page 230.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 230. Item 001: Regional Bodies, page 230; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies, page 230; Item 003: United Nations Organizations, page 231; Item 004: International Bodies, page 231; Item 007: Households, page 231; Item 009: Other Transfers, 231. And I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. Madam Minister, the line Item 01: TT Connect Service Centres, can you indicate how many new centres you will be rolling out in 2019/2020?

**Hon. West:** Mr. Chairman, we are still finalizing our plans for that. What we are doing is changing the infrastructure to make it more efficient so that we can build out more centres at a cheaper cost. So when we come to a final determination as to the revised cost, we will be better able to do that.

At the moment we have equipment in hand to complete two new centres and thereafter we will determine how many more we can. But what we are trying to do is at least complete the original mandate to complete 20 centres by the end of this administration's term.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Would you be able to provide the locations in writing?

**Hon. West:** Once those are determined. They are not yet determined.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, page 232.

Members, we now move on to the other book, Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, and we go into Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, and we are on page 183. 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*; 03: Trinidad and Tobago Telecommunications Authority. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 183. Item 001: General Administration, page 183. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 183. Item 001: General Administration, page 183. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 184. Members, you all are with me, eh? Item 001: General Administration, page 184. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 184. Item 007: Households, page 184; Item 009: Other Transfers, page 184.

Different book, Development Programme. We go to page 81. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 81. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 82. Infrastructure Development Fund, page 193. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 183.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 31 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you, Mr. PS and also to the senior technocrats from the Ministry of Public Administration. Thank you for coming.

**7.45 p.m.**

Members, Head 06: Service Commissions. You with us, Madam, Public Administration? Minister of Finance. Okay. So Members, we are at Head 06, Service Commissions. Welcome, again, to you Madam Minister and also the—  
[*Interruption*] Okay. Madam Minister.

*Head 06: Service Commissions Department, \$80,944,300.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Public Administration to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes, but before you move on, I would just like to mention the Director of Personnel Administration, thank you for coming and senior executives from the Service Commission.

**Hon. West:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The primary function of the Service Commissions Department is to provide support services to enable four service commissions: the Public Service Commission, the Teaching Service Commission, the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and the Police Service Commission, to discharge their constitutional responsibilities of staffing and the exercise of disciplinary control over the respective services.

The role and function of the Public Service Commission, Teaching Service Commission and the JLSC which are enshrined in the Constitution are to appoint persons to hold or to act in public offices, make appointments on promotion, transfer, confirm appointments, remove, exercise disciplinary control and enforce standards of conduct.

The role and function of the Police Service Commission are to recruit the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police, to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the functions of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of police; to prepare an annual performance appraisal report in such form as may be prescribed by the Commissioner for the Commissioner and the Deputy

Commissioner of Police; monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the functions of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police. In considering matters falling within its purview, each service commission is guided by the principles, procedures and rules set out in its regulations, various service acts and policies handed down from time to time.

The Service Commissions Department is mandated to assist the service commissions in fostering a positive discipline among public officers and ensuring that appropriate procedures are applied where there are breaches of the various codes of conduct; ensure the recruitment of the best possible candidates for appointment to entry level offices in the various services in keeping with the principles, procedures and policies laid down by the respective service commissions, and ensure that the human resource needs are of the highest levels of the services and the legitimate career goals and expectations of officers are satisfied.

It is noteworthy that upon the approval and implementation of the recommendations of the concluded institutional strengthening exercise, the Service Commissions Department hopes to evolve into a future state that will enhance the provision of improved technical support, predominantly providing improved oversight and monitoring of Ministries, Departments and government agencies. I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I stand ready to answer the questions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

*Question proposed:* That Head 06 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$80,944,300 for Head 06, Service Commissions Department, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We now

proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. So we are in Recurrent Expenditure booklet and on page 34. Page 3-4. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, page 34. Item 001: General Administration, page 34. And I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. Madam Minister, with regard to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and the expenditure of \$33,400,000. Can you indicate how many vacant posts there are at the Service Commissions at this time?

**Hon. West:** Number of permanent officers, 159. Number of vacant posts, 191. Number of vacant posts with bodies, 163. Number of vacant posts without bodies, 28.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Any indication of how many—the allowances intended to fill in this financial year?

**Hon. West:** There are 20 vacant posts that we are proposing to fill in fiscal 2020.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, good evening. If I could recollect, you just told my colleague from Fyzabad that there were 191 vacant posts. And I listened to the Minister of Finance very attentively during this Standing Finance Committee as it relates to filling of vacancies and the responsibilities of the Service Commissions and so on. Any reason why only 20 posts are being filled?

**Hon. West:** I did say that of the 191 vacant posts the number of vacant posts with bodies were 163. So there are people in most of the posts, there are only 28 that have no bodies in them.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay. So they are acting?

**Hon. West:** There are vacant posts either contract or temporary persons.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Imbert:** I would like to point out to the Member. The irony of vacant posts

in the Service Commissions, since the Commission is responsible for filling the posts. It is a bit ironical “eh”.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Could I say something?

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. I want to say that I do agree with the Minister of Finance on that. And the other thing too is the number of acting posts within the Commissions themselves.

**Mr. Chairman:** Point taken. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Just to follow up on that. Minister, could we get an indication of what might be the causal factors in terms of not being able to fill these posts by the Service Commissions itself? What are the challenges that they face?

**Hon. West:** Member through you, Mr. Chairman. The Service Commissions is making an attempt to fill its positions; it has competing challenges it is dealing with. But the process that they have implemented of moving to an ICT platform should help them to address some of those challenges and hopefully in the not-too-distant future we will see a more effective operation in terms of filling posts internally and thereafter externally.

**Dr. Bodoë:** So, is a problem with process or is it personnel?

**Hon. West:** It is a combination of process and personnel, because you would recognize that in the absence of long-term employed people, the challenge of fixing that becomes more difficult. So that it is a combination of the two.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 34. Item 001: General Administration, pages 34 and 35. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, just to provide us, what has accounted for the increase of 1.9—approximately 1.9—

**Mr. Chairman:** Just give me the line Item, just for the records.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** 43: Security Services.

**Hon. West:** At the moment the division is renegotiating its security contracts, it anticipates an increase in the cost and therefore they have catered for that in the allocation.

**Mr. Imbert:** Just let me assist the Minister, we share responsibility for this area. The notes I have, it is as a result of the department's relocation to larger, more suitable accommodation. So there would be an increased requirement—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Complement.

**Mr. Imbert:**—for security. A larger, more suitable accommodation. So there would be an increase in their security needs.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 02: Tobago Services, page 36; Item 003: Public Service Commission, page 36; Item 004: Teaching Service Commission, page 36; Item 005: Judicial and Legal Service Commission, page 37; Item 006: Police Service Commission, page 37. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 38. Item 001: General Administration, page 38. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 38. Item 007: Households, page 38.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Different book, Development Programme, page 9. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 9. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 9. I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Madam Minister, could you give us an update with regard to the Implementation of the Electronic Document Management System, as to where we are with this process?

**Hon. West:** We have successfully closed off the evaluation activity. The award



and execution of the contract is done—not quite yet, it is about to be done. And then we will engage the vendor to commence system design. We are proposing to commence the pilot project in the first quarter of fiscal 2020.

**Mr. Imbert:** I think, Chairman, I just want to correct something what I just said.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** The increased provision for security is in fact a new contract. Not movement to another building. It is a new contractual arrangement.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Noted. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Just want to piggyback on 006. When we do this electronic document management system, would it be more efficient now, so the Service Commissions now could fill vacant posts throughout the various Ministries?

**Hon. West:** That is the plan. Yes.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay. I understand we have some posts like 10 years and 12 years waiting to be filled. Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and so.

**Hon. West:** Both the filling of posts and the collation of records for various purposes will be more efficient under the new system that we are proposing to put in.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Okay.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, could you indicate what will be the total cost to develop this programme? Are you in a position to give us—[*Interruption?*]

**Hon. West:** The estimated cost is \$25,708,650.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Could you say how much is being spent so far?

**Hon. West:** Well, we have just gotten to the identifying of the service provider. We are now about to contract him, so not much from this fund has been spent. So

the main expenditure will start in 2020.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member of Oropouche West, your mike is on.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Sorry.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 06 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you, Director of Personnel Administration and also to the senior technocrats from your Commission. Thank you.

**8.00 p.m.**

Hon. Members, Head 17, Personnel Department. I would like to welcome the Chief Personnel Officer. Welcome to the Parliament Chamber and also to your senior executives from your division.

*Head 17: Personnel Department, \$68,172,630.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Public Administration to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. West:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. The Personnel Department is the Department of Government charged with the responsibility for determining and/or advising on pay and other terms and conditions of service for a wide spectrum of employees within the public sector. It is established by section 13 of the Civil Service Act of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. It is headed by the Chief Personnel Officer.

The Department determines through consultation and negotiations with appropriate recognized associations and unions, the terms and conditions of service of the following groups of employee: approximately 59,000 monthly-paid officers in the civil, teaching, police, fire and prison services; approximately 4,000

monthly-paid officers employed in the statutory authorities, subject to the Statutory Authorities Act; approximately 26,000 daily-rated workers employed in Government Ministries and Departments and municipal corporations and approximately 48 monthly-paid and daily-rated employees of the Sugarcane Feeds Centre.

The Department also advises, makes recommendations on the terms and conditions of service of the following groups of officeholders and employees. Holders of offices within the purview of the Salaries Review Commission, employees of the whole statutory boards and state enterprises which receive guidelines for negotiations from the Human Resource Advisory Committee responsible for monitoring wage and salary negotiations in the public sector, members of the defence force and persons employed on contract in Ministries and Departments.

The specific duties of the Department are as follows: maintaining the classification of offices in the civil service, reviewing the remuneration payable to civil servants, administering the general regulations governing the civil service and establishing procedures for consultation and negotiations with an appropriate recognized association in respect of classification of officers, grievances, remuneration and terms and conditions.

In view of the far-reaching financial implications of many of the negotiations which the Personnel Department conducts, the Act governing the public service provides for the Department to be subject to the direction of the Minister of Finance in respect of all its negotiations with appropriate recognized associations and unions. Mr. Deputy Chair, I will end there and I will wait on questions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sure. Thank you, Madam Minister.

*Question proposed:* That Head 17 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$68,172,630 for Head 17, Personnel Department, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, and we are on page 76, Members.

Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, page 76. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. Minister, I would link this question to 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. In a response to the Parliament, based on a question from the committee last year, we are told that the staff establishment of the Personnel Department comprises 186 positions of which 111 positions are vacant. So two questions: Can we now confirm how many vacancies there are in the Personnel Department? And in view of the increase of 2,580,000 how many are expected to be filled? How many of those positions are expected to be filled in this financial year?

**Hon. West:** There are a total of 187 positions; 63 are filled and 124 are vacant. Provision is being made for the filling of vacant positions in the Human Resource Advisory stream and other vacancies to be filled by the Service Commissions Department. We are aiming for the sky in hoping to fill the 124, and we will see where we can get in the shortest possible time in terms of achieving that target.

**Mr. Chairman:** Couva South, we are on Item 001: General Administration, page 76. Okay. We would move on. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 76. Item 001: General Administration, pages 76 and 77. Sub-Head—Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** 02: Goods and Services, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Good and Services. Item 001: General Administration, pages 76 and 77.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay. Minister, could you just guide us as it relates to 16: Contract Employment. Who or what you are trying to address in terms of complement of persons and so on with this additional \$1.8 million?

**Mr. Chairman:** Madam Minister.

**Hon. West:** Mr. Deputy Chair, we have 23 positions filled and 35 vacant. So, we are seeking to fill as many of those vacant positions as we can. **Mr. Indarsingh:** These are people who will be bringing on to help or assist the CPO with negotiations and so on?

**Hon. West:** To help the CPO with its various functions.

**Mr. Imbert:** Let me just add some additional information.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** These positions were approved by Cabinet and they are areas of information technology, legal services, corporation communications, human resource management, change management and public procurement.

**Mr. Chairman:** Fine. Thank you.

**Mr. Imbert:** I think I got it right this time. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 78.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I wanted to ask—

**Mr. Chairman:** Another question on Goods and Services?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** On Other Contracted Services.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, proceed.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The increased expenditure of \$5.9 million will be for the engagement of what?

**Mr. Imbert:** We are looking at the UNIMED health plan. Okay? That is what we are looking at in the Ministry of Finance. Public Admin would have some

other agreements that they are looking at. Okay? So it is evaluation.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The job evaluation exercises?

**Mr. Imbert:** That is different.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** That is in the DP?

**Mr. Imbert:** Yeah. Yeah. That is different.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 78. Item001: General Administration, page 78. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 78. Item 001: Regional Bodies, page 78; Item 004: International Bodies, page 78; Item 007: Households, page 79. Pointe-a-Pierre. Okay.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Different book, and we are on page 45, development programme. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 45. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 45. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, with regard to line Item 034: Conduct of a Job Evaluation/Classification Exercise in respect of the Prison Services of Trinidad and Tobago, can you give us a status update on this project?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. West:** Through you, Mr. Deputy Chair, this project is hinged on the restructuring being done by national security. So we are waiting on them to finish that exercise after which we will commence our exercise.

**Dr. Bodoë:** 036: Conduct of a Job Evaluation and Compensation Exercise for the Civil Service. I see an allocation of 5 million for 2020.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, I can talk to that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** That has been on its way for quite a long time. There have been a lot of problems with respect to this project, but we finally got to a point where we can

engage a consultant, and that is why we have an allocation of 5 million in here.

**Dr. Bodoë:** For a consultant?

**Mr. Imbert:** Yeah.

**Mr. Chairman:** I recognize the Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you. Minister, in both 034 and 036, you indicated in relation to 034, the Ministry of National Security is currently engaged in a restructuring exercise. Have you reached the stage of a memorandum of understanding or an agreement being signed with the Prison Officers Association as it relates to 034?

**Mr. Imbert:** Let me come in here. That is not relevant to this line Item at all and you know that.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Mr. Minister, if you are engaging in a job evaluation exercise and you have a recognized majority union—

**Mr. Imbert:** This line Item has nothing to do with a collective agreement. Nothing. You know that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Members.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I know what I am saying.

**Mr. Chairman:** Members.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You was a part-time trade unionist.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are playing to the gallery.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am not playing to the gallery.

**Mr. Imbert:** This has nothing to do with that.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am trying to find out in the interest of the prison officers.

**Mr. Imbert:** As I said in my budget address, we intend to authorize the Chief Personnel Officer to make an offer to all categories of public officers in fiscal 2020.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** This has nothing do with collective bargaining.

**Mr. Imbert:** This has nothing to do with what you are talking about.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance and Member for Couva South. Okay?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** This has to with the parameters and so on with a job evaluation exercise, and that is all I am trying to find out. This has nothing to do with collective bargaining.

**Mr. Imbert:** Now, that you have changed your question, could you rephrase it please?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You are amazing.

**Mr. Imbert:** Now, that you have changed your question.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You are an amazing individual.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Imbert:** As your statements get refuted you are changing. What is the new question?

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed, Member.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The original question has been, Minister of Public Administration, with respect to 034, has there been or is there a memorandum of understanding which has been agreed to between parties as it relates involving the Prison Officers Association as it relates to this job evaluation exercise?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Public Administration.

**Hon. West:** Mr. Deputy Chair, through you to the Member, the CPO has not been engaged in that exercise at all. It is something that is strictly with the Ministry of National Security, so we cannot say what process has been adopted in it.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay. Thank you very much. And with respect to—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Chairman, if I may just—

**Mr. Chairman:** More information on what was just said?



**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yeah, some clarity.

**Mr. Chairman:** Go ahead Minister.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** The Ministry, as I understand it, has engaged a consultant to deal with this particular issue in an effort to modernize the prison service and bring the jobs in line with a more modern prison administration.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No problem with that, but the issue is, as you go forward, you still have to get the agreement.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** No, no, no. Let us not—you know you and I have quite a good relationship.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Will always have that relationship.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes. Yeah, yeah. We have developed quite a good relationship of late. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Chairman:** We are not going into any debate now, Madam and Couva South.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** But I will say that if it is necessary, the relationship can change, if necessary, but right now we are on good terms.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us deal with the facts please.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Those are the facts, Mr. Chairman. [*Laughter*] Those are the facts. But what I want to say is that in an effort to—

**Mr. Chairman:** I still have to be careful, you know. The banter could get out of hand.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:**—ensure that the prison service meets its new requirements, there is a necessity to re-examine what each job does and what it needs to do in the future. So that is why they are doing this job evaluation exercise.

**8.15 p.m.**

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And that is good, nobody is against the modernization of the prison service, but as I said, taking into consideration that there is a recognized

majority union and going forward they will have to sign off on this.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** No, no, no, I mean, that is understood.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think that is understood. That is understood.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** That is understood. That is separate and apart.

**Mr. Chairman:** I would like to recognize the Member for Fyzabad now.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Give the advice to the Minister of Finance. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Chairman. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Mr. Imbert:** He gives a story every five minutes.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, with regard to line Item 037: Development of a Knowledge and Information Management System, I see we have had some allocations 2018, 2019, but no allocation in 2020. Can you indicate the status of this project whether it is completed or it is still ongoing?

**Hon. West:** The project is completed but for the inputting of information which is still ongoing.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, can you indicate what benefits this project would have brought to the public service?

**Hon. West:** It is intended to make the operation of the CPO more efficient. What we have is the digitization of the files, the CPO's files, which would allow it to more efficiently carry out their functions.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes, Chairman, in Arouca/Maloney's quest to distract me, [*Crosstalk*] we lost the answers as relates to 036. With respect to the Conduct of the Job Evaluation and Compensation Exercise for the Civil Service—

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

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on.

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—Minister, you have a time frame when you think that this may be completed?

**Hon. West:** We expect it to take 24 months and we are anticipating it will start shortly.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** It will start shortly. In addition—

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Well, I want to object, he did not ask that question before.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, forget the objection, he wants a time frame and he got his answer.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No, if the Minister of Finance was listening, I referred to 036 also.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, no, no, no, you never asked that question. Never.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. You got your answer, Member?

**Mr. Imbert:** You are playing for the cameras, man.

**Mr. Chairman:** Next question.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yeah.

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Further to that, I will ask in relation to this particular issue with the civil service too, Minister, have you had a framework agreement with the Public Services Association?

**Hon. West:** In respect of the job evaluation?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yeah.

**Hon. West:** Not at this point.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Not at this point?

**Hon. West:** No.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So you do not have a commencement date?

**Hon. West:** Well, we are waiting on approval to go forward with the contract. As I said earlier, we expect that to happen shortly and we expect the project to take two years, so during the process of that we will engage with our relevant stakeholders.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay. Thank you very much, Minister.

**Hon. West:** You are welcome.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 17 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Madam Minister, thank you Chief Personnel Officer and the senior executives from the Personnel Department, do reach safely.

Hon. Members, we would now like to suspend Standing Finance Committee for the day and we will resume tomorrow, Tuesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, 2019, at 10.00a.m.

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