

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, October 16, 2020***APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2021) BILL, 2020**

[Fifth Day]



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

[Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George]

1.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, if we could have some order please, the meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will now resume. Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 81(2) and (8), the Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements, along with the Appropriation Bill, have been referred to the Committee for consideration. The documents before the Committee therefore include the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly, Draft Estimates of Development Programme* and the Appropriation (Financial Year 2021) Bill, 2020.

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

The proposed work schedule: Hon. Members, you are reminded that the Committee agreed to meet as follows: today, Friday, October 16, 2020 at 1.30 p.m.; Monday, October 19, 2020 at 10.00 a.m.; Tuesday, October 20, 2020 at 10.00 a.m.; Wednesday, October 21, 2020 at 10.00 a.m. and Thursday, October 22, 2020

UNREVISED

at 10.00 a.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, may I just say that on Thursday we may have to make an amendment to that time, but I will let you know in good enough time.

Madam Chairman: That is noted.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, I am also reminded that the Committee must consider a minimum of eight Heads of Expenditure today in order to complete its work programme in the five days allotted.

Procedure for each Head: Hon. Members, you are reminded that the procedure for each Head of Expenditure shall be as follows:

1. The Head and the amount to be appropriated will be announced by the Chair.
2. The Minister will then be given the option to make a brief opening statement.
3. The Chairman will then propose the question that the sum proposed shall stand part of the Schedule.
4. For each Head of Expenditure, the Chairman will call the Sub-Head followed by the Item. I will not call the Sub-Items. Discussion—and I stress “discussion”—can ensue on the Item called or the relevant Sub-Item, and clarification sought. Once the Committee moves to another Sub-Head, questions from a previous Sub-Head will not be entertained.
5. The Chairman will repeat the procedure for the *Development Programme*.
6. Once this is concluded, the Chairman will then put the question that the

sum stand part of the Schedule.

7. This procedure will be repeated for each Head of Expenditure.

Speaking time: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 45(1), the speaking time in Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on each intervention. We have invited accounting officers and technocrats to arrive at specific times during the day. So I encourage Members to adhere to the agreed schedule. Okay? So that we begin—yes, Member for Oropouche East?

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, as we begin this process in a new Parliament as well, I just want to be a 100 per cent clear and for clarity for new Members as well that as we proceed with the Standing Finance Committee, the Standing Orders are in effect and Members may raise a matter involving the Standing Orders. They are in effect for this Committee as well. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Yes, they are.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much.

Head 28: Ministry of Health, \$5,214,977,262.

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

Hon. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Good afternoon to colleagues. No doubt, Madam Chair, the issue of COVID has dominated Health for the past nine months or so. In my opening statement, I would like to sincerely thank every single health care worker in Trinidad and Tobago, and by extension, every single front line worker. In thanking health care workers, I thank everyone, from doctors, nurses, specialists, patient care, escorts, ENAs, wards maids, drivers, messengers. It was truly a team effort that saw, passing through the parallel health care system, over 4,000 patients in the past eight months or so, no small feat, whilst at the same time, the regular health care system operated.

It is this dedication to duty that has shown the way, not only in Trinidad and Tobago but elsewhere. And in closing, again I would just like to thank every single health care worker, and, Madam Chair, I am ready to proceed. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister of Health.

Question proposed: That Head 28 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,214,977,262 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 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; Item 004: Vertical Services; Item 005: North West Regional Health Authority. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance—

Hon. Member: Your microphone is off. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member, Member—

Dr. Bodoë: Madam Chair, I want to refer to 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance under the NCRHA, and with regard to the increase of 150,000 and in the explanation, “Includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents.” And the question I want to ask is that, in light of the new demands on the public health institutions due to COVID-19, will the increase of 150,000, in this instance, be sufficient to strengthen the work of the NCRHA?

Hon. Deyalsingh: The answer is, yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. Just to follow up, Minister. Minister, through you, Madam Chair, in a written submission dated November 08, 2019, the Ministry indicated that a number of posts at the RHAs would be made redundant when the incumbents retire or permanently separate from the Ministry, including the following—and I will just quote a few that was in the submission: Accounting Assistants, Administrative Officer II, Boiler Operator II, Cashier II, Cleaner I, Hospital Attendant I, maintenance repairmen, and so on. And the question really is, did this decision apply to all of the RHAs?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So that has to do with public servants who retire, and I am being advised by the Permanent Secretary those posts are not filled.

Dr. Bodoë: Those are the Ministry of Health posts?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Correct.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am just following up to the question posed by my colleague, Minister. I do not know if you have the information as it relates to how many vacant positions currently exist and probably a common trend at the North Central Regional Health Authority, the North West Regional Health Authority and the South West.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So these posts have to do with public officers who went across to the RHAs, correct? Yeah? These will deal with people like cooks, cleaners, drivers, support staff, and what is going to happen here, as those people retire or accept VSEP, we do not typically fill them as indicated earlier.

Mr. Indarsingh: So it does not take, for example, into consideration like a position such as director of health, and so on?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, Sir.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair, 007; 01: Eastern Regional Health Authority. Hon. Minister, I see there is an increase of 80,000. In light of the new demands on the public health institution due to COVID-19, will the increase of 80,000 be sufficient to strengthen the work of the eastern regional?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So the same answers that I just gave to the Member for Fyzabad and Couva South, apply to the four RHAs under this Sub-Head. It has to do with public officers currently in the RHA system. It does not have to do with any other set of personnel, and these numbers will go down with time due to retirement, attrition, whatever. Okay? So the same explanation applies to all four RHAs.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the Minister: Minister, in light of the announcement—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Which line Item please?

Mr. Hosein: We are on the same 005, under Salaries and Cost of Living.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so just one minute, just for us to have a little order. We would have been at 006. The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla sort of leapfrogged to 007 and therefore, I am willing to entertain 006. That is where we are at.

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay, Member.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. It would apply here. Salaries and Cost of Living, Madam

Chair, in light of the Minister of Finance's announcement that there would be a freeze in the public service hiring, I want to know whether or not this applies to medical workers in the RHAs.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So the same explanation which I gave to the Members for Fyzabad, Couva South and Cumuto/Manzanilla applies to this. It is the same explanation. It has to do with employees who are public officers in the RHAs and as these people either retire, or whatever, the numbers come down. It does not have to do with more hiring necessarily.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir:—02/001/08: Rent/Lease- Office Accommodation and Storage.

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. [*Crosstalk*] Member, Member for Diego Martin North/East—Member for Diego Martin North/East, many of the Members here are new and I think we all need to practise very early considerable tolerance with each other. Okay? Yes, Member, we are at page 191, all right, where we are considering 006 on page 191. Is that where you are at?

Dr. Ragbir: I am on page 193.

Madam Chairman: No, we have not reached there as yet. Member for Diego Martin North/East, please. So we will leave you until we come to that question, that page. Okay? All right, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, I just want to make it clear whether or not the RHAs are going to hire medical staff having regard to the pandemic and also if the Couva children's hospital falls under NCRHA. So I just want to make it clear, if the Minister can make it clear whether or not they are going to hire any medical professionals in this fiscal year.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Could I be advised as to which line Item the hon. Member is

referring?

Mr. Hosein: We are on 006, Madam Chair, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So as indicated to Fyzabad, Couva South, Cumuto/Manzanilla, the same explanation which I gave, applies. These have to do with public officers, for example, cooks, cleaners, drivers, under this category. There are other line items to deal with doctors and nurses, and when we come to it, hon. Member, we can deal with it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East, no questions?

Dr. Moonilal: The Member said be patient. We will deal with it later.

Madam Chairman: We go to 007. [*Interruption*] You are on 007?

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Sorry, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. 008; 009.

Dr. Seecheran: Madam Chair, I have six questions for the Minister, under 002: Goods and Services, line Item No. 21: Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings.

Madam Chairman: I think—just now. You might still be ahead of us.

Dr. Seecheran: Okay.

Madam Chairman: I think, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, was your question at Item 009?

Dr. Ragbir: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: All right, because I thought you told me at page 192. So we are going on to Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001, and this is at page 193. Any questions under 001, any of the Sub-Items there?

Dr. Seecheran: 21 falls under that?

Madam Chairman: That is Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings?

Dr. Seecheran: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes please, Member.

Dr. Seecheran: I have six questions for the hon. Minister. Question No. 1: Could the Minister provide a list of the public health facilities which would be targeted for repairs and maintenance during fiscal 2020 and 2021?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Madam Chairman, something is wrong.

Mr. Imbert: Intervene here please.

Madam Chairman: We are at page 193.

Mr. Imbert: But what line Item?

Madam Chairman: The Member pointed out Sub-Item 21, so we are at 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration. [*Interruption*] Well, it is not a matter of one to 20. That is why I said we need extreme tolerance with each other. I said when I call the Item I will not call the Sub-Item and Members can refer to any Sub-Item. Okay? So I think we can proceed on the basis that we will all be tolerant of each other.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure, and I have the answer, Madam Speaker—Madam Chair. So, hon. Member, this has to do with the continuing maintenance works for Ministry of Health buildings, for example, the head office, housing of staff at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. It also has to do with maintenance at Couva Hospital. So those are some of the facilities that this Head will be responsible for. Okay?

Dr. Seecheran: Continuing. Given the decrease in allocation by over 26 million, how does the amount for repairs and maintenance work planned for fiscal 2021, compare to 2020, given that we are in a pandemic?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, so, maintenance at Ministry of Health is independent of the pandemic. I do not know how else to put it, but if we need more funding there

is the mid-year review where we could come back for, to look for increased funding under the mid-year review in March/April.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Can I go to my third question now?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Seecheran: Can the Minister describe how public health facilities are maintained, and the procurement process for the selection of contractors for the repairs and maintenance of buildings?

Hon. Deyalsingh: It is done in a combination of ways. We do have at the Ministry in-house teams. The RHA also has in-house teams, and anything that cannot be handled in-house, they will go out for tender. If it is an emergency, the typical three-quote system would apply. So there is a variety of ways to procure these services.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh: You are welcome.

Dr. Seecheran: Next question: Does this allocation include consultancy services, and could you provide some details?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No Sir, this does not include consultancy. It is strictly for repairs and maintenance of buildings.

Dr. Seecheran: Lastly, what is the difference between this expenditure and 005/06/C.234, Hospital Refurbishment Programme under the *Development Programme* under the Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So when we come to that line Item we will deal with that then.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chairman, before you go to Mr. Fyzabad, I just wanted to ask the Minister of Health, as a follow-up to a question.

Madam Chairman: Sure. We recognize people to try to get this done in order of

them catching my sight, so I will now take the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 16: Contract Employment. I just want to seek clarification because if you look at that line Item, the difference between 2020 and 2021, I am seeing an increase here of 700—so the question here, Minister, was this allocation used to employ the additional doctors for manning the COVID-19 hotlines?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So this line Item was used initially to bring on extra interns which this Cabinet approved. So we currently have 371 interns up from 296. So we employed approximately 80 more interns. These are doctors coming into the system. We also used this for foreign health care worker recruitment, for example, the 11 ICU nurses that came in from Cuba, and so on. So that is what this line Item will be used for.

Dr. Bodoë: Right. So, you had indicated in the mid-year review as well that you had employed some additional doctors to man the COVID hotlines. Can you indicate if that arrangement is still in place and how many doctors are so employed?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, that arrangement is still in place. We employed 22 extra to man the hotline alone.

Dr. Bodoë: Has any sort of audit been done in terms of the number of calls these doctors receive on a daily basis?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, but I do not have the actual figures with me now.

Dr. Bodoë: Can we perhaps get a report on the status of that?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. Will do.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. We do have you down, Caroni East.

Dr. Ragbir: Well, I wanted to start with 02/004/39. Is that okay?

Hon. Deyalsingh: What page?

Dr. Ragbir: At page 194.

Madam Chairman: No, no, we are still at page 193. [*Interruption*] Minister, please. Member for Oropouche West, and Members, we are on page 193 which is 02, 001. Member for Oropouche West, no? Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chairman, if you would allow me, my question was a follow-up to one asked by Caroni East with regard to construction.

Madam Chairman: It matters not. Once you are on an Item here on page 193, you can ask.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. With regard to construction—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Item number?

Ms. Ameen:—where you indicated—

Hon. Deyalsingh: What line Item, so I can—

Madam Chairman: One minute. May I hear the question please? With regard to construction, yes?

Ms. Ameen: The Minister had indicated that construction within the hospitals and the health sector is not going to be affected by COVID. There have been a number of government construction projects that have had delays.

Madam Chairman: All right, so one minute. Member for St. Augustine, I believe if I recall what the Minister said was maintenance is independent of the pandemic. Because the question was under Sub-Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings. The Member did not speak of construction. The Member spoke of maintenance. So I will not allow you that. Maybe you can find your construction under another Head.

Ms. Ameen: There is another heading, Development Programme?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Madam Chairman: I think that is where it would be.

Dr. Seecheran: Under line Item No. 22: Short-term Employment, could the hon. Minister please state how many persons are currently employed on short-term contract arrangements at the Ministry?

Hon. Deyalsingh: 87.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. And what kinds of work do these short-term employees do?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Project management, IVCD, Insect Vector Control Division, health education, facilities manager, policy department and so on.

Dr. Seecheran: Also, what proportion of short-term recruitments for fiscal year 2021 would be carried out to deal with the effects of COVID-19?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, so Insect Vector—okay, I know everything is going to be about COVID. This has to do with HIV/AIDS which is independent of COVID. Drug Inspectorate, which is independent of COVID. Insect Vector, which is independent of COVID. So many of these things are independent of COVID. They are used for the specific purposes as outlined.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer to line Item 23: Fees. I note a drastic reduction from the Estimates to the Revised Estimates for 2020. Can you indicate, Sir, why there was this drastic decrease? What was left out, what was not pursued?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So as far as I know there was an increase of \$191,385. I am not seeing a decrease.

Mr. Tancoo: The initial allocation, Sir, for 2020, was \$5.4 million. The revised was \$800,000—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Oh, for 2020. Well, for 2021, we got an increase, so that is what we are dealing with. I will have to find out about 2020 for you. But we did get an increase in 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Can you indicate, Sir, what those Fees were specifically for?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So those are licences, technical support, antivirus agreements and so on, also legal fees.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I therefore ask for your commitment to provide some information for the decrease in the last financial year?

Hon. Deyalsingh: What specific information would you like, Member?

Mr. Tancoo: I would like to get a listing of the Fees that were estimated for in 2020, and then the Fees that were actually paid for in 2020.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item No. 16, just a general question. Can you say if contract employment falls under the freeze in public service hiring, that there will be no contract employees hired based on that freeze, or is it only for the public service appointees?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I will let the Minister of Finance answer that.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, on behalf of the Government the decision with respect to vacant posts refers only—and this has been said on multiple occasions since it was announced on the 5th of October—establishment positions within the public service do not, cannot and will not apply to contract employment. I hope this does not come up in another Ministry.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Mr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under line Item No. 23: Fees, I would like to ask the Minister what changes are expected given the increase in allocation to Fees in 2021?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Under Fees?

Mr. Seecharan: Yes, line Item No. 23.

2.00 p.m.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So this increase was based on what we expect to have in this fiscal year, renewal of anti-virus support, increased technical support as we move the Ministry and the RHAs from a paper-based system to e-platform. So some of this will go towards that.

Dr. Seecheran: And could the Minister provide a breakdown of the Fees to us in writing, please?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. I think that was already asked for and it will be provided.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may move forward to Sub-Item 28, Madam Speaker? Sorry. Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: That is Other Contracted Services?

Mr. Tancoo: Other Contracted Services. There was a reduction of \$438,000. Can I get a clarification as to what contracted services have been discontinued?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So contracted services have not been discontinued but if we need more we will come back in the mid-year review to bolster this particular line Item.

Mr. Tancoo: Just to follow up, Sir—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mr. Tancoo:—can you indicate then what contracted services are currently included in this initial payment?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So this line Item was used to facilitate the parallel health care system for COVID-19 rooms and meals especially when we were

quarantining people by the hundreds. With the current policy that patients could quarantine at home, we will not have the great demand for rooms and meals as we did in the first phase of the pandemic.

Mr. Tancoo: So just to confirm, Minister, are you suggesting that the pandemic provision for the parallel health services for quarantining individuals cost in 2020 \$888,000?

Hon. Deyalsingh: It would have actually cost more because other costs were incurred under other Heads—

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh:—which we will come to in a short while.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 62. I refer to Promotions, Publicity and Printing, and I see that there was a significant decrease in the 2020 Estimates and the Revised Estimates, and then there was a significant decrease in the Estimates for 2021. Did that 384,730 reflect the COVID expenditures, the daily promotions and what not explaining what the population is supposed to do or is that not from another account?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So that line Item is used for Promotions, Publicity and Printing for a whole host of services including HIV/AIDS, NCDs, mosquito-borne diseases and the COVID-19 pandemic. What we did do was start, as demography changes and as people migrate to social media, we took a conscious decision to move a great part of our advertising spend away from typical mass media which is radio, TV and press, and to make heavy use of social media which is much more cost effective, and we started doing simple things like village miking which is much more targeted and effective.

Mr. Charles: So is the Minister telling us that that 384,000 does not include, for example, the daily briefings that are held on COVID, et cetera?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No. That is done under the auspices of TTT so we do not pay for that directly.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am at line Item 37, Janitorial Services. Minister, I am seeing a decrease of \$400,000 from what was expended in 2020. So it went from \$1.2 million to \$800,000. Can the Minister indicate whether or not this cost, this Janitorial Services, includes the cost of sanitizing?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No. This is not for sanitizing our facilities. This is just regular cleaning, and what we do, we make much more use of in-house cleaning staff.

Mr. Hosein: So that accounts for the decrease of 400,000?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes. We have moved away from contract, you know, from having the big companies do it and we do a lot more of it in-house.

Mr. Hosein: So are there any contract services at all at the Ministry for Janitorial Services?

Hon. Deyalsingh: There will be some janitorial, yes, but we have moved to using a significant amount of in-house janitorial services.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West. No longer? Member for St. Augustine, do you still have a question? Okay, so we move on. We are on page 194, Item 004, Vertical Services. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I want to refer to line Item 39.

Hon. Deyalsingh: 39.

Dr. Bodoë: Drug and Other Related Materials and Supplies, I just want you to reconfirm what that expenditure covers?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So this relates to drug procurement, the PAHO Strategic Fund, the expanded programme for immunization for pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals. That is what that is used for.

Dr. Bodoë: And those are supplies for all of the facilities—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Correct.

Dr. Bodoë:—under the Ministry of Health?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Correct.

Dr. Bodoë: So, Minister, I just—because we have the 2019 figure here, I have noticed that 2019 there was—normally there is an expenditure of between 500 and 600 million under this line Item. In 2020, I see the Revised Estimate was 144,200,000 with a shortfall. Now, I know an explanation did come forward—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë:—in this Parliament as to how that gap was met. And I see in that in 2021 we now have an allocation of 162,614,000, an increase of 18 million. So my question is: What is the expended expenditure for 2021 and how is the gap going to be met in this financial year?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So the gap will be met using the same funding mechanism we used for the last fiscal, that same funding mechanism will be used for this fiscal. What did we spend last year? I will have to get that for you. Do we have it here? We will get it for you.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. They have an expected expenditure for this year under that line Item.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Can you give us the figure?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sorry. Just repeat. The mask—

Dr. Bodoë: The expected figure for 2021 under the line Item.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. It is going to be in the vicinity of four to 500 million at this point in time.

Dr. Bodoë: Right.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay? And what we spent last year was 441.

Dr. Bodoë: 441?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah. All right. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, I am just looking at line Item 01 and, can you account for this decrease of \$4.8 million in Travelling and Subsistence and if this decrease can impact on the quality of supervision or even the quality of service in that division?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, Sir, it will not. And what we will do, if we require more funding under this line Item, we will surely approach the Minister of Finance in the mid-year review.

Mr. Paray: Any position on what would have accounted for the huge decrease?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We had some arrears to settle which we now no longer have.

Mr. Paray: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, just as a follow-up, would you be able to provide to the Members here a listing of the arrears that you indicated that you had to settle?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad. Member for Fyzabad, I have the same difficulty.

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry. Through you, Madam Chairman, Minister, I just want to go back to line Item 39.

Hon. Deyalsingh: 39?

Dr. Bodoë: 39, Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies. And Minister, in the mid-year appropriation—the supplementation of appropriations—you had mentioned the possible use of a drug called immune globulin (human) to treat COVID-19 patients.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Um hmm.

Dr. Bodoë: Which you yourself described as very costly and you were surprised at the—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, two to \$300,000 per person.

Dr. Bodoë: Yes. So just a few questions with regard to that. Can you confirm whether this drug has actually been used to treat COVID-19 patients as indicated? And if the answer is yes, how many patients have been treated? What was the cost per unit? And the total expenditure so far for that particular drug? And what was the procurement process used? And who was the supplier of this drug?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So the procurement process would have been done by NIPDEC in their usual fashion. All the other questions we will have to get the answers for you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 39. Madam Chair, I keep hearing from my constituents that certain drugs are unavailable, those dealing with the NCDs—non-communicable diseases—high blood pressure, et cetera. Is the Minister satisfied that this figure will satisfy the needs of the regional health authorities, the pharmaceutical needs, and also the health facilities—and the complaints we are hearing are not necessarily correct?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Some of the complaints you are hearing are actually true but it has nothing to do with the amount expended on pharmaceuticals. A lot has to do with supply chain management and the way the health centres order or do not order drugs in time and do not manage drugs when they reach critical reorder quantities. I have been personally to the Indian Walk Health Centre and noticed severe supply chain logistics issues, and that we are now trying to solve that with a new computerized system called **SALME**, where all the health centres will be actually online. Okay?

Mr. Charles: So is the Minister giving the assurance, and I hear it in what you are saying, that the Lengua health facility and the Rochard Douglas health facility and the Williamsville health facility will be able, given the system that you have just described to satisfy the needs of the constituents?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes. In terms of quantity of drugs ordered and stored at C40, the answer is yes. What we have to do is to bring all these health centres online, live, via a new system. The old system N what? N-Com is outdated, it is 10 years old, and we are now piloting a new system in four health centres right now, four, and we are piloting that. The pilot is going well, and once we do that, we could roll it out throughout the entire system including all of yours.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the Minister. Minister in your—again, I refer to line Item 39.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: And in your budget contribution you indicated that the sum of \$66,142,999.23 has been set aside for the eventual procurement of 460,000 vaccines and once they have developed—You can indicate whether that sum is included in the allocation of the 162,614 million—

Hon. Deyalsingh: No.

Dr. Bodoë: Or whether that will come from a different source?

Hon. Deyalsingh: It will come from the financing mechanism that we will use—that we used last year and that we will use again this year but it comes from this Vote.

Dr. Bodoë:—i.e. NIPDEC?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: I just wanted to use the opportunity to bring to the attention of the Minister of Health similar drug shortages at the Macoya Health Centre in St. Augustine constituency.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Minister of Health, I just want to ask, the 460,000 vaccines, is it the Government's choice to actually vaccinate all the population of Trinidad and Tobago for the COVID-19?

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So that does not apply to this—any line Item here, hon. Member.

Dr. Ragbir: Yeah, it is on 39.

Hon. Deyalsingh: No.

Dr. Ragbir: 02/04/39.

Hon. Deyalsingh: The policy on vaccination, whether it is mandatory or not, does not apply to this particular Head.

Madam Chairman: So really what you are asking is whether the vaccines come

under that Head?

Dr. Ragbir: Yeah.

Hon. Deyalsingh: The answer is yes. The vaccines fall there but not the policy.

Dr. Ragbir: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member or Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I just want to follow up on a question asked by colleague from Naparima. Is it that the Minister is suggesting that—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Which line Item, please.

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry. I am under line Item 39—.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo:—as a follow up from my colleague from Naparima who indicated— You indicated in your response to him that there was programme being rolled out and subsequent to the roll-out individual health centres and so on would be able to access drugs. Is it that we are expected to wait until that programme is rolled out before these health facilities can find support and access to the drugs that are needed for constituents?

2.15 p.m.

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, Sir. The health centres currently have a procurement process. What we are doing is moving that from procurement process from a system which is paper-based, fax-based, email-based, to one which is purely online real time, called **SALME**. It is currently being tested at four health centres. It seems to be working well. The next step is to now tie it in to the inventory at C40. Once that works out then we start to roll it out. But there is an existing procurement system, which is not working well, which we recognize, and that is why we are moving to a more online real time system.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Would Minister be prepared to give the names of those four health facilities, so the population can monitor it to see the progress that we will be getting shortly?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure, sure. So I know one is St. Joseph; one is in central; one is in the east; and one is in south, I believe. So, we chose, you know, at four ends to start it off, so we started off in four.

Mr. Charles: All right. Would you be prepared at some later stage to give us the names?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Of course. Yes, of course.

Mr. Charles: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005; Item 006; Item—is there something on 006? Item 007; Item 008; Item 009. We are at pages 195 to 196. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Under 009, the Sub-Item is actually on 199, page 199, and it is under—

Madam Chairman: No, no, no, 009 ends at page 196. Okay. So, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. 009, National Alcoholic and Drug Abuse Prevention. I noticed, well, from 01 to 13, and it follows, later on we will see declines, decreases in expenditures. Now, given some concerns about unemployment, and poverty, and spousal abuse, does the Minister not think that we should be putting on emphasis on drug abuse prevention and alcoholism in the context of what our psychiatrists and our sociologists and psychologists are telling us about are pervasive problems in our society.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So if you look at the decreases under 03, Uniforms, that would have very minor effect, because the funding provided is sufficient based on what we spent in 2020. Under electricity the funding provided there may be

sufficient based on what we spent in 2020, \$82,000. If insufficient for electricity we come back to the mid-year review. Telephones, same rationale applies, and Rent/Lease of Office Accommodation same rationale applies. The point is, this does not adversely affect the outreach programmes where we go into schools and communities, and what we are doing now with COVID is making much more use of webinars, which are much more cost effective.

Mr. Charles: I hear you Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So that work goes on unabated.

Mr. Charles: I hear you Minister, but you will forgive me, and I do not want to jump because throughout we are seeing decreases in Goods and Services. We will see that in the next Item, and therefore I am just concerned that the budget does not reflect a reality.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. And as usual we would come back in the mid-year review if we require more.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Asked and answered, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we go on to Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001; Item 004; Item 009. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair, this is under line Item 01, Regional Health Authority, on page—

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, no, wait. You would adopt 009.

Madam Chairman: We are page—009 is on page 197.

Dr. Seecheran: Okay. All right, sorry.

Madam Chairman: So we go on the Sub-Head 04, which begins on page 197; Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001, Regional Bodies. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoie: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to the funding for the

Caribbean Public Health Agency, I note that the funding for 2021 has been increased by 1 per cent compared to 2020. We know that the funding comes from Trinidad and Tobago and the other Caribbean countries, so in this context I want to ask, in the context of the increased demand because of the COVID-19, does the Government have any intention or feel the need to increase the funding to CARPHA in this financial year?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So the quota contribution is independent of COVID, Zika, chickungunya. It is just what the regional governments by formula have agreed to pay to CARPHA. It is independent of the actual operations of CARPHA. So I know we could bring in COVID on anything, but this is what is agreed to by formula under the Heads of Government.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. And, Madam Chair, my follow up question would be, so you are saying and giving the assurance Minister to the country that regardless if there are extenuating circumstances in any particular member country that adequate services will be provided regardless of—

Hon. Deyalsingh: I cannot speak at any other country, I could speak to Trinidad and Tobago's commitment under the Heads of Government agreement which formed CARPHA in 2012. This is our contribution and we will pay our contribution, which is quite enough at this point in time.

Dr. Bodoë: Would you be in a position Minister to provide, perhaps in writing, the number of COVID-19 tests that was done by—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Under what line Item, Member?

Dr. Bodoë: Same line Item.

Hon. Deyalsingh: This does not—COVID-19 testing does not apply to this line Item, and you know that.

Dr. Bodoë: [*Laughs*] I was asking in the context—

Hon. Deyalsingh: You know that.

Dr. Bodoë: I was asking in the context of value for money, Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: We are on 001/09, Regional Bodies Quota Contribution. This has nothing to do with testing. There may be a future line Item where we could entertain that.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister I am at 001, Regional Bodies.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: I am seeing an increase of \$229 million in this line Item, can you explain the increase please?

Madam Chairman: All right. So, Member for Barataria/San Juan, I understand your question, but if you notice we will have each of the Sub-Items, and maybe you could ask your question as it relates to the Sub-Item.

Mr. Hosein: To the Sub-Item, yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay? So, I do not know in terms of if your question applies to 001/09 where we are at.

Mr. Hosein: So I am at 005 also, Madam Chair, Non-Profit Institutions.

Madam Chairman: We are not there as yet, please.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: You will wait till then?

Mr. Hosein: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Okay, thank you. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Madam Chair, Item 09, Caribbean Public Health Agency.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Charles: I wish the Minister to confirm that Trinidad is the largest contributor compared to the other regional countries. In fact I know, but he could confirm. And that CARPHA's testing facilities are located in Trinidad, he could confirm. If that is the case, why it is only until recently our testing from CARPHA was 130th per capita that of Grenada? Was there something that could explain that discrepancy?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, Madam Chairman, as I have explained before, this line Item has to do with a quota contribution to CARPHA.

Mr. Charles: Agreed.

Hon. Deyalsingh: It has nothing or very little to do with testing. There will be other line Items that that could be dealt under.

Ms. Ameen: Chairman. Chairman.

Mr. Charles: Is the Minister telling us that our contribution has nothing to do, absolutely, with our request for services? If so, this is strange.

Ms. Ameen: Chairman, just to clarify, I think—

Madam Chairman: I do not believe that was the question asked, and therefore I do not think that that was the question answered. What was told is this is only in terms of what our contributions are.

Ms. Ameen: Chairman, I think—

Madam Chairman: Member, Member for Couva South. Member for St. Augustine, I know this is new to you, but as I said before—

Ms. Ameen: I just wanted to clarify.

Madam Chairman: Member, there is a particular procedure. All right, thank you very much. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, have you reached 005, Non-Profit Organizations?

Madam Chairman: No, we have not.

Mr. Indarsingh: I will hold then.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you are also at 005? Okay, so we go on to 003, United Nations Organizations; 005, Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, your allocation of \$18.3 million, I see that you have a list here of approximately 22 organizations.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: This is not an exhaustive list. How many institutions benefited from this 18.3 million?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So that is an exhaustive list. That is who we have registered and have signed MOUs with the Ministry of Health. So, it is an exhaustive list.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. All right, thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh: No problem.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to follow up on that same line Item, Minister. The 18.3 that is allocated, 2021, how is it allocated to these 20 institutions? Is it based on—?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, each institution will submit their plan of work, list of their expenses, revenue and so on, and based on what they provide, based on the MOU, based on their deliverables, they are portioned certain sums of money.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodo: Okay, Madam. Minister I noted that compared to 2019, 2020 you spent, almost \$6 million extra was expended, and the figure will remain at the same 18 million for 2021.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: So my question here would be, what would have accounted for this increase?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, we were on a serious drive, like for instance, NCDs—so we would have supported a lot of the organizations that were concerned with cancer screening and so on, NCD screening. And once a work plan could support we would provide the necessary funding.

Dr. Bodoë: So, the same organizations, but some would have received increased funding. Is that what you are saying?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. Minister, I also note that during your public conversation you had indicated that there was distribution of masks by non-profit organizations. Can you indicate whether any of these non-profit institutions were used for mask distribution during the COVID-19 crisis?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So not these, the non-profit that was used was FEEL, which the Ministry loosely sent all the masks to from the private sector, they went to FEEL, and FEEL through their network of NGOs would have distributed masks. Not these as listed here.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, again, through you, Minister, would there be an appropriate line Item going forward that we can ask further questions on that mask distribution procurement legislation process?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Well, no. The Ministry of Health does not expend funds on masks.

Dr. Bodoë: So, you would have just been the distributing agency?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, FEEL was the distribution arm.

Dr. Bodoë: And they would have been the coordinator?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We just partnered with FEEL to drive the process.

Dr. Bodoë: I see.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, what—same line Item. What systems are in place to evaluate and monitor the funds transferred to these enterprises and boards to ensure accountability and value for money?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We do a combination of regular reporting on a quarterly basis, and site visits, to the actual institutions. Go on the ground and make sure that what the reports say is reflected on the on the ground activities.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, most of these organizations here do very good work. I am seeing, Lupus Society, Trinidad Cancer Society. In light of COVID-19, and there may have been some additional operational costs for most these NGOs, does the Minister not think it wise that additional moneys could have been given to these NGOs in light of this COVID-19 pandemic? And I have another question, whether or not the Minister can give an undertaking to provide—

Madam Chairman: Let the Minister answer your first question.

Mr. Hosein: Sure.

2.30 p.m.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, so, Madam Chair, I know, as I have said it before, it will be fashionable to ask everything in the context of COVID-19. However, we will treat each of these agencies—as the Member for Fyzabad said, they got increases. Once the increases are warranted and can be backed up by their work plan, they will be increased, as we have done. In the case of the Lupus Society, they have not fulfilled their obligations under the MOU. We wrote to them in July 2020 for their

proposals and they have not replied as yet. So we have to safeguard the taxpayer also. So once the organizations fulfil their obligations with us for reporting, they will be given their funding.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you, Madam Chair. Could the Minister give us a breakdown of the allocations to each one of the 20 NGOs here that comes out of the \$18.3 million?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. We could provide that to you in writing.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Madam Chair, Minister, I just wanted to refer you to—just get some clarification, and you said that the mask distribution was done by FEEL. Can you indicate the process that was used to distribute those masks?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So that does not apply there—

Madam Chairman: Just a minute.

Hon. Deyalsingh: There is no line item for that. I have no direct relationship with FEEL. FEEL does not fall in under any line item here.

Madam Chairman: In addition to which—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Therefore, there is no budget for it.

Madam Chairman:—we leave out one of the institutions under this.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we go on to 007. Mayaro, you have a question? I am sorry, Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Yes, Ma'am, thank you. Minister, of these 22 institutions that are receiving that \$18.3 million, can you advise whether all of these organizations have conformed with the requirements of the Non-Profit Organisations Act in terms of their legal standing now under that new Bill.

Hon. Deyalsingh: I would not have that information now but the Attorney General seems to have it there.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Member, the provisions of the Non-Profit Organisations Act, like every other provision, for the Companies Act, et cetera, in the current COVID pandemic, are currently extended to December 31, 2020. And in those circumstances, there is not an overriding pressure to complete that process until that date has passed.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 22: National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention, and I saw that 200,000 was estimated in 2020 but none spent, none spent in actual 2019, and we have an estimate of 200,000 estimated for 2021. Why it was not spent and what assurance we have that it will be spent in fiscal 2021?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So, the reason why it was not spent, I will have to get back to you, but I could tell you what the work plan is for 2021. We want to conduct a national survey of substance abuse in both primary and secondary schools, education and sensitization programmes in schools, commemoration of World No Tobacco Day. We will also get involved here with the whole issue of cannabis, when that whole issue is done and dusted. So they would have a significant role to play there. We will have community drug prevention initiatives, train the trainer and so on. So these are some of the activities for this fiscal.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to line Item 01: Medical Treatment of Nationals in Institutions, can you confirm that this is where the EPP programme falls under?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes. A significant part of it, yes.

Dr. Bodoë: And Minister, can you provide—for each of the private institutions, it would have provided a service, can you provide, perhaps in writing, a list of the procedures and the services performed and the number of patients—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë:—treated for 2021?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë: I also note, Minister, that you had a decrease in expenditure of 20 million from that spent in 2020—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë:—from 75 to 55. Can you give a reason why this might be so, Minister?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes. Because we started to use the Couva facility, even you may not admit it, for the radiological activity. Since last year, we did 4,000 radiological investigations there which typically would have gone into the private sector before that. So that will account for a steep drop in it. We started up our own LINAC in St. James. So some of the patients that would have gone for external brain radiation in private sector are not being treated in public sector, because what we are trying to do is to move more and more services back into the public sector as opposed to farming them out to the private sector.

Dr. Bodoë: So, Minister, thank you for that response. I just wanted you to clarify, in view of the Couva Hospital now being used for COVID patients, are the outpatient diagnostic facilities, like the CT scanner, for example, and radiology and so, is it still available to the public at this time?

Hon. Deyalsingh: It has been temporarily suspended and we are now in discussions to come up with a separate—I am just doing the notes—sterile pathway to get into those facilities, because they are separate and apart from where

the COVID patients are, because you do not want to leave the equipment there, we want to continue using it. As I said, we have done 4,000 patients there already and we want to continue that.

Dr. Bodoë: So that is my concern, Minister. How long do you anticipate it will take for that to be a reality?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Not more than two to three weeks.

Dr. Bodoë: Also, Minister, as we are talking about utilizing facilities, there is a laboratory available at the Couva Hospital. Can you confirm whether that is being utilized at the present time?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Laboratory for what?

Dr. Bodoë: Diagnostic laboratory in the facility.

Hon. Deyalsingh: I think so, yes. Let me find out, but I believe it is.

Dr. Bodoë: Can you confirm that?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, with the External Patient Programme at the EPP, with the reduction of \$20 million, is there bias towards certain procedures, means, angiograms, open heart surgeries, as opposed to corneal transplants, diagnostic investigations, because you have to balance that \$20 million gap.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes. So again, we have moved significant amounts of these services out of the private sector and brought it back into the public. Let me mention one again, prosthetics, used to be here. Prosthetics has now gone to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. If we need to top up this, again, we will come back in the mid-year review and have that looked at.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am at Item 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister confirm whether or not this includes doctors on contract?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, this is to pay medical interns. We have one contract officer. The total number of people under this Vote is 79; 78 interns and one contract officer.

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister indicate why, after an allocation of \$8.1 million was made in 2020, only \$3.6 million was spent?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Those were the actual numbers of persons who actually finished their contract.

Mr. Hosein: So, as it stands, are there any other interns or contract officers awaiting gratuity?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Most likely, yes, but we will have to find out for you.

Mr. Hosein: Can you give us the number, please?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Of course.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, in relation to the External Patient Care Programme—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh:—could you confirm whether any of the public institutions at this time is conducting angiograms, whether it is at Port of Spain, Mount Hope or San

Fernando?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So, the only health facility, which is a sin of omission, as I said in my budget debate under several governments is that we only have one cath lab in the public health sector in Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Indarsingh: Is the cath lab at Mount Hope functioning at this moment?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Well, it is.

Mr. Indarsingh: It is?

Hon. Deyalsingh: And what we have also done is gone out for tender for a cath lab for San Fernando General Hospital. So we will be doubling our capacity to perform catheterization services for the people of south.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, two of my constituents— Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: One minute, please. Would you like, Minister of Finance, to add something to the response?

Mr. Imbert: It was in private institutions.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah. The Minister of Finance—

Mr. Imbert: He seems to be going somewhere else.

Madam Chairman: And this is the External Patient Care Programme.

Mr. Imbert: He seems to be going into the public health care system. That is where he is going.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister of Finance.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Minister of Finance. All right, Member for Couva South, I will allow you to ask the question. Ask the question.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am merely in the context of the External Patient Care Programme, Madam Chair, I am just trying to clarify, if the cath lab—two constituents of mine have advised me that the cath lab at the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex is non-functional and whether this allocation, Minister, will be

sufficient to deal with angiograms or the explosion or the increase in request of— in relation to angiograms which may be needed through the External Patient Care Programme?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So I cannot confirm or deny what your constituents have said. If you want that done, send their names to me and I will follow-up. However, as I said, we will come back in the mid-year review if we need more funding under this line Item.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Mr. Seecheran: Madam Chair, my question is for 009: Other Transfers.

Madam Chairman: All right. So we will wait there. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Question to the Minister with regard to line Item 08: VSEP. Is it that we are continuing voluntary separation of employment for medical officers?

Hon. Deyalsingh: This is—yes. The short answer is, yes. These are for public officers in the RHAs.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair, 01, again, the Medical Treatment of Nationals in Institutions, the 55 million allocation for 2021 Minister. Does this take into account institutions that are owed in arrears?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sorry?

Mr. Lee: Is it current? Do we owe any institutions in arrears for outstanding—

Hon. Deyalsingh: I would imagine so, yes.

Mr. Lee: Could we be provided with a list of those institutions and the amount?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam, 04/007/01 which is the same, External Patient Programme. I note the decrease there—[*Interruption*—do I restart or continue? Press on? Thank you, Madam. Given the decrease in allocation for 2021, and add to that, the hon. Minister just indicated that the arrears are pending, how is this going to affect the volume of services provided through these partnerships?

Hon. Deyalsingh: There will be very little adverse effect. Once this budget is passed, we will get funding to clear up those arrears. And as I said, if we need more, we will come back in the mid-year review.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yeah, but in the meantime, what happens? So, how much in arrears are we owing?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I do not have that figure with me now.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can you please provide that for us?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Of course. Yes, that was already promised.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can I? Another question?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Same, under Transfers to Households, under the Medical Treatment of Nationals. What is the breakdown of expenditure from this allocation on each of the Items that it provides for, which is for angiograms, open heart surgeries, dialysis, cataract, CT, MRI scans.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So dialysis is not covered here. Dialysis is covered under a separate programme but we could provide that information for you, Member.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: For each of the Items that this allocation would cover.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. But I just want to say dialysis is not covered here.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: How many health institutions benefit from funding for

CT and MRI scans?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We will get that information for you because that was asked.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, what was asked was to provide a full list of all the providers and the balances owed to them and the particular procedures performed. That will be provided.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What metrics, if any, are used to assess the performance of this programme, external patient.

Hon. Deyalsingh: We do a quality assurance test on them. We do audits of the health facilities that we send them out to.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: May I ask who is the “we”?

Hon. Deyalsingh: At the Ministry, we have an audit department.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay. How is value for money ensured under this programme?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Through the audit department.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Through the audit. And when was the last audit done?

Hon. Deyalsingh: In 2019.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: 2019 fiscal or 2019—

Hon. Deyalsingh: I will get that for you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can we be provided with a copy of that last audit report?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Siparia.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah, so—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am still under 04 but in another Item.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah, Madam Chair, I am being advised by the Attorney

General—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Not to make promises.

Hon. Deyalsingh:—that some of the information that I have unwittingly agreed to may be privileged, may be confidential, so I would take [*Crosstalk*] the advice from the—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: An audit for external patient care is confidential?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The public deserves to know—

Hon. Deyalsingh: From the private sector.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The public deserves to know where public funding is being expended. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Deyalsingh: I will take the advice from the Attorney General. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: We did not ask for records. [*Crosstalk*] We are asking for the audit to ensure value for money of the expenditure of public funds.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, you can run but you cannot hide it, you know. You have FOIA. [*Crosstalk*]

2.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Siparia and Member for Diego Martin North/East, I think we agreed as a body a little earlier that we will practise some tolerance among us. So I am hoping that we—I am hoping that we hold to that commitment. Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, for the record, obviously everything that is within public interest to be disclosed will be. I am just cautioning the Minister of Health that insofar as certain things may involve (a) either privileged material, (b) confidential information, (c) sensitive personal

information, that there are certain steps that one has to engage in, including consent for disclosure in certain circumstances. Further, there are also certain aspects of reports that are under investigation, and therefore, one has to be careful as to those matters. So whilst the Government will, of course, engage in disclosure as is advisable and is appropriate, I am just ensuring that my colleague does not give an undertaking because there is a committee of undertakings in this Parliament which he cannot discharge. So I am just drawing the caveat to that position. There is no attempt to obscure or to hide. It is just to act with priority lest we throw the baby out with the proverbial bathwater.

Madam Chairman: Member for Siparia, are you finished?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: On that, but I am still under page 198, 04—

Madam Chairman: 007/04? We are under 007.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I want to go to, I am sorry, to 009 unless there is something else under 007.

Madam Chairman: No, no. just one minute. I see the Member for Naparima. Your hand was up under 007: Households?

Mr. Charles: I defer to the Member for Siparia. All I wanted to advise my learned friend, the Member for San Fernando West, was that we were requesting information—metadata on expenditures to private institutions, not personal information. So therefore I think—while his advice is appreciated, I think it is not relevant to the question asked.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General, I believe you wanted to clarify something.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Yes please. Madam Chair, I thank my friend for that clarification. I just wish to indicate that what I interjected in was what the hon. Minister of Health

gave by way of a statement which could not stand without caution. It is the undertaking that would be recorded from him that is actionable, and therefore, I had to intervene. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: 00—Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Can the Minister then give an undertaking if there are any confidential matters contained in the report whether or not it could be redacted and disclosed to the public?

Madam Chairman: Well, I do not think that that is necessary. I think that the overall statement of the Attorney General puts it into context that everything that is disclosed will be in accordance with all the overriding laws. Okay? So there is a general agreement for disclosure, but it will be conditioned by the other provisions. Okay?

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, then can the Minister give us an indication that we can have an answer regarding whether or not the report is disclosable within a couple of—tomorrow?

Madam Chairman: Excuse me, I am not hearing you.

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister then give an undertaking whether or not a deadline—if he can give a deadline for when he can give an answer whether the report is disclosable?

Madam Chairman: We usually say by the end of this exercise. That is what we usually say. Okay? Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, I can answer that squarely as no. These involve, in certain circumstances, writing to hundreds of people if necessary, obtaining consent, if necessary, after a perusal, et cetera. So that request cannot be there. I just want to point out that this is in direct collision to what Naparima has just said. Naparima has commendably asked for metadata. Metadata is generalized data

which there is no objectionable position to. Barataria/San Juan's position is entirely the opposite of that. So they are at odds with each other.

Madam Chairman: Can we move on? 009: Other Transfers. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam Chair. 01: Regional Health Authority, and on that same page 198 in the furthest right side column it tells us that this is for Emergency Ambulance Service and Others. So for the EAS, 66.- something million for the EAS. My question is: Who is responsible for accessing compliance with the standards for the EAS?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, under the Ministry of Health there is the National Ambulance Authority I believe, and they are responsible for that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And do they also do audits?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, we do audits. I think we have audits up to 2018.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The last one was?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We have audits up to 2018.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: '18? Fiscal or calendar?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Calendar.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What about '19?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We have audits up to 2018.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: 2018. Calendar 2018.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So we are in the process of doing the others now. Yes, '19.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What are the other metrics that you use to assess the efficiency of the EAS?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Turnaround time at the facilities, response time and so on.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So therefore, using those metrics, what is the Ministry's assessments of the EAS efficiency based on the metrics you have identified? I am sure they may not all—you just named turnaround time. How

many people were in there? How many people rescued while they are on the EAS?

Hon. Deyalsingh: By and large the ambulance service has improved significantly in the past five years.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And how do we measure that increase?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Turnaround times and response times.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So they have a faster turnaround time?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, they do.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Would you kindly let us know what is it? Was it a turnaround time five minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes, an hour?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, it used to be when we came in as a Government up to about two hours.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And now it is what, five minutes?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We reduced that down to about, in best case scenario, 15 minutes, sometimes half an hour, 45 minutes. So the ambulances are in and out much faster than before.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: You are welcome.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What was the staff complement of the EAS as at September 30, 2020?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I will have to get that from GMRTT.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And when we get that can we also assess whether that staff complement is sufficient to carry out the mandate of the EAS?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And if not, what plans there are to deal with any deficit there?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: How many ambulances are there on the fleet?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. We will have to get that for you. I am seeing here ambulance units 58, with a level basic 25 and level three— So we will get that for you. But I think it is up to about 75 right now.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And would you kindly advise—

Hon. Deyalsingh: And that is for Trinidad alone. Tobago has its separate system.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can we get those numbers in due course?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: These numbers, are they the optimum numbers required, that should be available for the situation we have?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I will have to get that for you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: If not, will you be required to purchase additional ambulances?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Well it is for GMRTT to purchase, not the Ministry of Health. But we will certainly work with them.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So you could kindly let us know? There was a report from one of our JSCs on the Local Authorities, Service Commissions, Statutory Authorities including the THA. It is the Thirteenth Report of the JSC on an enquiry to the efficiency and effectiveness of this ambulance service, the National Emergency Ambulance Service. It was recommended in that Thirteenth Report that the Ministry of Health work toward a development of a training programme for EMTs and paramedics for treating with mentally ill patients. In your response, ministerial response, the Ministry explained that this would be done. Can you give us a status of this initiative?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So that was done under the Emergency Medical Personnel Board. So we had to set up the board first and then the board will engage with the

training. So we have set up the board.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: But no training has taken place yet?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I cannot confirm, but I know GMRTT does their own training.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yeah, but you may want to please advise because we want to know that they are doing what needs to be done.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Correct.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is a way of accessing efficiency and standards. One more question under the same Item, Regional Health Authority. If we go to the far right, (viii) speaks about Legal Settlements, 2.9 million. Can you tell us what those may be?

Hon. Deyalsingh: The Attorney General—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Breakdown of those legal settlements.

Hon. Deyalsingh:—will elucidate there as he did in past Standing Finance Committees.

Mr. Al-Rawi: We would have to get the list for you. I regret I have not come with list of litigation. It is a quantum head so the Ministry would have to provide it to me and then I can perhaps assist.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay. So can we ask for a breakdown?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Sure.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mrs. Persad Bissessar SC: 2.9 million, what matters, what can kind matters, would this settlements by consent; were these settlements due to court orders and so? Can we please get that?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, just a slight correction.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly. It says 2.5 million and not 2.9.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am sorry then, 2.-something million. I apologize. The writing is very fine and with the mask it is frosting people who wear glasses. It is difficult, I apologize, Member. I am done with that particular Item.

Madam Chairman: All right. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I just wanted, and Madam Chair, through you, I just wanted to take Items 02, 03, 04 and 05 because there is a common question with regard to all of the RHAs. Minister, this budget document will indicate that in 2020 almost \$4 billion was expended by the RHAs and close to 4 billion again will be expended this year, and the question really I would want to ask whether you would be in a position to provide for 2020 the details of the expenditure, you know, with regard to perhaps breaking it down to the Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services, and the development projects that would have taken place in the RHAs because there is no other document that allows us the opportunity to examine the details of the RHA expenditure. So if I can ask for that for all of the four RHAs; and if I can also ask for a programme of work with regard to the 2021 expenditure for each of the RHA—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë:—and whether the RHAs, whether there is still that arrangement in terms of the annual service agreements that would have been the agreement between the Ministry and the RHAs in terms of providing services, whether that is still in place, Minister?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So I can give you some information now because you are asking a general sense. Right?

Dr. Bodoë: Yes.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So this was used for like salaries, trade payables. They were also used now for the COVID expenditures. So this is where some of the COVID

expenditures would have come in, for HR consumables, infrastructure and equipment across the four RHAs.

Dr. Bodoë: Great. So would you give us a detailed breakdown in writing then for the 2020 expenditure?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. So I can tell you offhand ERHA spent 9.5 million on COVID; North-Central spent the bulk, 56.9; South-West, 26.5; North-West, 9.2. So the total COVID response under these heads came up to 102.2 million.

Dr. Bodoë: For the COVID-19 expenditure?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, under these four Heads.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. Minister, I just want to throw out something, perhaps for this Committee to consider, and the Parliament, because again this is a recurrent thing. We have 4 billion which is the majority of the expenditure of the Ministry of Health and yet we do not have an opportunity to examine the details of expenditure either in the previous year or going forward, and I just wanted to suggest, through you, Madam Chair, whether we can consider bringing the RHA accounts into the yellow books as we do for other statutory authorities, whether that is possible or feasible, Minister of Health, and something we can look at.

Hon. Deyalsingh: That would be a decision that could be taken by the Ministry of Finance.

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I do not know how feasible it is.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay. Sure. I just wanted to also throw out another suggestion, because you know there is the whole question of whether the public receives value for money, this big expenditure on the RHAs and so on, and whether— Now I know the RHAs are bound by the—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, hold on. What line Item are we dealing with now because

I think we are going down a rabbit hole now? Could you ask a question on a line Item—

Dr. Bodoë: Okay, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Hon. Deyalsingh:—instead of general accounting principles?

Dr. Bodoë: I was just throwing out a suggestion, Minister. But anyway—

Madam Chairman: One minute please. The Member could also make a statement—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay.

Hon. Member: Orr-hor.

Madam Chairman:—because it is a discussion. It is not necessarily a question. So he may have a general observation.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair, but I will tie it to 04, 05, the four RHAs—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Right.

Dr. Bodoë:—and just to suggest that perhaps the RHAs can be mandated to provide—while we take the time to decide if they will come before the yellow books—to provide an annual report with the deliverables, and so on so, the public can review and see their performances for each of the RHAs. It is just a suggestion.

Hon. Deyalsingh: I take that under advisement.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, if I can, under 04: NCRHA, if we look at the explanation there. Now the estimate of 1.1 billion for 2021, I see that includes in the explanation column operating cost for the Arima Hospital, of 200 million. Would you care to provide some details there, Minister? In particular whether new staff—this will include the engagement of new staff.

3.00 p.m.

I understand the current arrangement is staff from the Eric Williams Medical

Sciences Complex is being seconded, so my question: Would that include provision for new and separate staff for Arima Hospital?

Hon. Deyalsingh: And the answer is yes. Well, it will be both new staff and some staff came from Eric Williams.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah. Can you indicate the number of new staff you expect—

Hon. Deyalsingh: For Arima alone?

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah.

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, I would not have that figure off the top of my—

Dr. Bodoë: Could you provide that in writing with regard to the category of staff?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah.

Dr. Bodoë: And, Madam Chair, if I may, with regard to 05, the operating cost for the Point Fortin Hospital, I want to ask the same question, whether that would include new staff and if so, can you give us a list?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So it would be a combination again because some staff from the old Point Fortin Area Hospital would have moved across but remember that was a 39-bed facility, Point Fortin is 100 beds, so it will be a combination of new staff and new hires.

Dr. Bodoë: Yes. I would be particularly interested in the number of new staff, Madam Chair.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë: And just before I leave 05, the operating cost of the New Horizon Facility, Minister, I just want to confirm that this is the facility in Piparo that has come under the watch of the SWRHA.

Hon. Deyalsingh: That is correct. That is a part of our mental health decentralization policy.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah, and there have been some issues raised with regard to the

efficiency of the operation of that facility, Minister, and I just wanted in view of the expenditure of 13.3 million, whether you can give us an assurance, perhaps provide the number of patients that you expect to be treated there, 2021.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So the current number of patients there is 31.

Dr. Bodoë: Right. And would you be in a position to give us the assurance that whatever issues that are there currently will be addressed with this \$13.3 million going forward?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I will certainly pass it on to the CEO of South West RHA for him to look at. Thank you.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I am still at 01, which is the same Sub-Head, RHA. I noticed we have moved from 139 million to 94 million under this Head which includes some very critical services: the Emergency Ambulance Services, et cetera. Can you indicate what services we are now spending less on compared to 2019 figures?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So we will not necessarily be spending less, if we need more funding, we will certainly come back in the mid-year review to bolster funding under this Head. So no services will be cut, no services will be decreased.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West, are you complete?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, under line Item 03: Eastern Regional Health Authority, just for clarity, \$439 million, this is the funding that goes for the entire operation of the health authority, manpower,

equipment, maintenance, janitorial, everything.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So what has happened here, remember vacant posts have come out so a significant amount would have come out for that but this is to cover those operating costs.

Mr. Paray: So, I am aware that there are a couple of services that are having some challenges in that region: neurology services, stenography services. I have heard that some of the employees are having some challenges getting enough masks and so on, especially those in the high-traffic areas. Can the Minister say whether if he is aware of this and if he is not, can you give the assurance that you can look into it, taking note of the \$20 million reduction in allocation that is going to the ERHA?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So I continue to be dismayed by the narrative that there are insufficient masks in the health care service. With the advent of COVID, as I have said publicly several times, we reviewed the protocol and we are giving the appropriate PPE based on health care workers' exposure. So those on the front line, especially those engaged in procedures that involve intubation which produces aerosols, they get the highest level of PPE.

Let me say it again, because it is a very unfortunate narrative. There is no shortage of PPE from the start of COVID to now. We have simply made PPE available at the correct level to the correct person at the correct time. Prior to COVID, it was not like that. Okay? That is a very unfortunate narrative that you guys keep pushing and it does not help. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Paray: So first of all, Minister—

Madam Chairman: All right.

Mr. Paray: Madam Chair, if I could just ask a follow-up?

Madam Chairman: There is no Standing Order there please. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Yes, thank you. Minister, I am just simply reiterating what staff of the

organization has told me as a Member of Parliament as their representative. I understand that the allocation should be—a change out of a face mask every four hours, I understand that they are asked to keep the mask for the entire shift. I was just asking based on that information that I have if that is something that should be addressed or can be addressed if it is not being addressed.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So I will repeat, at the start of the COVID pandemic, we made the appropriate PPE available to the level of staff engaged in procedures based on their risk of exposure. There has never been from then to now any shortage of PPE for health care workers.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Just to be 100 per cent clear here, I am on page 199, Other Transfers under 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies and I am at No. 19. Minister, you are asking us to approve moneys on interest payments for a loan of \$101 million for Re-Development of the Central Block at Port of Spain. Could you just indicate to us before we give you this approval as to the status of construction and whether or not a construction contract has been signed and agreed to?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So a contract for construction was signed with Shanghai, the same contractors who built the Couva Hospital. I paid a site visit about three weeks ago. You want the status of construction, all the piles have been laid 100 per cent, the excavation has started and the next phase is to pour concrete. The project, as of now, is on time and on schedule.

Dr. Moonilal: And just a follow-up, Minister, when is the completion date for this project?

Hon. Deyalsingh: This is going to be in 2022, sometime in 2022. I cannot give you an exact month at this point in time. All things being equal, 2022.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Five hundred and forty beds.

Dr. Moonilal: But not a block laid so far, okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East, you finished? All right.
Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. At Item 01: Regional Health Authority, in the explanation column I am seeing that there are vacant posts in the sum of \$23 million. Can the Minister give us a breakdown of how many vacant positions there are throughout the various RHAs?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah, so we will provide that to you, Member.

Mr. Hosein: In writing?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Also, just clarification, Minister, the question that the Member for Oropouche East just raised with respect to the interest payment of a loan of 101.9 million, I am seeing also at page 200, I do not know if we are there as yet, Madam Chair, Transfers to State Enterprises.

Madam Chairman: We are still on page 200. Are you still under 009? If you are under 009, it does not matter the page.

Mr. Hosein: I will have to wait until 011, yeah, because it relates to. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay, good. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My colleague from Barataria/San Juan raised the particular issue of the number of vacant posts in the Regional Health Authorities, but I want to ask the Minister under 04: North Central Regional Health Authority. Mr. Minister, in terms of your staff complement there, you have a director of health that is acting?

Hon. Deyalsingh: At?

Mr. Indarsingh: The North Central Regional Health Authority.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So the RHA is responsible for health care delivery. I would not know every single position acting or permanent in each RHA. If you want that information, we can provide it for you.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, and I would like to know whether you can provide this meeting with the information with whether your longstanding director of health was recently demoted and replaced by another candidate.

Madam Chairman: All right, so I would not allow that in this type of exercise that you are undertaking. Okay? Do you have any other questions, Member for Couva South?

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, Madam Chair, while I may not agree—

Madam Chairman: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am back to page 198, still looking at Transfers and Subsidies and dealing with Regional Health Authority, that is 01, under Other Transfers. My colleague from St. Augustine asked the question about the decrease here, decreased allocation and the Minister's response was if we need more, we will come back to the mid-term review, but the question I think bypasses the fact that in 2020—so this is not a question of coming back, this has gone. In 2020, there was an allocation and then the Revised Estimates, it is less than that. So what was foregone? What expenditure was foregone to allow for that revised lower estimate for 2020?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah, so we will have to check on that and get back to you, Member.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sure. Madam, I have some other questions on this same, can I continue?

Madam Chairman: You can ask.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: All right. I am looking now at the RHAs and if I may with your leave, there is one question that can be asked about each of the RHAs so 02, 03, 04. Is that okay?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. Oh, sorry.

Madam Chairman: The question you said is with the RHAs?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes.

Madam Chairman: So you are under 01 or you are under all of—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: 02, 03, 04, 05; a blanket question. And this ties back with the suggestion or an issue raised by my colleague from Fyzabad. Because we are dealing with these RHAs which are created by statute and one would have seen their estimates done in a breakdown, we are given the blanket allocations and we do not have a breakdown of what the moneys will be spent for. And therefore, the question I can ask now is: What would be the priority spending for each of these RHAs, the four RHAs? You may not be able to give it right away because we just have a blanket total figure but there is no breakdown on how it is going to be spent, Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So these will fall under recurrent expenditure: staffing, utilities, electricity and so on.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, they will come under the normal Sub-Heads.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Under recurrent, yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yeah, but can we have a breakdown, I am asking please, of how much will be for Personnel, how much would be Goods and Services, how much would be Transfers and Subsidies and the other Items that come under recurrent for each of these RHAs.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So I can tell you for North-West RHA, salaries was \$887,783,085; for Eastern RHA, \$442,706,156.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Is this a “was” or is this estimated forward? This is a “was”, I heard you say the word “was”.

Hon. Deyalsingh: That was the actual expenditure so we can provide that to you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is the revised expenditure for fiscal—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Actual, actual for 2020.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Actual for 2020, sure, and going forward for 2021, the estimates.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So we could provide that for you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Minister. There is a decrease in the allocation to the North-West RHAs in the allocation there by over \$10 million, Minister. What aspects of the work may be impacted with that initial? You say you will come back in mid-term anytime you need more.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Correct. So no work will be adversely affected, we will come back in the mid-year review.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And of course, Minister, you know when you come back in the mid-term, you are not going to get everything that you ask for, so that between now and mid-term, what Items will be foregone, expenditure foregone, would you be able to say, between now and getting some increase in the mid-term?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Nothing will be foregone, no services to patients will be foregone. What we are doing in the RHAs is becoming much more efficient and I gave the examples of doing more inside than farming out outside and the RHAs have been doing more inside, for example, cataract surgeries instead of farming it out, so what we are doing is driving efficiencies across the board.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: You are welcome.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: During last year’s SFC 2019, Minister, you

recognized the need to emphasize wellness in addition to health care. I am asking what elements of the North-West RHA's expenditure in fiscal 2021 would help to further this commitment that you made towards wellness?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So we did significant work with mental health wellness, we did significant work with cancer screening wellness and the whole NCD programme because that is the biggest challenge facing Trinidad and Tobago right now, NCDs.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And as we go forward in 2021, what are the aspects of wellness that this—

Hon. Deyalsingh: We continue that under the NCD programme.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: NCDs.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, non-communicable diseases: diabetes, hypertension, cancers and so on.

3.15 p.m.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Minister. The North West RHA has oversight of St. Ann's.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Director of this hospital has explained that more should be done to establish mental health clinics catering to men.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: This call was made in the context of T&T having the third highest suicide rate in the Americas; third highest suicide rate in the Americas, and the rate of suicide for men across all age groups is significantly higher than for women.

Minister, you explained in October 2019, that mental health has been an area of focus for the Ministry in recent years. So the questions are following on this

narrative. How will specific Items of expenditure linked to mental health initiatives at St. Ann's be strengthened in fiscal 2020, especially given now there is a decrease in the allocations to North West?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, it is being driven by a policy position at the Ministry of Health. It started when I took a Note to the Cabinet to create the position of a National Director of Mental Health with the objective of the decentralization of mental health away from St. Ann's.

St. Ann's was seen as the Holy Grail of mental health in Trinidad and Tobago, which focused on the long-term commitment of mentally-ill patients in St. Ann's, for up to 30 and 40 years. We have started to move away from that model to put mental health wellness back into a more community-based setting. Hence, New Horizon which we spoke about earlier where we have 31 persons closer to their families. That model has shown to be the gold standard around the world.

We opened the new Diego Martin Health Centre. The old health centre now is to be converted to a mental health wellness centre. So both men, women, family, children can get mental health services closer to their communities. So we have fulfilled the policy mandate. Now we are in the implementation phase.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: When did we complete the policy?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: When did we complete or finalize the policy framework?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Once Cabinet approved the position—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So we have not yet finalized the framework?

Hon. Deyalsingh: The policy position to decentralize has begun.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Has begun or will?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, so we have 31 in New Horizon.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sure, so I am asking when was the policy framework finalized?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Oh, early 2020? Early 2020, or before that. I cannot give you the exact date.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, about.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah, late 2019, maybe 2020.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Last year? Early 2020, about; thereabouts.

Will there be any, given suicide rates that I mentioned being higher for men, Minister, will there be any new development projects considered to establish mental health clinics for men, more health and wellness, if there are any at all, to give more emphasis?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I will have to get the director. I will have to get that person to speak to that. I could get that information for you. But we have also started school outreaches, because we have to start with the children. And under North West we have started a series of interventions in schools already.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Do these schools have children in them or are we doing it online?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, we started it last year and the year before.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So it cannot happen now.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Unless you go into online as well, which you may want to consider if it is so important.

With the Eastern Regional Health Authority, my questions are as follows: Repeat what I said for two, three four, the spending priority. So leave that alone.

There is a 4.4 per cent decrease in the allocation for fiscal 2021. How will the work of this Eastern Regional Health Authority be affected by that decrease?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Through increased efficiency and if we need extra funding we come back in the mid-year review.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You come back in the mid-term. What happens in the meantime? I keep asking this question.

Hon. Deyalsingh: This is more than enough to see us through until March/April.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Last year Minister, during the SFC October 2019, Minister, you recognized the need again to emphasize wellness. What elements of the Eastern Regional Health Authority expenditure in fiscal 2021 will help you with your—this commitment for this specific—

Hon. Deyalsingh: So again, we started wellness programmes in the domain of non-communicable diseases, diabetes, hypertension, cancer screening.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: This is through the Eastern RHA?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We are doing it across the board but you asked about Eastern.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yeah.

Hon. Deyalsingh: We do community outreaches.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Through the Eastern.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am asking for each authority.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah, because in Eastern, remember they have the far-flung villages—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Um hmm.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:—like Matelot and so on, Grande Riviere, so they actually go out into those far-flung communities.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Could you give me an example of when they go out? What exactly takes place?

Hon. Deyalsingh: They do typical screening.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And then, who is the “they”?

Hon. Deyalsingh: The doctors and nurses at the RHAs, they send out teams to do typical health screenings, body mass index, diabetes screening, hypertension screening, and so on.

We totally refurbished the Toco Health Centre to put in for the first time a dental suite. So they get dental services now for the—well, in a much more modern environment than before.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So you have a kind of community outreach and the doctors, nurses, et cetera, they go out in the communities. How do they meet people? You tell people come to a venue, at a date, time and place?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Again, the ERHA has its outreach activities, miking, flyers, whatever.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, you said they go in and do testing, and so on.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, so when the people—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is physical.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Al-Rawi: How they are reached.

Hon. Deyalsingh: How they are reached? They are informed via promotions.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: When was the last such activity?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Again, the ERHA, I would not have details as to the dates, when each RHA does what they do.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You see Minister, can we get it because you may tell us “we are doing this, and we are doing that and we are doing that”.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: When? And given what is happening with the COVID restrictions—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Um hmm.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Is it that the doctors and nurses go out, they call people and you said miking or whatever. They are invited to come to a venue. Maybe those restrictions will put a blanket on that as well, and then what will be the alternatives. The Ministry may consider the RHAs, and this will go for all of them, that they may consider to continue the outreach programmes.

Hon. Deyalsingh: And the outreach programmes continue unabated at the health centres, Toco, Cumana, and so on.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is one. But you told me there is another, which is the community outreach, especially for far-flung rural communities.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Would you be kind enough to tell us?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So they do work in community centres and so on.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Would you be kind enough to tell us when last there was that kind of outreach?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Well, I would not have that detail here. So I can get that for you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you so much, Minister, and I will rest on those for the moment. But the questions are common to all the RHAs, Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So I kindly await the responses from your Ministry. Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I just want to draw your attention to line Item 09, which is with regard to the School Health Programme, 09, Audio test, hearing aid service and eyeglasses. Of course we all would agree, this House,

that the vision and hearing of the school children is extremely important. So I have two concerns. One is that in 2020, we only spent \$258,405. Although I see the allocation has been increased back to 500,000. But my questions really would be: How are these schools selected? How do you go about targeting the students? Are you in a position to indicate how many students have been targeted, for example, for 2021?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So for 2020, hearing tests were done on 8,727 students. Of those, 225 were referred to DRETCHI for further examination. Vision testing, 16,654, of that, 1,904 students were referred for further vision testing. So those are the figures that I have.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure, and while that is commendable, Minister, my question really is: How do you select the schools? What is the process for determining which schools you go to test? Because that might just represent the tip of the iceberg, Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. So I know there is a schedule that is applied across the country, but again, I would not have the actual minute details.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure.

Hon. Deyalsingh: That is done countrywide.

Dr. Bodoë: And I just wanted to ask, because in my own constituency sometimes you would have non-profit organizations who would partner and come and do testing and provide eye glasses, and so on. Has the Ministry considered that option? Or do these NGOs engage the Ministry to assist in the provision of these services?

Hon. Deyalsingh: It is something to be considered.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay, I just wanted to throw that out.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: At page 199, Item 06: Children's Life Fund Authority. And I see 2.4 million estimated. And the Revised Estimate, 2.4; again 2.4. Could the Minister provide/indicate the number of applications to the Fund last year or any year?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So this line Item is not to pay for actual procedures. This is to cover the operating cost of the CLF. Right? So you could ask that question under a different line Item. This one is just to cover the stipends paid to board members and operating costs. But I could get that information for you, the actual number of applicants.

Mr. Charles: Right, and the numbers rejected.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mr. Charles: Good, thanks.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a follow-up question for the Minister with regard to the PPE.

Hon. Deyalsingh: What line Item?

Dr. Seecheran: That would be under line Items 02, 03, 04 and 05.

Madam Chairman: That is 199 and 198.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Right.

Dr. Seecheran: For the Regional Health Authorities. Right, Minister, is there a committee to assess the effectiveness and the quality of PPE being used in the public health sector? Because, as you remember during my budget contribution I said 70 per cent of the PPE in China, when tested by the American authorities, were found to be ineffective. What percentage of PPE currently being used in our public health sector, is from China?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I would not have that percentage. But we do have, as you know

the Infection Prevention Control Committees at all the RHAs.

Mr. Imbert: What line Item is that may I ask?

Dr. Seecheran: It would be under all the Regional Health Authorities, 02

Mr. Imbert: All the RHAs? Come on, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Member, if you would recall as far as the RHAs, they are given a block sum and there was some discussion earlier that these are operating expenses used for various things. So, I have allowed it. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Yes, because I definitely know in one health centre the masks being used are from a Chinese company and when I assessed the box, it made no mention to the effectiveness, the filtration properties of the mask. It just seemed to be a very generic mask and these are what the health care workers are using to test COVID positive patients. So what I am asking is what percentage of PPE similar to this is currently in our system?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, so a couple of things. We do not knowingly treat COVID positive patients in a health centre.

Dr. Seecheran: We have to assume everyone is COVID positive, Sir.

Hon. Deyalsingh: That is different to what you just said. That is why I say there is a particular narrative being spun around COVID and you all are steering—

Dr. Seecheran: In a health situation you should assume everyone is COVID positive.

Hon. Deyalsingh: We know that and that is why we all wear masks. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Members, remember we go back to the basic rule of tolerance. We can only hear the person who has been granted audience. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: So my question is: What percentage of the PPE currently being used in our public health sector is currently from China. Because the ads that the

Ministry of Health put out when the persons are donning their PPE is 3M and the US currently does not export PPE anymore. So what PPE are we using?

Hon. Deyalsingh: That is not true. We got PPE from the United States up to last week, including 3M masks. Why do you all push this narrative?

Dr. Seecheran: Well, I cannot get it as a dentist.

Hon. Deyalsingh: That is different. You are in the private sector. In the public sector we get PPE from the United States on a regular basis. Do not confuse a dentist in the private sector.

Madam Chairman: Just one minute, Minister of Health. If we do not listen, we run the risk of somebody asking the same question in the next five minutes.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Let me be pellucidly clear. The public health sector receives PPE, including 3M, N95 masks from the United States on a regular basis. Your shortage has to deal with a dental application in the private sector. Do not confuse the two, because you are pushing a false narrative.

3.30 p.m.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, my question is: Could you give the House a percentage of the amount of PPE currently being used in the public health sector from China?

Hon. Deyalsingh: And as I have indicated that is something I will have to get for you [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] but I just want to put on record your assertion that we are not getting PPE—

Dr. Seecheran: Well, I am a health care worker and I am not getting PPE from the US.

Hon. Deyalsingh:—premium medical supplies from the United States for the public health sector is totally false. You may not be getting for the private sector to use in your dental practice. That is totally different.

Hon. Member: China, China, answer that question.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East, are you finished with your question?

Dr. Seecheran: Yeah, but he did not answer.

Hon Member: “He can’t, he can’t.”

Hon. Deyalsingh: Which part did I not answer?

Dr. Seecheran: Could you give us a percentage on either the—

Hon. Deyalsingh: And I said I will get it. I said I do not have it here with me now.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Thank you, Sir.

Madam Chairman: And you see, this is the difficulty we would encounter if Members continue to crosstalk, okay. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, Line Item 06 the Children’s Life Fund and the Minister indicated that this has to do with the administration of the CLF. Hon. Minister, with respect to this particular line Item, I have a few questions.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Mr. Padarath: The first one being, is that whether or not you would be able to provide us with an organizational structure of the Children’s Life Fund in terms of the administrative part of it, one? Secondly, how many members of staff and their relevant positions in the Children’s Life Fund as it relates to the administration of it?

Minister, I had the opportunity to visit the Children’s Life Fund a few months ago on behalf of the Member for Siparia for an applicant. And at that time when I went there was an OJT pretty much that was running the Children’s Life Fund in terms of the administration. And that is why I ask these questions. At that time I visited, it could have been that the others were on lunch or on a break, but it is in that context that we are asking in terms of whether or not there is proper

staffing and proper organizational structure with respect to the Children's Life Fund?

And the second question is really with respect to the Life Fund, and whether or not Government or the board itself has engaged in a reviewing of the policy as it relates to the conditions that would qualify for one to be successful in terms of accessing the life fund? I know that there have been many persons applying with the conditions of beta thalassemia and other serious conditions, whether or not at a policy position the board whether they have recommended for a review of the Children's Life Fund Act? Or whether Government is considering it?

Madam Chairman: So, Minister, and Member for Princes Town, I will allow the first two questions with respect to the structure—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Madam Chairman:—and the staff and positions. The one with respect to policy—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Madam Chairman:—I would not allow it under Operating Cost.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So we will provide the organizational structure and the staff complement for you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I want to ask a question regarding the NWRHA and in particular the St. Ann's Hospital. Now, there are reports that there are water shortages at that hospital. Can the Minister—

Hon. Deyalsingh: There are what, sorry?

Mr. Hosein:—water shortages, can the Minister confirm whether or not that has been rectified? And secondly, whether or not that facility is housing COVID-19 patients?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, so I said clearly that we have a ward set aside at St. Ann's for COVID positive patients who have mental health challenges. So the answer is yes, they are separate from the rest of the population. And for the water issues, I will have the check with the CEO, they are in charge of that but I will find out for you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I am on line Item 10: Interest Payment on \$500 million Fixed Rate Bullet Loan through Republic Bank Limited. I note that there was an estimate of \$27.958 million in 2020 but no money has been spent in 2020 based on the Revised Estimate, and there is no budget for it in 2021. So my question is whether, what is the state of this interest payment and whether it is one of those multiple items that seems to be promised—excluded sorry—from the estimates this year, with the Minister's intention to bring it into the mid-year review.

Hon. Deyalsingh: From what I understand the loan has been fully repaid.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, the school health programme with audio testing, hearing aid service and eyeglasses, how were you able to deal with the children being home since March? Because a lot of the parents do not want to go to the health centre? And those children with hearing or visual difficulties, how did the Ministry of Health deal with that issue? I know it would have been very trying?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We will have to look at that to see what alternate arrangements can be made.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, Madam Chair, to the Minister. Minister, this morning one of the newspapers reported 30 nurses at the North West—

Hon. Deyalsingh: What line Item are we on?

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry, in relation to 02: North West Regional Health Authority.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Umm hmm.

Dr. Bodoë: Yes, so there was a newspaper report of 30 nurses testing positive for COVID. Nothing dramatic but of course the fact that they have to quarantine for 14 days.

Hon. Deyalsingh: If positive.

Dr. Bodoë: And the concerns there—no they were tested positive.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Right.

Dr. Bodoë: And the concerns expressed by the TTRNA of the additional stress on nurses and so on, and the concern as to whether—

Hon. Deyalsingh: How is that coming here? Okay.

Dr. Bodoë:—and the concerns expressed by the TTRNA, Minister, as to whether there is adequate rotation of nurses to allow them sufficient time to protect their mental health and so on. Would you be in a position to perhaps explain what the arrangements are currently?

Madam Chairman: All right, so I will not allow that—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Madam Chairman:—under this Item. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Hon. Minister indicated in response to my colleague from Caroni East, private medical care personnel will not be able to access certain kinds of PPE. My question is this: What about when persons go to private

institutions which you are now allowing to happen to be tested, will those private institutions be allowed to access these special kind of—the masks that you were speaking about?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, we do not supply PPE to the private sector. We supply PPE to the public.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: To the public, you made that very clear. But if it is people are advised they can go for testing at private institutions, would you not think that it would be prudent that they also have access? Not necessarily free, but they also have access to purchase the proper types of masks?

Hon. Deyalsingh: How does that come—Madam Chair, may I seek your guidance please?

Madam Chairman: Sure. [*Crosstalk*] Just one minute. I think the point has been made very clear what we are examining here is the expenditure on public institutions. Maybe, Member for Siparia, if your question were asked in a different way I may have allowed it, okay? But, you are asking about private institutions, which “doh mind” it may be advertised that you can go to a private institution. It still remains a private institution. So I would not allow the question.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, Minister, if I may—

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town. Sorry, I will come back to you. Member for Princes Town. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Chair, you have indicated that a statement can be made in addition to questions?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So therefore, I would like to make this statement on that issue. That I think that it will be very prudent and in fact highly recommended that private medical institutions and private medical personnel be allowed in some

way to access it, not necessarily free but they should be able to purchase it and have it for use, because they are still taking care of the health of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in their respective jobs. [*Desk thumping*] And my second question is related to the issue of flu vaccines.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Under which line Item?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Under the South West Regional Health Authority. There are 31 health centres in the South West Regional Health Authority and they will be administering flu vaccines and my question will be: What is the anticipated expenditure related to administering the flu vaccine in 2021?

Madam Chairman: Would this not come under something else because this is the operating cost. I believe another Item, the cost of jobs and so on was discussed earlier that had gone.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister, there is no breakdown with respect to any of the health authorities.

Madam Chairman: No, no, no, no. What is clear here is this is the operating cost. When we had done a little earlier jobs and something like that. I cannot remember the exact Item—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Correct.

Madam Chairman:—it was quite clear that the discussion then was about things like vaccines and so on. So I would not allow it under this Operation Cost. I think that item has already—page 194, Item 004: 39. Okay, so—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Respectfully, I am guided, Madam, but I am asking for the specific amount of money to administer these flu vaccines? I am not asking about the jobs.

Madam Chairman: And that is what I am saying, Member for Siparia, unfortunately, I think the opportunity to have asked that—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: On the jobs?

Madam Chairman:—has already passed, unfortunately. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am guided, Madam, with the greatest—

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Excuse me, excuse me, Members. I am having grave difficulty in hearing the Member for Barataria/San Juan. And Member for Barataria/San Juan, might I suggest I know the mask, I have the same problem too, maybe we should try and speak a little more direct. Thanks.

Mr. Hosein: Sure, can you hear me now? Now, I am looking at Item 02, 03, 04 and 05, can the Minister indicate what is the cost for the tents that are being used at these RHAs for the COVID period, and the suppliers of the tents?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, that I will have to get for you because that will be covered under infrastructure, but I would not have the cost of each tent. But what I told the RHAs, which they have done is to stop renting tents and purchase their own tents, and most of them have complied.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam, I would like to go back to line Item 06 just to seek clarification from the hon. Minister. With respect to the Children's Life Fund, Minister I am looking through the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* as well as—

Madam Chairman: Wait, wait, wait, you are not on the Development Programme.

Mr. Padarath: I know, but I also looked at recurrent estimates as well and just for

clarification, I looked at the IDF as well, and I am not seeing a particular line Item that you referred to when we raised the issue of the Children's Life Fund. Is it that the funds allocated to that, the disbursements in terms of how much is allocated for the actual surgeries, whether that has been lumped with the RHAs?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Madam Chair, may I seek our guidance on what line Item the hon. Member—

Mr. Padarath: Line Item 06, hon. Minister, I am just seeking your clarification on that.

Madam Chairman: One minute, I think Member, Member for Princes Town, you are on 06?

Mr. Padarath: Yes Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Which is on page 199 right?

Mr. Padarath: Yes.

Madam Chairman: And the question you are asking is what? With respect to the number—

Mr. Padarath: I am just seeking clarification from the hon. Minister if he can point us to because he indicated to that we should wait for further down road to ask about the Children's Life Fund but I am looking and I am not seeing it. And therefore I am asking the hon. Minister whether he can clarify as to whether it has been lumped with the RHAs or if he can point us to where is the particular line Item?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, Madam Chair, I will repeat 06: Children Life Authority is to cover the general operating cost of the Children's Life Fund and stipends to board members. I said so at least twice.

Mr. Padarath: And Madam, we are not disputing that. What I am asking the Minister to clarify is that he indicated that we can ask about the Children's Life

Fund in terms of their disbursements further down to road. But when we look into the actual estimates—

Hon. Deyalsingh: And if and when we reach there we will answer it.

Mr. Padarath:—there is no other line Item to ask under.

Madam Chairman: And all I am saying is, under this particular Item, I do not know that the Minister can be compelled to tell you where next to, okay? And I think you have asked and the Minister has answered.

Item 01: Other Transfers Abroad, page 200. Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, pages 200 to 201, Sub-Head 06 Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Hon. Members, you will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. Item 004: Statutory Boards, this is at page 201. Okay, are we there? It is a different book.

3.45 p.m.

And we are at 14, Princess Elizabeth Home for Handicapped Children, Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditures, page 181 Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 02: Goods 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 for Development Programme*; new book. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme Consolidated Fund; this is at page 69. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Hon. Members, Item 004 spans three pages and therefore I will announce the project groups. E: Special Education, which is at page 69. A: Hospitals, which is at page 70. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the Minister, with regard to 001, are we under Hospitals? We can take that?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: The medical equipment upgrade programme, I see there is a decrease, proposed decrease of 5 million. Minister, can you indicate how this programme will be affected by that decrease?

Hon. Deyalsingh: It will not be significantly affected because we did a lot of work in 2020 at NWRHA. Four triple scrub sinks for the main operating theatre at \$851,010. Ten sewerage pumps for the neonatal ICU. It goes on: ERHA, we did significant work, one phaco machine to do cataract surgeries there. Point-of-Care Testing for Toco/Mayaro. South-west, we bought 20 new patient trolleys. NCRHA, we did significant work on our 2021 projects. Digital X-ray machines. Twenty patient trolleys for Port of Spain. For Sangre Grande, infant incubators for the NICU. They never had a NICU, they have one now. Five cardiac monitors. Two ultrasound machines. For San Fernando, electrosurgical generators, multi-gas monitors, 13 new anesthetic machines and it goes on and on. And so there will be no significant—

Dr. Bodoë: Madam Chair, Minister, there has been concern recently about the availability of the CRRT machines for patients who require dialysis who are in the ICU. As you may be aware, this is a portable machine that needs to be utilized. I understand that, two from Mount Hope have been sent to Couva to be used, but I understand an order has been placed for new machines.

Hon. Deyalsingh: We have ordered five more. I gave instructions about a month or two months ago to order five more.

Dr. Bodoë: So my question is, Minister, how soon do you anticipate this will be?

Hon. Deyalsingh: As soon as humanly possible. This country was underserved by CRRT machines and we gave the order to order five more.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay, thank you Minister. Minister, the other question would be in terms—there has been the issue in the public domain of the breakdown of CT machines and the unavailability of CT machines and so on. Can you say how many CT scanners are currently in use across the public health sector?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So San Fernando, you have two; Port of Spain, you have a one. One is being installed at St. James, so they will have two under north-west. North Central, you have one, and we installed one at Sangre Grande about two years ago.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, could you, in this light, can you say what continuity plans are in place to ensure uninterrupted access to CT scan services?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So we have engaged—we have advised the RHAs to engage the agents for the machines, to have, after the extended warranty period, to have a programme of preventative maintenance. But we are also looking—and this is the problem. To stock a tube in Trinidad as you know, you are a former chairman of a RHA, a tube has a sell by date, and the thing that goes more often is the tube. So the question is, do I bring a tube, spend X hundred thousand dollars, it lays here, it is never used, you know. So we are looking at some of these things now. Is it possible, now that we have more CT machines. But then it may go across different brands? Siemens, GE, whatever.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So we have to look at that.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah, so Minister, I understand that systems—that machines will break down, but my concern is that when this happens, is the arrangement where these services can be accessed by—[*Interruption*] Still in place.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, and that is still in place. And that is what made that particular—I know where you are going with this.

Dr. Bodoë: No, no, no generally.

Hon. Deyalsingh: But that has never been reversed.

Dr. Bodoë: And the CEOs are still empowered and authorized to make that arrangement?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Of course.

Dr. Bodoë: I just wanted to confirm that, Minister.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, with regard to the commissioning and decommissioning of the Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals, the allocation of 20 million—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Which line Item, Member?

Dr. Bodoë: That would be 003, under Hospitals.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, question?

Dr. Bodoë: Can you indicate what that expenditure will cover?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah, so this will cover— As you know, when you build a new hospital, you are going to have a defects liability period. And even when you commission you are going to have snagging. So this will incorporate, you know, repairing things that may go wrong under the defects liability period due to snagging.

Dr. Bodoë: Madam, do we continue under Other Services as well?

Madam Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. Bodoë: Okay.

Madam Chairman: And Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is just a follow-up query to a statement made by the Minister previously that the country, and I quote, “The country has been underserved by CRRT machines”, and that he had ordered a needed five, which he hopes will come relatively quickly. My question still is: When did you

discover that the country was underserved by these CRRT machines given that you have been Minister for five years?

Hon. Deyalsingh: When we had the issue of COVID, because COVID exacerbated the need for CRRT machines.

Mr. Tancoo: After five years. Thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh: It is plain and simple.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, we now go on to D: Other Services. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 007: Waiting List for Surgery, with 15 million has been allocated. Minister, again, from my constituents. I am hearing of extended waiting lists for particular types of surgeries. I had a friend who just went to the hospital yesterday and he was given a date sometime in March next year and he feels that when he goes March, they would slip it up to November. The question is: Do we have a target best practice waiting time across the RHAs in Trinidad and Tobago for specific types of surgeries? And I have a follow-up question afterwards.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So those will be clinical decisions made by the particular doctors whether a surgery is elective, emergency or otherwise.

Mr. Charles: So with respect to elective surgeries, are their benchmarks set by the Ministry of Health in terms of the time frames? So a cataract operation will take—you know the waiting time in South-West Regional Health will be three months. Do we have that kind of procedure?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes. So for cataract surgeries in particular, because this deals with cataracts, we made a decision back in 2016 to decrease our reliance on the private sector to do cataract surgeries; and let me give you the figures. In 2016, we farmed out to the private sector 971; 2017, we dropped it to 381; 2018, we dropped

it to 223; and 2019, we dropped it to 191, while at the same time increasing it significantly in the public sector. So that is why we were able to save a lot of money—

Mr. Charles: Yep.

Hon. Deyalsingh:—and move these facilities back to the public sector.

Mr. Charles: Minister, I am not asking you about—

Hon. Deyalsingh: [*Interruption*] We are trying as fast as humanly possible to keep the waiting list for cataract surgeries to at least about three months at this point in time.

Mr. Charles: Three months?

Hon. Deyalsingh: At this point in time, give or take. Because sometimes you give somebody an appointment, they come in, their pressure is high on that day. Their diabetes is out of control.

Mr. Charles: Right.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So there maybe patient factors why they may not get their surgery on a particular day.

Mr. Charles: So you are giving the assurance that the Ministry, which has overall responsibility for overlooking the health system in Trinidad and Tobago, has benchmarks for particular types of elective or other types of surgery?

Hon. Deyalsingh: In the case of cataracts, yes.

Mr. Charles: Could you could you make the time frames available for specific types of work? So when a constituent comes and he says that he has been put off last eight months, I could refer him to this document in terms of the expectations of the Ministry of Health.

Hon. Deyalsingh: We will try to facilitate you.

Mr. Charles: Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the learned Minister of Health: In June 2020—this is line Item, Consolidated Fund.

Hon. Deyalsingh: What?

Dr. Ragbir: 04/07/A. 001?

Hon. Deyalsingh: What? Sorry.

Dr. Ragbir: Medical equipment? This is page 70.

Madam Chairman: Yes. And you are aware?

Dr. Ragbir: 004/07/001, Consolidated Fund.

Hon. Deyalsingh: I am not see—

Madam Chairman: No. What we are at is Other Services at page 70. Are we in the same book?

Dr. Ragbir: Yes. At 28. Yep.

Madam Chairman: Okay, in the meantime, can I go on to Member for Fyzabad and I will come back to you? Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair, I just wanted to follow up on a question asked by my colleague for Naparima with regard to the waiting list for surgery. With regard to the 15 million that was spent in 2020 Minister, can you give us a list in writing by provider, the procedures performed and the cost per procedure?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë: Would you be in a position to provide that for us?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We will try to comply with that request.

Dr. Bodoë: And, Madam, if I may continue and refer to 002 the Special Programme - Treatment of Adult Cardiac Disease, and to note that we would have spent \$18 million, just over \$18 million in 2020—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë:—and we are proposing to spend \$35 million in 2021. And my question is in regard to that expenditure, Minister, would be, can you list the providers of these services in 2020? Can you indicate how much of this increased allocation of 35 million in 2021 would be for outstanding bills? And how many patients are on the waiting list for this programme by procedure? So for example, angiogram—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë:—stenting, open heart surgery and so on?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, sure.

Dr. Bodoë: Can you also give us an idea of the list the target for 2021? Again, would be by procedure?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure. So, 1,233 patients received cardiac procedures for the period October 2019 to September 2020. That included 702 angiograms, which were done at the private institutions at a cost of \$4.2 million. Stenting, 132; coronary artery bypass grafting 336; other procedures, 63. The total bills paid, 16.6 million, outstanding \$22 million. This amount is going to be decreased significantly once I get the cath lab in San Fernando up and running in this fiscal, because, as I said, San Fernando needed a cath lab and we are going to do it in this fiscal year.

4.00 p.m.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure, Minister, and I am happy for that.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: If I could just engage you just for another minute on the cath lab at San Fernando, can you indicate to us exactly what is the status with regard to that cath lab?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Tenders are being evaluated now.

Dr. Bodoë: And you expect to start to break ground, how soon?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I cannot give you that. Tenders are being evaluated now.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. Just one more question, Minister. Now, we do have in-house facilities at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, am I correct in saying that there are two cath labs at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, we have a biplane and a single-plane.

Dr. Bodoë: Right. Can you confirm that one of those labs is actually operational?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I have, to the best of my knowledge, I could find out if they are operational, but I have no information as to their operationalization right now.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure.

Hon. Deyalsingh: I could find out.

Dr. Bodoë: I understand Minister. My other concern is that one of the labs is being refurbished and the contract has been awarded, work is ongoing, and that that facility was supposed to be delivered almost a year ago, and has not yet been delivered to the NCRHA. Are you in a position to say why?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I cannot say why right now.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. Just before I leave the open-heart surgery, Minister, would you be in a position to provide perhaps, in writing, the number of procedures of open-heart surgeries? Sorry, I retract. I think you answered that question.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes I did. That is okay.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So, Member for Fyzabad, I would allow you one last question. We could come back to you on another round. Yes?

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I would take the opportunity to address line-Item 003: The special programme with regard to renal dialysis.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: And I note the expenditure of 18 million in 2020, sorry, of 40 million in 2020 and an increased estimate for 100 million in 2021. So, my question there

Minister would be, first of all, for each supplier of the services—this is outsourcing services, right?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. We have 12 private suppliers.

Dr. Bodoë: Right. So I wanted to get the number of patients treated for each supplier. I wanted to get in writing the number of patients treated, the cycles performed because, of course, some patients will have multiple cycles.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Correct.

Dr. Bodoë: The complications, if that is looked at, at the Ministry—and there is a reason I asked that—and the cost that would have been paid to each supplier.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So we dialysed in—we have 1,283 patients on that list and we anticipate for 2021 that will go up to 1,359. The other information we will have to get for you.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. Would that explain the increased allocation of 60 million in 2021?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah, by and large.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah. I have more questions, but—

Madam Chairman: I would come back to you. You are under 001 in “A”.

Dr. Ragbir: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Is that where you are?

Dr. Ragbir: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Member, in June 2020 it was reported that patients at San Fernando General Hospital have been asked to pay for CT scans at private health facilities, henceforth, the SWRHA CEO was asked to investigate the matter. I am asking, what has been the status of such investigation?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I do not think that falls under this line Item, Madam Chair, I am guided by your ruling.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Okay. So I would not allow it. Let us go on to the

Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is on 018: Establishment of a Renal Dialysis Centre. Minister, can you just indicate why no money was spent in 2020 and 200,000 is now being allocated in 2021.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Because that matter is before the courts.

Mr. Hosein: And also, with respect to 002: Special Programme—Treatment of Adult Cardiac Disease, can you indicate why there was a significant decrease in the expenditure from what was estimated to be revised from 30 million to 18.3 million?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Just repeat please, I am not hearing you.

Mr. Hosein: What is the reason for the decrease in the expenditure, because you were allocated 30 million in 2020 and only 18.3 million was spent?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I will have to get that for you Member.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Mr. Tancoo: Asked and answered, Madam Chair.

Dr. Bodoë: Establishment of a Renal Dialysis Centre. I know you say the matter is before the court. I am aware of that. But is it a renal dialysis centre or is it two renal dialysis centres?

Hon. Deyalsingh: It was supposed to be two; one at Mount Hope and one in south West.

Dr. Bodoë: So it is really two?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: So that should be renal dialysis centres?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Centres.

Dr. Bodoë: I just wanted to have that corrected.

Hon. Deyalsingh: That is fine.

Dr. Bodoë: I just wanted to raise the issue of 005: Tissue Transplant, and I see in 2020, there was an estimate of 700,000 but 170,000 was spent. I understand that is variable.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: But I see an allocation of 900,000 for 2021. Is there something anticipated, some improvement in terms of tissue transplant that you anticipate will take place in 2021?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, we are on a drive to significantly upscale our Kidney Transplant Programme. We did only two in fiscal '19/'20. We are going on a life donor and disease donor programme. I, myself, have committed to becoming a donor and we are targetting around 20 for this fiscal.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah, well, can I follow up, Madam Chair? Minister, I am glad you mentioned the donor programme because that was something that was started some years ago. The Permanent Secretary would be aware of that prior to your time. Could you indicate the number of organ donors we currently have registered in Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I do not have that off the top of my head. We will have to get that for you.

Dr. Bodoë: Is that information available?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah.

Dr. Bodoë: Can we have that?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I am sure we could get it to you.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Health Facilities. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. We are at pages 71 to 72. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. I go to Administrative Services. 001:

Review of the National Health Insurance Scheme. I know this has been touted as coming on stream or being considered, Minister, but I see out of an estimate of 200,000 in 2020, no money was spent and there is no allocation in 2021. Can you indicate, what is the status of that? What is the Government thinking on this?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So what we learnt is that before you could launch that type of programme, we need to convert this country from paper-based patient records to electronic-based paper records, and through the PSIP you would see various programmes to start that process. So, let us get that process done first, and I think you will agree that that is the way to go.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure.

Mr. Hosein: Madam, I am just seeking your clarification. Can I ask a question on “F” which is Health Facilities or did we pass that item?

Madam Chairman: Once we passed an item, we cannot go back. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, 003: Health Information Systems for Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals. I see we have 20 million for 2021 estimate, can the hon. Minister tell me what this entails?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. So this follows up on what the Member for Fyzabad and I was speaking about. Before we could do the National Health Insurance Programme, we need to move this country from paper-based to electronic-based medical record. So that is what this is about. So we have completed the negotiations with a vendor for an HIS, and in 2021 we will be hiring a subject matter expert. We also have the RFP being evaluated for it. So we have made some progress on it.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, line-Item 003. Could you tell the House if any redundancies are being built into this system should this system crash or be hacked?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Well, I cannot give you the technical details because we are now hiring the subject matter expert. We are now doing the RFPs. But, as you know, I have investigated this around the world and as you know, no electronic system is hack proof. We would try to put in as many firewalls as possible, but no one can say that these e-systems are totally hack proof.

Dr. Seecheran: So, Minister, would this system be backed up on a cloud or?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, as I said, all those technical details will be worked out. We are just in the policy part of it now, hiring the subject matter experts and we have gone out for the RFPs and they will work out the technical details.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: I can just move on to Foreign and Technical Assistance, Madam Chair, with your permission?

Madam Chairman: Yes, you can.

Dr. Bodoë: And the Health Services Support Programme, I know it is an IDB funded programme.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: In conjunction with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. And I saw recent advertisements in the newspaper regarding the procurement of a supplier with regard to this programme. Can you give us an idea of what that 60,600,000 2021 estimate is intended to achieve?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So for 2021, we are buying physical activity equipment for 479 primary schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago; 134 secondary schools

and for 14 special-Ed schools. That special-Ed schools procurement actually came out of a joint select committee. I think you were on it, where people were asking well, what about special kids. We are going to be doing the Healthy Youth Wellness Programme, Gestational Diabetes Management Programme, healthy workplaces. Again, electronic human resource management system, computerized maintenance management systems for the RHAs. So that is what we have on stream for 2021. The contract for the gestational diabetes programme has been signed. Prof. Teelucksingh will be leading that particular charge.

Dr. Bodoë: Excellent.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members—

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: I am sorry about that Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Do I have permission to keep moving down? I just wanted to ask a question on Equipment and Vehicles, G. With regards to the purchase of the Linear Accelerator, I note Minister that you indicated the Linear Accelerator is now housed in St. James.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: But I see no expenditure item here. Can you indicate whether that machine was intended for the National Oncology Centre and has been moved? Can you explain the reason for no expenditure?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Because this is for capital expenditure, all the money has been spent already.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay.

Hon. Deyalsingh: And installed and operating.

Dr. Bodoë: Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund, which is at page 194. Member you still have—yes, please.

Dr. Bodoë: Item 002, Minister, the Equipping of the Chemistry Food and Drugs Lab and Preparatory Work for the National Public Health Laboratory. I know that is addressed later on in the IDF. It is a 1.5 million allocation and it is listed here as a new project. Can you shed some light on that, Minister?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So as you know, the Chemistry Food and Drugs Lab Building, we had to do significant work on it. So we purchased new laboratory equipment and so on. The final phase now is to get the sign off from the fire department and they are going through the building now and will tell us what fire specs they need.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. There is another question. I think I will raise that under the IDF.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Madam Chairman: All right. So, Members, we go on now to the Infrastructure Development Fund which is at page 194. It spans Item 004: Social Infrastructure spans pages 195 to 198. And, therefore, hon. Members, I propose to announce the project groups. So we at page 195. I am sorry. Page 199. I am sorry.

Hon. Deyalsingh: 199? Right. Yes, good.

Madam Chairman: So, we are at page 200. Okay. So, 004: Social Infrastructure. 07: Health, F—Health Facilities. Member for Fyzabad.

4.15 p.m.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sir, line Item 003: Construction of the National Oncology Centre. I note expenditure up to 2020 but no allocation in 2021, can you indicate—can you give an explanation for this?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So as I indicated at last year's joint select, that project has been bedeviled from the very beginning. Successive governments suffered through it

and we took a decision to end the project. It went into arbitration and all is well, the project is ended. So that is why there is no expenditure.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. Minister, would you be in a position to indicate how much money was expended on that project prior to the Government's decision to end the project?

Hon. Deyalsingh: I think in the area of—I do not want to quote an incorrect figure but I can get that for you.

Dr. Bodoë: Now, I know that there is some infrastructure on the ground at Mount Hope for that project. What would be the Government's plan to deal with that site?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So one of the issues with the infrastructure, because of the time lapse between when it was laid, the earthquake codes had changed. So if you have to reuse that for NOC you will have to do significant retrofitting. It may not be financially feasible.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, I know that St. James is being developed as an oncology unit. My question would be—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, so could you tell me what line item you are at?

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry, I am just sticking with the 003 just in regard to the fact that you have now confirmed that the Government is no longer—

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, I confirmed that at last year's Standing Finance Committee.
[Laughter]

Dr. Bodoë: All right. A year is a long time. So my question is: Is there any intention to provide any facility in the south? I was saying that the facilities are being developed in St. James—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë:—does the Government have any intention to provide any such facility in the south for oncology?

Hon. Deyalsingh: There is something that we are looking at but I am taking it one stage at a time. I want to get the cath lab up and running in south first.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay. 004, the Construction of the Arima Hospital. Now, Minister, you indicated in your budget contribution that that hospital was completed and opened and being used, and I see an allocation of \$86 million under the line Item, Construction of the Arima Hospital. Can you indicate what that expenditure will be for?

Hon. Deyalsingh: The same answer that I gave before, defects liability period and expenditure is due to snagging.

Dr. Bodoë: And the same will apply to 05: Construction in Point Fortin?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Point Fortin, and so on. Yeah. Any brand new infrastructural project you will have a defects liability period that you carry on the books and make allocation to correct any defects you get out of your snagging list.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. I can give way, Madam. I have a couple of other questions here.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Member. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Just a point of observation, on page 200 and 201 the Head is 28 not 201. There is a typo error there.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much.

Dr. Ragbir: Right. So my question, hon. Minister, Sangre Grande Hospital, what is the present status of construction presently?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay. So construction has begun. They did all the subsurface works. They are now pouring, I believe, or have already poured the ground floor and then steel will start to go up. And the project is on schedule at this time.

Dr. Ragbir: Good.

Hon. Deyalsingh: It is on schedule.

Dr. Ragbir: And possible completion date?

Hon. Deyalsingh: 2022.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Sir.

Dr. Bodoë: Item 010, Minister, operationalization of the Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility, and I see here the San Fernando General Hospital. Is that a typo or is there an explanation for that? And it relates to the allocation of \$45 million in that line Item.

Hon. Deyalsingh: I think that has to do with the cath lab and dialysis shares for Couva, because prior to COVID we were also going to put a cath lab in Couva, and about—a significant amount of dialysis shares in Couva. So the cath lab for Couva and the dialysis suite for Couva will be currently on hold because of COVID. Okay?

Dr. Bodoë: Okay, understood. And 009, the Construction of CARPHA, NPHL and NBTS labs in Valsayn, estimate in 2020 nothing spent and no allocation in 2021, can you update us on this?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes. That is because there is a land matter that is before the courts involving somebody who was claiming adverse possession. So that is before the courts so we will have to wait for that court matter to be finished.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. But just to be clear, those three facilities are going to be housed in one location, one building?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, that is the plan.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah. Okay. Thank you, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to line Item 010: Operationalization of the Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility and so, I continue to hear, in terms of the acquisition of dialysis machines, and so on, and it

will be applicable to Couva also in terms of the continued—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh:—operationalization. Could you tell us based on the machines that will be acquired for Couva and probably in your planning and continued development, the other hospitals, do you have an adequate complement of what we would call “dialysis nurses” to meet the acquisition of the new machines, and so on?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, as I just indicated, we are, at this point in time, not proceeding with the dialysis suite for Couva. The other part of your question is right now we are in—even in what we provide in south. We have providers that train dialysis techs and we do training with nurses, and so on. So when we have that need we have them trained.

Mr. Indarsingh: And I know that we are focusing on Couva, right, but, in the context of this, addressing this whole issue of dialysis provision—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, so we need to stick to 010. Madam Chair, I just seek your guidance here.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I promise this will be my last question. It is in relation to 004: Public Buildings, Construction of the Ministry of Health Administrative Building. Minister, I just ask this on behalf of the hard-working staff at the Ministry of Health and they are looking forward to new accommodation. I see an allocation of 1 million. Can you indicate the estimated overall cost of this project, starting date and expected completion?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So I think work is supposed to commence very soon. All the contracts have been signed. I do not have the exact cost now but it is being financed under BOLT arrangement. Those are the details I have now and that we

hope construction is going to start anytime soon.

Dr. Bodoë: Location?

Hon. Deyalsingh: This is in an L-shaped piece of land. If you know where MRFTT is, it is on Jerningham Avenue coming on to Queen's Park East.

Dr. Bodoë: I see the PS is smiling so obviously it is a good location. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Well, this is 22 years in the making. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Bodoë: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Yes, last question. Hon, Minister, 001: Upgrade of C40 Building in Chaguaramas, where you house your drugs, I gather nothing was spent in 2020 for upgrade. Can you tell me what is it that needs to be done at Chaguaramas?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. So what we did in 2020, we purchased and installed a new chiller. We repaired the freight elevator to take supplies from the ground floor up to the first floor. For 2021, general building renovations, air conditioning and electrical upgrade; that is what we have planned for 2021.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay.

Madam Chairman: All right. So if there are no further questions, and just to ensure that everybody knew we did Multi-Sectoral and Other Services also.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 28 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, PS, and all the technocrats who have accompanied you. You all are excused.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: We now go on to Head 26: Ministry of Education. And,

Members, while we get ready, we are at the *Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, and that is at page 171.

Head 26: Ministry of Education, \$5,070,856,830.

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

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Education is charged with the equitable, holistic and quality education of all learners in Trinidad and Tobago. As we transform to a digital society, the Ministry of Education has a critical mandate to produce the citizens who will take us into the future we wish to create. Minister Lisa Morris-Julian and myself, along with the Permanent Secretary and all the staff at the Ministry of Education, are committed to doing what is necessary to drive the transformation needed in the Ministry of Education at this time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 26 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,070,856,830 for Head 26: Ministry of Education 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 now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. We are at page 171. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at Sub-Head 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. In light of the fact, Madam Minister, that fiscal 2021 has received the same allocation that fiscal 2020 was initially estimated to receive,

could the Minister indicate what the additional 6.2 million in fiscal 2020 was spent on?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That was the expenditure for 2020 based on the employees under the Public Service Commission in 2020.

Ms. Haynes: So is it like payment of back pay, because there was an additional 6 million spent in 2020 and then we went back to the initial allocation in 2021.

4.30 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There was a shortfall in the allocation for the previous year and that made up the allocation. The difference made up the allocation.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So if the Minister is saying—I am at 01—that this is based on persons who were employed in the establishment, that they needed an additional 6 million for 2020, then why is the same estimate not reflected in 2021 as in 2020, because there is a decrease of 6.2 million.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Certainly if more is needed as was done in 2020, more will be supplied in 2021.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chairman, can the Minister—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute please, Member for St. Augustine. I believe the Member for Baratavia/San Juan asked a question, and it has not been addressed as yet. I believe the Member was asking about the decrease in 2021 estimates of 6.2 million.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Hosein: I am not hearing.

Mr. Imbert: I am hearing some discussion about additional explanation, but it is a decrease.

Ms. Haynes: Nobody said additional expenditure. We are saying that can we account for the extra 6.2 million that was spent in fiscal 2020 since we are now

back to the original estimate that was given for 2020 into 2021. So an additional 6.2 was spent in 2020. So yes, it is an acknowledgement that there is a decrease, so we are saying can we account for that money that was spent. That is the question.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There was an arrears and that was paid in 2020.

Mr. Hosein: So then can the Minister indicate how much additional staff came on at the Ministry for the period 2020 for an increase in expenditure of 6.2 million?

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan, I do not read the response of the Minister to say that additional people. I believe I heard her say it was arrears that was paid.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chairman, if you look at the estimate for 2020 and you look at the Revised Estimates for 2021, it was 193 million estimated; \$199 million was spent, so there was an increase of \$6 million.

Madam Chairman: Which the Minister said was on account of arrears.

Mr. Imbert: Back pay.

Madam Chairman: So therefore if I understand the discussion which both you and Tabaquite are seeking, it is really to say, "Well why yuh gone back to that figure"? But the Minister has answered it because she said it was an arrears. That is what I have understood.

Mr. Hosein: Can then the Minister, Madam Chair, explain or indicate to this House how many employees were entitled to this back pay of \$6.3 million?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That can be provided to you at a later date.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am seeing a reduced allocation for the Government's contribution to group health insurance.

Madam Chairman: Tell me what item you are at please, that would help me greatly.

Ms. Ameen: The Group Health Insurance is Item 20.

Madam Chairman: Item 20, yes.

Ms. Ameen: There is a reduction in the allocation. This is the group health insurance for monthly-paid officers.

Madam Chairman: I am seeing daily-rated, so if you are telling me it is 20 that is why I asked.

Ms. Ameen: 27, sorry, is the monthly-paid officers, yes that is correct.

Madam Chairman: Then there is no decrease there if you are at 27.

Ms. Ameen: Sorry, the decrease is—

Mr. Imbert: There was no decrease.

Ms. Ameen: Sorry, from 2020, and the Revised Estimates compared to the Revised Estimates—the Estimates, sorry, for 2021. In other words, in 2020 there was a higher allocation than in 2021. I just want to ask—so I just want to ask the reason for this reduction and if any monthly paid employees will be affected.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The reduction between what, sorry, Madam Chairman. The reduction is between what? Which two figures are you referring to?

Ms. Ameen: The 2020 Estimates.

Mr. Imbert: There are *Draft Estimates of Expenditure*. This particular Item is Government contributions to group health insurance monthly-paid officers. Therefore, at the beginning of the year based on the number of persons employed, based on the contribution rates, et cetera, an estimate would be made, but the actual expenditure during the year would be different. It is not going to be exactly the same.

So what the Budget Division has done, since the actual expenditure was 1.9 million, they have simply allocated 1.9 million. If you go back to 2019, you would see it is 1.911. It is just based on the number of persons and the contributions they

are making to the group health plan. It is impossible to do an estimate that is exactly accurate to the last cent. So there is no magic in any of this.

Ms. Ameen: So my question out of this, Mr. Minister, is to get the assurance from you that if there is a shortfall it would be supplemented, so that the health plan would not be affected.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, yes, yes.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: So can we go on? Item 005: Secondary Education. Item 006: Primary Education. We are at page 172.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 32: Remuneration for Substitute Teachers. There is no estimate, no expenditure for 2021, so if the Minister can explain. That is line Item 32, page 172.

Madam Chairman: And this is 006, Sub-Item 32.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This programme of substitute teachers will not be run in 2021.

Ms. Haynes: Is there any reason that we will have no substitute teachers?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We are actually going to move funds if necessary into this for 2021, sorry.

Ms. Haynes: So let me get this straight. So if there is a need for a substitute teacher we will then move funds, but there will be no allocated amount at all?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is no allocated amount, and it will be funded by moving funds, if necessary, in 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I am just noticing a recurring issue here where the Government's contribution to NIS on a year to year basis seems to be declining. Is there a particular reason for that trend, given that salaries—

Madam Chairman: Are you at Item 27?

Mr. Tancoo: I am at Item 27—sorry, 05, page 172, 006: Primary Education, Sub-Head: 05. My query is with regard to the continuous—it has happened elsewhere in the document as well, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: No, no, we are at Item 006, 05: Government contributions to NIS. Yes?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: You are saying that it is declining. I am not seeing a decline. I see the Revised Estimates 2020, is \$84,400,000, and I see that same figure for the 2021 Estimate.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am, and following up to what the Minister had indicated before there was \$85 million estimated in 2020, a subsequent decline in Revised Estimates and a 2021 estimate. So there is in fact a decline from the Estimates of 2020 to the Estimates of 2021.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West, I think that is in similar nature the question with the insurance, NIS is also insurance, and I believe the response to that was that this cannot be estimated to the cent, and therefore is pegged against what was actually spent for the new fiscal year.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Item 011; Item 012; Item 014, which is at page 173; item 016, page 174.

Mr. Hosein: I am looking at 01: Salaries and Cost of Living, again. I am seeing there was an estimated 2.7 million for 2020, and then a reduction to \$1.2 million in 2020, that was actually spent. Can the Minister just give a reason for the decrease in this expenditure?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The expenditure in 2021 is estimated based on the

expenditure in 2020. Allocation is based on the expenditure of 2020.

Mr. Hosein: What is the reason for the reduction?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is no decrease; that is what we spent in 2020.

Mr. Hosein: No, I am asking for fiscal 2020. What is the reason for the reduction in expenditure?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Salaries and COLA, so whatever was—we have 16 monthly-paid employees, and that is the figure that was expended to service them in 2020.

Mr. Hosein: 16?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Um hmm.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so we go on. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Under Sub-Head 01: Travelling and Subsistence, I note that there was an increase between the Estimates and the Revised Estimates for 2020, and then a decrease subsequent to that in 2021. Can the Minister explain, what was the reason for the increase by almost a third in 2020, and following up on that what was the reason for the decrease thereafter?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There were arrears due from the previous years in 2020 and so that was paid in 2020.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro?

Mr. Paray: Just to confirm, Madam Chair, can I question Goods and Services on page 175?

Madam Chairman: Yes, it spans 174 to 176.

Mr. Paray: Thank you. Madam Minister, line Item 16 and 22 with regard to Contract Employment. I notice if you put both of them together you are getting about \$25 million reduction in Contract Employment. Could you give us an

estimate of exactly how many persons may be affected by this decrease in terms of Contract Employment?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Which line Item are you referring to?

Mr. Paray: 16 and 22, on page 175.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is no planned reduction. We have 1,467 employees being paid under line Item 16, and this estimate is required to service them. Again, if it is necessary to move funds into this line Item, it will be done to be able to service the employees being paid under this line Item.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: My colleague Mayaro asked, but I do not know if I missed something there. He enquired under 16 and also 22, you have a combined of nearly \$26 million, and the Minister indicated that 1,467 contract officers are being serviced by this allocation?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I was referring to line Item 16.

Mr. Indarsingh: 16? So there is no reduction in terms of the number of contract officers between fiscal 2020 and 2021?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is no planned reduction, no.

Mr. Indarsingh: No? So what accounts for this reduction of \$21, 950,000.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is an estimate based on the number of officers that are employed by the Ministry, and if as the year proceeds there needs to be more money put into this, there will be.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Madam Chair, I am on this same line Item because I am trying to understand—

Madam Chairman: Which is the same?

Ms. Haynes: Line Item 16: Contract Employment. I think where we are finding difficulty is that it is \$21 million. So the question becomes: You needed the \$21 million in 2020, now you do not need it in 2021, what accounts for this decrease if there is no planned reduction in the number of contracts?

4.45 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I want to draw the Member's attention to the 2019 actual expenditure which is 165 million-odd—

Ms. Haynes: Which is still more—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could you hold on? Could I finish? And I want to draw your attention to the 2020 Draft Estimates which was 110. I want to draw the Member's attention to the 2020 Revised Estimates which was 171. So I want to, again, say that if further funds are required for this line Item, based on the officers that are employed, it will be provided for that purpose.

Madam Chairman: Member for—[*Crosstalk*]—No. No. Do not tell me go ahead. What you say is—

Mr. Indarsingh: I lifted my hand.

Madam Chairman: Okay fine. Okay great. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, with respect to this same issue it meant that, at 16, it meant that they would have paid 171 million to persons who were employed as contract officers. Now we have a decrease of 21.9 million. Why was this not budgeted in the 2021 Estimates if the money is needed?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Once again, Madam Chair, depending on the employment at the Ministry, officers leave, officers come. Depending on the level of employment at the Ministry, if more is required as was required in 2020, further funds will be provided.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, can I another question?

Madam Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Hosein: I am at number 17, line Item 17: Training. Can the Minister indicate why \$300,000 was estimated in 2020 but only \$6,000 was spent for that fiscal?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Because, Madam Chair, the training schedule was interrupted because of the COVID situation. In addition to that, the Ministry is moving to use more in-house training, as well as collaboration with other Ministries, such as the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation to provide training to reduce the cost in these areas.

Mr. Hosein: And on line Item 28, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Line Item?

Mr. Hosein: 28: Other Contracted Services.

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein: I am seeing that, in the Explanation, 21 million is allocated for School Transport. Can the Minister confirm whether or not all of the outstanding payments to those drivers have been made, school bus drivers?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is one fortnight outstanding.

Mr. Hosein: One? I beg your pardon.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is one fortnight outstanding.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And can the Minister indicate— for Other Services, there is an allocation of \$2 million. What does this—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry. Which line Item?

Mr. Hosein: It is the same 28, under School Transport, in Explanation, you are seeing an explanation for 2 million.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am sorry.

Mr. Hosein: It is in the explanation column.

Madam Chairman: The explanation column, the sort of remarks.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could the Member restate?

Mr. Hosein: So at line Item 28, Minister, at the explanation column, you are seeing Other Services for 2 million. Can the Minister indicate what accounts for this \$2 million?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Disposal of unserviceable items in school.

Mr. Hosein: Disposal—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Disposal of unserviceable items in schools, desks and chairs and so on that have to be disposed of.

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister indicate whether or not this would be contracted out?

Madam Chairman: Member, that is the Head it is under.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And for the last year, that is fiscal 2020, \$33 million was spent. Can the Minister indicate how much of that 33 million were services such as disposal those items?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No funds were allocated to that. The funds that were expended were mainly to pay school transport.

Mr. Hosein: The full 33 million for school transport?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Yes?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thanks, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to line Item Contract Employment, the \$171,950 was spent—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Are we going back to 16, sorry?

Madam Chairman: He is entitled to.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, it is 16, right?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah. That sum in the 2020 Revised Estimates was spent on how many contract officers?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: 1,467.

Mr. Indarsingh: 1,467 was actually spent you said.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Contract Employment.

Madam Chairman: Persons, that is what you asked?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah— no, the 1,467 contract officers— \$171,950,000 was spent there. Right? 171,950,000 was spent as salaries for 1,467 contract officers. Yes or no?—in 2020.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I think I answered that already, Member.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah. So, I am a bit—this was actually spent in 2020. You said there was no reduction for 2021.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I said there is no planned reduction in contract employment.

Mr. Indarsingh: So if you—and you actually spend this this sum in 2020, why is there a reduction with no planned reduction in staff? Why is there a decrease of 21,950,000?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In 2019 actual expenditure, the figure under there is 165 million. In 2020, the Revised Estimates is 171, with no planned increase in employment. This varies based on the number of contract officers within the Ministry and so, an estimation is made, an allocation is given, and if it needs to be supplemented, then it will be supplemented.

Madam Chairman: That that has been answered already. Member for Tabaquite. No? Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair, I am on line Item 34: University

Graduate Recruitment Programme. There was no allocation in 2020, none in 2021. Is it that this programme has now been cut?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Once we are advised by the Ministry of Finance on the way forward with this, it will be engaged by the Ministry.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 28, and looking at the value for school transport service, and I just want to find out. I know in the last session there was a conversation around a reduction or a revisiting of routes and so on, in terms of better managing the school transport system. What I want to ask is, if this value is purely based on a contingent value in the event school normalizes over the next term or has there been some consideration in terms of routes and student numbers to allow for less amount of maxis on the roads for these students?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: A combination of both.

Mr. Paray: Minister, could you just repeat the response?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is a combination of both. Both the—we are looking at the routes and so on, as well as the fact that there will be reduced travelling time for the student based on our present circumstance.

Mr. Paray: So, when school reopens or whenever it reopens we can expect a rationalization of routes and numbers in terms of seats provided for students getting to schools?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That will all—yes, and that will be expected, as well as the whole issues of how schools reopens and so on. Yes.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Chair, through you, with the COVID pandemic a

certain amount of spacing is required in vehicles. You would therefore need more vehicles to transport the same number of pupils if you have to maintain that space within those vehicles transporting children. Has consideration been given to this and will there be an opportunity to revise the allocation to school transport to facilitate children getting there safely whenever we reopen?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Chair, that would certainly take into consideration the way school reopens and the number of children going to school on any particular day, and that is under consideration right now. And it very well may be that not the same numbers of students that are used to traveling every day, will travel every day.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 99, that is on page 176, Employee Assistance Programme. Yes? So I note that there is a 500,000-plus decrease, and the EAP is meant for psychological and organizational support in a time when we are going through a global pandemic, can we explain the decrease in the Employee Assistance Programme at this time?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The need for this programme certainly is recognized, especially in this time. The allocation is provided and again, once more, if needed in this line Item, it will be provided.

Ms. Haynes: But, Madam Chair, while I appreciate the Minister's responses very much, I think when we are doing the allocation, we should be aware of what is happening and therefore, not under-budget and then come back, because there are a lot of Items here, we are hearing, "Well, we will need to revise and we will need to revise." But if you acknowledge—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: If there is a line Item on a question we can take that.

Madam Chairman: A minute, please.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Members are allowed to make a comment.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Yes. So if we can acknowledge—thank you, Madam Chair. If we can acknowledge the need for the programme at this time, why decrease the allocation at this material time?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Chair, I think I have been asked that question before, and I am certain that I have answered it.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And I think the Minister of Finance might be in a position to assist.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. I would just like to make a general comment. The line Ministers do not make the allocations. So it is wrong to ask a Minister why that Minister has underprovided or overprovided in a particular Item. Ministers do not make the allocations.

Ms. Haynes: So—

Mr. Imbert: The allocations are made—I am not finished. The allocations are made by the Ministry of Finance based on the advice on the Budget Division in consultation with the public service. In every situation, there may be an underprovision or an overprovision. During the year, as is customary, there will be a variation of appropriation, sometimes there is a supplementation of appropriation. This has been done in Trinidad and Tobago for last 50 years. These are simply Estimates.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Madam Chair, I understand what the Minister is saying, you know—

Mr. Imbert: I “doh” think you understand at all.

Ms. Haynes: But the purpose of this exercise—

Mr. Imbert: I “doh” think you understand.

Ms. Haynes:—is to give explanations for the accounting that we are going through right now. So if we are not doing that, then respectfully, Minister, we are allowed to ask for the explanations for the decreases in this material time. So if it is that the line Minister is not supposed to answer this question, well then, perhaps you can give us the answer as to why the decrease in the EAP at this time?

Madam Chairman: Okay. I just want to remind all of us here because, of course, we are playing a bit of musical chairs because of the numbers. The overriding rule in here for all of us is tolerance, so we will try to regain it. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I want to go back to Item 43: Security Services. I note that there has been a significant reduction between the Estimates and the Revised Estimates in 2020; 205 million was initially estimated but 135 million was actually spent in 2020. Can the Minister explain why this difference existed? Is it that we have less security services being provided at these institutions?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The allocation was paired against the expenditure 2020. There are other claims that will come in, and when they come in, if we have to exceed that expenditure, we certainly will apply in the mid-term to the Ministry of Finance for an increased allocation.

Mr. Imbert: I will also come in here. In every year, there would be arrears from previous years. So that the allocations and the actual expenditure would be very different from year to year. It is not static, it is dynamic. So that, in a particular year, you may see a larger figure which may be caused by payment of arrears, outstanding bills and so on, that is not the core requirement for that particular Item.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. I will just follow up, again, please. If—well, let

me ask it this way, Ma'am, 135 million was the amount of claims that came in. Am I correct? Can the Minister then indicate what is outstanding?

Madam Chairman: Which year are you talking about? For 2020, Member?

Mr. Tancoo: 2020. Yes, thank you.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So we can provide that at a later date.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

5.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we will now move on, Item 005: Secondary Education; Item 006: Primary Education; Item 007: District Services Division; Item 008: Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Madam, through you, the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre has a dramatic reduction for training under Item 17, can you state what type of training specifically you intend, and how you have more than half less allocated for this line Item?

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The facility is being repaired so the ability to have training classes there is reduced and so that is why the allocation is reduced to this extent. It is generally training for teachers.

Ms. Ameen: Training for the teachers?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: For teachers. Face to face training for teachers.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. One other, Mr. Chairman. The repairs and maintenance of the building—this is for recurrent repairs and maintenance. In 2020 there was an allocation of 200,000 which was not utilized or not released, and in this year we have zero being allocated. Can you give an explanation for this?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: For the RCLRC in the Development Programme for

repairs, so that is being covered in a different line Item.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. 005 under Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, I noticed that there was an allocation of 150,000 for Telephones, but none was spent in 2020 and none budgeted for 2021. Can the Minister explain whether Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre has been disconnected by TSTT?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]*—*with the line at the RCLRC and so they are using a different system for Telephones at this time.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Member. Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Is it that this has been happening for the last, well, for the last year and is expected to continue into 2021? Is this matter so significant that it cannot be resolved at this time?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: At this point it is being resolved with TSTT, and the repairs are being sorted out.

Mr. Tancoo: Ma'am, then would it not have been practical to put an estimate for the cost of telephone services for 2021?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Once again, as required the line Item can be resourced through transfers.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I then conclude, Ma'am, that there are going to be several instances where we have severe under-budgeting and therefore the total expenditure projected for the Ministry of Education is substantially less than it will actually be in 2021 because of deliberately under estimation?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, that is not the case. No, that is not a reasonable conclusion at all. As any—

Mr. Tancoo: It is not an unreasonable conclusion.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Can I finish?

Mr. Chairman: The Minister is responding, one second.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In any Ministry based on the different allocations to line Items, as the Minister of Finance just raised, there may be overestimation or underestimation, therefore a normal part of a Ministry's function is to transfer funds that are available in other areas into areas which may need more at any particular point in time. So that is not a reasonable conclusion you just came to.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Just for clarification, this is neither an estimation, sorry.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, could I just, it is on the same matter, just to clarify. Could I ask the Member to look at explanation where you will see that you can vire funds from one Head to the next with the approval of the Budgets Division, and with any budgeting exercise there will be instances, as the Minister of Finance said, where there is less money allocated or more money than is needed. But, when the issue comes up, once you get the approval, either the Minister of Finance or the Budgets Division, the Ministry can move funds to deal with the issue.

Mr. Tancoo: I thank you very, very much, Ma'am.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Tancoo: No, I have one more. I just wanted to clarify, Sir, that is neither an example of underestimation or overestimation. There is simply no estimate here.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: In those circumstances, you just need to apply to the Budgets Division if money is needed to deal with an issue.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, a virement would have to be done from some other vote within—that was what was allocated to the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. The Minister had mentioned earlier that there is significant

development work or repairs or renovations ongoing at this facility. We can observe that several Items, Telephones is not the only one, we also have Books and Periodicals, Maintenance of Vehicles—well, we spoke earlier of the repairs and maintenance aspect, Other Contracted Services. These Items did not get an allocation or a release in 2020, and have no allocation for 2021. How is this related to the repairs? Is there such significant development or renovation going on at that facility? And if so, at what capacity are they functioning in terms of the number of trainees that are being dealt with at this time?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: What particular line Item we are referring to?

Ms. Ameen: The Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. There are several Items which—**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Could you refer to—

Ms. Ameen:—I called out—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—if you could refer to one?

Ms. Ameen:—and I will repeat—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mm hmm.

Ms. Ameen:—with regard to 05, Telephones; with regard to 11, Books and Periodicals; with regard to 13, Maintenance of Vehicles; with regard to 21, Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings; with regard to 17, Training; with regard to 28, Other Contracted Services. All of these Items have had either zero or quite a small amount released in 2020, and either zero or a small amount allocated in 2021. The Minister indicated earlier that there is some significant development, work, taking place at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre at this time. My question is: How significant is that development work, and is it that it is affecting the amount of training that can take place at that facility at this time? If it is, what percentage do you see as the average in terms of reduction in the number of trainees or reduction in the operations there?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Chair, I would have answered the question dealing specifically with 05. I would have answered the question—

Mr. Chairman: Again, the mike. Just—because of the mask.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I would have answered the question specifically dealing with 05, I would have answered the question specifically dealing with 17, and therefore I would have answered the question dealing with 21. I answered those already.

Mr. Chairman: She answered those already.

Ms. Ameen: Yes. Mr. Chairman, the question is, if the repair work that is ongoing that the Minister mentioned earlier, based on that is there a reduction in the capacity of the facility to train at this time?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, if this is dealing with Item 17 I would have answered that we have less training going on, because that is usually for face to face training, and quite a lot of training is now taking place in the virtual environment, so that the allocation was reduced there. So it is not necessarily a reflection on the reduction in training, but face to face training that used to place there, certainly that would have been reduced and the virtual and online training is what is mainly used at this point in time.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. The Minister had explained that and that has to do with training for the teachers there. I am asking, there are a number of Items that have reduced allocation, and I am asking—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, again, you are asking the question, but I think based on what the Minister saying is that she has already answered some of them. So rather than put all in “grap”, could you probably take it one by one, and I will give you the opportunity to ask the direct question.

Ms. Ameen: My question is—

Mr. Chairman: So let us do it based on the particular line Item one by one and then we move forward.

Ms. Ameen: Yes. Is Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre operating at a reduced capacity at this time?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: With respect to which line Item, Member. Again, which line Item is it? Is it training because I just answered that with respect to training, with respect to what?

Mr. Chairman: So again, as the Minister is saying, reduced in terms of which particular line Item? She said she answered on training, and which other one you said you answered on already.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I just answered Telephones as well.

Mr. Chairman: And telephone as well.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Which is the other one?

Ms. Ameen: As I pointed out earlier, Mr. Chairman. As I pointed out earlier, several—and I do not think I need to repeat them—several Items there is a reduction. So, my question is to whether overall the facility—you know, the Minister did mention that there was repairs going on at that facility, so I am simply asking if it is perhaps because of the renovation that is taking place there, that you have a reduction in the ability to use the whole facility, and therefore a number of these other expenses are reduced? So, I am asking if—and it has to do with a combination. All of these Items have been reduced, and I am asking—

Mr. Chairman: But Member, Okay. And the Minister has said what she has answered already. So what I am saying, as the Member for St. Augustine, I am saying if you identify the particular line Item, because you have identified, let me see, one, two, three, four, five, six of—seven of them you have identified, right, because I ticked it off here, and what the Minister is saying that she has answered

two or three of them already. So therefore, identify the other ones line by line and then we would be able to move on.

Ms. Ameen: I quite understand that, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I am giving you the opportunity, but if it is you want to persist we will probably have to move on.

Ms. Ameen: No. I quite understand that. My question is to the overall capacity of the institute to do training at this time, but—

Mr. Chairman: Okay. All right, fine. Minister, are you in a position to answer an overall question based on the Rudranath Capildeo Resource Centre?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I already answered the question on training and several other issues. If there is not another based on any of the line Items here then I cannot see how it is being tabled.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So, Member, are you in position to go to any particular line Item? I want to give you the opportunity—

[Ms. Ameen shakes head in the negative]

Okay, Barataria/San Juan.

Ms. Ameen: The question has not been answered but we could move on.

Mr. Hosein: The question has already been asked.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Item 009, Early Childhood Care and Education Unit, page 178. Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I noticed that for the ECC Unit, there is no estimate for 2020. Sorry, there was an estimate for 2020 with regard to 06/10, 11, 12 and 21, none of which was spent in 2020, although there was an estimate for it, and none of which has been budgeted for 2021. Can the Minister indicate why that is so?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The outstanding bills to WASA were calculated and a

representation made to the Ministry of Finance with respect to paying what is owed.

Mr. Tancoo: That is it? What about the allocation for Office Stationery and Supplies, Books and Periodicals, Materials and Supplies, repairs and maintenance of the building?

Mr. Chairman: Member, ease of reference will be better to use if you identify the number rather than the particular Item. So just give me the number so it will make it easy reference for both everyone listening and plus for the Minister to answer.

Mr. Tancoo: Duly guided, Sir. I am referring to Items 10, 11, 12 and 21, all in the same column.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: All of these allocations were moved under the General Admin vote, and so these areas would be serviced from the General Admin vote of the Ministry of Education. They are within the Ministry at this time.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Item 011: Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry; Item 014: National Examination Council; Item 015: Spanish Secretariat, page 179; Item 016: Scholarships and Advanced Training Division, page 180. Sub-Head—Member for St. Augustine, which one, Item 016.

Ms. Ameen: 016: Scholarships and Advanced Training Division.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, Item 16, there is a reduction in Contract Employment from 22 in the year 2020 to 21 million in the year 2021. Can the Minister account for the decrease?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This vote deals with the associate professionals. So it all depends on the number of them that are employed in any one year at the Ministry.

And so again the vote being, expenditure, the estimate sorry for 2021 is pegged against what was given for 2020. If more is required then it will be provided as was done in 2020.

Ms. Ameen: Okay, so, is it that the—does the Ministry plan to, for instance, not renew the contract of any people who are on contact at this time.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: These are the associate professionals, as you would notice in 2020 the estimate was 21 million and 22 was required, so more—it was supplemented. So the same is made and it depends on the number of associate professionals that are brought into the different areas—

Ms. Ameen: Then you will ask for it to be supplemented? All right.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: If necessary, yes.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chairman. I refer to Sub-Head 23: Fees. I noticed that 500,000 was estimated and budgeted for 2020 under the heading Fees, but none was actually expended. May I ask the Minister to advise what fees were initially considered when the budget was first constructed and therefore what Fees were then expended on?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is a fee that is paid to the UTC for scholars and that is now going to be serviced from the General Admin vote. The division is at the Head Office.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 16: Contract Employment. Minister, you advise us that this is the Associate Professionals Programme. Can you just let us know how many persons are currently on the

programme?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: One hundred and seventy.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Hosein: One hundred and seventy?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Help me. Which one you asked for, the APs or the contracts?

Mr. Hosein: The APs.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The 170 is the contract. But I will provide the APs at a later date for you, the number of APs.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, someone from my constituency asked me to raise—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: If I again—170 is number of APs that are on contract and are being paid from this line Item.

Mr. Hosein: Also, can you advise me whether or not this programme will continue because someone from my constituency asked me to raise this concern with you, whether or not scholarships will be giving out in this fiscal year. Yes?

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 180. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am looking at line Item 04: Other Minor Equipment. There was an estimate of 40 million in 2020. The Revised Estimate was 1.3 million. Now does this also take into consideration in 2019 only 900,000 was actually spent and now we are seeing an estimate again of 40 million, which is an increase of \$38.6 million? Can the Minister advise what could account for this, what minor equipment they envisioned being purchased for \$38 plus million.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That is the funds that were used to purchase laptops for the E-Testing of the Ministry.

Ms. Haynes: Pardon.

Hon. Gadsby-Dolly: This would be used to purchase devices for the E-Testing initiative of the Ministry.

Ms. Haynes: And so that accounts for the 2021 Estimates as well now.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, it is. It was not extended for that purpose in 2020—

Ms. Haynes: So you need to buy it for 20—understood.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: To the Committee, what is this E-Testing that the laptops will be for?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: CXC is moving towards the E-Testing and therefore it is necessary to provide devices to move in that direction eventually. So this is the start of it.

Mr. Hosein: So this would be enough allocation to provide computers to all of the secondary schools for the CXC exam?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, no. That was not what was explained. It is said that these devices are to be used for that purpose. It was not to supply all the secondary school students with devices at this time.

Mr. Hosein: So how many schools this will take care of, this allocation for the fiscal 2021?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is not to be divided for the use of schools in the curriculum. This is a different thing where we would be using this for a pilot study to work on how this E-Testing will roll out.

Mr. Hosein: So who will be allocated a laptop?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This will be sent to the schools to be able to do the pilot. It is not for the students.

Mr. Hosein: Correct. And so how many schools will this cover?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We will provide the information on it, it is an initiative that is coming on stream. We will provide that at a later date.

Mr. Hosein: Can you also provide how many schools will be covered as compared to how many schools will not be covered?

Ms. Haynes: Which schools.

Mr. Hosein: And which schools.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Certainly.

Ms. Haynes: I was adding to my colleague in that list, Madam Minister, that you have just undertaken to provide, a breakdown of the schools would be necessary for us to see how this pilot project will be—[*Crosstalk*]*—yes, but the Chairman called so I am adding my point. Thank you.*

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: My Item is 008, next page.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration, page 180; Item 006: Primary Education, page 180; Item 007: District Services Division, page 181. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Sir, I wanted to catch your attention for 006, please.

Mr. Chairman: 006?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: All right, proceed.

Mr. Hosein: I am on 03: Furniture and Furnishings. I saw that there was an estimate for \$1.5 million and there is no expenditure for 2020 and no estimates for 2021. Can the Minister explain why?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We would have votes in the developmental budget that can cater for any furniture and furnishings that need to be supplied to primary schools. So those would be used for this purpose.

Mr. Hosein: That will fall under DP?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Developmental Programme.

Mr. Hosein: Yeah, thanks.

Mr. Chairman: Item 007: District Services Division; Item—Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, in 2020 this Division was given 50,000 for Office Equipment, 50,000 for Furniture and Furnishings and 50,000 for Other Minor Equipment. However, in 2020 it was not utilized for office furniture or for furniture and furnishings and only 2,200 was used under Minor Equipment. In this year we see nothing being allocated. Well the allocations seems to reflect the Revised Estimates, what was spent. Can the Minister give the status of this Division in terms of how they are functioning and what this reflection means?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There are votes in the developmental budget that deal with supplying and assisting our district offices. And so if you have to get any allocation here—as you can see the 2020 Draft Estimates were very small and that was not utilized. So if there needs to be utilization in any of these areas we will be able to supplement that using funds from the developmental budget.

Mr. Chairman: Member, okay. Item 008: Rudranath Capildeo Resource Learning Centre, page 181. Item—Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Yes, Mr. Chairman. The Items indicated here, 02 for Office Equipment; 03 for Furniture and Furnishings and 04 for Other Minor Equipment. Earlier I had tried to ask a question under another Head and it has to do with what appears to be a trend of a number of Items where funds are either being not utilized and now not being allocated. And so, Mr. Chairman, while we ask questions on each individual line Item, I also have a general question in terms of how functional is the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre at this time.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Chair, I indicated earlier that the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre is undergoing some refurbishment works. I am at a loss

to explain which line Item I am being asked about. And if I am asked about a particular line Item, I certainly can provide the answer that deals with that which is the remit of this Committee.

Mr. Chairman: So Member?

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I do understand the Minister's reply. But the Committee, I mean, yes, we go line by line, but I am asking if the Minister could explain to the nation by giving her indication that there is renovation at this facility. What capacity is it functioning at?

Mr. Chairman: Unless you as the Member would like to be specific in how the procedure goes line by line, I am giving you that opportunity, other than that we need to move on. The Minister has given an answer on more than one occasion with regard to this particular—

Ms. Ameen: No, there was no answer, but we could move on.

Mr. Chairman: All right, fair enough. Item 009: Early Childhood Care and Education Unit, page 181. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. Once more I am seeing a cut in the ECCE unit. I am wondering whether this Unit, Ma'am, continues to exist and to function or if this also included in your General Admin allocation.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am seeing that it is located at the Head Office of the Ministry and therefore any allocations are under the General Admin budget.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 182, Item 001: Regional Bodies. I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 01: Caribbean Examination Council. I noticed in 2020 the Revised Estimate over what was budgeted in 2020 was about \$7.5 million more to CXC in 2020, and I noticed

in 2021 the estimate, that \$7.5 million has been reduced.

What would have accounted that increase in the actual spend in 2020 of that \$7.5 million to CXC?

5.30 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]—and that was paid in 2020.

Mr. Paray: Minister, my second part of that question is that funding that we paid to CXC, does that include the proper preparation and applicable examination and correct grading of students' papers? Is that what the Ministry expects when we spend that money at CXC?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Every territory pays an annual contribution to CXC and this is Trinidad and Tobago's figure, and that is what is covered under this line item.

Mr. Paray: Minister, the third part of that question: What recourse does the Ministry have if CXC, as a provider, does not deliver on its stipulated deliverables to the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am sure that that question is related to the contribution of Trinidad and Tobago to the operations of CXC. I feel as though that may be a different kind of question that may want to be raised in a different forum. But this—every territory, CXC is a regional body and every territory contributes to the running of CXC. So this is what—this is represented in this figure here.

Mr. Paray: So, there is no particular course of action that the Ministry can take in the event that CXC does not deliver what it is promised to do in terms of the grading and examination of our students in Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: CXC is an organ of Caricom. They have, of course, their terms and conditions, their ways of operation. That is not necessarily under examination in this line item, and so, what the Member is asking is a totally

different type of question.

Mr. Paray: I do not know a totally different type of question. Hon. Minister, the question is quite clear. If we are paying CXC a sum of money to provide a particular job, a service to us, and we, as the customer, are not satisfied on what is being delivered, what is our course of action?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That is a question that deals with the operations of CXC. This here is dealing with the payment, the annual contribution to CXC by the country. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Members, please. I think the Minister has given and— [*Interruption*—Couva South? Yes, I think the Minister has given adequate information in terms of that particular, and as she said, it is not identified in the line Item, but I understand the point you were trying to make. So I now go to Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. So we will try it like this. What systems are in place in the Ministry to evaluate and monitor the use of funds transferred to these institutions and programmes to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is getting value for money and that there is accountability each time we allocate these funds? So the Ministry must have some sort of evaluation and monitoring for money expended to these regional bodies. So that is what we would like to know, what system is there in the Ministry to evaluate and monitor the spending and ensure accountability to the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I am going to allow one feedback on this particular aspect and then we will move on.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: CXC is an organ of Caricom and as an organ of Caricom, there are specific deliverables and they are answerable to the council, not the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago—but we are a part of the

council. So certainly there are different ways and means for dealing with CXC and dealing with any matter that comes up with respect to CXC. That is not determined within the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago. That is determined by the Caricom and the council of which Trinidad and Tobago is a part.

Ms. Haynes: I believe my question—I asked a question about all the regional bodies and you gave me something about CXC. Now I understand that my colleague was asking you a question about CXC and I understand that you are talking about it being a regional body, but I am asking a question as to systems in the Ministry to evaluate and monitor moneys that is being accounted for. [*Desk thumping*] So my question has nothing to do with CXC and their procedure. It is to do with the Ministry's procedure on money expended from the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman: And again, Members—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Chair, which line Item would that be referred to—

Mr. Chairman: Minister. Minister, one second. And again—[*Crosstalk*]—Member for Tabaquite—and again, the forum for that particular question that you are identifying does not fall within identifying what we are doing at this Standing Finance Committee. Okay? So Minister, you have a feedback to give on that last comment there or you—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, I gave my comment.

Mr. Chairman: You gave your contribution on that already.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It was asked and I answered.

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan, you still had something to mention? Item—

Mr. Ram: Mr. Chair, Caroni Central.

Mr. Chairman: Caroni Central. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In respect of the same line Item 01: Caribbean Examinations Council, can the Minister explain why no allocation was

made in 2019 for the payment of those fees?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No expenditure was done in 2019, which would have resulted in us having an arrears in 2020 which was what was paid.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Supplemental please, yes. So based on that, and it really got my attention when you said we had arrears, so that the Revised Estimates for 2020 afforded for an additional 7.5 million. So is it then that the annual figure is 7.5 million?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We would have paid a portion and then there were arrears. So the annual figure is what you see as the 11,275,100.

Mr. Ram: If you paid a portion in 2019 none is reflected here, please, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I did not say we paid it in 2019. I said we paid a portion and the outstanding figure was what you see represented as the decrease. That was what was paid extra in 2020.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Just for the record, Mr. Deputy Chair, I am looking at 01—

Mr. Chairman: Member, in the mike. Speak in the mike, please.

Mr. Hosein: I am looking at 01, sorry—let me move my book—and there is no expenditure for 2019, so I do not understand what the Minister is saying.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I just said—and I did not say we paid it in 2019.

Mr. Hosein: It is blank.

Mr. Chairman: I think, Member, the Minister clarified the statement. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I understand the Minister's explanation that no expenditure was made in 2019, and therefore, we were in arrears. In 2020, the

allocation of 11.275 is consistent with the allocation in 2021. The Minister explained that the additional allocation in 2020 was utilized to pay arrears. Does this represent the full amount of the arrears; and if not, what arrangements are in place to pay the outstanding amount?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Whatever arrears were due in 2020 were paid.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies, page 181; Item 003: United Nation Organizations, page 182; Item 004: International Bodies, page 182; Item 006: Educational Institutions, pages 183 and 184, and I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am at line Item 01: Grants to Assisted Secondary Schools. There is a decrease of \$8 million. Can the Minister explain, please?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Again, Mr. Chair, this decrease has been budgeted. Once again, once there is a shortfall, the Ministry of Finance will be approached to supplement this allocation. This is an estimate.

Ms. Haynes: Perhaps the Minister can help me here. These Grants to Assisted Secondary Schools, they should be a fixed figure, we should know, unless you built additional secondary schools that we did not know of or something like that. If in 2019, you spent 46 million, actually, you revised the estimate; in 2020, it was 47 million, a revised of 42 million, why estimate 34 million in 2022 to something that ought to be generally a fixed kind of figure?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This depends on the student. It is paid per student. So it depends on the student population at the school and, again, the estimate is given and as required, more can be put into the line Item.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan, firstly, and then I will—

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister give us a breakdown of the number of schools that were assisted for this \$42 million?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We will provide that at a later date, sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Now I recognize the Member for Naparima, first.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Item 09— it is a similar question to 01— Grants to Assisted Primary Schools, there is a 7 million decrease. Now, I understand that assisted primary schools are complaining about lack of equipment, et cetera. My own grandchildren go to school and we have to pitch in to help the schools. Could the Minister explain what in the budgeting exercise would account for a 7 million decrease?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Once again, the budgeting exercise is based on expected revenue, and therefore, expenditure is given that way. So an allocation has been made here, and depending on if there is a shortfall, there is the mid-term where the Ministry can approach the Minister of Finance, again, asking for it to be supplemented. So that option is available and will be taken once it is necessary.

Mr. Chairman: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: So the Minister is saying—telling us that this 7 million reduction has nothing to do with a decrease in request or a change in the allocation, but it is primarily as a result of shortfall in revenues, and therefore, available funds to fund what was required and done last year? This is what you are saying?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Mr. Charles: Right.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member for Naparima?

Mr. Charles: Not a follow-up, but another Item. Item 19: Servol Junior Life Centres, I see a \$1.6 million decrease. Now, I am concerned in terms of the crime, in terms of single parents, in terms of the problems of urban males, that every

effort be done to ensure that we provide infrastructure and support to steer them away from a life of crime so that we enter into a phase of crime prevention and not crime suppression and rehabilitation. Could the Minister justify in these times a cut of 1.6 million to the Servol Junior Life Centres?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I agree completely with the Member that we are in the point where we have to make sure that we suppress crime and, of course, that is the goal of education and all the different programmes that have been put here. For that reason, an allocation has been made to these different areas, and once more, if required, the Ministry of Finance will be approached to provide same.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. With your permission, I would like to ask the Minister to provide a list of each school which would have received grants under 01, 09 and 11 for the years 2019, 2020 and proposed 2021?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Just to draw to the Member's attention that line Item 11 did not have an allocation in 2020. So that would not be provided. However, his request for 01 and 09 will be provided.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

5.45 p.m.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Given the Minister's answer to my colleague from Naparima as per the Servol programme, I draw attention to line Item 07 Servol Adolescent Training. An estimate of 3.6 million was given in 2020 but only 300,000 expended and we see 300,000 estimate in 2021. So what is the status with this programme? Is it that the 3 million was just never needed and we only need 300,000 to run this adolescent development training programme? If you could give us some insight into this programme and what is needed to fund it adequately?

Line Item 07.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We will provide that information at a later date.

Mr. Chairman: Information will be provided, Member. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Chair. I am looking at line Item 24, Grants to Government Secondary Schools, Education Programme. Again, can the Minister account for the decrease of \$10 million in this allocation?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Again, this is the allocation made to the Government secondary schools, the allocation is given and similarly, as for 01 and for 09, once additional funding is required, there is the midterm and we will be able to approach the Ministry of Finance to supplement these line Items.

Mr. Hosein: And 27 and 30, Textbook Rental Management Unit, primary schools and secondary schools, I see that no allocation was made for 2020. Is it that this textbook rental programme is going to be cut for 2020 and 2021?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The textbook system, we are actually moving to the e-book system and so we will be utilizing funds to be able to move in that direction.

Mr. Hosein: Is that under a different line Item?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, it is not.

Mr. Hosein: So where is the Ministry going to get the money for the e-textbook programme?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There are other sources that we can get money from.

Mr. Hosein: But there must be a line Item so that you can account to the Parliament.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, there does not have to be a line Item, it depends on how the project is being approached. It is a project and it is being approached, it is not in a line Item in this budget.

Mr. Hosein: And line Item 38, Council of Legal Education, there is a big reduction of \$11 million. Is it that the intake for this year is going to be less?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Additional funding was provided to offset outstanding balances and the estimated bidding is approximately 23. There is 20 allocated, if they need additional funds here, we will supply.

Mr. Hosein: So this figure accounts for arrears plus contributions for the current year?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In 2020, there were arrears paid so that is why you will see a large jump in the figure in 2020.

Mr. Hosein: And in 2021, there is no allocation for any arrears?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, the arrears were paid.

Mr. Hosein: And you confirm that there will be no reduction in the intake at the Hugh Wooding Law School?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is none planned.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 40, this Medical Post-Graduate Programme. Can you identify how that sum—

Mr. Chairman: Member, your mike and please, just shift it—yeah.

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry, thank you. Minister, line Item 40, Medical Post-Graduate Programme, the sum of \$500,000. Can you indicate how that would have been spent in 2020 and how it will be accessed in 2021?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We will provide that information to you.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I am at Item 46, National Training Agency, I note

that in 2019, there was 13 million actual spent and a Revised Estimate of the same 13 million in 2020 but a drop in 2021. I am just curious as to why there has been that decline. What less is going to be done by the National Training Agency that is currently being done?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The National Training Agency has indicated that they would be looking at reducing their operational expenditure and they will be trying to streamline their organization more to be able to fit within the allocation given.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche West, supplemental? Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Chair, but my colleague from Barataria/San Juan addressed 27 and 30.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am looking at line Item 35, Direct University Services, current, there is \$48 million decrease. Could the Minister advise us of what accounts for this decrease in expenditure?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, at a recent university grants committee meeting, all the campus recognized that because of—

Ms. Haynes: Excuse Minister, I am not hearing you clearly.

Mr. Imbert: The mike is on.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. I want to hear the answer.

Mr. Imbert: Are you hearing me now?

Ms. Haynes: Yes, much better. Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. At a recent university grants committee meeting, all of the territories indicated that because of the effect of COVID-19 on the regional economies, they would have to scale back their contribution to The University of the West Indies. Trinidad and Tobago is no exception so there is a reduction in terms of Trinidad and Tobago's contribution to The University of the West Indies.

I can assure you that the reduction by Trinidad and Tobago is significantly less than the other territories.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you very much, Minister of Finance.

Mr. Chairman: Supplement, Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. But that takes me to line Item 48, University of Trinidad and Tobago. The same answer applies here that Trinidad and Tobago has taken a decision because of COVID-19 to reduce the expenditure at UTT or are programmes being cut because there is a \$34 million decrease?

Mr. Imbert: If you look at the budget for this year, we have had to reduce expenditure across the board so there is nothing unique about these two Items. It is part of the overall problem that we have in this fiscal year.

Ms. Haynes: So is it the decrease will look at programme cuts or staff cuts? What are we looking at in UTT?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The UTT has indicated that in order to curtail expenditure, they will be developing a policy to use open-source software in delivery of teaching and learning which will reduce their software licensing cost. They are going to review their operations and they are going to look at digitalization. They are going to have a comprehensive review of their manpower requirements to ensure that they have value for money. They will implement a very rigorous monitoring system to ensure their financial effectiveness and some other measures. So the organization has indicated that they will be increasing their efficiency in order to reduce their expenditure across the board.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Ms. Ameen: Just a continuation from that before I go into the question I had raised my hand for. Sometime ago, UTT had reduced the staff strength. Given their new examination of being more efficient, do we anticipate that we will have to sever

more people in terms of jobs?

And, Mr. Chairman, I had a question with regard to the Commonwealth Caribbean Medical Research Council—

Mr. Chairman: Line Item.

Ms. Ameen: Item 37. I see that they have no allocation this year. Last year, they utilized \$47,000 but the year before that, they utilized \$87,000 and this year, they have absolutely no allocation at all. Could the Minister provide an explanation?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Funds have been provided under the Ministry of Health.

Ms. Ameen: Ministry of Health?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yeah, Ministry of Health, CARPHA.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 47, the Cocoa Research Unit. Is this subvention connected in any way to the Ministry of Agriculture Centre for Excellence in Agriculture and Biotechnology and are you concerned that there may be some duplication?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is a programme under the University of the West Indies so that is their programme.

Mr. Paray: Okay. And secondly, Madam Minister, line Item 63, Student Nurses Stipend, I notice in 2020, there was a \$30 million allocation that was not used and we are putting back \$9 million in 2021. I do know of several students who would have attended the University of the Southern Caribbean, nursing students who for the last couple years have been complaining that they did not receive their stipends. Can you say if this allocation would be addressing those students from those schools, especially the University of the Southern Caribbean?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This line Item deals with the stipends for nurses of Ministry of Health and COSTAATT.

Mr. Paray: Okay, so this does not pick up those—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is no stipend to USC in this line Item.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Chair. I am at line Item 62, School of Nursing. I saw gladly an increase in the allocation of \$4 million from what was the revised estimate in 2020. Can the Minister indicate whether or not this is the nursing academy that was built by the previous administration?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is the Nursing Education Unit under the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Hosein: And what will be the expected intake of nurses for this year having regard to the large increase?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The increase was based on the fact that the funds in 2019/2020 were utilized for only part of the year and so that is the allocation. It is very similar to what was allocated in 2020.

Mr. Hosein: So this, again, is for a shortfall from the previous year?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, that is the actual figure. In 2019/2020, the expenditure was less because there was only catering for part of the year. So the allocation in 2021 is very similar to that of 2020, because that is the usual level of the expenditure.

Mr. Hosein: What is the average annual intake of students for the school?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We will provide that to you at a later date.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, the Item 53, the MIC Pleasantville Technology Centre as well as 54, the MIC Craft Programme has a significant reduction in allocation

whereas in 2019, the expenditure was about 10 million; in 2020, it was 10 million but in 2021, we have a reduction of 3 million for both these institutions. Can the Minister provide an explanation?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Once again, the entire revenue of the country has decreased and therefore, a subsequent result of that is that we would have to reduce expenditure in many of the line Items, so certainly, this is one that it had to have been reduced and that is the situation at this time with respect to that line Item.

Ms. Ameen: I just want to ask further, Mr. Chairman, I do understand the explanation in terms of a need for a reduction across the board in terms of spending. Has the Ministry examined or do they plan to examine these programmes and align the reduction with the workforce requirement for your own strategic objectives in terms of the education requirements?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: As a part of our monitoring and evaluation of these units that fall under the Ministry, they submit to us their plans and so on with respect to how they operate and yes, the Ministry would provide guidance and advice on the plan submitted by each of these institutions.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, line Item 48, University of Trinidad and Tobago. I understand the financial position of the Government and the need to curtail expenditure. So the question I am asking: Given a 34.4 million reduction in the allocation to UTT, is this based on some study, the rationalization of the programme offering by UTT, and if so will this lead to a reduction in staff, and if so, by how much?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: As I explained before, each of the institutions, based on the budget that they are presented with, will make their plan for the year and that

will be communicated with the Ministry of Education. And I would have said before that there is no indication at this time of any staff reduction. We do not have that information at the Ministry at this time.

Mr. Charles: Follow-up. So am I to understand that the Minister is telling us that cuts were made and then subsequently the institutions will inform the Ministry about the areas that should be cut or the areas that should be rationalized? Is the Minister telling us that this exercise, this budget exercise, did not take into account information presented by the institutions in connection with their strategic approach to a reduced revenue situation?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: What I am saying very clearly, Mr. Chair, is that based on our overall reduction in revenue as a country every Ministry would have a reduced allocation. Every institution under the Ministry would therefore have to have a reduction in the allocation and the institution itself will do what it needs to do to plan, based on that allocation, and based on the budget that they would have presented, and they will present that plan to the Ministry with respect to how they intend to proceed as the year goes on. That is what I am saying.

Mr. Chair, if I may just return to Item 63, I am just giving some information that was requested with respect to the number of nurses. At COSTAATT it is 650 and the Ministry of Education, 150. So it is 800 student nurses in all. That was the request, I think by the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: In terms of the UTT, the UTT's mandate has a lot to do with preparing our citizens for what is required in Trinidad and Tobago. And different governments would have different objectives, in terms of what areas they would encourage studies in, what areas they would provide scholarships in, for example, to provide a workforce that would feed into the areas you are trying to strengthen,

the industries you are trying to strengthen. The UTT plays a big role in educating our students.

With this reduced allocation, would the Ministry be giving UTT any guidelines to follow when they are looking at revising their programmes or their expenditure, in terms of what areas to place priority in, based on the industries you want to strengthen or support? So if your drive is tourism or your drive is yachting, yacht repairs, whatever the area in the economy that you want to strengthen, are they going to be provided with general guidelines in examining and reducing their programmes?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The Ministry of Education maintains that dialogue with these institutions, and certainly it will be a dialogue with respect to how they go forward and what they focus on. So, yes.

Mr. Chairman: Item 007, Households, page 184 and 185. Do I recognize the Member for Tabaquite?

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am at line Item 19, Retraining Programme for Displaced Workers. There is a \$2 million decrease and in time when there are a number of workers being displaced, I am asking why the decrease here at this point?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chair, this again is another programme that would have to be reduced based on our reduced circumstances. And so the institution will do its best to offer the programme to as many people as it can under the circumstances that we are faced with.

Ms. Haynes: And the same goes for the Student Support Services Programme. It is because of overall reduction in expenditure we have chosen to reduce the expenditure here as well.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Which line Item is that?

Ms. Haynes: That is line Item 15, right above, Student Support Services Programme. In 2019—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is one with the Ministry of Finance.

Ms. Haynes: Pardon?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We are going to review that line Item with the Ministry of Finance.

Ms. Haynes: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am referring to 15.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want look at 09. This is the Early Childhood Care and Education at Servol and also 29, together, Point Lisas Industrial Apprenticeship Programme. The Early Childhood Care and Education, Servol, has been cut by \$5 million and again this deals with the disadvantaged in our society and those who need a heads-up and those who, if they lose out in the early childhood age group, they could never recover at primary school and secondary school and university. So we are talking about persistent poverty. At the same time, while we decrease Servol Early Childhood Care and Education by 5 million, we have an allocation of 3 million for the Point Lisas Industrial Apprenticeship Programme.

My understanding is that they are laying off workers in the Point Lisas industry. My understanding also is that the model is in question at this time. So I am asking the question: Why are you spending 3 million at Point Lisas Apprenticeship Programme, and at the same time cutting by 5 million the Early Childhood Care and Education at Servol?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I will deal with 09, Servol. Once again, it is recognized

that many of these programmes are extremely impactful. But again our circumstances are as they are and our revenue reduction is as it is and therefore the allocation has been made. And in many instances when these institutions get a reduction, they may approach the Ministry and the Ministry of Finance asking for some rationalization. So once again, the allocation is there, a substantial allocation, and if there needs to be a supplementation of this, it will be done. There is no intention to underfund. But there is a reality that must be faced.

And as we go across to 29, because that was also asked about, regardless of whether the programme is being reduced, well then that should indicate why there is a reduction in the allocation here. And even though there is a reduction, it does not mean that this programme is unnecessary.

Mr. Charles: I am not saying—Sir, a follow-up—they are unnecessary, hon. Minister. I am saying at this time you are training them for jobs that do not exist. And therefore it seems to be, in terms of a question of prioritization, given your limited resources that are available to you, that you spend it in areas of greatest need and greatest effect and efficacy.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chair, respectfully, I do not know that the need does not exist. The Member has not presented data to that effect and, therefore I cannot make a comment on that.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. At line Item 28, Bursaries, Financial Assistance, Tertiary, there is an allocation of 500,000 for 2020 and no moneys was spent in 2020, and there is no allocation for 2021. Can the Minister indicate if there were any applications at all for any financial assistance?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: However, funding for tertiary studies is provided in a different line Item. Scholarships are in line Item, but certainly we can provide

information at a later date as to whether an applications were made under this line Item.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, just for clarification, I would have thought that this line Item would have covered those students who are not recipients of scholarships and require financial assistance.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I said funding for tertiary education is dealt with as scholarships and that is under that line Item and if you want the information as to whether anyone applied under this line Item, I would provide that at a later date.

Mr. Hosein: At line Item 40, Gratuities to Contract Officers, an allocation of \$25 million was made in 2020, with only \$5 million being spent for that year. Then I am seeing 5 million again estimated for 2021. I am certain that they would have had several persons who were entitled to gratuity, hence the large allocation for 2020 in the sum of \$25 million. Can the Minister indicate why only \$5 million was spent in the last year and only \$5 million is now being allocated for the present year? Persons would want their gratuity having regard to the situation that we are in.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The calculation of gratuities and the approvals are being worked out with the CPO, the Comptroller of Accounts, and so on, so that is why the entire expenditure was not made in 2020 and only 5 million— Another 5 million is allocated so we expect that we will be able to sort out that number, and certainly if more is needed at that time, if we are able to sort out the entire amount, then we will be approaching the Ministry of Finance for the funding to be able to pay those gratuities.

Mr. Hosein: Can you inform us of how many persons currently are entitled to gratuity payments?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We will provide that for you at a later date.

Mr. Hosein: At Item 25, Servol's Human Development and Skills Training Programme. I am seeing that there is a cut of about \$6 million in this programme. Can the Minister indicate why are we going to reduce the programme? Is staff going to be reduced at the Servol centres? Because this is a very large decrease; it is \$6 million.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Once again, the entire allocation to the Ministry would have been reduced based on our circumstances. So, these are very impactful and important programmes, however, we face the reality of what our revenue is.

Mr. Hosein: It is a clear question.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could I continue and answer my question that has been asked?

Mr. Hosein: You can continue.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thanks. So the allocation has been reduced. Again, with respect to Servol and other institutions, when there is a reduction, if there is a situation where it needs to be revisited, that is entirely possible. There is the midterm that more money can be allocated to these programmes as well, and that representation will be made on the level of the institution to the Ministry and from the Ministry to the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Hosein: You see Minister, you cannot continue to repeat this answer that you will come back in the midterm.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: You continue to ask the question.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Mr. Chair, I am directing the Minister to line Item 23, Servol High-Tech and Advanced Skills Training. Now this question comes as a result of the Government's stated policy on digitization. On a move to go online, the Minister of Finance made the point in his budget statement, and now we are seeing, as we go

through the details of the accounting exercise, that money is being taken from the High-Tech and Advanced Skills Training Programme. Now, when you are looking overall priority of the Government, if you stated your policy position on digitization, how can you justify the cut to the Servol High-Tech and Advanced Skills Training Programme in the same vein?

Additionally, Servol is meant to serve a certain section of society who ordinarily is kind of left out of this high-tech training. So why cut \$2 million from here given your stated overall policy position?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I told the Member that this is simply not the only line Item that deals with digitization. I am certain this is the second Head to be examined, when we go, even in this Head, there is ample allocation made for digitization methods, within the Ministry as well as provision of devices, and certainly when we go to the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation, I am sure the Member will see there are adequate provisions made which would underscore the policy of the Government with respect to going towards digitization. So this one line Item does not reflect the entire position of the Government with respect to digitization.

6.15 p.m.

Ms. Haynes: Now, I understand that. However, my question was specific to the students who access the Servol training and those students are now losing a \$2 million allocation. So, regardless of what exists anywhere else we have to be able to say that the SERVOL Hi-Tech & Advanced Skills Training Programme has gotten a reduction and they train a specific segment of our society who ought not to be left out of this digitization train.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chair, what we have to be able to say is really the remit of the Government, and I assure the Member that what we have to say will be

said when we look at the allocations throughout the Government for this purpose.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, with regard to Item 19: Retraining Programme for Displaced Workers, I want to make a statement and a plea. There are more and more displaced workers in this country every day based on the current economic situation. It is my view that this Retraining Programme for Displaced Workers should be utilized in a meaningful way given the current situation.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to Item 09: Early Childhood Care and Education (Servol), I do understand the Minister's response. What I wanted to get clear is whether any centres, any of these early childhood centres, Servol childhood centres are earmarked to be closed at all? And, Mr. Chairman, I will allow that because my other question is on another Item or can I proceed?

Mr. Chairman: We will deal with this one and then we will go to the other one.

Ms. Ameen: Yes, thank you.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The Ministry has no information about the closing of any Servol ECCE centres at this time

Ms. Ameen: I thank you very much for that commitment. Mr. Chairman, with regard to Item 23: SERVOL Hi-Tech & Advanced Skills Training Programme, given the reduction in the allocation, can the Minister indicate if there is an anticipated reduction in the number of trainees that this programme will now cater for, and if so, what it would be?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No information about reduction in the number of trainees in this programme at this time.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. In light of the Minister's previous comment that many of these Heads are very, very critical, but overall a reduction is required. There has been a—sorry, yeah, a \$36 million reduction overall. I was just wondering whether the Minister has done any assessment about the number of jobs that are going to be lost as a result of these reductions.

Mr. Chairman: That is a general comment on that whole line Item that you are referring to on Households?

Mr. Tancoo: Correct, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Minister.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That question assumes that jobs will be lost. I do not have that information and I do not know if the Member has that information, but I certainly did not say that in this House.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Just to clarify, the question is whether any assessment has been done. I am neither quantifying nor qualifying.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The assessment again assumes that jobs will be lost, and that has not been the information given here.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am back at Items 23 and 25, Mr. Chair. So is the Minister confirming to this honourable House that no jobs will be lost in this fiscal year for the Servol programme?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: What I said, and I repeat is that there is no information at the Ministry of Education at this time that indicates that.

Mr. Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers, page 185. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Are we covering 011: Transfers to State Enterprises in that or not?

Mr. Chairman: No. We are coming to that now.

Mr. Charles: Okay.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, may I?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Let me just indicate, Mr. Chairman, that agencies such as Servol and other agencies of this nature are not run by the Ministry of Education.

[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hosein: I think we have moved on from this point. I thought we moved—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I have the floor.

Mr. Chairman: Members, Members, I have given the Minister the opportunity to make a comment. Proceed. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I have the floor. [*Interruption*] They are already back. Anyway, yes, Mr. Chairman, agencies of this nature the Minister of Education will not be able to say if there would be job cuts, job losses. This is a subvention to these agencies to ensure that they can run. So, Mr. Chairman, the whole premise of the questioning on that side about job cuts and job losses is unfounded. [*Crosstalk*] It is a totally false premise. [*Interruption*] Yes it is.

Mr. Chairman: Item—Okay, let us move on, Members.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Naparima, please.

Mr. Chairman: Let us move on, Members. Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, page 186. I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I am talking specifically about 02: National Schools Dietary Services Ltd. And I am assuming here that that is what people like myself will call the “School Feeding Programme”. When I look at the data in front of me in 2019, approximately 240 was spent, and in 2021 we will spend approximately a half of what was spent in 2019, a decrease of \$52 million.

Now, given the fact that we will have increased poverty, or rising unemployment in Naparima and elsewhere, the School Feeding Programme is

supposed to pick up part of that slack. And my guru Lloyd Best used to say that the school feeding programme is pivotal—I have five minutes—is pivotal in transforming our society. If we link it to agriculture and if we link it to agriculture and food production. So I am saying in the context of that move to change our society from KFC and whatnot to local foods, one; and secondly, to pick up the slack with respect to poverty in the society, I cannot notwithstanding a reduction, see a \$52 million reduction in the School Feeding Programme, when I could go to a thousand other areas that seem to be prioritized.

Would the Minister explain the 52 million? In what areas? How many less children will get it? And if any philosophical thought was given to what that will mean to our society?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chair, may I draw to the attention of the hon. Member that the school feeding, this allocation is expected to feed for the next two terms assuming that face to face feeding resumes, and therefore the reduction in the allocation can be understood very easily in that light.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman: On the same one, okay. AG, Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: May I add, Mr. Chair, that during the course of the entire budget and in particular the appearance of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in this House which is quite exceptional, that the Government informed specifically that there were other areas of movement of feeding to these children via the green baskets, the food baskets via the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, underwritten by expenditure.

And therefore, the deep philosophical underpinning is that the green baskets that so many thousands of people have received promote number one, diversification. Number two, the improvement of the agricultural sector from the

farm via NAMDEVCO directly to the homes for the same children on the school feeding list. And that under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and also the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services the moneys is diverted away from this programme are to be found there. You take from the left hand and you give to the right hand. And this was capably demonstrated by the Minister of Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in the course of the budget, and will be found in the whole-of-government approach to this aspect.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. If you would permit me one second to address what the Attorney General just brought before us. On or about early September there was an announcement about school feeding, and then it was announced again that it was moving to Social Development in connection with Agriculture. So the Attorney General will forgive us until we see it happen the announcements hold little water at this point.

But my question, [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Chairman, is on Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme Ltd. That line Item is 08, page 186. Now, there is a decrease of \$6.3 million to this Youth Training and Employment Partnership. But if you look on page 123 of the Minister's budget statement, the Workforce Recovery Programme is meant to be housed under this Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, and that Workforce Recovery Programme, the programme is meant to:

“...enables unemployed citizens of Commonwealth Member States, young people...” et cetera “...losing their employment...free and unlimited access to over 4,000 courses and 400 specialisations...”—et cetera.

And that YTEPP is supposed to facilitate this. How does the Minister justify this \$6.3 million decrease when you have an additional Workforce Recovery

Programme under this line Item?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chairman, allow me to make a comment regarding the National Schools Dietary Services Limited to indicate that as a usual part of their operations they take food from our local producers. So that is a normal part of it. So therefore, it is not a wait to see what happens. This is the normal operation of the School Feeding Programme.

In addition to that the YTEPP, this line Item deals with the operational expenditure of YTEPP, and the other one deals with a separate issue. So they are not linked in the way that the Member is trying to link them.

Ms. Haynes: So is it that we will find the allocation for this Workforce Recovery Programme somewhere else?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We just discussed it in a separate line Item. [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Haynes: Which line Item?

Hon. Member: “Ahhh.”

Ms. Haynes: Where did we just discuss this?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Member, it was you that linked the two and I just told you that this one deals with the operational expenditure of YTEPP, and the other one would deal with the Workforce Programme that you referred to.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: I just want to be guided because it was not the Member for Tabaquite that linked the Workforce Recovery Programme to the YTEPP, it was the Minister in the budget. So, the thing is YTEPP has an allocation, that allocation has been reduced but the Minister in his budget presentation stated that the Workforce Recovery Programme is going to be an initiative of YTEPP. So, can the Minister indicate where this funding will come from for this programme? And when this programme is expected to begin? So, is it that funding will be sourced later in the

year because it does not—there is no intention to begin it immediately or something like that. Well, the Minister of Finance stepped out but he was the one who made the link.

Mr. Chairman: Remember, the budget statement is not being discussed today, right?

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: The hon. Member linked it with this particular programme, so I need to get a line Item in order for the question to be put forward.

Ms. Ameen: Line Item 08: Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Operational expenditure of YTEPP. I have answered that question.

Ms. Ameen: All right. And my question is, Mr. Chair, does that include any allocation for this new initiative called the Workforce Recovery Programme?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No. That would be a separate line Item.

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

Ms. Ameen: I just want to add—

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Let me just add to—Minister, the same line Item 08. I agree that it is a new programme and maybe it is under development or something like that. But now that you have decreased, now you are bringing on added responsibilities to YTEPP and this is their operating expenses and you have decreased it by \$6.3 million.

The question I would like to ask is that, given these added responsibilities, how do you expect them now with these added—with a decrease in their operational expenses of \$6.3 million?

6.30 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We certainly all have had to become a lot more lean in how we operate, certainly at all of the Ministries, and that will be expected to be rolled down into the state enterprises and statutory bodies because that is what is required at this time. We simply have to do more with less, that is available to us.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers; Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies; page 186.

Mr. Tancoo: Hold on one second please. If I may, I have a question. I have a question?

Mr. Chairman: Well, you now want to ask a question on which particular line Item?

Mr. Tancoo: Line Item 10 and 11, EFCL Interests and Principle.

Mr. Chairman: All right, proceed, proceed.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. My question relates to whether or not EFCL has been taking—well, EFCL is paying these loans, and this interest on this loan, as it relates to whether or not EFCL is going to be using these loans to pay legal judgments filed against it or the EFCL contractors which have outstanding claims against the company?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Not for that purpose.

Mr. Tancoo: Can you repeat that please?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Not the loans for that purpose.

Mr. Tancoo: So, can I then request from the Minister whether or not a statement—a factual statement—as to whether or not there are in fact loans that have been taken out by EFCL for those purposes, payment of legal fees, payment of legal judgments and payment for contractors?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Those are not the loans referred to in these two line items that are being specifically pointed out by the hon. Member, who I assure that all statements are factual in this House.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, page 186. And we are going on to a new booklet. *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* for the financial year 2021, and we are on page 186. Item 004: Statutory Boards, page 186. I recognize the Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, the COSTAATT—Item 56: COSTAATT; in 2019, the allocation was 109 million. It was reduced in 2020 and this year you have a further reduction of \$10 million. Can the Minister indicate the reason for the reduction? What areas within COSTAATT you will find that reduction?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Similarly to the allocations to UWI and— [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Right, we are on page 155, right, of the Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. That is the booklet you are in? Page 155, Members. 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*. 01 National Institute of Higher Education, Research Science and Technology; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; page 155. Members, you all are with me?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Item 001: General Administration, page 155; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 155; Item 001: General Administration, pages 155 and 156; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment and Purchases, page 156; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 156; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and

Subsidies; Item 007: Households, page 156; Item 12: Board of Industrial Training. Members, 13: National Commission for UNESCO. No questions, Members? 56 College of Science Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago. St. Augustine, COSTAATT, Member?

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I was just enquiring into—

Mr. Chairman: Page 172 eh.

Ms. Ameen: Yes. I was just enquiring, Mr. Chairman, whether this will cause any of the programmes currently offered—

Mr. Chairman: Line Item, we need to—what line Item?

Ms. Ameen: The Item to COSTAATT?

Mr. Chairman: Oh, yes.

Ms. Ameen: Yes, yes to COSTAATT.

Mr. Chairman: No, but remember COSTAATT, but then we need to look at the particular breakdown on page 172 under COSTAATT and you identify the particular line Item, and you proceed from there. Thank you.

Ms. Ameen: Yes, okay Mr. Chairman, thank you. I just want to ask with regard to Item 01: under Personnel Expenditure, which is Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there is a decrease of \$1 million. Previously, we had an expenditure of— allocation of 4 million and the expenditure of 4 million in 2020, the Revised Estimates. So this 1 million represents a quarter in terms of the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances allocation. Can the Minister indicate if COSTAATT has indicated that they plan to reduce their number of employees?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is indicated that there is a freeze on filling of vacancies on the permanent establishment.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. That would represent additional hiring. Is it that you have any persons whose—for instance, their contracts are coming to an end or

something? This is a reduction, this is not— New hiring would mean additional funding. Reduced hiring indicates that the amount to be spent on employees will be reduced. So I am asking if there is a reduced allocation, if it means that some of the existing employees are not budgeted for and if that means that any of them will be fired?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is a further indication that the age of retirement will be 60 for contract staff. So no staff over the age of 60 will be continued.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, page 172. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; page 173. Item 001: General Administration; page 173. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 173. Item 006: Educational Institutions; page 173.

Ms. Ameen: Sir, I had my hand up, I wanted to ask a question.

Mr. Chairman: Which one you are at, St. Augustine?

Ms. Ameen: Pardon?

Mr. Chairman: Which one?

Ms. Ameen: Right, Current Transfers and Subsidies, 04, under the School of Nursing?

Mr. Chairman: Page 173.

Ms. Ameen: Yes page 170? The previous expenditure in 2020 was 15 million. The allocation in 2020—in this year, is 7 million. That represents a cut of more than half to the School of Nursing. Can the Minister explain—I know earlier you indicated the School of Nursing falls under the Ministry of Health, this is not the nursing school in El Dorado, so maybe I would appreciate an explanation for this more than half in reduction?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The actual payment will be now made under the Ministry of Education and that was covered in the earlier line Item. So this

payment is not going to be made from COSTAATT. It is moved to the Ministry of Education now.

Mr. Chairman: Member, follow up?

Ms. Ameen: Yes, I do, I do understand, but I am asking if you have a reduction in the number of—do you anticipate a reduction in the number of nurses?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So the Ministry of Education is paying the stipends and this figure you are seeing here is to pay their operational costs. So it has been split, whereas in other years, it would have been together.

Mr. Chairman: Item 007: Households, page 173. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We are at page 62. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 62; Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, page 62; Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 63 to 65. I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister, Line Item 004: National and Additional Scholarships based on Advanced Level Examination. Based on the current fiasco regarding the grades awarded by CXC to our A' level students, is the Ministry considering going forward with the awards of national scholarship in this year?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Scholarships will be awarded in 2020, yes.

Mr. Paray: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: I note that the estimate for 2021 is much less than what was actually paid out in 2019. This is the same line Item 004, and 2020. Is this estimate for 2021 based on current fiasco with the CXC? Is it that—and the CAPE students—that we can now judge that we need something like \$20 million less for scholarships?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is a \$35 million decrease in this line Item. And this, again, has been estimated because the scholarships for this year have not yet been determined. Of course, there are open, there are additional scholarships, and it depends on how many of each you have so the allocation is here. And again, if it needs to be boosted based on the actual scholarships that are awarded, that will be done.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. And, can I continue?

Mr. Chairman: Follow up?

Ms. Haynes: Yes, line items 004: Tobago Technology Center. There is no estimate in 2021. Has the center been completed? Is that the case here?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry, which line Item, sorry?

Ms. Haynes: 004: Tobago Technology Center.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No funds were requested under this line Item.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, you indicated under 004: National/Additional Scholarships based on Advanced Level Examinations—in 2020, could you advise us how many open and national scholarships were awarded?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We would have to provide that information.

Mr. Indarsingh: You would provide that information?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is it in total or separate?

Mr. Indarsingh: Separate.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We would provide that; 400 in total we would provide the breakdown, the disaggregation, at a later date.

Mr. Indarsingh: And I know that you indicated to my colleague from Mayaro that scholarships will be awarded. You do not envisage a timeline based on this situation which has unfolded with CXC?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The Ministry is awaiting the report and once that is received, we will know the direction we go in but scholarships will be awarded.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: I am watching your action, Member. Sorry.

Ms. Ameen:—Item 001: Establishment of Diego Martin HYPE Centre. No allocation is given this year, but 200,000 was given last year and 225,000 the previous year. Could the Minister give the status of the establishment of this HYPE centre?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The centre is 100 per cent completed.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I also would like to enquire into the Construction of the HYPE Admin—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry, could I just clarify that answer.

Ms. Ameen: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The procurement of furniture is 100 per cent completed and there is a fire alarm system that is in 80 per cent progress.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member for St. Augustine?

Ms. Ameen: So is that that—because there is no allocation for this year. So I am asking if that would complete the establishment of the centre.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: There is a small amount that is outstanding and funds will be vired to be able to do that.

Ms. Ameen: Okay. And when will that centre be operational? When do you anticipate?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Which centre?

Ms. Ameen: The Establishment of the Diego Martin HYPE Centre. That is the Item.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: But it is not a new centre. The funds that were allocated here were for specific works and those are almost at the stage of completion. That is the fire alarm system and the procurement of furniture. So it is not a new centre that is being built.

Ms. Ameen: So it continues operating now?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Ms. Ameen: Okay. The other Item has to do with the Construction of HYPE Admin. & O'Meara Centre which is Item 003. I see, Mr. Chairman, that in 2020, an allocation of 1million was given, but only 500,000 was utilized. This year, I see 1.5 million has been allocated. Can the Minister give an explanation for the lack of use of the entire allocation in the last fiscal and the plans for the explanation and plans for the 1.5 which is an additional allocation this year?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The COVID situation would have interrupted the ongoing works at this centre. However, the funds were used for procurement of equipment for labs and workshops. Expenditure was given for supply and installation of security lighting. There are \$325,000-odd in commitments to supply installation and testing of the PA system, and in fiscal 2021, those commitments will be paid and external work projects will be done and a fire and security alarm system will be installed.

Ms. Ameen: And this would be in the 1.5 million? All of those things would be covered?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: All of those things are intended to be covered as much as possible.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I suspect that they will need more for that. What I want to ask is after the planned work for this 1.5 million, what percentage completed would this administrative centre be?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We will provide that.

Ms. Ameen: Well, tied to that, if you could also include what the balance to complete the centre is. What the total balance would be? I ask for the percentage completed.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I also want to go down a little further to the Establishment of the Undergraduate Scholarship which is 006.

Mr. Chairman: We have not arrived at that line Item as yet, so hold.

Ms. Ameen: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. Actually, my questions were for 008 and 009 which fall under my colleague's question.

Mr. Chairman: Page 63, eh, Members.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, yes, yes.

Mr. Chairman: Members, we are now moving on to Educational Services, which is Oropouche West. I will come back to you, Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. My question relates to the Programme of Development Scholarships and Post Graduate Scholarships. I am looking at line Items 008 and 009. From my recollection, those were specific scholarships which were designed to treat with areas of expertise determined to be in desperate need in Trinidad and Tobago. As a result, the severe curtailment of access to those

scholarships will impact upon the development potential of the country. I am wondering why those particular areas have been targeted for reduction.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Those two line Items, Mr. Chair, have been consolidated into line Item 007.

Ms. Haynes: My question was asked by Oropouche West.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, Chair.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, you forget “meh”.

Mr. Chairman: No, no. I have not forgotten you. Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Chair. Oropouche East asked one of the questions, but I want to move to page 64 with respect to 025: Establishment of the Aviation Institute—UTT Camden Campus. Minister, in 2020, there was an allocation of \$8.5 million. Only 1.9 million was spent in 2020. Could you indicate what will be done with this \$5 million in 2021 as it relates to the Aviation Institute?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In fiscal 2021, the planned works would be to progress the cafeteria renovation and installation of the hanger enclosure.

Mr. Indarsingh: I cannot hear you.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: To progress the cafeteria renovation—the question about 2021, yes?—renovation works which are at 40 per cent and the installation of the hanger enclosure which is now at 2 per cent. So that has just begun.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, every time “yuh skip meh out, meh questions get more, eh”. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: We have a list that we are going by up here, Madam.

Ms. Ameen: My question is on back to page 63, with regard to the Item 006: Establishment of Undergraduate Scholarships Scheme for Students with

disabilities. I am very pleased to see that Item to establish this scholarship scheme. There are a number of differently-abled students who have different challenges, and I think it is important to have a category of scholarships for students with disabilities. I see that the allocation in 2020 is 200,000. In the previous year, only 95,000 was spent and in 2019, only 12,000 was the Actual expenditure. My question to you, given that scholarships usually run into the millions, what does an allocation of 200,000 intend to cover if you are giving scholarships to differently-abled?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is intended to cover the needs of those who apply for it which have been very few over the past few years.

Ms. Ameen: Well, Mr. Chairman, I want to take this opportunity to encourage the Minister to let it be known that there is a special category of scholarships for differently-abled students. Maybe they do not apply because they are not aware. My other question, Mr. Chairman, goes to the other page.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Let me just indicate that with regard to the scholarships for students with disabilities, they are not excluded from other scholarships. So they can access on both sides.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine, we are not on the other page as yet. So, one second. Let me get Barataria/San Juan and we will come back to you. Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Oropouche West anticipated my question. Thanks.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Madam Minister, I have two line Items, line Item 052: Relocation of NIHERST. For 2021, \$4 million. It is a new project. Could you just expand where NIHERST is relocating to? I read in the media today there is something from D'Abadie to somewhere. Could you enlighten?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am sorry. Which line Item are we on?

Mr. Lee: Oh, we are not there?

Mr. Chairman: You have gone ahead.

Mr. Lee: Sorry, sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Let us bring it up to speed. G. Educational Services, page 63; J. Science Technology and Applied Arts, pages 63 to 65. Right, St. Augustine. Member for St. Augustine, I will give way to you here.

Ms. Ameen: Yes, I wanted to ask, NSDP, National Skills Development Programme, there is no expenditure, but there was an allocation of 1 million in 2020, and there is no expenditure in 2020. Can the Minister explain why that happened?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That was actually an error. The expenditure is 823,883 in 2020.

Ms. Ameen: Oh, well, that is a relief. Mr. Chair, the MIC, Metal Industries Company—Training Subsidy. Can you explain, Madam Minister, in 2020, the allocation was 2.5 million. In 2020 though, they only utilized 1.8 million of that. This MIC has complained that their allocation in other areas has been significantly reduced, yet, it seems that they have not utilized their full allocation here. They have, however, been allocated the 2.5 million again. Have they accounted for not utilizing their full allocation in 2020, and, if so, then what justifies giving them 2.5 million again?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Just to indicate that 2020 was a year of upheaval for most institutions, and so there would be instances where they were not able to do exactly what they intended to do. This year's allocation they intend to increase the intake of engineers and journeymen, and so the allocation is given against that background.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Line Items 52 and 53. I can go there, Chair? Madam

Minister, line Item 052: Relocation of NIHERST, new project, 2021, \$4 million.
Could you describe where that relocation is and why?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is a new project, the relocation of NIHERST to the UTT O'Meara campus.

Mr. Lee: If you could expand, is it that a campus is relocating to UTT O'Meara from somewhere to there or is it the headquarters or the—?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is moving from the head office to the Ministry of Education to the UTT O'Meara Campus, and so there will be an integration of both the corporate office and the National Science Centre as a single site.

Mr. Lee: Okay. So, at the end of the day, NIHERST, that is where their head office will now be relocated at the end of the day. Line Item 053: Establishment of La Horquetta Skills and Technology Centre. While it is not a new project, the line item has been there and a small amount of 288,000 has been allocated for this year. Could you just, you know, what is expected of that particular centre and under what agency that would fall under if it does get off the ground?

7.00 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is NESC and the amounts allocated would be to pay off for provision of architectural, structural foundation, engineering, electrical designs and drawings, scope of works and field investigations, lab testing and engineering analysis.

Mr. Lee: Just one other follow-up question to that. Has a site been assigned or found in that particular area within La Horquetta?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, pages 66 to 67. I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The seamless education system project, there is no allocation so that project has been completed?

Mr. Chairman: Line Item, please.

Ms. Haynes: Line Item 031. It has been completed?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It has been completed. IDB projects that have been completed, yes.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. Thank you. And to line Item 042: Acquisition of Delivery of Laptops and Tablets, it is a new project, \$50 million, if the Minister could give us a little—and the nation is closely tuned in, how we will deliver on this project of laptops and tablets. So is it means testing? How are we going to decide which students? If we could get some details of this project, please?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, the students will be means tested with respect to their actual need for the device.

Ms. Haynes: And so there has been a provision of laptops from volunteers and different organizations, so there is a kind of recurring list of who has received and then you go on to means testing, because—I will explain myself. What is happening in my constituency of Tabaquite, the Macaulay Government school, the Machel Montano volunteer delivery of laptops and tablets, I am still receiving calls about students who would not have received, et cetera. So what I am saying is that this \$50 million, as we provide devices to students across the school spectrum, we need to be very clear on the details in terms of who would have received from corporate donors, et cetera. And so the Ministry can then, like I said, give us a kind of detailed listing on who has received already, the students, et cetera, so that we are not crossing and people do not end up with two and three and four laptops and students have none—and some have none.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Just to indicate that the donation by corporate sponsors,

they choose the schools and they directly interact with the principals, and so they are provided, and the principals keep a record of who receives a device. So when the Government has to provide devices there will be a clear indication of who already received. And based on who is indicating a need and their score on the means test, they will be able to acquire a device.

Ms. Haynes: Excellent.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. Just a follow-up with regard to the Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets. Can the Minister indicate how many devices will be provided with the \$50 million allocated?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The devices will be split between tablets and laptops, and the work at this point is going to the providers through the Ministry of Public Administration, and negotiating the best price for the bulk purchase. So that is what we are heading to doing now. So that is the actual work going on now.

Ms. Haynes: Also, Mr. Chair, I just want to ask if there will be an emphasis on those students who are in exam classes, for instance, CSEC, SEA?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The intention is to ensure that all of our learners receive a device, whether a tablet or a laptop, and it is critical at all levels to receive, because certainly we would not want any student at the lower level to not have and then end up in a situation where they need one and they have fallen back in the examination classes. So the intention is to ensure that all receive.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Chairman, and we all want to see that our children get the laptops and the tablets, and so on. Minister, with respect to 041: The Upgrade of ICT Infrastructure for 456: Government and Government Assisted Primary Schools in Trinidad, I see no allocation for 2021 and I know that school is

not functioning at the moment, but could you, based on what may occur next year and so on, why there is no allocation for this particular line Item?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The Ministry of Public Administration has been resourced to be able to provide what is needed at the school.

Mr. Indarsingh: Adequately?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: So your Ministry will no longer have oversight in this particular area?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Collaborative whole-of-government approach so the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation will be the one that is resourced to do it in collaboration, of course, with the Ministry of Education when it comes to schools.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: I am back again at Item 307: School Improvement Project-Laventille Community, I just wanted to clarify which school does this Item address? Is it a specific school or—?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This Item addresses a number of schools, not one particular school within the greater Laventille area.

Ms. Ameen: Okay. Can the Minister provide a list of schools and the work that would have been done and what is planned? I am seeing 10 million for the upcoming fiscal, which is good, but I just wanted to ask, what work will be done on what school? What type of work?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, we can provide what was done previously and the plan for going forward, that certainly is being looked at now in conjunction with the Community Recovery Committee. And so that can be provided when it

becomes available, but certainly what can be provided at this time is what was done in 2020.

Ms. Haynes: And, Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to ask, concerning Item 042: Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets, given that corporate Trinidad and Tobago continues to give to schools, as well as the individuals, what is the Government's current count in terms of the number of students who are still in need of devices?

Mr. Chairman: The Minister mentioned that the list will be provided.

Ms. Ameen: The list—

Mr. Chairman: The list will be provided.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, which list? Sorry, Chair.

Ms. Ameen: No, no, that is for something else. That was for something else. That was for the schools in Laventille. This one has to do with the acquisition of the laptops.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chair, this is not exactly a line Item but I will answer the question, and I would say that based on the last count, this is in early October, it is still indicating 65,000 which we know would be an inflated figure, and that is why the importance of the means test to be applied across the board.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, Item 005 span two pages, therefore I will announce the project groups: A. Administrative Services, page 66; F. Public Buildings, page 66 to 67; Infrastructure Development Fund—

[Chairman confers with Procedural Clerk]

Mr. Lee: Minister, just under F.: Public Buildings, line Item 027, in 2020 there was a concept of building an international fine cocoa innovation centre. I see there is no longer an allocation there, has it been shelved or has it been moved to another

Ministry or that project?—because, you know, I listened to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, he talks about cocoa being the next great find again. I do not know if that building or that concept has been moved.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This project, we are unable to fund this project this year and so we are in discussion with UWI and they are looking at the way forward for this particular project now.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: No, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre asked the question.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: My question has to do with Item 026: Students' Halls of Residence, St. John Road. The Item is here, there has been no allocation in 2019, none in 2020 and none in 2021. Can the Minister explain?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This project was completed in 2010 and for fiscal 2021 UWI requested reimbursement and this was unable to be accommodated through the Ministry of Finance.

Ms. Ameen: To what amount was that—reimbursement?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In the amount of 49,320,000.

Ms. Ameen: Minister, can you say what that reimbursement would have been for?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The funds utilized by UWI on this project.

Ms. Ameen: Does the Government intend to pay that amount? And since it is not being paid in this year will it acquire any interest?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, it is not being paid by the Government in this year and that is the extent to which I can answer that question.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Chairman. It relates to line Item 030 on

page 67, and also 034, if I could double up, Minister, because in 030 there was an allocation of \$5 million in 2020 and 3,200,000 was spent and you have not seen anything for 2021, so I do not know if the phase one upgrade of the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre has been completed. And then I see now under 034, an upgrade of the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, new project \$3 million, if you could provide some information as what it relates, because this centre is in the constituency of Couva South and I have been a visitor and I have been seeing the collapsing infrastructure, and so on.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Phase one was completed. Virtually it is at 95 per cent and so the funds allocated would be for a new phase of that project in the amount of 3 million.

Mr. Indarsingh: What was done in phase one and what will be done in phase two?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Phase one covered the supply and install and commission of new air-condition units, sanitize and clean the service and service the existing air-conditions, interior and exterior restoration of renovation services, fencing works, diagnostic exercise and the sewerage system, restore and recommissioning of the existing sewer system; supply, install and commission of an interior and exterior camera security and surveillance system; refurbishment, upgrade and servicing of the auditorium's PA and lighting technical system, purchase of a UPS for the printing unit.

And phase two involves upgrade of plumbing and electrical systems, painting of the exterior roofing and building walls, general care to the exterior, extension of the car park facilities, purchasing of office and cafeteria equipment, repairs and maintenance of equipment and buildings, office equipment and other minor equipment. The allocation this year will be used as far as it can go with

respect to completing the works under phase two.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

7.15 p.m.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I think you are getting a clearer idea of why I was asking earlier if the renovation work at this facility is affecting the operations given the lack of spending under certain Heads in recurrent. But, Mr. Chairman, I want to ask a question on Item 031: The Refurbishment and Outfitting of the Food Laboratory at the Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension. This Item, there was an expenditure of 1 million in the last fiscal year, and this year there is no allocation. Could the Minister explain?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This has not begun. The expenditure was not on this Item, so that has not begun.

Ms. Ameen: So, Mr. Chair, well for some reason the department reported that they did actually spend \$1 million. Sorry, they were allocated 1 million but it was not utilized. Has an explanation been provided? And I see that no allocation was given. Is it that the programme has been squashed or you have decided not to go forward with it?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The programme is deferred. It would have been delayed by the COVID-19 situation, and it is now deferred.

Ms. Ameen: You have no date for when that is deferred to?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. Ameen: My other question, Mr. Chairman, is 033: University Central Water Storage System at UWI. I know that has been an issue at UWI for quite some time. I see again the estimate was \$2 million, but none was expended. Is it that the releases never went to the university?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In general quite a number of the infrastructural projects

would have been delayed and some of them unable to begin because of the COVID-19 shutdown. So it was unable to begin in 2020 and it has been deferred in 2021.

Ms. Ameen: I am familiar that the whole issue of the water storage at UWI has been around for some time, and it is something I think that should get some priority.

Mr. Chairman: Development Fund, page 195; Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 195 to 197.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am at line Item 001: Early Childhood Care and Education. So that line Item we are seeing an estimate for \$5 million. This is as opposed to the actual figure spent in 2019 of 65 million, and now Revised Estimate in 2020 of 23 million. So if the Minister would care to explain why we are only allocating—well, estimating, about 5 million for 2021?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Chair, this allocation will be used to two ECCE centres that are at advanced stages of completion.

Ms. Haynes: Which two ECCE centres, please?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The Tulsi Manas and the Maracas Valley.

Ms. Haynes: And so the other ECCE centres that are in advanced stages of completion, they are just going to be left, included Springvale which is in my constituency? So we are just leaving those out for the fiscal 2021?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Other arrangements will be made to deal with other schools that have to be addressed.

Ms. Ameen: Would the Minister be able to provide—

Mr. Chairman: Member, one second. Tabaquite, you are—

Ms. Haynes: St. Augustine could go ahead.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. It was a supplementary to—

Mr. Chairman: St. Augustine—Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: I go to (b), Primary Schools. Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item under (b) Primary 120: Improvements, Refurbishment, Extension to Primary Schools. I am using that line Item because I am not seeing the primary school I am looking for within this group. It has to do with the Anglican Claxton Bay primary school that was condemned last year, and your predecessor had promised to start rebuilding. So I am seeking some guidance whether the Anglican Claxton Bay primary school, the children have been relocated in the Marabella area, if there are any plans for that particular school in the Claxton Bay area?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This vote only covers refurbishment and extensions. So if it is a school that needs entire reconstruction, it would not be covered under this.

Mr. Lee: There is no particular line Item for that school at this point in time?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: When you get to it, you certainly could ask the question.

Mr. Indarsingh: Chairman. Minister, 426: Construction of the Freeport SDMS Primary. Could you advise what this \$700,000 will be spent on, Minister?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The funds allocated will be required to pay outstanding consultancy fees. The contractor was terminated on this project.

Mr. Indarsingh: Consultancy fees you said?—because I know that at one point in time there was a plan to build a new school. But is this still in the pipeline, or what is being done in relation to the existing school compound?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, it is still in the pipeline. The construction of the school is still in the pipeline, yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: So this \$700,000 is being spent in relation to fees for consultancy on the new school, or something that is being done on the existing school compound?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The fee is for the new school.

Mr. Indarsingh: For the new school? Based on what is being done, you have a projected date for sod turning for this particular school?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Not at this time.

Mr. Indarsingh: Not at this time? Supplementary, Mr. Chairman. I could go into secondary, Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: One second. Member for Tabaquite, and then we will come to you Chaguanas.

Ms. Haynes: I am looking at line Item 378: Construction of the Rousillac SDMS Primary School. There was a revised estimate of \$10 million in 2020, no estimate for 2021. Could the Minister advise what is happening with that Rousillac SDMS Primary School?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: We have quite a few schools that are in advanced stages, in different stages of completion I should say, so it is being approached on a phase by phase basis. So what is happening right now is the first set of schools that were identified, those are being cleared off, and Rousillac SDMS is not one of those particular ones in that phase, but certainly attention will be paid to it in a later phase.

Ms. Haynes: Understood, thank you. Just one quick follow-up on the early childhood care and education centres. What steps are being taken to protect the incomplete spaces that the Minister of Finance said that additional provisions would be used, but there are spaces that have been in advanced stages of completion but now they are being vandalized, like the Springvale ECCE Centre that I raised, among others? They are being vandalized, there is destruction to the property. Would the Ministry seek to secure those properties so that when you do get to them that there would be less work to be done?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The centres that have not been handed over to the

Ministry would not be taken care of them in the way you speak about by the Ministry itself, because they are not the property of the Ministry at this time, understanding of course the situation that is taking place with some of them. So the Ministry can do its best to draw attention to it, but they are not handed over at this time to the Ministry.

Ms. Haynes: Understood.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, through you, Madam Minister, Item 2 B, 276: Upgrade of the Egypt Village Government. The 2021 Estimate, is that for works that are currently going on—sorry, happening?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This school is completed, that is just to clear off the final accounts.

Ms. Mohit: Clear out the?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The final accounts owing on the school.

Ms. Mohit: Okay, thank you. As well as, Mr. Chair, the construction of the Enterprise Government Primary?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Which line Item?

Mr. Chairman: 327: Construction of Enterprise Government; 3-2-7.

Ms. Mohit: Was this to do with the destruction that occurred at the school during the last financial year? Has that been completed?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The 2020 you are referring to?

Ms. Mohit: Yes, due to the fact that there is no allocation in 2021 I am just enquiring if it was completed.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The amount expended in 2020 was to clear off the final accounts, and it should be completed yes.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. Moving on to Item 414. The Revised Estimate would have been increased by about 6 million, and the 2021 Estimate being \$1.45 million.

Madam Minister, would this allocation complete the works that are taking place at this primary school?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No; more funds would have to be provided in this particular project.

Ms. Mohit: What is the estimated time period?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I would have to provide that for you, but it is 96 per cent completed.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you very much. Item 440: Construction of the Montrose Vedic school, which has been a longstanding issue. The Revised Estimate for 2020 was 10 million. Sorry. The Estimate for 2020, Revised Estimate, no funding there, and the Estimate for 2021, \$10 million again. What is the status of this project? What is the estimated start date?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The expected to start in this fiscal. If you need more specificity than that, I can provide that for you.

Ms. Mohit: Please do. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman: Couva South.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hold on one second.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the hon. Minister indicate if the Waterloo ECCE Centre was in fact completed and handed over to the Ministry?

Mr. Chairman: Member, line Item?

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item, under Preschool, Early Childhood Care and Education, line Item 001.

Mr. Chairman: It is page 195, 001: Early Childhood. Proceed.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister indicate if in fact the Waterloo ECCE Centre was completed as a self-help project and handed over to the Ministry of Education, if it satisfies to be opened sometime soon?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Chair, under this line Item there are two ECCE centres that are at advanced stages of completion to be opened.

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It does not involve the Waterloo centre.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Chairman. Just to put it on the radar, because I have heard the Minister with her responses as it relates to early childhood care and education, 001, Minister. With the passage of time because you have indicated that you only have two on your radar, but there is one that was about 99 per cent completed in the constituency of Couva South, the Sonny Ladoo Early Childhood Education Centre. I think I wrote your predecessor. There is a very thick bundle in the Ministry of Education on this particular institution, and I hope that you would see the wisdom in ensuring that it is refurbished and opened for the benefit of the preschoolers in the constituency.

7.30 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The Member's comment is noted.

Mr. Chairman: St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, thank you. Under B, Primary the refurbishment and improvement to Primary Schools, I did mention in my budget contribution the Curepe Presbyterian School. It is not listed here and I want to take this opportunity to bring it to the attention of the Minister because that— I know you indicated earlier that there are some construction sites that the Ministry does not have possession of. However, this structure is on the existing compound which falls under the Ministry. But because of the neglect over the past five years of the

structure, we now have a lot of rats and snakes and so on, we also have vandals hiding out in the structure and because of that, there is an impact on the existing functioning school which is on the same compound.

So I want to ask, even if it is not listed here to be completed, whether through the recurrent expenditure or in some way, we could find a method to secure the students who are still on that compound from the dangers posed in that structure because it is not being completed and we will welcome a visit by you to the site to have a better appreciation of the situation.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The Member's comment is understood and noted.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: I want to ask is if hon. Minister could advise if the school was in fact completed by a self-help project and handed over to the Ministry as a completed project and—

Mr. Chairman: Member, again, we identify by line Item. Right? If the school is not listed under the particular line Item, the question will not be able to be entertained, unless you are able to identify it in one of the particular line Items.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chair, for the guidance. Following up from the response that the Minister would have given with respect to the security that will be provided for the completed projects, if this school would qualify for security to protect the compound from vandalization?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you care to comment?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am sorry. I am not sure which that was. I did not give any response on security to be provided for construction areas.

Mr. Chairman: Member—

Mr. Ratiram: The Minister—

Mr. Chairman:—you care to expound on it more—

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Mr. Chairman:—so that the Minister could be able to answer you.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. Definitely, Chair. The hon. Minister advised earlier that schools that were completed and to be opened, that security would be provided to ensure that they are not vandalized, and to provide the security for the compound itself. What I am asking is, if it is this school satisfies such criteria?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am sorry, Member, but maybe you misunderstood what it is I say. I did not say that. What I said is, that there are some schools that are in stages of completion but they are not handed over to the Ministry and therefore, they are unable to provide those services at the school. That is what I said.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Chair. Item 120: Improvements/Refurbishment/Extensions to Primary Schools—

Mr. Chairman: Member, I am not hearing you clear.

Mr. Charles: Yes. I am reading Item 120: Improvement/Refurbishment/Extensions, page—

Mr. Chairman: Page 195.

Mr. Charles:—195? That is where we are? Yes. Improvement/Refurbishment/Extensions to Primary Schools, and I am pleading with the Minister to not forget, although it is not listed here, the Reform Hindu School that I think you made a promise. I know the situation with finance but if you could find it in your heart to help us, we would be grateful. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Mayaro. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 402: Construction of Rio Claro Presbyterian School. I see that there is an allocation of \$2.7 million. Could the Minister share exactly what areas of construction that are

earmarked for that school?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This school is completed and the funding is to be used to pay final accounts.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: J. Science, Technology and Applied Arts, page 197. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral— okay, my apologies. C. Secondary. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, with respect to line Item 331: Improvement/Refurbishment/Extensions to Secondary Schools and so on. I do not know if you are aware that prior to the COVID, and virtually for all of 2019 and 2020 too, before the onset of the COVID, that the Couva West Secondary School was non-functional. And I really hope that when the school environment resumes fully, in terms of children in the classroom, that some part of this allocation will be utilized for the issues that are plaguing this school from an infrastructural point of view. I do not know if in this \$25 million, there is a percentage for the Couva West Secondary School.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Noted, MP.

Mr. Indarsingh: Noted means?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Noted means I hear and understand what you have just said.

Mr. Chairman: E. Special—St. Augustine. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: I have a question for E but I am still on C, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Ms. Ameen: The construction of the Caroni—Item 357: Construction of Caroni Village SDMS Boys, is that Vishnu Boys College that you are referring to? And if so, the allocation of 10 million in 2019—sorry, was utilized, and I see no

allocation. Is it that that particular project was completed? And the same question for 395 the Holy Cross College; 357 and 395.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: 395 has not yet been fully completed. And 359— no.

Ms. Ameen: 357.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: 357?

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Caroni Village SDMS Boys.

Ms. Ameen: An allocation of 10 million was spent in 2019. I see no allocation for 2020 or 2021, but I know that the work is—

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is not completed. No, it is not completed.

Ms. Ameen: So can you then tell us, Madam Minister, what plans are there to complete the work seeing that there is no allocation here?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Again, it will be included in subsequent phase of completion.

Ms. Ameen: And in the Holy Cross Boys, this one also not completed?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Holy Cross is not completed, I said that before. It is not completed.

Mr. Chairman: She mentioned, it is not completed.

Ms. Ameen: It is not?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, it is not completed.

Mr. Chairman: E. Special Education. Members, you are all with me, eh? E. Special Education. Pointe-a-Pierre. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item 501: Development of a School for Special Ed at Pointe-a-Pierre. I am grateful that 500,000 was spent in 2020, and another 500 allocated. But could you—I know we had—there were plans to build a

special ed school in Macaulay in Pointe-a-Pierre. I do not know if it is the same and I just want to inquire in 2020, the 500,000 that was spent, what was it spent on?—and just some details.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is renovations works to the existing plan.

Mr. Lee: Well, I am a little bit curious. Where is that location? Because—of that school, or is it a plan?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is on the Petrotrin compound.

Mr. Lee: Oh, the Petrotrin compound.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Chair. That school on the Petrotrin compound, did the students have access to that school currently?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, they do.

Mr. Hosein: And can I move on to 514: Repairs and Maintenance of Special Schools?

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Hosein: Is any allocation within this line Item, Minister, inclusive of any funding for school for visual impaired students?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes. It would be.

Mr. Hosein: Yes? Can you tell us, in terms of a monetary figure, what allocation is given to them?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Once the budget is approved, we will work out what each school will be allocated based on their needs.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. So, can you then give us undertaking, if you can just give us a list of those schools and what would be estimated to be spent on them?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, we cannot undertake to provide that. What we can

say is that, based on the allocation, the needs of schools and their priorities will be ascertained and the funding will be applied as necessary.

Mr. Hosein: It is based on a request from each school basically?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes. The Ministry will assess.

Mr. Chairman: J. Science, Technology and Applied Arts, page 197. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now, I raise this in the context of what we discussed in the Recurrent Expenditure which showed an overall cut to UTT, and now we are looking at \$70 million to be allocated for UTT main campus here in Wallerfield. So here is my question. You have \$70 million here allocated for a new building. Yes? But we are decreasing the allocation for the existing UTT campuses across the board. And I want the Minister to just rationalize this spending for me, please.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This represents a consolidation to one compound which will reduce operational cost across different campuses, and so, this is undergoing, and the faster it is completed, the lower the operational cost of UTT will become.

Ms. Haynes: So when we spend this \$70 million here, we will be closing down some of the other campuses, relocating them here? Right?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, it is a consolidation.

Ms. Haynes: Okay, and is there a timeline for this that has been established that you could share with us?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is a phased construction. We can provide a final time line for you at a later date.

Ms. Haynes: Appreciated.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 198. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I am at line Item 21: Repairs to Earthquake Damaged Schools. Can the Minister indicate how many schools and which schools are in fact affected by the earthquake? I assume this was the earthquake two years ago.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Ten schools were identified as having been damaged.

Mr. Hosein: Which schools are those?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Holy Name Convent Port of Spain, Diego Martin Girls RC, Toco Secondary School, Santa Maria RC, Forest Reserve Anglican School, East Mucurapo Secondary, Curepe Anglican Primary, St. Benedict's College, Barrackpore East Secondary and Barrackpore West Secondary.

Mr. Hosein: And were those schools occupied after the earthquake or were the students housed elsewhere?

7.45 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, in some instances the schools were occupied.

Mr. Hosein: Some of the schools were occupied while some were unoccupied?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Some had to be relocated in certain areas, yes.

Mr. Hosein: And can the Minister then indicate, what is the average timeline for the completion of the repairs of these 10 schools?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is an ongoing process—but when all 10 will be complete?

Mr. Hosein: Because what I am anticipating, Minister, is the fact that if some students are being housed at other facilities, having regard to, I do not know, if we anticipate that there will still be social distancing when school reopens, whether or not there will be sufficient accommodation for the students at the various institutions?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Based on the information, there is one school that is outstanding—two schools that are outstanding, and the others have been completed, and one is at 60 per cent completion and—

Mr. Hosein: Which one? Which one is that, Minister?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Toco. Toco is at 60 per cent completion, and Santa Maria RC and Forest Reserve AC, those two have work still in progress. The others have been completed, so it is three that are outstanding and works are ongoing there.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 26 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister; thank you, Madam PS, and all the senior technocrats from your Ministry for your attendance here today. Thank you.

Head 78: Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, \$4,963,845,000.

[MRS. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Social Development and Family Services to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Cox: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is the social sector agency charged the remit of being dynamic and service-driven it is delivery of a multifaceted, responsive and social safety net for all citizens. The Ministry aims to build resilience and sustainability amongst the most vulnerable individuals and households in the country. And this remit is a critical component in Government's national recovery relief efforts. We understand that the sum allocated to the Ministry is a direct investment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago by a government that is genuinely interested in the

holistic development of all. As such, accountability, transparency, equity and efficiency must remain at the heart of all projects, programmes and initiatives. The executive and staff of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services remain committed to the revitalization of the social services sector, and the modernized data-centric approach in support of the most at risk and marginalized households and population. Thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 78 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$4,963,845,000 for Head 78: Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and—of Recurrent Expenditure*, excuse me.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 385; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 001/08 as it pertains to vacant posts. Can the Minister provide to us as at September 30, 2020, which posts remained vacant? I am seeing that, Madam Chair, this allocation which is usually provided for caters for posts that are critical to the operations of this Ministry, how would the hiring freeze affect such?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Cox: Thank you. I have a list of vacant positions, but there is no allocation for vacant posts. There is nothing we can do at this time. This was read out in the

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And Family Services (cont'd)

budget.

Ms. Mohit: I cannot hear, Madam Chair, sorry.

Hon. Cox: There is no allocation for vacant positions, because this was read out in the budget by the Minister of Finance.

Ms. Mohit: Yes, we are aware of that, Madam Chair, but it does not stop from asking, as at September 30, 2020, which posts remained vacant, or how many?

Hon. Cox: Okay, we would have to send that listing.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. And the second part?

Madam Chairman: Yes, you can. Did you get the other part, Minister?

Hon. Cox: What was the second part?

Ms. Mohit: Seeing that this allocation usually provides for critical operations of the Ministry, how would the hiring freeze affect such, in the midst of the COVID pandemic?

Hon. Cox: We will continue to operate with what we have.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 14, Remuneration to Member of Cabinet Approved Committees. Can the Minister provide to us the membership of those appointed committees, and what are the mandates of those committees?

Hon. Cox: There is an Inter-Ministerial Research Council, National Enrichment Centre Management Committee, National Social Mitigation Plan Inter-Sectoral Advisory Committee, Policy and Programme Committee, Inter-Agency Committee to promote and monitor the Implementation of the UN Conventions on the rights of PWDs and National Policy on Persons and Disabilities.

Ms. Mohit: As well as the membership, Madam Chair.

Hon. Cox: Okay, we will provide the membership.

Ms. Mohit: You would provide such?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Item 01—

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, you are moving on the 003?

Madam Chairman: 003.

Ms. Mohit: You have not reached there as yet?

Madam Chairman: No, we have not reached there as yet. Let me just go on.
Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, I am back at line Item 08. Can the Minister confirm whether or not the non-allocation of moneys for fiscal 2021 is a result of the announcement by the Government for the public servants freeze in hiring?

Hon. Cox: You really want me to answer that question?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, I do, that is why I asked it.

Hon. Cox: The answer is yes.

Mr. Hosein: Yes?

Hon. Cox: Um hmm.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. With respect to line Item 003, Sub-Item 06.

Madam Chairman: We have not reached 003 as yet.

Mr. Padarath: Oh, my apologies, sorry.

Madam Chairman: Are we all finished with 001? Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: This is a follow up from my colleague the Member for Barataria/San Juan. Thank you, hon. Minister, I know you indicated earlier you would provide a list of those positions that are vacant. Are you in any position to say when these positions would have become vacant?

Hon. Cox: I would provide that also, because they would all be at a different time.

Mr. Rambally: Because I just want to point out, you know, while my colleague would have asked this, and why I am asking as well with a follow up. You see, we do not see anything there for 2020, nor revised estimate, which suggests that these posts have been vacant for some time.

Hon Cox: Not all the positions.

Mr. Rambally: We would appreciate the list and the dates that they would have become vacant please.

Madam Chairman: Item 003, Social Welfare. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, with respect to line Item 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances. Given the number of persons requiring assistance, especially during COVID, and from my own experience as an MP, I know in particular the Princes Town office, the Social Development office, they have scaled back in terms of the amount of persons they have employed there, and their services. Can you indicate whether or not this allocation represents, or rather I should put it another way. Given the number of additional persons requiring assistance during COVID, is the number of persons employed currently at the Ministry sufficient to service all aspects in terms of the sub-offices that the Ministry of Social Development would have in various constituencies, or is there a plan to cut back? A continued plan to cut back?

8.00 p.m.

Hon. Cox: Well, as far as I am aware, there is no plan to cut back and you mentioned about scaling down, but there was no scaling down.

Mr. Padarath: Okay, Madam. Maybe, Minister, under line Item 01, again, I raise it in the context of the scaling back is that the Princes Town office, in particular, the complement of staff there has been decreased. I do not know, probably they

were contract officers and their contracts have not been renewed, but I would also use it as an opportunity to invite you to the Princes Town office which I would be very happy to accompany you with.

Hon. Cox: Okay, thank you. I would be there soon.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Back on 003. Can the Minister indicate how many social welfare offices there are currently operational in Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Chairman: Under which Item you are asking?

Mr. Hosein: Madam, that would just falls generally under 003, it could also fall under 01 because it would take staff at all of the offices. So I just wanted to know how many offices that they currently have that are operational in the both islands?

Madam Chairman: Well, 01 is Salaries. That is people.

Mr. Hosein: What is the total number of staff and per office?

Madam Chairman: Excuse me?

Mr. Hosein: The total number of staff, please.

Madam Chairman: Oh, the total number of staff—

Mr. Hosein: And per office.

Hon. Cox: Social Welfare?

Mr. Hosein: Social Welfare, yes.

Hon. Cox: All right. I know there are 10—

Mr. Hosein: Ten offices?

Hon. Cox: Ten in Trinidad, one in Tobago.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you again, Madam Chair, Item 003; 06: Remuneration to Board

Members. Can the Minister indicate whether all boards have a full complement seeing that they are so important in terms of appeals and what not?

Hon. Cox: Yes, all the boards have a full complement.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: 005: Child Development Centre. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Can the Minister explain the reason almost \$500,000 budgeted for in 2020 was not spent. Is it that, Madam Chair, through you, persons are being terminated or there exist vacant posts. Can the Minister state? Thank you.

Hon. Cox: With regard to termination, I do not think so. I believe it is vacant posts. Vacant post.

Ms. Mohit: Vacant posts exist? Okay. So that would be the reason for you reduction in 2021?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: National Family Services; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: We are at 006, Madam Chair?

Madam Chairman: We are at Item 001, page 387 to page 388; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, 02/001/05: Telephones. Why have the telephone bills—can the Minister indicate, why have the telephone bills in the Ministry doubled in the last two years?

Hon. Cox: Because of call centres.

Ms. Mohit: Call centres?

Hon. Cox: We have call centres operating, yes.

Ms. Mohit: Can you indicate where are these call centres?

Hon. Cox: One is located in Port of Spain and I believe, is it Couva? Couva.

Ms. Mohit: Port of Spain and Couva?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: This call centre makes calls or receive calls?

Hon. Cox: Both.

Ms. Mohit: Both?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: For what purposes?

Hon. Cox: Well, of course, if we want to improve the service delivery—

Ms. Mohit: I am very sorry, I cannot hear you. I know the mask is preventing but—

Hon. Cox: Yes. Improving our service delivery to clients we—

Ms. Mohit: Improving service—

Hon. Cox: [*Inaudible*]—call centres and even now, particularly, with the time of COVID-19, where persons needed to get on to the Ministry even more.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, moving to 08, just under, Rent/ Lease- Office Accommodation and Storage, \$1 million increase. Can the Minister state what would have accounted for these increases, whether the Ministry has any new offices or any new lease agreements?

Hon. Cox: Actually, I believe this includes four car parks, the two storage facilities at Trade Zone.

Ms. Mohit: Are you all hearing? Going down, Madam Chair, Item 16: Contract Employment, totalling 21 million, an increase of 500,000. Can the Minister advise on the number of contract employees and also, Item 22: Short-term Employment—

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we will take the first question. Minister.

Ms. Mohit: The number of employees, Item 16.

Hon. Cox: One hundred and seventy-two are on contract; 172.

Ms. Mohit: Moving down—before I go to Item 22, Madam Chair, back to 08, if we can just have a listing of the offices that are leased and the cost of those, as well as the landlords, please, when you are providing the information to us.

Hon. Cox: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Mohit: Going to Short-term Employment, Item 22. The number of short-term contract employees?

Hon. Cox: One hundred and seventy-four short-term contract employees.

Ms. Mohit: Would these employees be utilized due the freeze in hiring?

Hon. Cox: I did not hear—what is your question?

Ms. Mohit: Due to the proposed freeze in hiring—

Hon. Cox: Yes?

Ms. Mohit:—would the contract employees be utilized at the various—

Hon. Cox: They are being utilized at this time.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, on the same line Item 16: Contract Employment, we see an increase of 500,000. Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to provide us for this financial year, what positions they propose to hire persons under contract employment in terms of—at the Ministry? And also, if we can get a breakdown with respect to these positions, going forward, for contract employment, the scope of works for these positions please and possibly the salary ranges.

Hon. Cox: Okay, this could be provided, but I know that two major areas at this point would be legal and our IT department.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. So—

Hon. Cox: Because of our digitization effort.

Mr. Padarath: Sure. So this is part of the digitalization and not necessarily an increase with respect to contract employment to deal with the COVID-19 grants and so on?

Hon. Cox: No.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am also on line Item number 16: Contract Employment. I am looking at the 2020 Estimates which was 11.2 million and the Revised Estimates which is 20.5 million which is a— so that is the amount actually spent. A difference of 9.3 million additional was given under this Sub-Item for fiscal 2020. Can the Minister indicate how many additional positions or what is the reasons for the discrepancy or the high increase from 11.2 million to 20.5 million for fiscal 2020?

Hon. Cox: Well, a number of IT positions have been filled and we are still filling some of those positions.

Mr. Hosein: Twenty-nine positions?

Hon. Cox: About 29 positions, yeah. Expansion of the legal department.

Mr. Hosein: So that is an average about \$320,000 per person for the year? So that is a monthly salary of about \$26,000?

Hon. Cox: Well, I will have to check and see. The 29 only have to deal with IT. Okay? I did not put the—we do not have the information for legal but I know that there is an expansion of the legal department.

Mr. Hosein: That is quite high.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under Sub-Head 22: Short-term Employment, I would appreciate if the Minister could also provide a listing of the

number of positions, the salary ranges and the job description, please. And if that can be for 2019, 2020 and proposed 2021.

Hon. Cox: Okay, but I can tell you offhand that some of these positions are also customer service positions.

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry, Ma'am, can I ask that you come closer to the mike? I can barely hear you.

Hon. Cox: Some of these positions are customer service positions as we try to, you know, engage the clients and be more customer friendly, and I will get the listing and submit.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair, Oropouche West would have—

Madam Chairman:—would have asked the question?

Ms. Mohit:—would have asked the question.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Hon. Minister, line Item, through you, Madam, 28: Other Contracted Services. If we look at the 2020 Revised Estimates we see an allocation in use of 3 million. The 2021 Estimates, there is a decrease by 1 million. Could one, the hon. Minister indicate the contracted services that would have utilized this Vote and what would account for a decrease by 1 million in light of the current challenges at the Ministry I am sure would be facing at this time?

Hon. Cox: I know I can say that this is due to a decrease in occupied buildings, so this is resulting in the reduction of certain contracted services.

Mr. Padarath: In light of that answer, hon. Minister, would you be able to share, maybe not now, but would you be able to share with us what locations these buildings would have been at with relation to the Revised Estimates at 2020, being

at 3 million, and now having a decrease by 1 million? Which buildings would have been no longer in use with respect to the Ministry's use that would account for the 1 million decrease?

Hon. Cox: Okay. Arima, Barataria, Point Fortin.

Mr. Padarath: So is it that these offices are now closed, Madam Minister?

Hon. Cox: I know that Arima— I think there is something is taking place with Arima, Tunapuna's office, Point Fortin. Point Fortin has been relocated and there has been a merging in one of the Barataria offices.

Mr. Padarath: There has been a merging with respect to the Barataria office? But in light of this decrease, is there any specific office under the purview of your Ministry, whether it is a sub-office in a constituency or a regional office, that has closed, that would account for this 1 million decrease?

Hon. Cox: No, not to my knowledge. I can check.

Mr. Padarath: Please. So would you give an undertaking to get back to us with respect to the rationale for this particular decrease, one, and if so, what were the locations in terms of the discontinuation?

Hon. Cox: Well, I am just hearing that all the regional offices are in service.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. I hear you, Minister, with respect to the regional offices being in service at this time, but there is a representation of 1 million decrease and therefore, there must be an explanation—

Hon. Cox: You do not think that is a good thing?

Mr. Padarath:—for why there is a decrease. So I am asking for— if you do not have the information now, which I understand, whether or not you would give the undertaking to provide it in writing for us as to why there is 1 million decrease and what would account for this particular decrease, whether it is closures of Ministry of Social Development and Family Services offices, as in a previous question I had

raised earlier in light of that, that is why I am asking. So if you can provide that in writing, we will be grateful.

8.15 p.m.

Hon. Cox: Okay, no problem.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, in following on with my colleagues, line Items 16 and 22, I know you indicated you would provide the information, just if you could also add to the information to be supplied the length of the different categories of persons who are taken on, on employment, the length of their contract please? I know for Item 16 you would have indicated legal and IT, and I suppose there may be other categories under 22, but if we could know the length of their short-term employment as well as the contract employment.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer to Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings. I note that in 2020 there was an estimate of \$2.3 million but nothing was spent in 2020. Can the Minister indicate why nothing was spent? And also as a follow-up to that, I see that we are estimating a \$1 million expenditure in 2021, so whether or not the Items proposed to be repaired or maintained in 2021 whether that is what is being done now—sorry the buildings that were supposed to be maintained in 2020 whether those are the ones that are being done now?

Hon. Cox: The answer is yes, this is what is taking place now. Part of it would be location and reconfiguring, and upgrading of office spaces.

Mr. Tancoo: So why then, Ma'am, was no expenditure undertaken in 2020 to repair and maintain these buildings?

Hon. Cox: I will have to find that out myself.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, through you, the Minister, on Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance to Buildings. This \$1 million increase in addition to what my colleague asked, can the Minister identify those buildings that are outlined for repairs and maintenance?

Hon. Cox: One is the Hernandez Place in Arima, the National Enrichment Centre and Piparo Empowerment Centre.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, I am moving down to Item 40: Food at Institutions. I see there is an increase of \$115,000, which may be a good indication, but the question is why such a disproportionate figure, can the Minister elucidate on the rationale for such an increase of 115? I repeat it may be a good indication. Item 40: Food at Institutions.

Hon. Cox: If you are asking it is the same, is a restoration of the allocation.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, could you speak closer to the mike. I am not hearing.

Hon. Cox: What I am seeing here is if you look at 2020 figures and the estimates for 2021, it appears to be the same figures.

Ms. Mohit: It is an increase on the estimates for 2020.

Hon. Cox: Okay. 2020 Estimates 556, Revised Estimate 380. 2021 is 495, where is the increase?

Ms. Mohit: That is what we are trying to understand, the rationale because you have a revised of 380 and then it jumps to 495,000 which is an increase of 115,000.

Hon. Cox: I will make a check on this. I will double check this.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: It think the Minister of Finance wants to give some

assistance.

Mr. Imbert: A general comment. Something like food at institutions, something that would be quite unpredictable in terms of what the prices of food would be.

Hon. Member: Speak in your mike, hon. Minister.

Mr. Imbert: Again? An item like food at institutions is something that would be quite unpredictable in terms of the number of persons in the institutions, the cost of the food and many other variables. The 495 is simply an estimate based on a number of factors. That is it. It is not an exact science.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Minister of Finance. We did indicate at the beginning, good indication. Item 43: Security Services. Where there is an increase of 500,000, could the Minister state why that increase; what contract obligations is undertaken, vis-à-vis a private security, MTS, or any other arrangements?

Hon. Cox: Okay. This reflects a request for additional guards inclusive of armed officers at various offices throughout the Ministry. You hear me clearly?

Ms. Mohit: Throughout the Ministry meaning throughout the country or regional offices, et cetera.

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Thanks a lot. Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, an increase of 445,000. Can the Minister state what is anticipated to be undertaken with this sum and what are the benefits to be derived?

Hon. Cox: Okay. One of the areas is that the Ministry would be relaunching the website and this also has to do with the upgrade and maintenance of the website. Also, of course, the cost of promotions and publicity. Actually this is a low figure. The cost is exorbitant, so therefore that is the reason why we had to increase.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East, I will take somebody else and then come back to you in the other round.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Question asked and answered, Madam Chair, but I would like to be recalled under Item 02: Goods and Services.

Madam Chairman: You are at Item—

Mr. Paray: Yeah, I would like to be recalled when we get to Goods and Services. My question was asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: All right. Yeah. Okay, thanks. Member Cumuto/Manzanilla. Just one minute. No, we had Cumuto/Manzanilla down. So I will now go to Princes Town. You are down Chaguanas West. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. A follow-up question from the Member for Chaguanas East, line item 43: Security Services. Earlier, the hon. Minister told us that the decrease under Repairs and Buildings, 21, was because they were using less facilities, but if we look at line Item 43 for Security Services there is an increase by half a million dollars. So I am just trying to ask the Minister for the rationale, how do you reconcile that you have less facilities but you have an increase for Security Services; and also if the Minister could advise us if it is one service provider for all these offices in terms of providing security services and who is that service provider?

Hon. Cox: Okay. Well, I understand there are multiple service providers for these facilities. If you want the listing we can provide that. But I think you would recognize that at this time you want to make sure that your staff is comfortable serving the public, and therefore, there was a need to ramp up the security at various offices and this is the reason why there is an increase.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Returning to Item 62. I note that there was an

estimate for 2020 of \$1 million which was immediately—this estimate was done before COVID emerged. During COVID the expenditure actually dropped which is when I think that the Ministry would have engaged in a significant amount of publicity and promotions. I am just curious as to how this figure of 350 can be reconciled with what was in fact an increased amount of publicity and promotions.

Hon. Cox: Because a lot of the work was done in-house. Some the work that was done was in-house because of COVID-19.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Is that proposed to continue into 2021 because you have now gone from 350 to 795?

Hon. Cox: Of course it will continue, but we also still need to heighten awareness of what is taking place in the Ministry. There are a lot persons who are saying they are not aware of some of the services provided and also how to access it, and that is what we have to ramp up.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Hon. Cox: Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am going back at line Item 40: Food at Institutions. Minister, can you just indicate to us which institutions they are referring to here in this vote and how often is the food provided?

Hon. Cox: It is three meals and it is the Piparo Empowerment Centre.

Mr. Hosein: Piparo Empowerment Centre.

Hon. Cox: It is drug rehabilitation centre.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And can you tell us, who is the contractor?

Hon. Cox: The food contractors?

Mr. Hosein: Yeah. Who provides the food?

Hon. Cox: It is done in-house.

Mr. Hosein: In-house?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: No.

Madam Chairman: No? Member for Princes Town. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just following on, on my colleagues, line Item 62. Madam Minister, I believe in your earlier explanation you would have said some of the costs being exorbitant—so that we are really just trying to reconcile the figures—is it that the cost of advertising, or whatever it is, whatever promotions, that something is exorbitant and then we are seeing that—that is what you are saying will facilitate the increase estimates 795?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Rambally: Okay. That is one. And I believe you would have indicated that you needed to update some IT. Am I correct in that? Sorry.

Hon. Cox: Maintenance—

Mr. Rambally: Maintenance? So—

Hon. Cox:—and upgrade of the website.

Mr. Rambally: Or, sorry. So that would not clash with line Item 15?

Hon. Cox: No, apparently the money comes from 62.

Madam Chairman: Item 15, Member.

Mr. Rambally: I am asking in light of the hon. Minister's indication that it would have the cost of some maintenance taking place under line Item 62, whether that would not clash with line Item 15?

Hon. Cox: No. When it comes to the website, this is where it is placed.

Mr. Rambally: So this is specifically relating to website?

Hon. Cox: Yes. And also the Communications Department in the Ministry is also communications and education. So this also involves the printing and publishing, and so on, of brochures, manuals, booklets.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 40: Food at Institutions. Just a follow-up on something the hon. Minister said and I know this Piparo Empowerment Centre falls in my constituency of Princes Town. I just wanted to have a sense from the hon. Minister with respect to this particular line Item whether she can give us an indication of the complement of persons staying there presently and probably an average? I know we have had some challenges with persons at the Piparo Empowerment Centre going into the community, and so on, and at one point in time we were able to have some integration going on in a communal way in terms of getting projects, and so on, assisted with persons staying at the Piparo Empowerment Centre, but at this time if the Minister could give an average of the complement that would qualify for an increase of 115,000 but with an allocation of almost half a million dollars in food for one year if we can get an idea of the complement?

Hon. Cox: Okay, I will check on it and I will get back to you.

Madam Chairman: So Item 002: Division of Ageing; Item 003: Social Welfare.
Member for Chaguanas East.

8.30 p.m.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 003/28: Other Contracted Services, 2021 Estimate of 10 million. Can the Minister provide to us what services are paid for using this Sub-Item?

Hon. Cox: I will have to get that information to you because I do not have it here.

I have TTPost, NIB and PTSC.

Ms. Mohit: TTPost, NIB and PTSC. Does the PTSC payment have to do with the Eldamo?

Hon. Cox: No.

Ms. Mohit: No? What purpose is PTSC is contracted for? Buses for—? Is it senior citizens?

Hon. Cox: Yes, it is transportation to clients inclusive of senior citizens.

Ms. Mohit: Can the Minister state where these services are provided? Whether it be rural communities, urban areas. Where?

Hon. Cox: Nationally.

Ms. Mohit: Nationally?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Line Item 21 please, Repairs and Maintenance Buildings, I am seeing there is an allocation of \$33,610 in 2020 but only \$2,500 was spent. Now, I know a lot of these buildings are in a state of disrepair and require repairs. Can the Minister indicate why not all of the money was spent in terms of the repairs to these buildings and upgrades?

Hon. Cox: Well, because of COVID-19.

Mr. Hosein: But I am seeing in 2019, only 2,200 was spent also; there was no COVID-19 in 2019.

Hon. Cox: Well, I will have to find out that.

Mr. Hosein: Yeah, I think that is something that we really have to look at because there are many buildings that are currently in need of repair.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Line Item 28, I am going back to Other Contracted Services.

Madam Chairman: Where are you please? 28?

Mr. Padarath: 28: Other Contracted Services, and following on something the hon. Minister said, I just wanted clarification. Minister, you indicated that this would also include payment to PTSC for the senior citizens' programme but also I am aware that the Ministry also puts on buses in rural areas for impoverished areas. I know in particular my own constituency had this particular programme and it has been discontinued. Would the hon. Minister give us the undertaking to provide to us the routes and the days for which this programme is proposed to utilize in terms of the areas that will be serviced by PTSC and also a plug to put back Princes Town among that please?

Hon. Cox: Okay, somebody is now saying Diego Martin has to come before.
[Laughter and crosstalk]

Mr. Padarath: Well, Minister, you can also use your yacht to bring them up, you know. We have the waterfront. *[Laughter]*

Hon. Cox: I think you may also have to talk to PTSC too, eh, because it is nationally and PTSC routes we use.

Mr. Padarath: I understand but I am almost certain that if the Ministry is paying, also the Ministry would have some sort of input—

Hon. Cox: Make an intervention.

Mr. Padarath:—in terms of if there is a consultation, I would appreciate that, Minister.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: In addition to what my colleague is stating, when you are providing

such information to us, if you can include the offices to contact based on the routes and the areas so that we can also share that.

Hon. Cox: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005. Item 006. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair, again. Item 006/08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. Can the Minister state what is the reason for such a decrease? Can you also state, Madam Minister, whether or not leases have ended or just have not been renewed?

Hon. Cox: I think the plan is to move into a new building. We are trying to merge some of the offices into one building so therefore, there will be a decrease in rent.

Ms. Mohit: So this is why there exists a decrease now?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, through you, a follow-up question. Madam Minister, have you all looked at ideas between renting, purchasing or building in terms of your structures?

Hon. Cox: Yes, I believe that there is an exercise taking place right now concerning that.

Ms. Mohit: That is taking place right now.

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Line Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence, I just wanted to get an idea from you of whether or not this particular line Item reflects the Travelling and Subsistence for employees under National Family Services?

Madam Chairman: 01?

Mr. Padarath: 01.

Hon. Cox: Yes, it does.

Mr. Padarath: Yes, it does? And could you tell me approximately or if you have it off the top of your head how many employees does this affect?

Hon. Cox: We will provide that.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. And the rationale for the increase, now, I am looking at the comparison in the 2020 Estimates, it was 321, the revised 150 and then this year's allocation, bringing it back up to 321, whether or not this will reflect an upsurge in terms of intervention from the Ministry through the National Family Services for the COVID period or particularly for support for impoverished families or domestic violence victims, et cetera.

Hon. Cox: Well, it is actually a mixture. COVID and also National Family Services now would be taking a more leading role in the social sector as the first responders so we want to ensure and engage families and from the situation with families, then we would move on to other areas.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. So this, Minister, would then be from 2020 where we had 150,000 allocation to now 321,192, represent more roving officers from the National Family Services into these communities?

Hon. Cox: That is the plan.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. All right.

Madam Chairman: All right, so we go on. Item—I am sorry. Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 05: Telephones, it is quite a large increase of \$50,000. Any reason why that phone bill has gone up so much?

Hon. Cox: This has to do with COVID-19 phone calls, a lot more calls.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 007/03/04: Other Minor Equipment.

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

Ms. Mohit: Oh, sorry, that is another Head, I do apologize. Maybe that is an error, I apologize.

Madam Chairman: Yes, that is okay. All right. So Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to 007/02: Senior Citizens Grant.

Madam Chairman: No, we are on page 391.

Mr Indarsingh: Oh, okay. "When yuh reach."

Madam Chairman: All right. So can we go on now? Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Is that where you are, Member for Chaguanas East? Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 03/001/04, that is Other Minor Equipment. You have an Estimate in 2020 of 303,500; Revised Estimate of 100,000; and 2021, you have 1 million, an increase of 900,000. Can the Minister explain what changes are expected?

Hon. Cox: Okay, this has to do with the new accommodation that I spoke about earlier on.

Ms. Mohit: Due to the movement.

Hon. Cox: Therefore, there will be a need for upgrade of new equipment.

Ms. Mohit: Okay, thanks a lot.

Madam Chairman: Item 002; Item 003; Item 005; Item 006; Item 007.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, we are at page 393. Item 005. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 04/005/31, can the Minister state if there is a formula

for disbursement to these institutions and in addition to that, Madam Minister, if you can provide a breakdown of the proposed allocation to each of the 24 named institutions and if you can also state to us in terms of these 24 listed under 31, if any of these are identified to be receiving an increase.

Hon. Cox: Okay, I will provide that information.

Ms. Mohit: At a later date?

Hon. Cox: These amounts were Cabinet approved, eh, but I will provide it at another date.

Ms. Mohit: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am at Item 02: Other Social Programmes. Can the Minister give a breakdown of what these programmes are? I see that there is an increase of \$300,000 from what was spent from the last fiscal.

Hon. Cox: I believe this Other Social Programmes has to deal with, from time to time, when there are needs, they can be fulfilled.

Mr. Hosein: Can you give us a list of the programmes that the \$700,000 was spent on for fiscal 2020?

Hon. Cox: Okay, this will be provided.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam, under Contribution to Non-Profit Institutions, 31, one of the organizations listed is the Autism Services of Trinidad/South Support Group. Minister, my constituency, the last time an evaluation was done, Princes Town constituency has the highest number of children with special needs, particularly cerebral palsy and autism.

The question that I would like to have an answer to is that separate and apart

from the financial contributions to these non-profit institutions, particularly the Autism Services of Trinidad/South Support Group, is the Ministry looking at utilizing any of their facilities within the south or central region to provide additional services to children who are specifically inflicted with autism or cerebral palsy?

Hon. Cox: I believe the National Enrichment Centre in Chaguanas is one of the areas that the Ministry is using.

Mr. Padarath: Hon. Minister, can you indicate at this time, I know you are new to the Ministry but at this time, whether or not the Autistic Society or any of these organizations, particularly those inflicted with autism and cerebral palsy, have been utilizing this facility?

Hon. Cox: I will find out. The answer is yes.

Mr. Padarath: Is it that I am getting from you, Minister, that there is no impediment to providing additional support to these organizations through that institution?

Hon. Cox: I will have to check that.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. Why I asked, Minister, is that they have approached me—as I said, my constituency has some of the highest rates of children particularly inflicted with cerebral palsy and they have approached me, especially them and the Autistic Society to get additional support through the utilization of these centres. Because you would also appreciate that Trinidad and Tobago, we are very limited in terms of providing schooling in particular for special-needs children, especially those with cerebral palsy and autism so that is why I am asking in that context of the utilization of that centre as an additional support for these organizations. If at least we can get an undertaking for that to relieve some burden, we would appreciate it.

Hon. Cox: Okay, yes.

8.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. No? Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to line Item 31, I would appreciate if you would provide to the committee a listing of these individual institutions plus the actual allocation.

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. A listing of the individual institutions for 31?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Are they not listed there in the explanation?

Mr. Tancoo: No, no, no. Item 31, it says in the explanation, 31 includes. So I am assuming the word includes means it is not a comprehensive list. What I would like to get is a comprehensive list and the value of the contribution to each of these institutions for 2019, 2020 and 2021 proposed, please.

Hon. Cox: Okay, but this is the list.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: That line Item 31, earlier you had indicated 21 institutions. These are actually 24, so against that backdrop we were asking if we could have the complete list of all of them. Now, we understand you to be saying this is exhaustive. But could we just have that confirmed how many institutions there are and what payments, according to my colleague, have been made for 2019 and 2020, please, proposed, sorry for 2020.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 006. Item 007. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, with respect to 02

Senior Citizens Grant, I am seeing a drastic decrease of \$243,789,423. Could you give us some information as it relates to this drastic decrease?

Hon. Cox: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Come on, be serious.

Hon. Cox: Minister of Finance.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, I believe you are being asked to assist.

Mr. Imbert: And that is very unfortunate. It is more than the original estimate for 2021.

Mr. Indarsingh: When you say more than.

Mr. Imbert: It is in black and white. The original estimate for 2020 was 3,798,476,000. The estimate for 2021 is 3,819,210,577. And what happens with the Senior Citizens Grant depends on when the payments become due. This is paid at the first day of the month. And quite often we make an allocation within the fiscal year for 13 months, so that you have the funds available for the first month of the next fiscal and sometimes we do not and we use the Contingency Fund and we reconcile at the end of the year when we close the accounts. So it is nothing unusual about this. You and I have debated closing of the account at least 10 times already. You are well aware of the procedure. There is no problem here.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much for your guidance.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Because of the fact that I have indicated that there are some cases, because I am aware, throughout the country, but in my constituency I see a lot of them. A decrease of 89 million, now when we look at the figures, the 2020 Estimate is 521 million. The Revised Estimate for 2020 is 610 million and the 2021 estimates coming back to the exact same figure of 521 million, with a decrease of 89 million. Could the hon. Minister indicate to us how many persons

are on this disability grant as of today's date? And possibly as well, if the hon. Minister can provide to the House an explanation for why a decrease of 89 million, especially considering that there are some many complaints of persons being unable to access this disability grant.

Hon. Cox: Okay we have 25,308 persons on the disability grant. What is the next part of your question?

Mr. Padarath: Minister, if you can indicate to us what would account for this decrease of 89 million, in light of so many complaints nationally of persons unable to access the disability grant.

Hon. Cox: I missed the line Item.

Mr. Padarath: Okay, line Item 08, because the figure reflected from 2020 estimates to the 2021 estimates is exactly the same thing.

Hon. Cox: Okay, I would check that for you.

Mr. Imbert: We were looking to this with there would be no person who is currently in receipt of a disability grant who would not get such a grant.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, what would probably also be helpful is that in light of this decrease of 89 million, is if the Ministry would be able to give an undertaking to provide to us how many persons would have applied for this grant over the last financial year and how many persons would have been denied this grant. It will help us to explain why there is a decrease. Because in light of all that is happening and there are so many calls nationally for persons to access this disability grant and not being able to, we would like to have an idea of how many persons have been rejected, in terms of their applications over the last financial year.

Hon. Cox: Okay, the former Minister would explain.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, if I may.

Madam Chairman: I believe—so the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: If I may, you would notice that the 2020 Estimate was 521 million. The 2021 Estimate is 521 million, the same amount. And Madam Chairman, that is the amount that we normally work with. What happened in 2020, when we had to do the revised estimates we had an increase in the amount that we paid out because of the COVID situation, and because we gave people an amount, a top-up, in relation to the disability grant. And we also gave people who had applied but their grant had not been finalized. So that would be the increase that you see with the 610 million. The normal figure is 521 million.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. Minister, you said something interesting there where you indicated that persons who may not have been on the disability grant but would have applied that there would have been some sort of special consideration in light of what was happening. What has happened since then, or what is intention in terms of how do we treat with those persons since that decision was made? Is it that they now go into system as part of the system, or it was just for this particular period?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Let me explain. Because we had people who had applied but had not been finalized, but they were in the system, they had not been finalized, so we gave an amount. It may not have been the amount for which they qualified, if we had done the full application right through to the end. But because they had applied we knew that they would have been in a difficult situation and consequently we gave a certain amount that was approved by the Cabinet for those people who were in the system but were not finalized.

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Princes Town, you understand what I am saying?

Mr. Padarath: I understand what you are saying Minister.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Right. Thanks very much.

Mr. Padarath: Again, Minister, in light of that information that you have shared with us, would it be possible, through the line Minister herself to get an idea of how many persons that would have affected?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah. I am certain that the line Minister would be able to give you that.

Hon. Cox: Okay. I just want to give you an update that we have 25,149 persons in receipt of disability grants and this includes 2,134 children with a disability.

And from 2015, new persons who came on the programme was 1,614; 2016, 1,626; in 2017, 1,244; 2018, 1,088; 2019, 1,703; and this year, 1,538 new persons came on the disability programme.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, just one additional question in light of this same information that has been raised. You gave us the figure with respect to the amount of children that this grant assist. I know part of the challenge has been to actually access the grant itself. Is there any thought at the Ministry right now, with respect to review and revise the criteria for a disability grant to be provided particularly to children?

Hon. Cox: That is being considered right now.

Mr. Padarath: It is being reviewed right now?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, could you give us an idea in terms of time frame of whether something would be taking—well of course I am sure you will have to get Cabinet approval; whether it will be out for consultation? What is the process by means of reviewing this disability grant, especially in relation to children?

Hon. Cox: I will have to give you that information because I am not aware how far this is in the Ministry.

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Hon. Cox: I would be able to give you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I know you are moving forward. I seek your indulgence please to go back to Item 005. I had something that I really wanted to raise on behalf of the NCPD.

Madam Chairman: The unfortunate thing is, Member for Couva North, we are at 007. And I know it is taxing. What I would ask is that, if you can try and highlight upfront, the areas, hopefully we will get it right. But regrettably at this time it is difficult for me to go two Items back. Okay. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. At line Item 03, Social Assistance, Minister, I see that there has been an increase in expenditure for fiscal 2020 from what was originally allocated, and this increase is in the sum of \$184 million. Can you just explain what this social assistance vote includes?

Hon. Cox: Well because of COVID-19, and this social assistance is public assistance grant, inclusive of income support.

Mr. Hosein: Inclusive of?

Hon. Cox: Income support grant.

Mr. Hosein: Income support.

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And can you say how many persons may have accessed this service for fiscal 2020?

Hon. Cox: 47,774 persons accessed the income support grant, 2020.

Mr. Hosein: Item 04, Urgent Temporary Assistance. I also saw a jump there, in terms of what was originally allocated to what the revised estimate was for fiscal 2020. Can the Minister indicate again, what are some of the Items that fall under

this vote and who can access this urgent temporary assistance?

Mr. Imbert: Just let me come in here and make a general comment. If you look at Item 03, you would see it went up in 2020. That was definitely as a result of additional relief provided for COVID-19.

With respect to 04, in fiscal 2019, we had some significant natural disasters, which would have caused a significant expenditure on Item 04, which did not recur in 2020, to the extent that they occurred in 2019. Hence the Revised Estimate for 2019 is 65 and the 2021 is 50. Normally under that Item, we do not have that level of expenditure. But there were some problems in fiscal 2019.

But in 2020, in all of these things, the former Minister of Social Development and Family Services was very clear about it. There are a number of enhanced payments made of a large—a wide range of categories of social assistance, across the board; a large number of enhanced payments, top-ups, additional payments, and so on. So that the 2020 Revised Estimates are not reflective of a normal year.

You would have to go back to 2019. And then even in 2019 there are some aberrations like Urgent Temporary Assistance of 143 million. That is not normal. Normally it is much less than that.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, is this like for flood relief grants?

Mr. Imbert: Yes. The Greenvale problem in fiscal 2019, which cost over \$100 million, which is not normal. Normally you have that type of expenditure. So that, you have to understand that 2019 is a better guide but there are aberrations in 2019 as well, to give you a better understanding of what the 2021 Estimates should be.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

9.00 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I also need to indicate that in 2019, in particular, as the

Minister of Finance said, you would see that that is way higher than the 2020 Estimates, and that was the—there was a 2018 natural disaster that took place that the Ministry had to deal with. There was a 2019 disaster that took place that the Ministry had to deal with. And consequently, 2019 is way above what would normally have been the figure. The usual figure is in the order of 30 million. However, in 2020, it went up to the 65 million because of the same issue with the COVID, and because COVID is a continuing circumstance, we determine that we should put it at 50 million just in case of anything, but 30 million is the normal figure.

Mr. Hosein: One very grey area—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes?

Mr. Hosein: Now, I understand line Item 04 to be for persons who would have suffered because of a natural disaster, and 03 would be more of if a person is in need of help, for example, COVID. But I am just getting a little blurring that you are also mentioning COVID under 04 which is the Urgent Temporary Assistance.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, that is because of the assistance. We may have had situations because of persons who may have lost their normal—the rental situations and things like that, that we would have had to use under this Head.

Mr. Hosein: For temporary housing?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Temporary urgent—urgent temporary assistance. Additionally, we had situations with the persons who are socially displaced and so on, which was not—so a lot of these we have had to use because of the 2020 circumstances.

Mr. Hosein: Okay sure. And, Madam Chair, if I may, at 06: Rehabilitative Programme, I am seeing that no allocation is being made for 2021. Is there a reason for no allocation for this programme?

Hon. Cox: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Hosein: I beg your pardon?

Hon. Cox: It has been incorporated under NSDP.

Mr. Hosein: Okay, and also 09: Assistance to National Heroes. Can you just tell us who are the persons who access this grant?

Hon. Cox: We will provide that information.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, in terms of 02: Senior Citizens Grant, the Minister of Finance would have given a contribution. However, in 2020, the Revised Estimates would have increased given the fact that the former Minister would have given an explanation as per 03, 04, 08. Does this also relate to 02, in terms of persons who would have applied before you would have had an increase in the estimate? In terms of the senior citizens grant?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: I would think it is a combination a large number of factors that would have caused this increase. It would have included some of what you just spoke about, but by and large, this is additional relief arising from COVID.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, in terms of 03 to 04, since they are so closely related, I would just include them at once. Could the Minister indicate if migrants were recipients of these services?

Hon. Cox: No.

Ms. Mohit: No?

Hon. Cox: No.

Ms. Mohit: Thanks.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, may I say that with regard to the migrants,

you would recall that we had a programme of giving funding to churches and other religious organizations. The migrants would have been helped by those religious bodies and that would have been under the Office of the Prime Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, line Item 08, I just want to make it clear that there is no question on the bona fides of what has been indicated earlier. Hon. Minister, you indicated some numbers of persons who are on the disability programme, and I think the numbers, you indicated them by years.

Now, based on what we heard from the Leader of Government Business, former Minister, is it that those persons whose applications may not have been finalized, they are included in the numbers that the hon. Minister would have called or cited for 2020? She cited some numbers of persons who are on the list and you indicated that there were certain persons whose applications may not have been finalized, but the Cabinet would have given special consideration. I use that word loosely. I cannot remember the phrase you used. But special consideration so that they would have been able to access some funding. I am asking if this is included in the numbers that the Minister has quoted? That is one.

And bearing in mind that we are still in the COVID pandemic period, I am concerned that whether we would sufficiently be able to cater for persons who may need to continue accessing it, or new persons, and we have a decrease in the estimate, we have a decrease for 2021? So, it is really two questions, whether those persons that have been cited before who are not on the list, whether they are included in your numbers? And then further, knowing that we are still in the pandemic, whether we would be catering properly for persons, bearing in mind we have a decrease of 89 million?

Hon. Cox: I think the first answer is no, and I know that persons with a disability

will be taken care of.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, can the Minister state if there will be any adjustments in terms of line Items 02; 03; 04, to the means test exercise or applications for these services?

Hon. Cox: 02; 03; 04? All right, well, 02 does not fall under the means test.

Ms. Mohit: I said means test and application—

Hon. Cox: And application?

Ms. Mohit:—because I know senior citizens would be application.

Hon. Cox: Okay.

Ms. Mohit: Any adjustments to any of the two? Meaning the application for Item 02, or the means test?

Hon. Cox: Well, as a matter of fact, with Item 02 that does not arise but concerning the means test, there is a review of the means test taking place now.

Ms. Mohit: There is a review of the means test?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. What is the time frame that is expected to come into effect?

Hon. Cox: Hmm, in a matter of months.

Ms. Mohit: When is the review expected to be completed and come into effect?

Hon. Cox: I would say in second quarter.

Ms. Mohit: Second quarter?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 11: Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme- Development Component for Recipients, the Revised Estimates would have been no funding; 2021, you have gotten back what you estimated in 2020, \$300,000. Is this programme related today the rise up, in terms of having

persons who are on the programme transition into developing themselves so that they cannot be reliant?

Hon. Cox: Step up.

Ms. Mohit: Do you have a plan to have this programme effective during this fiscal year?

Hon. Cox: Yes, definitely.

Ms. Mohit: Yes?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Madam Chair, 40 is a different—until you go to the other.

Madam Chairman: You want to ask something under 40? 40 is still 007.

Ms. Mohit: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Gratuities to Contract Officers?

Ms. Mohit: Yes. Can the Minister state, Madam Chair, there is an increase of \$1 million in the 2021 Estimates, how many outstanding gratuities are there at the Ministry? And can the Minister outline those periods for us?

Hon. Cox: Okay, we will have to provide that information in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I want to go back to 03 and to 04. I am glad the Minister raised 2018/2019 flooding experiences. I have in my constituency several individuals who have indicated to me that they have applied for the flooding grant and not received any such grant from the Ministry yet. Can I appeal to the Minister to provide to the House—to the Committee, sorry, a breakdown of the geographic breakdown, if possible—a constituency breakdown, preferably, of the recipients of both the social assistance grant and the urgent temporary assistance grant?

Madam Chairman: In what year?

Mr. Tancoo: 2019, 2020 and 2021 proposed, please.

Hon. Cox: I just want you to know that the breakdowns that we have, how we compile it, that it is not on a constituency basis. Particularly when it comes to the flooding, it is the regional corporations that are responsible for assessing the flood victims and then send in the information to us once it is approved to pay.

Mr. Tancoo: So then Ma'am, would you be able to provide it by regional corporation?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Madam Chairman: For what period, I would allow 2020 but not 2019. Member for Oropouche West, you would most probably be able to get that from questions answered on the Parliament's record, okay?

Mr. Tancoo: I would accept that, Ma'am. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: But I would not allow 2019.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, 2019 would probably also be in the Ministry's report which is laid in the Parliament. So, 2020 might be the one that the Minister should be asked to do.

Madam Chairman: Okay, that is what I said. I will only allow 2020. Maybe, Member for Oropouche West, your Whip might be able to guide with respect to how to locate it on the previous Parliament records. Okay?

Mr. Tancoo: Sure, thank you very much, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: You are welcome. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Could the hon. Minister advise us if under Item 08: Disability Grant, children with disability who are in school happens to cover there or that goes into a special child—special grant for children?

Hon. Cox: Children are covered.

Mr. Ratiram: And they are not covered there?

Hon. Cox: They are covered.

Mr. Ratiram: They are covered there?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: And could the hon. Minister indicate if any special provisions are being made for these children who are not in regular school but who attend school for disabled children? If any provisions are being made for like electronic devices and stuff for these children?

Madam Chairman: Would you be talking about schools like Lady Hochoy and so on? Would you be—

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, like NCPD, et cetera, if any— so if not, I am just making a humble appeal to the Minister to provide some special consideration for these children, especially during this COVID time, where they would not be able to attend the schools and will be doing online classes, if special consideration could be made for them to be considered for electronic devices?

Hon. Cox: I will look into it. I will also talk to my colleague from the Ministry of Education but know that these schools get special subventions from this Ministry on a yearly basis.

Mr. Ratiram: However, through you, Chair, these subventions would not have traditionally catered for the current COVID, social distancing, at home classes, online classes, and so forth, so that is why I am asking on behalf of these students if special consideration can be made?

Hon. Cox: Yes, I will. I will pass on the information.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so, Item 009. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 009; 02: the NSDP, National Social Development Programme; 2020, \$5 million, Revised Estimate of \$3.5 million; 2021, you would have gotten—well, it is the same as the 2020 Estimates stating a \$1.5 million increase. Madam Minister, this would be assistance such as roof repairs, catering

for disasters as well, as well as electrical and plumbing assistance. If I am to be correct, can you state how many pending applications are there?

And can you provide to us a total of how many grants would have been given out to applicants?

9.15 p.m.

Hon. Cox: We will provide that information under NSDP, right? Specifically.

Ms. Mohit: Yes, under NSDP.

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, under National Service, Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP), taken into consideration that several of the recipient of Social Services Support will be the people requesting the GAPP support as well, what was the rationale behind transferring this well oiled well needed service over to a new Ministry under the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

Hon. Cox: Well, actually the acronym GAPP involves Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, is a programme where the adolescents, these are the persons from—I think it is really from 18 to 35, which could be called youth. They are trained to take care of elderly persons. And I believe that is the rationale why this programme was moved to—

Mr. Paray: So the focus, the rationale, was that because it is a training component it was moved.

Hon. Cox: Is a training component for youth.

Mr. Paray: Okay. But do you expect to have some challenges in terms of requesting the support to get it back into the communities when this is moved to a

new Ministry? I am just asking, because when constituents come to me, especially with elderly folks and they need the assistance, we already know the process to get to the social welfare office, make the request and so on, because you have established in the communities the 10 offices. I do not—I mean, I am expecting some challenges requesting the service out of this new Ministry, unless it may be housed within your Ministry in terms of that office to get that support back into the community. Do not know if that is something that you have considered?

Hon. Cox: Yeah. Well, we will try to have a smooth transition, because we know that this is a much needed service and we will try as, you know, much as possible to make the transition smooth.

Madam Chairman: Member Chaguanas East, are you—you have a question to ask, or?

Ms. Mohit: No.

Madam Chairman: No? All right. So can we go?

Ms. Mohit: Sure.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. This is a new book. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. We are at page 509. 15: Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retarded Children, Lady Hochoy Home; Sub-Head 41: Trinidad Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired; 42: Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association. Hon. Members, you will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-head 09: Development Programme Consolidated Fund, page 164. That is another book. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Yes Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, establishment of—Item 04: Establishment of Social Displacement Centres, an allocation of \$2 million. Can the Minister state what is the actual start date for this project?

Hon. Cox: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Can the Minister also indicate to us the number of Social Displacement Centres currently under the Ministry?

Hon. Cox: Two.

Ms. Mohit: Two?

Hon. Cox: Yeah.

Ms. Mohit: Can you also indicate—a follow-up question—the estimate cost to complete the centres—it says “centres” in your line Item—the estimate cost to complete and how many centres you intend to build?

Madam Chairman: Which item are we under? We are still under 044?

Ms. Mohit: Yes, it says “Displacement Centres”.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Mohit: So I am just asking the estimated cost to complete and how many centres?

Hon. Cox: This is supposed to be one centre. I do not think it is centres, supposed to be one, one centre.

Ms. Mohit: Four centres?

Hon. Cox: One, one.

Ms. Mohit: Oh one, one centre. Okay. And what is the estimated cost to complete?

Hon. Cox: We would have to get that figure for you. We do not have it here.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 095: DRETCHI Refurbishment/Reconfiguration. What is—can the Minister state if this allocation is sufficient for repairs to be undertaken?

Hon. Cox: This is particularly for roof repairs.

Ms. Mohit: Roof repairs?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: So it is sufficient you are saying?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 096, the Development Centre for Persons with Challenges; an estimate of \$1 million. Can the Minister state the actual start date for this project and which areas will this allocation be used?

Hon. Cox: This is really to procure therapy equipment for outfitting of the centre. And this is the pay management fees to service provider to manage the centre.

Ms. Mohit: Which centre?

Hon. Cox: National Enrichment Centre.

Ms. Mohit: So it is one centre?

Hon. Cox: This is in Carlsen Field.

Ms. Mohit: Carlsen Field.

Hon. Cox: Yeah.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Minister, if you can just indicate, you had an Estimate of 1.5 million in 2020 and a Revised Estimate of 100,000. Why was it not done in 2020?

Hon. Cox: 2020, COVID-19.

Ms. Mohit: So due to COVID you did not spend the allocation?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: So you are now going to look to spend it in 2021?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 112. The Street Dwellers Rehabilitation and Reintegration Project; \$1 million. It is actually a huge jump from 2020 Estimates. What is the actual start date of this project?

Hon. Cox: On this, I can tell you what this is for. This is for the refurbishment of the staircase and fabrication works to be undertaken at the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons.

Ms. Mohit: This is Item 112.

Hon. Cox: Yes 112, C 112.

Ms. Mohit: Um hmm. Which centre? Can you—

Hon. Cox: The Centre for Socially Displaced Persons at Riverside Plaza.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, specifically to Riverside Plaza?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Does your Ministry have any plans in terms of other areas on the street dwelling which is currently taking place?

Hon. Cox: Yes. Definitely.

Ms. Mohit: Catered for in any allocation?

Hon. Cox: The Assessment Centre.

Ms. Mohit: I beg, I did not hear you.

Hon. Cox: I think it is under 44, the Assessment Centre.

Ms. Mohit: Okay.

Hon. Cox: C 044: Establishment of Social Displacement Centre. This is also—will incorporate the homeless.

Ms. Mohit: So, you are saying that the street dwelling which is occurring in other areas, you have not catered for it under this allocation you have catered for Riverside Plaza and those other areas you have catered for that in—under 044?

Hon. Cox: Under 044, this—where we will be establishing an assessment centre. All right? So, this will also take into account the street dwellers, okay, because you have to assess them first.

Ms. Mohit: Which exists in other areas?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Refurbishment of Hernandez Place, 130. Can the Minister state—you have an estimate of 800,000 for 2021? Can you state if this allocation is sufficient for the refurbishment you are required to do the start date of such project, and what areas are you identifying for refurbishment at this said place?

Hon. Cox: This has already started and this is installation of a fire system, completion of civil works and outfitting Hernandez Place.

Ms. Mohit: Will that complete the works that is required?

Hon. Cox: Yes, it will.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. Item 132: Madam Chair, Refurbishment of Older Persons Homes; 900,000 estimate for 2021. Can the Minister state how many homes are carded for refurbishment? And what are your oversight mechanisms in place?

Hon. Cox: Well, this covers three homes, Chaguanas, Mayaro and Siparia, senior citizens homes. Chaguanas has started and this is just refurbishment of the homes. Oversight, this is being done by the project unit or the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, can you say what is the total estimated cost for the three projects?

Hon. Cox: 900,000.

Ms. Mohit: So the total allocation?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Anything else, Member for Chaguanas East??

Ms. Mohit: Sub-Head 9 is continued on the other page right, Madam Chair?

Madam Chairman: Are there any more questions under 004? All right, Item 005. Do you have a question, Member for Chaguanas East? Please proceed.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, 005, 029, the Establishment of a Data Centre and Storage Area Network. Seeing that you have—we are faced with COVID-19 at this time, and the Minister of Finance would have mentioned this in his budget presentation as well, can we have some clarification as to no allocation in this area?

9.30 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, if I may just answer that question. You would notice in a number of the PSIP projects that deal with data, you may see nothing allocated, because what we decided to do is to put the allocation under the Ministry of Public Administration, so that we will build one comprehensive system, that iGov would determine the best system, and then the different Ministries would have a system for their Ministry. But the allocation would be under public administration.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Especially if it was either a new project or a project that had not already started, we have put the funding under the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, I want to just draw your attention to Item 032: Establishment of an Integrated Social Enterprise Management System/E Pass. Now, taking note of the \$5.8 million price tag for this project, what tangible benefit can the citizens expect upon completion of this project when this system is activated?

Hon. Cox: This system would feed the digitization of all our grants that are not currently on our electronic database. Also, it will enable greater efficiency and

effectiveness in the processing of grants, and the introduction of this technology will facilitated an integrated, more dynamic and responsive system and, by extension, a more effective solution.

Mr. Paray: Any part of this upgrade, Minister, allows for better communication, perhaps online where applicants can go online and get the status of their applications?

Hon. Cox: Yes, yes, its covers that.

Mr. Paray: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Mohit: Item 032: Establishment of an Integrated Social Enterprise Management System/ E Pass. You had a 2020 Estimate of 1 million, a Revised Estimate of 1.5 million, and a 2021 Estimate of 5.8 million. Madam Chair, through you, can the Minister state for us what was the total cost to develop this project? What is the status of this project at this time and what changes are expected out of this project, launching the implementation of this project?

Hon. Cox: Okay. I think the total cost is 10.6 million. The contractor is on board, management fees were paid. And actually, I mentioned earlier on—what I mentioned is that you would see all our grants.

Ms. Mohit: Could you just speak a little clearer please, thanks.

Hon. Cox: Okay. I mentioned the benefits before. I do not know if you want me to repeat it, but you would see the digitization of all our grants that are currently in our electronic database, and you got the price, 10.6?

Ms. Mohit: Yes, I got the price.

Hon. Cox: The contractor is on board already. The management fee is paid, so they are actually working on this. By next year, they should be in operation.

Ms. Mohit: So, by next year, it should be implemented?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: 2022? Madam Chair, 034. The Ministry's PBX upgrade of \$1.5 million seem to be a new project. Madam Minister, as stated here in the explanation, can you indicate to us what is the total estimated cost of this new project and the purpose of this project?

Hon. Cox: This is the total estimated cost here. Also, the system that we have is archaic, outdated and, therefore, we needed to upgrade. Now that we have two call centres, our system cannot manage the inflow and outflow of our telephone calls and, therefore, of course, we want to ensure that persons can reach the Ministry. There have been a lot of complaints because if too many persons call through the calls get knocked out. So we definitely need an upgrade in the PBX system.

Ms. Mohit: So this upgrade is specifically at your call centres outlined earlier or at all offices?

Hon. Cox: At the Ministry of the whole.

Ms. Mohit: At the Ministry?

Hon. Cox: All offices.

Ms. Mohit: All offices?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 78 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister; thank you PS and the other technocrats from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. And hon. Members, just to do some housekeeping matters, the next Head is the Integrity Commission and with the consent of the Whip, the Office of Parliament will be taken after the Integrity Commission, then we will do the Elections and Boundaries Commission, Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Industrial Court. Okay?

Head 37: Integrity Commission, \$7,688,412.

Madam Chairman: Under the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, we will start at page 230. [*Pause*] I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Integrity Commission was established under the Integrity in Public Life Act, Chap. 22:01. It has an oversight role for the prevention of corruption, promoting the integrity of persons in public life and persons exercising public functions. It sets guidelines for the conduct of these persons who are defined in the Act.

Question proposed: That Head 37 stand part of the Schedule

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$7,688,412 for Head 37: Integrity Commission is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 230. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Pointe-a-Pierre? Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration, pages 230 to 231. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration, page 232. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 07: Households.

Hon. Members, we shall now proceed on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book, we are at page 85. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme Consolidated Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral & Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 37 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Registrar; thank you all the members of the Integrity Commission. Okay. Can we now go on to the Office of the Parliament?

Head 05: Parliament, \$150,151,560.

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

Hon. Imbert: It will be very short. The Parliament is one of the three arms of the State which comprise the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislature. The Office of the Parliament provides administrative and apolitical support services to the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$150,151,560 for Head 05: Parliament stand part of the Schedule. Hon. Members, the sum of \$150,151,560 for Head: 05 Parliament 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*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 22. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies.

9.45 p.m.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book, Page 7. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 05 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Madam Clerk, you are excused. And we will now go on to Elections and Boundaries Commission.

Head 08: Elections and Boundaries Commission, \$74,153,230.

Madam Chairman: Members, we will be starting at page 39 of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: Certainly. The Elections and Boundaries Commission is a successor institution of two separate bodies, a Boundaries Commission and an Elections Commission. These two bodies were amalgamated the 1976 republican Constitution. The Constitution provides for the establishment of a Commission, its membership, its responsibilities which include the registration of voters and the conduct of elections in every constituency. The Commission also reviews constituency boundaries among other things.

Question proposed: That Head 08 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$74,153,230 for Head 08, Elections and Boundaries Commission, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the follow Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure at page 39; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 40. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, line Item number 23, we wanted to get a basic breakdown of what the increased—well, the increased estimate, there is an increase of 1.3 million, what Fees are these expected to cover?

Hon. Imbert: The Fees include legal fees, licenses, and so on, and brokerage, and that is simply the estimate for this year—

Madam Chairman: Yes, please—

Hon. Imbert:—based on what they think their commitments will be in this year. They change from year to year. Legal fees, licenses, et cetera, would change from year to year, not simply the estimate of it this year. And then we are also rolling

out—the Commission, not “we”, where you may have heard the Commission is rolling out a new ID card in 2021, so that has a cost attached to it as well.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, that would fall under this Item as well, Fees, Item 23?

Hon. Imbert: Yes. I think I said that.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, I know you, you know, yes, you said that, some of us need clarity on these things. So getting back to line Item 23, now, what we would like to know is in terms of, you see we have the 2020 Revised Estimates reflecting 2.3, I understand the umbrella headings you have called, but in terms of legal fees, is there any particular area or any particular reason why this increase to cover legal fees and it could not have been simply equated with what was the Revised Estimates for 2020?

Hon. Imbert: It is just a provision for legal fees, you never know what lawsuits you guys might bring against the Commission. You know you all like to do that.

Mr. Al-Rawi: If I could assist on this particular Item—

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Al-Rawi: There was extensive litigation in the period 2015 to 2020. In fact, some \$8 million in legal fees are still outstanding from the UNC alone, let alone the EBC, so it is wise and proper in this position to insist upon that. The matter for cost is still outstanding.

Hon. Imbert:—the other side might file.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, just back to 23, and I heard the Minister indicate that there will be a roll out of a new ID card, Minister could you inform this meeting what is the projected date for the roll out of that new ID card and the completion date?

Madam Chairman: You may be aware, it was publicized, that they began issuing ID cards, the new form of ID card very recently. They are starting with renewals first—sorry, I apologize—new registrations first and then renewals would come in the following period next year. That is the projection. It will take some time because you are talking a million registered voters at this point in time. There may be, you know, some cleaning up of the list that may be required, but we are looking at a million 1.2 million, that sort of thing.

So it will take quite a while to issue these new cards. The Commission, I am now remembering in a meeting we had with them, they will be doing new registrations first obviously because those people would not have had an ID card before, so there is no conflict. And then as people's ID cards come up for renewal they would get the new ID card. So it will take some time.

Mr. Indarsingh: So if I could, in follow up, Madam Chair, if a by-election is to take place, what will be the position of the holders with the old ID cards, it would still be valid and so on?

Hon. Imbert: The ID cards were extended, you recall, to the end of this year.

Mr. Al-Rawi: In the COVID miscellaneous—

Mr. Indarsingh: I know—

Hon. Imbert: And if there is need of course to extend further because the distribution of the new ID cards is not complete, then of course the Attorney General would make appropriate adjustments to the law.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: And then, of course, you have the provision within the law where persons can vote without an ID card, but I am certain the collective heads will get together and come up with the most appropriate solution to this issue if it arises at all.

Mr. Indarsingh: All right.

Hon. Imbert: Okay?

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies.

Question put.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, you did not go through 002 under Item 02: Goods and Services. [*Crosstalk*] No.

Madam Chairman: If I am not mistaken, the question that Couva South asked was under Sub-Head 02—

Mr. Hosein: No, Couva South asked for 23. Please—

Madam Chairman: I think, if I am not mistaken, Chaguanas West may have asked under 02 also.

Mr. Hosein: Chaguanas West asked on—not Fees, 23, under page 40? Under Goods and Services, 002, at page 41.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, as I said, I know this is really a difficult exercise for—[*Interruption*] Minister of Finance—Minister of Finance—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hosein: No, no, it come—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance—Minister of Finance—[*Crosstalk*]
Okay. So, Members, as it gets later it may be a little more challenging for us all to follow, okay, so I will just ask that you try to individually pique our attention as difficult as that might be at this time. Okay? So I did Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, I did Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases and I did Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, when we were doing 02 we did 001 which was General Administration, so I was waiting for you to start 002 which was Election Expenses.

Madam Chairman: Yes, but I said Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, and then I went on to Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance, the—[*Crosstalk*] No, no, I really do not think I need assistance. Thank you. If I need help I would certainly ask for help.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, can we crave your indulgence just to go back to 002 under Goods and Services?

Hon. Members: “Nooo.”

Madam Chairman: Members, Members, Members, we had set certain ground rules—

Mr. Hosein: “Allyuh doh want to”—

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan—Member for Barataria/San Juan, you see, if we allow people to distract us what will happen to us is it breaks down our attention for going forward, okay, and therefore I know you want to participate in this process so I will ask you, do not be distracted by things that will make you lose your focus for us going forward. Okay? So it is regrettable and we have two—at least one substantial Item still to do and therefore I ask everybody to please pay attention. Okay? I have completed Sub-Head 02, I have completed Sub-Head 03, I have completed Sub-Head 04, and in fact I was at the stage of putting the question. Okay?

Question put and agreed to.

Head 08 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, all the technocrats from the EBC, the Minister of Finance.

10.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance—Minister of Finance, my meeting is still going on.

Okay Members, just so we could get a little head start. We are at page 156 of the Recurrent Estimates.

Head 23: Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, \$314,458,960.

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

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Chair. The Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs absorbed the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Attorney General's chambers and also the Ministry of Justice in some part in the year 2015, being an amalgamation of three Ministries.

We have navigated over the course of the last five years in a very efficient fashion, albeit with the usual vicissitudes of the public service and other parameters operating. We are very pleased to present ourselves tonight and make ourselves available to questions coming from hon. Members. [*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan, are we ready? Member for Couva South are we ready? Thank you, Attorney General.

Question proposed: That Head 23 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$314,458,960 for Head 23: Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 156, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001:

Standing Finance Committee
Head 23 Office of the Attorney General and Ministry
of Legal Affairs (cont'd)

General Administration; Item 002: Law Reform Commission; Item 003: Equal Opportunity Commission; Item 007: Intellectual Property Office; Item 009: Criminal Law Department. We are at page 159. Item 010: Sentencing Commission.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 160. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Law Reform Commission. We are at page 161. Item 003: Equal Opportunity Commission. We are at page 162. Item 005: Law Revision Commission; Item 007: Intellectual Property Office; Item 009: Criminal Law Department. We are at pages 164 and 165. Item 010: Sentencing Commission.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 166. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Law Reform Commission; Item 003: Equal Opportunity Commission; Item 005: Law Revision Commission; Item 007: Intellectual Property Office; Item 009: Criminal Law Department; Item 010: Sentencing Commission.

We are now at page 168. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme. We are at page 59, Consolidated Fund. Item 004: Social Infrastructure; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 23 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister, and thank you all the representatives from the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs. You all are excused.

Head 04: Industrial Court, \$24,649,920.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to indicate that the Industrial Court is at the cusp of some major development this year. Borrowing from the successes in particular at the Judiciary which we shall be applying across the board.

In those circumstances, Madam Chair, I offer myself to provide explanations to my hon. colleagues should they be in need of clarification.

Question proposed: That Head 04 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$24,649,920 for Head 04: Industrial Court, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 17.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration.
Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases.
Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, new book, Consolidated Fund. We are at page 5. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 04 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Registrar. Thank you, Attorney General. Thank you, all Members.

Hon. Members, the Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Monday

Standing Finance Committee
Head 04 Industrial Court (cont'd)

2020.10.16

the 19th day of October, 2020, at 10.00 a.m.

I wish you all a very pleasant weekend, and we will see you all on Monday.

Thank you very much.

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