

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Monday, October 19, 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]

10.00 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Good morning. The meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will be resumed and we are at Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, \$695,267,700.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you very much, Chairman. I am very happy to be here before the Committee to go through our Estimates for this fiscal. Madam Chair, I just want to quickly touch on five areas. The first is the area of digital transformation. A lot has been said about this area, and we propose to continue the work that started in 2015. We estimate that between 2015 and 2020, we have spent \$15 million on this area and we intend to continue and accelerate the work that we are doing. In particular, we intend to focus, continue the focus on land, agricultural land services, plant quarantine, and animal production and health. We have already had some success in relation to land and plant quarantine, and I am sure it is going to come up in the discussion.

The second area is the area of land tenure. We have said a lot about that. It remains a priority area for the Ministry and you would see the funding,

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particularly, in digital transformation reflecting that interest. But I have also said, Madam Chair, in this fiscal, we have to focus on the issue of enforcement. There has been—it is very clear that people who have been allocated land for agricultural purposes have not met that commitment. And if I may illustrate it in one way, Madam Chair, is to point out, for example, in the two-acre allocation, under the Caroni VSEP programme. Under that programme, in EMBD, we developed 3,334 parcels of land covering seven areas, La Fortune, Picton, Edinburgh, Felicity, Jerningham Junction, Caroni and La Gloria. And I will say of those 3,134 two-acre parcels, only 512 have been shown to have any type of agriculture on it. That is a 16 per cent rate, Madam Chair. It means that taxpayers having spent 2.6 billion to develop these sites, the land value foregone about 1.5 billion, it means that we have spent close 4 billion just on this section of agriculture, and we have 2,622 families being denied the opportunity to farm on these two acres because the current holders of it are not utilizing in it. I intend, as Minister, Madam Chair, to address this issue frontally in this fiscal year.

The third area, very quickly, is the area of praedial larceny, and I want to make it clear, it is the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service that has the first responder role in crime in this country and it should not be distinguished, whether the crime is against a merchant on Frederick Street or a farmer in Lopinot. Our Ministry provides support services through the Praedial Larceny Squad.

The fourth is the issue of the Centre of Excellence that is proposed in agriculture and biotech. I am sure we are going to talk more about that.

And then, the fifth area is, finally, to establish a single point of authority in relation to state land in this country and remove all the duplication and overlap that currently hinders the work that we do. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 77 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$695,267,700 for Head 77, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and we are at page 366, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: On Item 02: Wages and COLA, there has been an increase of 200,000. Can the hon. Minister explain what this increase represents?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I am looking for the Item. Is it at 02?

Mr. Ratiram: 02.

Hon. Rambharat: Yes, Madam Chair. What we do is that we try to estimate those payments which were due to be made in the last fiscal but the payment may not have been completed, so apart from having to meet the ongoing annual payment, we also factor in liabilities from the previous fiscal year which were not met in that fiscal year and would have to be met in this fiscal year. We also project, in some cases, where there are positions to be filled, that we project that expenditure into this financial year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Taking into consideration that the Minister would have placed a freeze on filling of vacancies, the Minister indicated that some was put aside for positions to be filled. Is there some special exemptions for those positions to be filled?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, notwithstanding the policy that has been advocated, in a specialized Ministry like the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries where you have positions that become vacant and have to be filled, for example, in the livestock area where we require daily-paid workers to perform certain functions like the support areas for animals and to keep animals alive or to keep the services provided to private farmers, you will have to seek a dispensation to have those vacancies filled.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. On Item 04: Allowances- Monthly Paid Officers, there has been a decrease of \$425,000. Can the hon. Minister advise what this decrease represents and what are the allowances that might be reduced in the next fiscal term?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, in the budgeting process, what you do— what the Ministry of Finance does, in collaboration with the Ministries, is to try to project the future expenditure. These are Estimates, we budget based on the actuals in the financial year and, as I said before, in some cases the actuals in a financial year may be determined based on the normal, plus liabilities that are carried forward. So this represents a determination that we may not have to meet liabilities that we met in the last financial year. It is not, Madam Chairman, I want to be very clear, it is not a decrease in the actual allowances paid to these officers. These officers are paid based on an agreement between the employer and the recognized majority union. This is not a decrease in the allowances but a decrease in the estimate of the liabilities to pay these allowances.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 05: Government's Contribution to NIS. Taking into consideration that Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there has not

been any increase, and the only increase is in Wages and COLA of 200,000. Can the hon. Minister explain the significant increase of 691,000?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I would say, again, these are Estimates. So, from one financial year to the other, you try to match your liabilities of the previous year. You may increase, you may decrease based on what caused you to arrive at a figure in that financial year, and you project forward what you may have to pay or what you estimate you have to pay, and sometimes you project by increasing or you project by decreasing, keeping in mind that the process of virement allows you to meet your statutory liabilities and all other liabilities.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, line Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. I noticed in 2020, there was a considerable value of non-payment to these boards. Would the Minister provide an explanation of why these stipends were not paid in 2020 and there is a substantial increase of 152,400 for 2021? And is the first part.

And secondly, can the Minister provide, in writing, a list of these boards and the identity of these members and the stipends that they currently receive? Thank you.

Hon. Rambharat: I thank you very much, Member, for providing the question. The response and the assignment which is to provide the information and we would provide it, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, if I may just give a little clarification for the Member for Mayaro. Member for Mayaro, would you notice that the Estimates of 2020 and the Estimates of 2021 are the same. You will recall that we have said on more than one occasion that, in most instances, we make the estimate similar or the same as what we had in the year before. And so, even though the Revised Estimate

is less, when we come to make the Estimates for the year that we are dealing with, we go back to the year past and we try to give as close as possible to that amount. If it is not used, you will see it showing next year but the objective is to avoid the Ministry having to vire funds or come back in the midterm to ask for more money. You would notice that it is the exact amount that we gave in 2020.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, based on your response, what would have accounted for the failure of the Ministry to pay these stipends in 2020 based on their estimate of \$200,400 as part of their estimate, but they were only were able to pay 48,000? What would have accounted for the non-payment of that money?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, may I intervene here? Madam Chair, I am just saying to Mayaro, the Minister did indicate that he would give detailed information, as you requested, in writing. So I do not think it is fair to ask this question at this time.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 30: Allowances- Daily-Rates Workers, there is an increase there of 209,000 for the allowances to the daily-rated workers. Can the Minister kindly explain?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, we would have said on three occasions already, when you do the Estimates, you try to align the Estimates as closely as possible to what your actuals were in the previous financial year, and you may project an increase. But when you examine the actuals, you may find that there are things in there that should have been paid but for various reasons, they have not been paid as yet. The liability was incurred but the payment has not taken place, and you project having to make the actual payment in the next fiscal year. It is a timing issue,

sometimes it is a documentation issue but the liability exists and you project that you are going to pay it in the next fiscal year that accounts for the projection of an increase.

In the normal course of things, however, if you are projecting to fill vacancies or to add staff, you also project an increase. But generally, in a Ministry of this size, with the number of daily-paid and so on, you normally deal with a comparison of actuals versus Estimates and what may account for having to pay something in a financial year in which the liability was not incurred.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am going to 06: Remuneration to Board Members. I noted in 2020, there was an estimate of 43,000 but there was no payment in 2020. Can the Minister indicate whether there was a board, whether it was functional, and if it was in place, why was no payment made?

10.15 a.m.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, there are provisions for payment of Cabinet appointed committees, board members and so on. Sometimes, for example, the board has not been appointed or a board has not been appointed simply because the entity ceased to exist during the last financial year, or the board ceased to function. In other words, we would not have appointed board members. It happens from time to time where the Government is reviewing a particular entity and we defer the appointment of board members. So, this may be a case where we have done that, there were no board members, or we have simply not received the report on the attendance. So, board members to be paid, the Ministry must be furnished with the records of the meetings and the attendance of the board members and so on, and in those cases the payment has not been made, but we still project that the liability may be incurred in this fiscal year, and we project for it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I am just trying to figure out if you do not know what the correct answer is, because you have given us a multiplicity of choices to choose from. Was a board appointed or not appointed?

Hon. Rambharat: Was a board appointed? Madam Chair, I have no idea what the Member is referring to. Was a board—

Madam Chairman: 06.

Hon. Rambharat: Right. So, I have set out for the Member, the scenarios. It is not SEA, it is not multiple choice, you have various scenarios when you are operating in the real world, so that if the Member wishes for me to furnish the information, I can do so, Madam Chair, but I have set out the mechanics of it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Have we moved to 002: Agriculture?

Madam Chairman: No.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay, when you reach.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North, I am not sure that you wanted to ask, you are okay? Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item 05, NIS contribution has increased and I just want to make a—so that is 05, 691,500. But I noticed all the NIS contributions have increased throughout your Ministry, their allocation. The question I am asking, based on the policy of the freeze on hiring, but these increases in NIS throughout your Ministry, is it due because of arrears to NIS?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes. As I said before, one of the factors in projecting an increase is where you have incurred the liability but at the end of the financial year you have not settled your liabilities. Sometimes it is because of paperwork or not having been invoiced, or in the case of NIS, simply the way in which we pay it and

we pay it as funds become available. So having not settled the liability in the previous financial year, you have to project into this financial year the prospect of paying your liabilities, in addition to liabilities which would normally accrue over the fiscal year.

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

Mr. Lee: Question, Minister. As you know NIS, if you are in arrears, attracts a penalty for late payment. Are these late payment interest fees worked into these increases?

Hon. Rambharat: No. The issue of penalties and interest is a matter for NIS in voicing—in making its claim. In the relationship between the State and NIS, because of the volume, the magnitude of the payments that have to be made, the issue of delays is not an unusual issue. In times where NIB, they have to go to court, so we do not as a rule factor in liabilities or interest in calculating, and if it does arise in the course of a claim and litigation, then it would be settled in the manner the hon. Attorney General intervenes to deal with matters of that nature, judgments against the State.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: If I may just say though, in addition to what the Minister has said, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre had said that he noticed an increase in NIS throughout. But if you just look at the first two, the one on page 366 and the one on page 367, there is no real increase, because when you look at the initial Estimates for 2020 it was 10,103,000, and now the 2021 Estimate is 10,387,000. When you look at page 367, the Estimate was 2,900,000 for 2020; the 2021 Estimate is 2,900,000. So in effect, we are budgeting around the same amount.

Mr. Lee: And that is why I asked the question, if they are in arrears, because—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay.

Mr. Lee:—if all things being equal, then all numbers are supposed to be the same,

technically. But because there is an increase based on how the numbers are played here, it shows an increase, but it may not be an increase, but the increase is due for maybe late payment, or non-payment of the actual NIS.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Also it could be that the amount that we—given when the budget is done, a payment may be owing at that time, so we have to make up allowances for that.

Madam Chairman: Okay, Chaguanas West, I am not certain if it is that you wanted to raise a question?

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, I did not indicate as such.

Madam Chairman: Okay, all right. So, we go on, Item 002: Agriculture. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I have continued to hear your explanations and so on with respect to projections and liabilities and payments not being effected and so on. With respect to 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., I see an increase of \$2 million, so could you tell us whether this is in keeping with the explanation that you have provided?

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you very much, Member. And when you combine your experience as a trade unionist and a Minister in the Ministry of Finance, you understand that this is how the budget is done. We deal with an Actual of 2019 and an Estimate, which is a higher figure, it will obviously give us, and it has to do—the specific Item: Wages, C.O.L.A., payments to be made to—some of these individual employees have to be payments that have to be vouched. For example, travelling claims, claims for reimbursements and so on. So that there is a projection based on the need to pay liabilities incurred in the previous year, which you have not paid in that year. Two million dollars will indicate for how many officers or so employed?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, it does not—it is an estimate, Member. So, it is estimated as a gross figure that when you look at the claims that you have—for example, when you look at what you receive on a monthly basis, some of these claims are not made on a timely manner, and even when they are made on a timely manner they are not settled by the end of the financial year. So it is not possible now to say 2 million is in respect of this number of employees. If you wish to get that breakdown I will be happy to provide it for you.

Mr. Indarsingh: If you could. And further to this, these projections or estimates, we are in 2021, but the Wages and C.O.L.A. for the workers in the agricultural sector there, or Division, they are existing on what salaries, 2013?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I would have to give you that in writing. It is not something that I have before me now.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Following up to what the Member for Couva South asked, on the 2 million, Item 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., with the increase of 2 million allocated here, can we expect to see some improvement, increase in efficiency in various areas of the sector?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, we all would like to see improvements. If it is that money is the magic, then I would not say that money is the magic. The State has been paying public sector as required. There has been no loss of jobs and no loss of remuneration, and the issue of efficiency has to do with management of the public sector, among other things, and motivation of people to do what they are supposed to do. I would not say that by merely estimating an increase, it is a magic wand to improve the efficiency of the public sector.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North, you have completed? Member for

Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: In 2020, there was an Estimate, \$80 million; 2021, Revised Estimate of \$70 million. So I know the Minister would want us to believe that this is an Arithmetic exercise, but it is not. These budgets are actually based on projections based on specific circumstances. I am curious to find out why there was this \$10 million drop in 2021—sorry, in 2020, in the amount of money allocated and spent to Wages and C.O.L.A.? Is the Minister in a position to answer that, or would you prefer to put it in writing?

Hon. Rambharat: Which option do you wish to give me?

Mr. Tancoo: Ah, whatever is convenient to you, Sir. I understand that I am putting you at a disadvantage.

Hon. Rambharat: Well, I always come very well prepared for my work. So that it is well known that the Government has announced a freeze. The filling of vacancies in the budgetary process every year, there is an assumption that all vacancies would be filled. It is not something that happens, so in the absence of what we have done is that we have assumed that vacancies will not be filled. But I have already said that there are cases where vacancies have to be filled. We projected the possibility of that, and I have also said that there are liabilities to be paid arising out of previous financial years, and those are projected. But you would see where these are—where these in relation to payment of wages and salaries, part of that is driven by that fact that we have not budgeted to fill vacancies we do not expect to fill in this fiscal year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. Just for clarification. From my understanding of the explanatory notes, 01 is where we have provisions for vacant posts between incumbents, and 02, wages and salaries, includes leave pay, that is where we have

a 10 million deficit.

Hon. Rambharat: Right, which you have explained it yourself. Where 01—your question related to 02.

Mr. Tancoo: Correct.

Hon. Rambharat: The 10 million is in 02. The note about provision for Vacant Posts is 01. There is a big difference between 01 and 02, to which you directed my attention, and in respect of which you would see no foot note. I hope that helps.

Mr. Tancoo: It does not, Sir. You refer to—my first question was with regard to 02, wages and salaries, and I asked about the \$10 million difference in 2020. You indicated, Sir that that included provision for vacant posts, which is why I am querying. Which is why in fact I am trying to clarify it, that 01 is where Vacant Posts is considered, not 02.

Hon. Rambharat: Well, perhaps, Member, you do not understand the difference between salaries and wages. Salaries in the public sector refer to monthly salaries, monthly paid as we call them, and wages refer to daily-paid workers as we call them. So, both relate to remuneration. You drew my attention to 02, which deals with daily paid workers, in respect of which there is no assumption that the vacant posts are to be filled, which accounts for the reduced figure to which you drew my attention.

Mr. Tancoo: And I thank you very much for your clarification, Sir. I would still like a clarification on my first question which is why is there a \$10 million drop in this critical component of the agricultural sector?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Member, I think the Minister has sought to answer that question for the last minutes maybe three minutes, so I suggest that we move on to another issue. So if you have something else that you would like to raise, if not, I will call Member for Naparima.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I refer to 01 and/or 02. I would like to know if these figures include allocations for the Praedial Larceny Squad.

Hon. Rambharat: No, Madam Chair, it does not. The Praedial Larceny Squad does not fall under the particular Sub-Heads under consideration.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Animal Production and Heath, page 367. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Items 01 and 02 both indicate an increase of 100,000 and 200,000 respectively. Taking again into consideration the Minister's guidance on freezing vacancy for the fiscal term, can the Minister please elaborate what this increase represents?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I say again, notwithstanding the fact that we have taken into consideration the general policy on freezing or the filling of vacant positions, there are instances in which, because of the specialized nature of the Ministry and so on, the positions in the Ministry, we would need to seek a dispensation to fill certain positions. And in doing that we have made projection. Apart from that, Madam Chair, running through the entire Head 77, where we are dealing with matters of remuneration, allowances and so on, we also factor into equation the fact that liabilities have been incurred in a particular financial year, not all liabilities are settled in that financial year, especially those that we deal with or try to process in the final month of the fiscal year, and therefore in accordance with well-established practice, we project a figure that allows us to pay in the next fiscal year which is this fiscal year. So as I tried to assist the Member for Couva North earlier in understanding that there is no one answer to this, there are several scenarios that we deal with as we manage the fiscal operations in any Ministry.

Madam Chairman: Okay, I recognize the Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, if I may just lend some assistance. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have been at pains to point out that what is on freeze is the public sector side of the equation, not the contract sector. That is number one. Number two, it has also been stated as a matter of policy as per the Prime Minister's address on a number of occasions, that the Cabinet will sit and consider and engage in filling appointments as the need arises from time to time.

I would just like to put on record one matter which straddles both the Attorney General and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and that is, we are going to be filing this year the Land Adjudication Tribunal and the other mechanisms to actually bring to life the Registration of Title to Lands Act. And therefore, there are projections in respect of arrears from the past year come forward, appointments that will be done under contract systems, because the go live of the system for fixing the title of, in particular, Tobago, is scheduled for almost an immediate roll out. So I just wanted to add that to the equation.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North, I believe you still have questions.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, thank you, Madam Chair. Just a follow-up question to the hon. Attorney General. The items that he just indicated where vacancies will be filled and persons will be placed in those positions, can he direct us to which line item to which that will fit into?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Member, if we could ask Couva North to just let us go back to—I think the Attorney General was just trying to give an example that would have covered a general situation, but we are not there. So if we could go back to where we were I think we will be able to get through this much more quickly.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay.

Madam Chairman: So we are at Animal Production and Health. Do you have any questions there, Member for Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Yeah, I will continue and this is the reason why I would have asked for these increase—and pointing out these increases, to identify whether it fits exactly what the hon. Attorney General has just explained. So I may continue asking as we go along when we see the relevant increases to determine whether it is for vacancies in Tobago, land management, various tribunals and so forth. Madam Chair, through you, there has been a significant decrease in the Revised Estimate for 2020 versus the actual spend in 2019 for line Item 02: Wages and C.O.L.A. In 2019 the actual spend was 21.1 million, where as in 2020 the Revised Estimates was 16.6 million. Was there a significant lack of activities in that line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I say yet again the Actual in 2019 would be the figure at the end of the calendar year when we go through that process of closing the accounts, coming to Parliament and closing the accounts, that is the actual figure. And in doing the 2020 Estimates, which is the column at the side of that, is a projection of 22.5 million. Consistent with what I say when you do the estimates you align yourself to the actuals because they are available at that time. Sometimes you project an increase in the actual, sometime you do not—in the estimates, sorry. The Revised Estimates 2020 to which the Member for Couva North is referring is based, comes after, while you are in 2020 fiscal and you are seeing what you are actually doing it gives you a better place to estimate what the real out turn would be in that fiscal. And that may be the fact that you are not paying liabilities in that fiscal that were paid in the previous fiscal, again because of accrual of liabilities. Sometimes you have multi-year liabilities based on various factors.

Again, consistent with that process of budgeting, in this fiscal we have

aligned ourselves to the Revised Estimates of 2020 as they were available then and we have projected 16.8 million, a small increase of 200,000, very much with the understanding of the process of virement and the process of the mid-year review and other facilities which allow you to deal with liabilities which are beyond the estimates we have provided for.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I seem to be having a little difficulty in understanding the Minister's response to what I have asked. Because the actual figure of 2019 would reflect what liabilities were actually satisfied with financial payout in 2019 and this is why the Minister indicated a slight increase to 22.5 million for 2020, whereas the Revised Estimates of 16.6 million for 2020 would be while the fiscal term is rolling out there may be accrual of outstanding liabilities. But, when we looked at the 2021, there is only a marginal increase of 200,000 which really does not come anyway close to the activities that would have been realized in 2019. So from the figure of 21.1 million to 16.8 million is a significant decrease in the payout for these financial activities. So I am trying to understand if it is that there has been a reduction in staff here, reduction because it is under Wages and C.O.L.A. and if it is that we are dealing with \$4 million less, then can the Minister explain where this reduction took place?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will try again. I had a life as a teacher [*Crosstalk*] so let me go there. Madam Chair. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Chairman, no, I have a lot of patience, Sir, I have patience.

Madam Chairman: I think, Minister, I would allow you give one other attempt to see—because I think the answers seemed to be a consistent answer, but I do not think it prevents the Member from Couva North seeking clarification.

Hon. Rambharat: I had given an undertaking earlier about providing in writing

and I think it covered this Item earlier. But I would just say this again. The actual for 2019 reflects down to the last dollar, what was paid out, paid in respect of Wages and C.O.L.A. Now we are dealing with union agreements and I was asked a question about the currency of the union agreement and maybe the Member for Couva South, your neighbor, will help later on. It is possible that payments due under a revised collective agreement, arrears, or arrears of COLA or other things that arise in relation to the payment of daily-paid workers, all those things may have been settled in 2019 which reflects on the \$21 million figure. And that is not unusual because in the public sector it is not unusual to accrue multi-year liabilities to workers as you negotiate with unions to try to resolve these matters. So 21,186,627 represent what you actually paid out in respect of that liability.

The Estimates for 2020, based on how estimates are done generally in the budgeting process, relates to what you actually spent in the previous financial year because that figure is available towards the end of the calendar year. You come to Parliament with the final figures to close the account. And that would have been available when we project the estimates for the next fiscal year. So you would see that 21.1 million and 22.5 are close enough; and it is an estimate. As we go through the 2020 fiscal year and you get to that point, for example, when you preparing the mid-year review, you have a better understanding of what the financial year would look like based on what you have settled already and what remains to be settled in the fiscal and that allows you to make a far more reasonable estimate of what you are likely to incur and that was the 6.6 million estimate.

And I would say from now, in December you would receive a bill which shows the final figures and it should be close to that 16.6 million unless something extraordinary happen during the final months of the last fiscal. And in projecting now, because we do not have the actuals, we project in line of how we do

budgeting, we project a figure that is close enough but also includes a small increase because we know that there is nothing that has happened to significantly decrease the liabilities but you make provision for the fact that there may be something in there that needs to be provided for. And that is how you get those figures. It does not relate to— For your conspiracy theory to pan out, it means that there must have been a significant decrease in the number of daily-paid workers employed by the Ministry and that has not happened from 2015 to 2020. Government has held its position that there should be no loss of jobs in the public sector insofar as that can be achieved. So there is no reduction in the cadre of daily-paid workers on those who are on the payroll, but the reduction is consistent with the budgetary process that I have outlined for you. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just would like to advise the hon. Minister on the same Item 02 that there is no conspiracy theory. What I was actually hoping that he would be able to address is not play with the figures that is in front of us but tell us the \$4 million decrease, where that \$4 million decrease could be represented. That is basically it. It is not a conspiracy theory but it was just a matter of looking at the figures because the figures clearly show a decline of \$4 million in this line Item.

10.45 a.m.

Madam Chairman: And I think that question has been answered. Okay? You have any other Item you would like to raise right now, Member for Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: There has also been—yes, Madam Chair, thank you. Item 05, there has also been an increase in Government's Contribution to N.I.S. of \$650,000, is this in keeping with what was explained earlier, hon. Minister, or is there something different?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, as I said before, it is in keeping because if the Member looks at the 2020 Estimates we estimated for the 2020 fiscal 2.9. We revised that estimate, but we used that 2020 Estimate for this fiscal year. Again, I said from time to time you may be aware in doing your estimate that a liability that had been incurred has not been settled in the fiscal. So you project to deal with that in the upcoming fiscal year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, the Attorney General made an intervention and I do not know if you would allow me to seek further clarification.

Madam Chairman: Member, I am sure we discussed that a short while ago when the Member for Arouca/Maloney indicated that those issues should be dealt with in their particular Sub-Head and Sub-Items. Okay? And I think the intervention by the Attorney General went a little broader than what we were discussing, but he was saying, "Look, there are other things that need to be factored in when you are looking at salaries and wages and COLA". So if it is that your question is now under 003 I will take it, if not I will ask you to hold it for later. Thank you very much.

Mr. Indarsingh: I will hold it at the appropriate time.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, just simply an observation that I wish to make. Hon. Minister, no disrespect whatsoever is meant, what we have observed with the Items is that the predecessors, those who came to account for their particular Ministry, we have not really gotten hypothetical situations to explain the decrease if there was in fact a decrease in the Estimate. So we have had people ascribing specificity as to why there is a decrease. So my colleagues Oropouche West and Couva North, we have had, for example, Leader

of Government Business and Ministry of Social Development and Family Services last week being able to talk about specific numbers of people who are actually obtaining social welfare grants as opposed to those who were not on the list and still was approved by the Cabinet. I am using that as an example. So you could imagine the specifics we have had accounted for on Friday and this morning what we are hearing, and I say this respectfully, we are having you giving general accounting methods in terms of the decrease in estimates. So we just want to get the specifics.

So that is the point I wanted to make, Madam Chair, before. I am glad you have called upon me now because I can make that point, but hon. Minister, very simple, let me ask the question so that we can understand with respect to line Item 2. The Actual expenditure for 2019 is 21 million approximately, the as accurate as possible figure for 2020 is 16.6 million. So I think it was just simply a question that in as much as you may estimate, how would you reconcile an estimate knowing that you just spent 16.6—sorry, 21.1 million and we are seeing a decrease? That is all it was, so we do not want a hypothetical situation. We want something more specific.

Madam Chairman: All right. So might I just intervene here because I am not going to allow the Minister to answer that again, and understanding the point you have raised, maybe it is the question that is asked. Okay? Because in some of the instances—well, I cannot tell people how to ask their questions. In some of the instances my recollection is people ask for actual numbers, how many people were employed, that kind of thing which will give a specific number if the Minister has it. If the Minister does not have it, the Minister would say, I would expect, that he undertakes to give it. And I think with respect to wages and salaries, this Minister has already indicated—and it may have been to Oropouche West—earlier when we

were looking at General Administration, that he would provide details and the Minister will correct me if I am wrong in my understanding, he would have provided some specific details under those two Sub-Heads because he did not have the information with him. Am I correct, Minister?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes, Madam Chair, you have dealt—both my colleague for Chaguanas West and yourself, you have dealt with it very admirably. The issue is in the question not in the response. I am here to provide as much assistance as I could, and where we get into the granular details those are normally provided in writing because it is impossible to bring that data here. But what I have been asked is to account for in general terms the differences.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, at line Item 30: Allowances - Daily-Rated Workers, can the Minister give us the number of daily-rated workers there were in 2019, as I see that \$158,000 was spent and then that was increased to 280 in 2020? So can you just give us the numbers in 2019 and 2020 please?

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, this is exactly what I just referred to. So I undertake to give this information to the Member for Barataria/San Juan in writing.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Horticulture. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, through you, can the hon. Minister advise the increase of 100,000 for Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, does this satisfy filling of any of the vacancies that the hon. Attorney General made reference to?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, as I said before, the projection for 2021, the Estimate, is aligned to the Actual in 2019. The Revised Estimate in 2020, where

we projected 1.4 million, the practice in some cases where you know what is likely to happen projecting an increase or a decrease, so we factored in the possibility of an increase consistent with the 2019, where it is less than or more than, the process of virement and other processes exist in the management of the country's financials and those would be utilized. And my colleague for Couva North wishes to have granular details he says, Chaguanas West says they enjoy, I will be happy to provide those in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. It was a simple question that I would have put forward to the Minister if he can simply advise, yes or no, if it is that this increase satisfies the vacancies that the hon. Attorney General had spoken about?

Madam Chairman: And I believe it was answered—

Hon. Rambharat: Thoroughly.

Madam Chairman:—in a very detailed way. Any other? All right, so we move on. Item 006: Surveys and Mapping. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Again, at line Item 30: Allowances - Daily-rated Workers. Minister, I am seeing that there was an estimate for \$120,000 for 2020, and the figure was significantly reduced which might be the Actual expenditure, to only \$25,000 as compared to \$95,000 being spent in 2019. Can you account for the decrease in the 2020 Estimates to the Actual?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, as I said before, when you do your 2020 Estimates it would have been just that, an estimate, and then it was based on what you projected. And by the time you do the revised estimates around the mid-year you are projecting based on what has actually happened, and maybe you do not foresee a change in the rest of the financial year. But that is not known until we see the final, final figures. So in some cases you continue to budget based on the original

estimate, continue to budget knowing that if there are increases or decreases the budgetary process allows you to do that, and that is because of factors known within that particular division and that is why we undertake to give things in writing because it requires going back into the books of that division to determine how they reached that figure.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. I would have been a bit more comfortable, Minister, with that answer if the 2019 Actual and the 2020 Actual were somewhat close to each other. Now, you are seeing there is a big disparity there of about \$70,000 which means that less persons would have been paid from the end of 2019 to the end of 2020. What I really want to know is whether or not there was a lack or a lower number of daily-rated workers in the Surveys and Mapping Division because there is a big gap, there is \$70,000 although 120 was estimated. The same 120 is estimated for this year again. So I would have been comfortable with your answer if the 2019 Actual and the 2020 Actual were somewhat close but there is a big gap between those two figures. So it is that there are less persons now being employed as daily-rated workers at the Survey and Mapping Division?

Hon. Rambharat: Because you have been so specific with your answer, Member, I would be able to tell you that surveys and mapping, there has been an issue with the building and the workers there do not work full days. That is to deal with some of the issues. COVID has an impact with some of these public facing places and some of what workers incur in the course of their duty, for example, you may find that travelling, for example, has been reduced, the claims would be reduced on account of rotation, and in respect of daily-paid workers allowances that would be incurred when they actually work. So in the daily-paid establishment the allowances are wide and varied, and many of them are incurred only when they

actually work. They have a lot of things. So that part of this reflects that particular Division and the way they have had to work while we try to overcome some of the issues with the place in which they work, and some of it would be COVID-related in not having incurred the liability of having to pay the allowances.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, the Minister did indicate that there were some issues with the building. Is it still that the Division is housed at the old post office?

Hon. Rambharat: Surveys and Mapping is split between Frederick Street and the old general post office, and the union recognized—we have had continuous meetings but it is understood that it is not simple to just move the Surveys and Mapping because of the vaults and the documents that are stored there. So we have tried to work with the union and try to make use of that building as much as we could, but we are getting to that point where it has become impractical to do that. And for other reasons in the management of the land functions going forward, we may get to the point soon where we would move from there, but the—

Mr. Hosein: Is there any immediate plan in this fiscal to move the building so that they can function at optimum capacity?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, the workers have been moved. Many of the workers have been redistributed where they could continue the work, the ones who do not have to access the vault, but it is not a good thing to be doing. So we are concurrently working on securing a location that will allow everybody to be in one place.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

11.00 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. The last response you gave, I think it is safe to say that there has been no loss of jobs but it is on account of those matters

that we have had this decrease.

Hon. Rambharat: I can say what I have said on many occasions, in accordance with the Government's policy to preserve the public sector, there has been no loss of jobs in the public sector. These decreases and increases and so on, the decreases do not represent a reduction in permanent employees in the public sector.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam. The Government has indicated that it will continue to regularize agricultural lands and provide leases to farmers. This requires surveys to be done. Do these surveys usually fall under this department and are these surveys going to be conducted in-house by the Ministry of Agriculture or are they going to be outsourced given the allocation we see here?

Madam Chairman: So you are asking that question in respect of which Head?

Ms. Ameen: With regard to the allocation for the Mapping Division.

Madam Chairman: So is it the entire allocation you are asking about or is there a particular Sub-Item?

Ms. Ameen: It is in response to the Minister's reply to Barataria/San Juan.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine, if maybe you could give me a little greater guidance because I am a little lost as to know where to fit your question because I think the last thing that was discussed with the Member for Barataria/San Juan came out of allowances and an explanation of whether—really what he was asking is if the decrease in allowances meant that less people were being employed. And if I understood the Minister, allowances are not wages and salaries, and allowances are tied to work actually being done. That is my recollection. And the Minister explained why sometimes allowances would have been lower based on accommodation and that sort of thing. I think generally that is what I understood, so I am not certain how your question—and it may be just

me—flows from that discussion. So maybe if you could assist me.

Ms. Ameen: Certainly. The Minister in his response indicated that many of these employees have been redistributed that due to the COVID restrictions, many of them are not working full hours and my question is with regard to whether if they are not working full hours, whether they are the ones conducting the surveys required to regulate the agricultural lands to provide leases to farmers and if this function is still being done in-house or if it is being outsourced.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, the surveys to users of state lands and potential users, the surveys are done by surveyors contracted by that particular private individual. There are times when the State does surveys. There are responsibilities relating to surveys that the State carries out but in relation to the land tenure issues, those surveyors are contracted by the particular client of the Ministry.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you for the answer.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Minister, can you just give this House an appreciation of the number of persons that are currently employed at the Surveys and Mapping Division?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I would have to give you that in writing.

Mr. Hosein: And if you could disaggregate into the various categories: daily-paid, contract and those on the establishment?

Hon. Rambharat: Sure. We will do that. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007, Land Management. Item 008 Fisheries. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, is this division responsible for the cleaning of beaches and rivers?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, the Ministry does not have a responsibility to clean up beaches and rivers.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, in the event of any oil spills, which division will be responsible for that?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has no responsibility in respect of oil spills. The Ministry represents the people who are affected by oil spills but in the policy relating to oil spills and the management of that issue, the Ministry has no responsibility.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. Okay. So Item 010, Forestry. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Item 14, Remuneration for Members of Cabinet-appointed Committee, can the hon. Minister advise why the significant disparity of 500,000 and the estimates for 2020 versus the revised estimates of 221,000?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, as I have said before, the 2020 estimates is based on the 2019 actuals and you see how close they are. The Revised Estimates for 2020 is based on the performance of the line Item at the point of the mid-year review and the projections at that time. The 2021 Estimates would be based on things known to the Ministry at the time so for example, the expansion in the—my colleague for Couva North would not have known this. In the Miscellaneous Bill, 2020, Bill No. 2, we expanded the composition of the WLCC which is an advisory committee to the Minister so that incurs an additional cost. Then some arrears to the WLCC to be paid in this fiscal having been occurred in the last fiscal and based on some work that we project to do in this fiscal going forward, we project to use more Cabinet-appointed committees and we have estimated the cost of doing that and that has to do with work that is restarting or work that is commencing because

from time to time, we do in fact appoint Cabinet-appointed committees.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Madam Chair, seeing that he has indicated these activities there that I may not have known, possibly it is not out in the public domain, can the hon. Minister provide for us, possibly in writing, copies of the Cabinet committees that makes up this line Item and who the members are?

Hon. Rambharat: So, Madam Chair, insofar as these exist, I would do that because I have said that some currently exist and I said we expect to appoint committees in this fiscal.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: The question was asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Minister, I have a question from one of my constituents in Caroni East who currently works in the Forestry Division and is a daily-paid worker. Minister, in the budget of 2020, it was indicated that daily-paid workers in the public service with an appropriate minimum length of service would be eligible for the minimum public service pension of \$3,500; a contributory pension plan similar to that of the health plan which is line Item 27. What I am asking is: Is this plan in place and when can we expect it to be in place?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, the question is very confusing. It sounds as though you have started by answering a question on behalf of a daily-paid employee in your constituency and 27 refers to—unless I am mistaken but 27 to which you referred, referred to the Government's contribution for health insurance for monthly-paid officers.

Dr. Seecheran: So we may have to go to line Item 20.

Hon. Rambharat: All right. So the Government's Contribution to Group Health

Insurance, Daily-rated workers, that plan has been in place for a long time and that is why we project to pay the contributions of our daily-paid workers along the lines of what was estimated, an actual expenditure in 2019.

Dr. Seecheran: So the pension is in place?

Madam Chairman: This is group health insurance.

Dr. Seecheran: Yeah. The reason why I asked it under this question was that in the budget statement, it said of 2020 that a pension plan similar to the health plan would be in place.

Madam Chairman: But there is no Item here for a pension plan. I am not seeing any Item here as pension plan, Member. So the Head you are seeking to put it under, I think you have answered it yourself because they deal with health insurance.

Dr. Seecheran: So it does not currently exist then?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, I think you answered it. The Member for Caroni East is asking about pension and referring to the group health insurance so that does not answer the question and the matter of the pension liability for daily-rated workers in the public sector is an Item carried by the Ministry of Finance in their accounts. Not reflected here.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: All right, so we go on to Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, Item 001, General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 05, Telephones, the actual figure for 2019 was 1.9 million but there was a significant increase of 7.2 million in 2020. Can the hon. Minister please explain the justification for this increase?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, the Member for Diego Martin North/East is speaking so loudly that—the Item under—

Madam Chairman: It is Item 05 under 02, 001, 04, Telephones.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I apologize again to my colleague. Is it Couva North or Barataria?

Madam Chairman: I am sorry, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: No problem, Madam Chair. Minister, we are at 05, Telephones, what I was seeking clarification on is the increase that we see from the 2019 actual figure of 1.9 million to the 2020 figure of 7.2 million.

Hon. Rambharat: It has to do with the project I referred to earlier, the IT project. It had to do with putting in infrastructure. I know that from your experience, you know that there is a one-off cost in putting in the IT infrastructure, the telephone infrastructure in this case, after which you pay your monthly fees. So it has to do with the need to expand coverage to the entire Ministry, the ministries all over the country and the need to put in the infrastructure as part of the upgrade of what we do. So this has to do with expenses or projections for work that we had not done before and it is new infrastructure and new work that had to be done.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Normally this new infrastructure would be in the budget programme and not in recurrent expenses. Can the Minister please explain why we are seeing it here in the recurrent expenses?

Hon. Rambharat: It could if it is an infrastructure upgrade carried out by a third party contractor engaged for that purpose but when you have one of the telecom companies putting in the infrastructure because of a long-term arrangement, contractual arrangement that you enter into to pay a monthly fee, then it forms part of your recurrent expenditure.

11.15 a.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thanks. Can the hon. Minister provide us, in writing, the information on the third party contractor, what this contract was about and for how much? And also, the 2021 figure is also significantly higher to the actual 2019. So is it that the project is still ongoing, and when does the Minister expect this project to be completed?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, I did not say that this refers to a third party contractor. What I said is that this is work telephones. This is work that is undertaken with one of the existing telephone telecommunications company. And in upgrading and expanding your telephone infrastructure— and telephone now, infrastructure now includes the basic infrastructure to also support your Internet, you incur an upfront cost, followed by a monthly cost and that is reflected in your recurrent.

And if however, in answer to the next question, there is a third party contractor providing IT infrastructure or something like that, it forms part of the Development Programme. But the way to budget for the telephone system, which is a recurrent expenditure is in this space. So I have no third party contractor to give information on, in this line Item.

In relation to the question on: Why are we budgeting estimating 3.736 million compared to the actual of 1.9? Well, that is self-explanatory. If we have expanded the reach of the telephone network and increased the lines and improved the infrastructure, then the ongoing cost is going to be higher because you are paying for more lines and you are paying for reach, which you have installed in other parts of the Ministry, which did not previously exist.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, from my understanding, what the Minister would

have indicated initially that the actual increase from 1.9 to 7.2 million between 2019 and 2020, was that there was some sort of upgrade project that was budgeted here and there was the initial payment at first towards that project. I would like if it is the Minister can provide us with some details of that project and the cost associated with that upgrade.

Madam Chairman: Minister?

Hon. Rambharat: Surely, Madam Chair, when we get to that line Item, which is in the Development Programme, I would do that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I have two questions for the hon. Minister on line Items 23 and 96. Under line Item 23, Madam Chair, hon. Minister, I noticed between 2019 and 2020, there was a considerable increase in terms of fees paid by \$4.4 million. Can you give an explanation of what specific fees would have escalated in that particular fiscal year that would have taken that up by \$4.4 million? Because I notice it is not being catered for in 2021. Could you identify which specific fees would have accounted for that increase in \$4.4 million?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, if I have the opportunity to say it again, the 2019 actual for line Item 23 is \$6.171 million. The figure the Member for Mayaro refers to is the 2020 Revised Estimate which is \$10.5 million and the Estimate of 5.35 is the Estimate that has been given. And we would not know the actual for 2020 until we get the out-turn at the close of this calendar year, but the Estimate would have been based on the fact that the Ministry projected to do certain things in relation to that item and does not project to do it in the 2021. So I can provide for the Member for Mayaro on that line Item what we incurred in the last fiscal year. And that should be close to what was the original estimate.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Minister. Minister, on line Item 96, under Fuel and Lubricants, I notices the 2020 Revised Estimate, and I am assuming there was no payments made to any vendor or supplier for fuel and lubricants, and I am very much interested to find out if the fact that no money is being spent for this particular Item, does it affect the relationship with your suppliers who are supplying these fuel and lubricants for your vehicles in your Ministry and is it hampering the delivery of service by your Ministry?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I do not see where my colleague sees that we are not paying for fuel and lubricants. We projected— 2021 Estimates provide for an 800,000 allocation for that. So, it means that we project to pay for that. I do not see where we give any indication that we plan to get that free.

Mr. Paray: Minister, in the 2020 Estimate, you estimated \$955,000 in fuel and lubricants but in the Revised Estimates for 2020, the amount paid, as far as my understanding of what a dash is, is zero. So, unless I am misinterpreting what that dash means, it means that in 2020, not a dollar was paid for oil, gas, whatever else falls under fuel and lubricants. So my question was: the fact that in 2020, the Revised Estimate is telling me that no money was paid to the suppliers. All I am asking if this is something that has happened, has it impacted the relationship with your vendors? And has it impacted the delivery of service by your Ministry?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I repeat, the 2020 Revised Estimates is just that. It was a projection and for whatever reason, I could supply the reason in writing, there was no projection made there. But I have said already, when we look at the out-turn for the last fiscal, we would see what the actual was. So the line Item, that column, 2020 Revised Estimates is not an indication that nothing was paid. It is an indication that the Ministry at that time did not project having to incur a liability in that fiscal on that Item.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Minister, I am back on line Item 05: Telephones. Was this telephone upgrade restricted to the building in Chaguanas or other buildings occupied by the Ministry?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, it was countrywide, as I indicated before. It was all over the Ministry's operations and it had to do with infrastructure and service, and the quality of the service and the extent of the service.

Mr. Hosein: Can you give us a list of those buildings there was the upgrade in?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I would do so.

Mr. Hosein: Line Item 21, please.

Madam Chairman: 41?

Mr. Hosein: 21: Repairs and Maintenance- Buildings. Minister, I saw that there was a—from the 2019 actual expenditure, there was \$386,000, and then the Revised Estimates of 2020 was 877,000. Which buildings were these repairs or maintenance done on?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, while he has not asked me it in that way, I will provide in writing to the Member the repairs and maintenance incurred in respect of buildings incurred in the last fiscal year. I would say that the 877 was an Estimate of what we intended to do.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, the 877 is what would have been spent— close to that would have been spent. The Estimate was 882 and the Revised Estimate was 877.

Hon. Rambharat: Right. So at that time, as I said so many times before, close to the midterm, that is what we were projecting to spend. And the out-turn will show us what we actually spent.

Mr. Hosein: But can you confirm whether any work was done?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, I have now undertaken to provide to you in writing on

Item 21, what was done in the last fiscal.

Mr. Hosein: And for the Estimate for 2021, can you also give us projection on what works are to be done on buildings occupied by your Ministry?

Hon. Rambharat: Sure. Madam Chair, I would do that.

Mr. Hosein: I am also on line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Minister, I saw that the actual expenditure for 2019 was 12.8 million. There was a reduction in the Estimate to 8.4 and then 8 million again was the Revised Estimate for 2020. Can you tell us how many persons would have lost their jobs between 2019 to 2020? Because there was a reduction of about roughly 4 million on that line Item, based on the actual expenditure for 2019 and what was revised to 2020.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, there are a lot of things to deal with in that one question that sounded like a statement. Madam Chair, the first thing is that the Member is dealing with 22, which is Short-term Employment. There are no jobs to be lost. Short-term employment is exactly that. Unfortunately, as Member for Couva South will tell you, sometimes we use short-term employment for a little more than short term, as you wait to deal with it in a permanent way.

But the 2019 actual was 12.8 and the Estimate for 2021 is 7.69 and the only thing that will help us is if we look at what was actually done in the last fiscal, '19/'20. So that the projection is based on what we estimated for 2020, the Revised Estimate and as I said, in the way we do the budgeting process, we have stopped to the 2020 Estimates based on what the Ministry would know, in terms of the short term. So if it is that you want the details of the Short-term Employment for the last fiscal, I would provide that to you.

Mr. Hosein: I would appreciate that. So then based on the Estimate for 2021 being 7.6 million, it would now mean that the Ministry intends to hire less persons for this fiscal year on Short-term Employment?

Hon. Rambharat: No, it does not mean that. It means that the Ministry projects that the needs for Short-term Employment are based on that Estimate.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And—

Hon. Rambharat: If— I have said before in the normal budgetary process, if the needs are more than that and the Ministry of Finance is convinced, then we do the virement or we do what we can do within the budgetary process.

Mr. Hosein: The last Item I want to ask on please, Madam Chair, if you would allow me is Item 23: Fees. Minister, I saw that the Estimate for 2020 would have been 5.2 million and the Revised Estimate would have been 10.5 million, which is a \$5 million— roughly a \$5 million increase in what was estimated to have been spent on fiscal 2020. Can you give us an idea of why there was this large increase, having regard to the Estimate?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, again, you are projecting work. So this is at the mid-year review, you are projecting work. This includes—fees include things like legal fees that you incur, professional fees that you incur and it is a projection and our estimate for the current fiscal is based on what we projected for the last fiscal, as I have said before, in keeping with the way we do the budget. So sometimes, as I said in the course of a financial year, depending on what lies ahead and what may be available, via virement, you will project a higher expenditure. It may not pan out or it may happen, but the invoicing does not occur in the fiscal year. So you project to have to pay something that— a service that has already been received.

Mr. Hosein: Can you give us a comprehensive breakdown of the fees and the suppliers for fiscal 2020—

Hon. Rambharat: Sure. I will do that, Madam Chair.

Mr. Hosein:—which amounts to the 10.5 million?

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I see in Item 34: University Graduate Recruitment Programme, I see that programme was budgeted for \$1 million in 2020 but the Revised Estimate was nil, and I am not seeing any proposal for 2021. Can the Minister kindly advise why no funds were utilized out of what was estimated for 2020, and why it is no funds was actually being allocated there for University Recruitment Programme?

Hon. Rambharat: The 31 refers to a programme across Ministries that was announced several years ago and for which the programme had to be developed, and in the intervening period Ministries like ours found that the OJT Programme provided us with the university graduates that we require, and there was also graduates who were available from the Returning Scholar Programme and we found that we also needed to do other things to get the type of employee we needed, by exposing not only university graduates, but persons who fell in the category below that which were diploma and sometimes secondary school entrance. And we have been working a lot with the OJT programme to provide that type of trainee for us. But I have over-answered that. The reason this has a zero provision is because the programme has not been developed across the Ministries because we found other ways in which we could achieve the same objective of employing university graduates, particularly in our Ministry.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, taking into consideration the freeze, again, announced by the Minister, the persons coming out of university at this point in time and with the discontinuance of this programme, can the Minister indicate where these persons may be able to fit into the sector?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I was convinced that in over answering the first question I provided the answer. But as I have said to the Member, we found that

we are able to provide opportunities for graduates via the OJT system. So it is not—and keep in mind as the hon. AG pointed out the freeze is not in relation to, it is in relation to the public service, the public sector. OJT is a separate programme that provides graduates to Ministries and state entities and even the private sector.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Agriculture. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 08: Rent and Lease. There has been a sharp increase, close to 200 percent, from the 2019 actual to the 2020 figures from 356,000 to the Revised Estimate of 951,000 in 2020. Can the Minister provide us with what new rental agreements has been entered into?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I do not believe we have entered into new agreements in the last fiscal, I do not believe, but we did in fact project. And that has to do with the land and surveys—surveys and mapping issue I dealt with earlier and the projection that the Ministry may need to go through rental, long term leases, for some of its accommodation.

So that, we have not actually incurred—in respect of surveys and mappings, we have not incurred. I will give in writing if we have incurred new rentals for the last fiscal. But I can say that what we project there is in relation to what I said before of having to find a space for surveys and mapping, the two places where they are now, possibly the Land Management Division in El Socorro and possibly—not possibly—certainly, the Land Adjudication Tribunal as my colleague the hon. AG referred to.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under Item 96: Fuel and Lubricants. Can the hon. Minister please indicate what caused the significant reduction from the actual expenditure of 561,000 to the 2020 Revised Estimate of 160,000?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, as I said before, the actual 561 is the actual and

it may have included previous year liabilities. The Revised Estimates may have factored in the non-existence of previous year and represent what was likely to be incurred, and the 2021 estimates, as we normally do, is aligned to previous estimates. This may also factor in things that we know we are going to incur in the upcoming fiscal because we have said we want to put some of the vehicles that have been down, we want to put them back on the road. We want to make sure that we are able to service some of the pumps like in Plum Mitan, make sure they are fueled, and some of those other things that we need to provide for. But as I said, ultimately how we use those funds it depends on the actual demand for the fuel and the lubricants.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question relates to line Item 15 and line Item 21, the question is the same. There was a spike in the proposed estimate for 2020 for Maintenance and Repairs of both the Equipment and Buildings. But that dropped, the Revised Estimate collapsed by two thirds in one instance. Can the Minister indicate what specific buildings and equipment was supposed to have been repaired in 2020 based on the estimate, but which were not so repaired or maintained based on the Revised Estimate?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I would ask for the opportunity to provide that in writing?

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Under line Item 43: Security Services, Minister, I am looking at the 2020 Estimate. You have \$1.3 million, and the actual for 2019 would have been \$445,000. Now, there must have been some intention of the Ministry to increase its security service hence the jump in allocation from what was actually expended in

2019 as compared to the estimate of 2020. Can you explain what is the reason for this high allocation in 2020?—and only \$528,000 was actually spent which means that whatever the intention was in terms of increasing security did not come to fruition.

Hon. Rambharat: Upon my appointment in 2015, not long after, I started to receive these letters about from two areas in particular, security service providers and telecom providers, telephone and Internet and so on. And the liabilities were extremely high. It seems as though we had not been paying for security services for many years as well as telecoms and Internet for many years. So I have spoken in Parliament about liabilities in those two categories of maybe \$15 million, having met those liabilities.

And those claims would come by simply a letter. So, we went through a process with the telecoms people and the security service provider to have those claims authenticated, vouched. And what you see there would have been the 2020 estimates projecting based on what we have been receiving in terms of claims and the likelihood of it being settled. And in many cases those—what was provided could not support the claim being made, and we have settled those that were properly vouched, and we estimate that going forward we would be a little more than the 2019 actual but not as much as the 1.3. That 1.3 projected settling liabilities.

Mr. Hosein: Could you confirm that some of the claims were settled?

Hon. Rambharat: Yeah, I could confirm it by the mere fact that the security services are still being provided. But I would be happy to provide in writing what we have settled and the details of what the 550 is expected to pay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister indicated earlier under 96:

Fuel and Lubricants that the increase of 440,000 for the 2021 estimates was with respect to the vehicles that are nonfunctional that the Minister expects to have repaired, up and going. Can the hon. Minister provide us a copy in writing of the proposed vehicles to be repaired at the Ministry?

Hon. Rambharat: Absolutely, Madam Chairman. I would do that.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Just as a clarification, Ma'am. Back to 43: Security Services, the Minister indicated that he met—I just want to make sure I heard him clearly—some \$15 million worth of outstanding bills; is that so?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I was very clear that I was dealing with two items. Matters relating to telecoms, telephone bills and Internet and security services across the Ministry. And I gave an estimate that I believe that the claims that were made by virtue of letters got to a figure that is about \$15 million which we have been dealing with and have substantially cleared.

Mr. Tancoo: All right, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 003: Animal Production and Health. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister give this Chamber an indication of what Item 12: Materials and Supplies, what item falls under Materials and Supplies?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, this would be the normal, the supplies that you require to maintain an administrative operation in an animal production and health environment, and if my colleague for Couva North desires I would be able to provide details in writing but it is a standard item.

Mr. Ratiram: [*Inaudible*]—and stuff for the animals? Under the APH?

Hon. Rambharat: I do not believe it does, but I would provide it in writing, Madam Chair. It gives me greater comfort to do that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Similar question as was asked before for Item 15 and 21. Again, there was a spike between Actual 2019 and Estimates for 2020, but a significant decline for the Revised Estimate 2021. I would just like to get an idea of what Repairs and Maintenance for both Equipment and Buildings which were projected to be taken place in 2020 actually was not done during the last fiscal?

Hon. Rambharat: I would do that, Madam Chair.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Horticulture. Item 006: Surveys and Mapping. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage. Madam Chair, from the 2019 actual figure of 960,000, there is a significant increase to the 2020 Revised Estimate of \$1.7 million in Rental/Lease. Can the Minister please explain what this increase represents? Is it a new lease that has been entered into?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I have said that this is an estimate, and I have explained the prospect of the increase by saying that we have had difficulties at the GPO office building, and we intend to move from there and possibly consolidate the two offices in Port of Spain. And I have said that and that is the reason why provision is made there in the estimate. But I have also said that we would like to consolidate land, we have a building under rental in El Socorro and we also need to provide for Land Adjudication Tribunal. So the figure you see there represents the Surveys and Mapping component of a liability we expect to have to incur in

getting a building that accommodates Surveys and Mapping as well as other elements of the land portfolio.

11.45 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, can the Minister supply copies of the lease agreement?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, is the Member asking me to supply the one that does not exist now or, the one that may exist in the future.

Mr. Ratiram: That is existing. There was an actual spend of 960 for 2019 and—

Madam Chairman: I guess what the Member is asking for would be any copies of existing leases for officers—

Hon. Rambharat: Right, I would happily provide that, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Okay Item 007: Land Management. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Also can we, if there is any lease agreement there, the budgeted figure, the actual for 2019 was 3 million was spent under Rent/Lease, Office Accommodation and Storage. Can the hon. Minister provide copies of lease agreement there also?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, as I have indicated, there is an existing lease in respect of the property at El Socorro, and I will provide a copy of that lease.

Madam Chairman: Item— I am sorry, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Based on—I am just asking something generally when it comes to rent, lease, office accommodation and storage. Based on the Attorney General's earlier remarks regarding the Government's intention to role out the tribunal the adjudication, would you not foresee, Minister, that you may need some additional office spaces and accommodation and even staff for this to really take

place, or, is it this adjudication tribunal going to fall somewhere other than land management?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, it surprised me that you were not paying attention all along. I have said in every discussion on land adjudication tribunal, I have said that we project and in the case of the tribunal, I said, we definitely have to incur a liability for the rental. And I also said we would like to have a building that accommodates Surveys and Mapping, the Land Management Division that is in your constituency, and the tribunal. And I did say earlier, I am pretty sure I did, I said when you get to the development programme, you will see a line Item for Land Adjudication Tribunal, because the Ministry of Planning and Development allows us to treat that as a development project for this fiscal.

Mr. Hosein: Why understand that, that is going to be based on the capital development of the programme, which is the adjudication of the tribunal, but then that will incur some recurrent expenditure, which should have been included in this part of the book—

Hon. Rambharat: No.

Mr. Hosein:—that deals with continuation of office rentals and storage and the regular.

Hon. Rambharat: Yeah, I understand what you are saying what, because it is a project we have, we have allowed in the project to deal with the expenses for the staff that is been hired, because it is, if you remember the legislation allows us to, maybe utilize existing staff in the Ministry. And in some cases, we may have to engage, right, on a short-term basis. For example, we are required to engage a consultant or technical advisor and those persons may come from the Ministry or may come from the outside, and the rules for a DP allows us to deal with that under the PSIP, until the recurrent expenditure has to be incurred.

Mr. Hosein: Clear. All of the recurrent expenditure for fiscal 2021 will be included in that item that we have to come to later on under the DP projects?

Hon. Rambharat: Not the recurrent expenditure, but the expenditure required to establish the project. So for example, you may find that have been established it, based if you locate a building for all three, then the actual expenditure will be different, because we have our allocations to Surveys and Mapping, for rent, for Land Management Division, for rent and for Land Tribunals. You may find that the expenditure will be incurred in a different way. If you have supplies, stationery and so on, you will include it in the project. But if you are renting a photocopier that is for general use, you may not attribute it to Land Adjudication Tribunal, you may not have to. So those things will pan out but in principle, you would see in the allocations for Land Management Division, which is in El Socorro, Surveys and Mapping at the two sites and the Land Adjudication Tribunal, you would see the allocations have been made.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair, Item 43: Security Services; I know that the Minister has indicated a desire to consolidate offices, office spaces, but in this instance here, there is a spike in the amount of money to be paid to Security Services from 168 million, in fact \$168,000 to 560,000 based on a revised estimate for the similar figure budgeted. So there seems to be a very significant increase in the amount of money paid to Security Services. Can Minister clarify as to what constituted the reason for this increase?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, at the opening in the five minutes as allocated I referenced as I did in the contribution in the House, I referenced the fact that enforcement of the covenants in the existing leases in respect of agricultural land, it will extend to all the others, but the enforcement of the covenant is something

that would be a priority for us in relation to land tenure. And this projected estimate takes into consideration that there may be need, there will be need to engage private security providers for that purpose.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Sir, but that is a projection for what will happen in 2021. But the same figure actually exists in the 2020 Revised Estimate. So, while you are saying that you will be engaging in additional security, engaging additional security work in 2021 which will explain the 560,000 projected for 2021, that same value of 560,000 was actually in 2020. But you have not done exactly what you proposed to do in 2021.

Hon. Rambharat: As I have explained on several occasions, what you see there as 560,000 is the Revised Estimate for 2020. In the outturn, you would see what we actually incurred. Now, at that time, we would have been taking into consideration the expected expenditure in relation to the additional security services. I could tell you that that has not been contracted, again because we were not in a position because of the COVID restrictions to implement what we would have liked to, in relation to the enforcement of the covenants. So I could anticipate that the expected expenditure in relation to that specific aspect was not incurred in the last fiscal.

Mr. Tancoo: So, Minister, you are saying that this 560,000, this figure in this estimates of expenditure, therefore, is predictably wrong, it is going to be definitely significantly lower?

Hon. Rambharat: Actually, I have just said to you, it would be an increase as we have projected, because I have said, that in this fiscal year, we intend to incur the expense of having to provide the additional security via contracted personnel, to ensure that we proceed with the enforcement of the covenants.

Mr. Tancoo: So maybe, I did not express myself clearly, I am specifically responding to your statement with regard to 2020 Revised Estimate.

Hon. Rambharat: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Since the initiatives that you are planning to take in 2021 did not take place, your comment was basically that the numbers that exist for 2020 revised is actually wrong in advance. So you know that at this point, that this figure is incorrect.

Madam Chairman: No. No, the Member did not say it was wrong. And maybe we using words differently, but it certainly connotes something different. What he said the 560 estimate, Revised Estimate in 2020 will be different from the actual when those come in. He said he can almost predict it will be different. Right. So you made a difference between an estimate and an actual. So I think to say that it is wrong, gives a different kind of connotation.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, may I come in here? It takes a little while to understand the terminology used by the Budgets Division, even experienced MPs struggle with it. There are three types of estimates. You have the original estimate, the revised estimate which is done by the Budgets Division in August and September, based on the information available to them at that time. And then you have the actual estimate, which is published the following year, which is an exact number. So the original, revised and actual are all different. And what the Minister is saying is that when the actual comes in, which is the exact figure, it will be different to the revised. The revised is only a guide as to what it may be, in the range of where it may be. I had this issue actually with the TTPS, where the estimates show that they got 335 million for Goods and Services, the revised but it is going to be more than that, it is closer to the 390 because that is the actual that we are now picking up. Okay?

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 43: Security Services; Minister there is a significant increase in the actual, from 2019 of 168,000 to the Revised Estimate of 2020 to 560,000. Based on what the hon. Minister of Finance would have just explained to us, this figure 560,000 is somewhat based on the revised estimate around August 2020. So there seems to be some significant increases there. Can the Minister indicate if any new security—if this Security Services is in-house security or contracted security?

Hon. Rambharat: Member for Couva North, with the greatest respect, you seem to have missed a discussion with your colleague from Oropouche West, we have traversed this issue across the cardinal points, but I will go there again. I said at the opening the five-minute opening, that we are very clear about the enforcement of the covenant, in particular in relation to agricultural land, particularly in relation to the two-acre parcels developed by the EMBD, where we have identified 2,622 parcels across seven areas, which are not being used for agriculture. And that means that, the taxpayers having provided 2.6 billion in development money, and 1.5 billion in the asset, which is a 4 billion expenditure, do not have the benefit of 2,622 parcels of land, which could be in the hands of people, citizens of this country who are begging me and begging you for land to do agriculture. And the only way we could deal with that, and put those 2,622 parcels of agricultural land, an asset worth \$4 billion is to go through the plots which we have now identified and retrieve it through a legal mechanism. And to do the process, we project we will need the support of private security providers. And that is why we projected in the 2020 Revised Estimate the need for 560,000 which was itself higher than the actual in 2019. Having not incurred expenditure on this particular aspect in the last fiscal, we continue to project it because this is going to be done in this fiscal. And

that is why you see a projected, it is an estimate that we would engage private security providers to provide the support in relation to this particular aspect.

Madam Chairman: Couva North, yes.

12.00 noon

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I am hearing the Minister speaking about the revised estimate being projected figures, whereas my understanding of the revised estimate would be a preliminary consolidation of the expense and the liabilities that the Ministry would have consolidated around the period August/September, prior to this sitting.

Madam Chairman: I think both the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the recent intervention by the Minister of Finance sought to give some clarification and my limited understanding—I do not think your understanding in itself is completely accurate. My understanding is that by the time they do the revised, it is not an actual figure, but it gives them a better guide, having regard to the fact that part of the fiscal year has gone, so that they can then do a more accurate estimate, but it is not an actual. So they may have taken into account the previous history as the financial year begins to roll out, but it is still an estimate.

Mr. Ratiram: I agree. So it is a preliminary consolidation of the liabilities.

Madam Chairman: Right. So based on the question you asked initially, my understanding, from what the Minister said on two occasions, is that this 560 revised estimate in 2020 bore no relationship to the actual in 2019, because there was a plan to enforcement of covenants, et cetera, et cetera, and I guess that is why there was a 2020 estimate of 650,000. Okay? That is at this time in 2020. But by the time the revised was done, they realized that they did not need 650 based on what the history had rolled and then they reduced it to 560, but it never happened. They still intend for it to happen in 2021 by a different mechanism, and that is why

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they have started a projection, an estimate at 560 in 2021, which has not begun to roll out, and which may very well be different when the revised estimate of 2021 comes. It might be more, it might be less, based on how fiscal 2021 begins to roll out. That is my understanding from what I have heard sitting here.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for the guidance, for the explanation.

Madam Chairman: And I agree, if it is one thing from the intervention of the Minister of Finance this morning—it was a very helpful intervention—by saying that there are three types of estimates, if I quote him correctly: the estimates in the first instance, the revision and what he calls actual, which in my mind cannot be an estimate. It is an actual. Okay? That is my understanding. Okay? And Member for Couva North, I think for lots of us who sit here, we share the sort of—I do not want to use the word “confusion”, but the acclimatization. We all do. Okay? So, do you have another question or can I go on to the Member for Oropouche West? Yes? Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Perhaps this might clarify Item 43. I would just like to get, if it is possible, a listing of the companies that would have been providing the security services projected. I would like 2019, 2020 and 2021 if that is possible, Minister. The list of the companies that are providing these services and the venues if possible as well.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I just want to be very clear. The Member wants the list of companies currently providing security services in respect of Item 43?

Mr. Tancoo: That is correct. And, in addition to that, the list of companies—well, it will also extend to 2020 and 2021.

Hon. Rambharat: Well it does not, because I am not in 2021 yet.

Mr. Tancoo: You are currently in fiscal 2021 for which you have budgeted a

figure. But, okay, we will take 2019 and 2020.

Hon. Rambharat: Right, sure. I will do that.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 008: Fisheries. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister advise if the repairs and maintenance of the Cold Storage Facility at the Orange Valley Wholesale Fish Market fits into Item 008?

Hon. Rambharat: If you visit the facility, you would realize that the facility has been—it is almost a brand new facility. I encourage you to go down there. It is almost a brand new facility notwithstanding what happened prior to 2015, we incurred substantial expense under the Development Programme to bring that facility, flagship facility, up to the standard it is. And the additional work that we are going to do on the freezers, cold storage that were not in use is under the Development Programme. We have catered to do that additional work in Orange Valley, which is in addition to a multimillion dollar upgrade we have previously done.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Under the Development Programme we will seek further clarification.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I refer to Item 61: Insurance. In 2020, you had estimated to spend \$176,000 on insurances under this Fisheries Division, but you now only revised to spend 20,000. Can the Minister indicate what insurances are not being pursued at this point?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I am seeing where we project an increase of 20,000 in this fiscal year. Maybe the Member can—

Mr. Tancoo: By all means, Sir. In 2019 you spent actual 20,000. In 2020, for some reason, you estimated that you were going to spend \$176,000. Based on that

estimate which would have come from some initiative that you had planned to undertake, you actually only spent \$20,000 revised for 2020. So that is your revised estimate, significantly less than what you had projected to spend, what you had budgeted to spend, what you had approval from this House to spend of 176,000. Your estimate is now \$40,000. I am even dealing with the \$40,000. I am trying to figure out what, out of the \$176,000 budgeted for in 2020 was not done, based on your now revised. Your revised estimate, I am assuming, would have been based on some additional information which would have come to hand or other documents which would not have come forward, based on what the Minister of Finance just explained to us.

Hon. Rambharat: Right. Thank you very much, Member, for making that very clear. So, I would commit to provide you in writing, but I would say to you that, in 2020, we were estimating that we would have had implementation of the new Fisheries Management Bill, and that Bill has been laid in Parliament and it brings with it a lot of responsibility, including, what would be the mandatory vessel tracking system in the country, in which the Ministry is required to carry out certain liabilities. You will see in the Development Programme, an allocation made for that, and we intend to have that implemented because of the importance of it. So the fact that that particular expense was not incurred, it is not that it was abandoned or anything like that. It was just that the basis for incurring the expense, which is the completion of the passage of the legislation, has not happened. So, we do not project to do it even in this fiscal, because we know the Bill still has to be debated, but you will see in the Development Programme, how we have handled some of that work that we have to do.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 08: Rent/Lease-Office Accommodation and Storage and Item 43: Security Services. From the actual 2019 figures, there has been a sharp increase to the 2020 Revised Estimate for both Rent and Security Services. Can the Minister provide us with copies of agreements that were actually paid off for 2019 and copies of any current existing agreements?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, just to be clear, this refers to under “Fisheries” Items 08 and 43?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Hon. Rambharat: All right. Thank you very much. I will do so.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Minister, you earlier made a statement regarding the fisheries Bill that was before the Parliament in the last session. I remembered it. Now, you say you do not intend for that to be passed in this year. Now, I know the EU has given us something called a “yellow card” because of the issue of the unregulated fishing industries. Are there any intentions, sorry—what are the implications of this yellow card that we have received from the EU?

Madam Chairman: Member, while the Minister may have answered something with respect to the Bill, that came in in response to explaining an Item under the Sub-Head and under the Item 61. Okay? So that for the process that we are undertaking, I would not allow that question. Certainly, you can, in the fullness of time, you will be able to pose that question and get an answer. Okay? But for this exercise, I would not allow that question.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you for your guidance, Madam Chair. I just asked it out of the seriousness of the issue.

Madam Chairman: That is fine. Item—Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: It has been already addressed.

Madam Chairman: Okay? Item 010: Forestry. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, there has been a significant increase from 133,000, Item 08: rent and lease agreement was 133,000 in 2019 to 250,000 in 2020. Can the Minister provide us with copies of the lease agreements that were paid for in 2019 and the current existing lease agreement that falls under this Sub-Head?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will do that.

Mr. Ratiram: Also, Madam Chair, for Item 43, there has been a significant increase also in security services of 515,000. Can the Minister advise what this increase in security services is for and if it is that there is any new contractual agreement, can the Minister provide copies of it?

Hon. Rambharat: I would put that in writing, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we go on to Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. We are at page 378. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Agriculture. Item 003: Animal Production and Health. Item 004: Horticulture. Item 007: Land Management. Item 008: Fisheries. We are now on to page 380. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies. Item 003: United Nations Organizations. Item 005: Non-Profit—these hands that are going up, are they under Item 003? Okay? Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Mr. Minister, line-Item 04: Sugar Cane Feeds Centre. Minister, I have seen the appropriations for this facility over the last couple years and I question the success of that unit. Perhaps you can just mention, give a view on it in our response. My question is for the \$8 million that we are appropriating for the next fiscal, what is the specific area of innovation in this facility? Can we expect in terms of agriculture in changing the fortunes of our country going forward for this \$8 million coming out of this facility?

12.15 p.m.

Hon. Rambharat: Well, Member, you may have heard me say that we found at one stage when we were doing the work on the PPPs for livestock, here was earmarked as a potential participant in that. Recently, I have said we are looking at that centre as a facility for giving hands-on training for our young farmers, that does not prevent it from also participating in having private sector participation. It is an excellent asset, land availability and infrastructure, but it has not—the original intention of it being—the original intention was, of course, for it to be a centre for research into the production of animal feed from sugar cane and over the years, it has become various other things. It still plays a valuable role as an abattoir in support of the livestock sector to develop some of the training and a facility for students and so on to participate. But you are right, the expenditure does not reflect the quality of its contribution and also, its potential in terms of what it could do. And we believe that because of its location and the need to have hands-on training for young farmers, we are working towards doing that, while at the same time exploring the possibility of private sector investment in it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am seeing here, under line Item 08: Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I applaud the Minister for putting this. Is this normal part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries or this is a new intervention?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, this is a—thanks to the intervention of the Minister of Finance, a lot of people— a lot of us had assumed that we had been providing support for the TTSPCA. It has been around for a long time. No disrespect to Animals Alive, they have a very important role in south Trinidad. Jowelle has done

an excellent job. It came to the Minister's attention that we had not really provided support for TTSPCA historically and when they provided the numbers it is significant, the amount of rescues they do on an annual basis, and this was provided for this fiscal year in order to support what they do.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central, did you have your hands up?

Madam Ram: No.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. All right. So, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I too also am happy to see that there is a new line Item 08 for allocation being made to the TTSPCA. Minister, there are other similar NGOs that recently, during the COVID period, you would have seen were asking for funding. Is there any way in which under this particular line Item of non-profits, whether they can also access funding from the Ministry? Because there was one particular farm that had horses and they were asking persons from the public to donate for these horses. There is one other area in south called Samsara, they are also asking for donations. Can these other organizations make applications to the Ministry to also get similar funding?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, the way we want to approach it is this. If you remember in the—in fact, the very last piece of legislation passed in the last term related to, in the main, animal welfare, and we are required to develop regulations, and one of the regulations relate to rescue programmes and standards for it. Because we have different programmes relating to animals in the country, some of which are not bona fide, some of which are involved in the illegal trade in wildlife. I am not saying any of the ones that you have identified there are doing that. So we require standards in the country in terms of what is an animal welfare establishment, and so on, and when we get there and we are able to certify, then the State could explore the prospects of providing some sort of funding.

The Ministry itself and the Zoological Society, all the ones you have identified from time to time would provide—the Ministry for sure would provide technical support if required, vet services, and so on. And the zoo does in fact assist in where there are medical emergencies, and things like that too. But in order to expand something like this, because of the potential for abuse, in order to expand something like this, we really need to have a standard for animals and animal rescues. I am saying that the ones who do it, the NGOs do in fact provide a very, very valuable service across the country.

Mr. Hosein: That is something of concern also. And the other question I would like to ask is on 04, which is Sugar Cane Feeds Centre. Now, Minister, I am informed that there are some equipment that may not be functional currently and I believe there is an issue with the CCTV cameras, are you satisfied that this allocation that I see almost as a recurrent expenditure since 2019, whether this will be enough to properly have all of those equipment and the cameras up and working at the centre?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, in the public sector, my experience so far has been, “if you want to know if a camera not working, let something be stolen”, because I have not had much success. We have spent hundreds of thousands and the Sugar Cane Feeds Centre, the facility allows you to secure it. It is a discreet location, excellent fencing and a perfect environment for CCTV, but I have not been fortunate as a Minister to ever have a situation where we have had footage when things happen. The Permanent Secretary is sitting right next to me and she knows my many enquiries, and that is why as a Government, we have taken a decision, consistent with what the MP for Mayaro asked today, and previously the former MP for Tabaquite routinely asked, and that is where you have these types of environment that lend themselves to pilfering and outright theft.

If we cannot secure the interest of the taxpayers, then we have to make alternative arrangements. So to answer your question, yes, I continue to support the investment in the security cameras but sometimes, there are bigger issues. We had the removal of 56 animals from Guayaguayare when they ended up in Penal. Were it not for the excellent work of law enforcement, those animals would have been lost to us, but it points to the issue being addressed overall that the State should not be in that type of business. It belongs in the hands of private farmers and the private sector, with a Ministry that supports what they do.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I too am grateful for the Head 08, but I am looking at 05 and 06 where we are looking at Rural Women Producers' Network and the 4H Young Farmers' Club. We had a fairly decent allocation in 2020, but with regard to the Rural Women Producers' Network, no money was apparently spent and for the Young Farmers' Club, only a fraction was actually scheduled to be spent in Revised 2020. Can the Minister indicate why nothing was spent for Rural Women Producers' Network in 2020 and such a small figure was actually expended on the 4H Young Farmers' Club at a time when we should be promoting these institutions?

Hon. Rambharat: Right. In relation to 05, that Rural Women Produces' Network is funded by a number of local and international agencies. They get funding for different things, but this funding is for one specific project that we fund on an annual basis for them and the Revised Estimates 2020 would have been done at a time when that particular event was not going to happen because of the COVID. So it did not happen but we consistently projected the 25,000 for that event.

In relation to 4H, you would see the actual in 2019 was 15,931. We consistently provide—the Minister of Finance consistently provides a significant

allocation to 4H. It is something that sometimes what they need—4H is supported by a particular county office in the Ministry and sometimes what they need is provided out of the Ministry's resources and they do not need to incur expense on it. But I will tell you that I have had discussions with 4H consistently on the need to do more and to fully utilize the allocation, because I have seen in my time that the allocation is not fully utilized.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Item 01: Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute, there is an increase of 354,000 to 7.8 million on the Revised Estimates of 2020. Can the Minister advise where we would expect to see improvement with the \$354,000 increase or where it is to be applied?

Hon. Rambharat: Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute was developed at the Caribbean institution to provide mainly training to the different islands, including Trinidad and Tobago, and over the years, the demand for the services has changed, but CFTDI had its own internal issues. But they have redeveloped and ramped up some of their training. They provide for some regional islands. They are a significant provider of training for the Tobago House of Assembly and the increase is really to support some of the additional training and equipment needs for CFTDI.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North? Item 007: Households. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 07: Emergency Food Support Measure- COVID-19, and I see this is a new Sub-Item because there are no allocations for this Item. Can the Minister advise what this new line Item is about?

Hon. Rambharat: That came in when the Government took the decision to

provide the persons who are serviced by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services through the food card project. This line Item went in there with the intention that the Ministry—NAMDEVCO would provide the veggie boxes through its resources to be reimbursed by the Ministry via the Ministry of Finance or the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. So the Item went in there and the Minister of Finance has developed a different mechanism to fund that work without having to come through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in terms of—as a step in the process of payment.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers, there is an increase of 4.5 million to this line Item. Can the hon. Minister identify how much contract officers does this amount apply to?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will have to give that information in writing. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under Sub-Item 05: Compensation, can the Minister indicate who received this compensation during the period 2019 and 2020, an estimate for 2021 and for what purposes?

12.30 p.m.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will have to provide that information in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Item 008: Subsidies.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Can the hon. Minister kindly provide in writing a list of the recipients of line Item 008-01 to 04, for the period

2019 and 2020?

Hon. Rambharat: With great pleasure. I notice my colleague from Couva North is not directing attention to the \$24 million increase. I was anxious to explain where that increase comes from. I will provide it in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister, 01: Agricultural Incentive Programme. From 2019—there was a significant increase in 2019 and 2020. At an earlier date the Minister would have indicated that there was a significant number of persons who would have applied for these Agricultural Incentive Programmes, but they were having difficulty in accessing the programme. Can the Minister kindly elaborate on what were the challenges regarding the accessing of this programme?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, Saturday was my birthday so I aged by one year, but I do not recall pointing to any difficulty in accessing this programme or any programme. But I believe any colleague might be referring to what we call the “agri incentive”, which was the grant of up to \$100,000. It is not reflected here. I was saying that having launched it, the mechanism of the public service to be able to provide a grant is so robust, a number of hurdles had to be crossed before we actually issued a cheque. I was happy to say that earlier this year we started issuing those cheques. That is Agri Incentive Programme that is housed in the Ministry of Finance on our behalf.

This Agricultural Incentive Programme is the traditional incentive programme that is provided to farmers. A significant part of it goes into vehicles, and the significant increase has to do with the fact that this Item was heavily understated in previous budgets, so what you found was that these claims were being made. A lot of your constituents in the past may have been complaining of not getting, so by 2015 we had a backlog where you had to wait four or five years to have an incentive paid, and we did two things. The Minister of Finance provided

funds to clear the backlog. Every year, sometimes in the mid-year review, we saw an additional payment of 10 million and that sort of thing. And now we are projecting it the way we figure we really believe it is at that level.

So the Agricultural Incentive Programme, that 26 million is in addition to the 20 million allocated for the Agri Incentive Programme, and it means that it is in excess of 57 million we provide in this type of support to the farmers. And it is not part of the 500 million that is now being provided as a special stimulus elsewhere in the budget.

Mr. Ratiram: As the Minister has brought the 500 million stimulus package into the conversation, can I ask on that at this time?

Madam Chairman: I think we will wait for that when it comes. The Minister has pointed it is elsewhere, we will do it then.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to Item 02: Incentive Programme, and Item 01: Agricultural Incentive Programme, could the Minister explain the difference in these two line Items please?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, originally at the start I was asked to and I gave an undertaking to provide the details in writing, so I will do so.

Mr. Ratiram: The details in writing would have been to the recipients of these programmes, but in terms of the difference between the two programmes, can you also provide that in writing?

Madam Chairman: I expect the details of the programme would in themselves lead to one drawing the conclusion with respect to the differences.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. With respect to Item 04, the relief for flood damage, the Minister spoke about persons from the constituency of Couva North who would have complained of having submitted applications for relief and were having difficulty in accessing it, and he is right, because within recent times at my office I

have received numerous complaints of floods which had taken place in the constituency affecting the farmers, and a lot of these farmers are still pending. When we look at the figures we see the budgeted figure for 2020 was \$10 million, but the actual revised estimate was only 3 million, so there seems to be a significant decrease in what was in the revised estimates versus what was budgeted. Can the Minister indicate the trend of thought for putting the estimate at 10 million for 2020, and what caused that significant difference, if he has that information at this time?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, as I indicated earlier, first, the liability under this Item is based on the actual weather episode. That is the first thing. Not everybody who claims to have suffered damage has actually suffered damage, and not everybody who has suffered damage is entitled to assistance from the State. There is a policy and there are requirements which must be met.

So this is based on—it is a projection based on historic trends; 2019 was the actual of 6.5 million. We projected to have to do more than that in 2021. The Revised Estimates would have been based on the actual claims which are being received and what we projected might happen in the fiscal year that we projected. But you would only know the amount we paid out when you see the outturn. But I could tell you in this particular Item 008 the Minister of Finance provided in June this year up to somewhere between \$13 million and \$18 million in order to deal with some of these claims under 008. What we are dealing with in the Ministry is current claims.

You may have constituents who come to you to say I have not received this or I have not received that, but it has to do with—yes there may be administrative failures on our part, but generally it has to do with the fact that the claim was disallowed and they keep insisting on having the claim predicated in their favour.

Mr. Ratiram: Does the increase of 7.5 million in this year's budget indicate an outstanding liability?

Hon. Rambharat: I do not believe so. It is consistent with the 2020 Estimates based on projections.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you just give us a breakdown of the number of farmers that were able to access line Item 01, the Agricultural Incentive Programme?

Hon. Rambharat: Absolutely; your colleague has just had requested from the start, Member for Couva North, and we undertook to provide that in writing.

Mr. Hosein: And you say that this is different from the agri incentive that was announced in the last budget, this budget?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: That will not be found in any of these line Items here?

Hon. Rambharat: It is in the Ministry of Finance line Item.

Mr. Hosein: Not the 500,000 million?

Hon. Rambharat: No, the other agri incentive is also housed in the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Hosein: Finance's allocations; thank you.

Mr. Paray: Question asked and answered, Madam Chair.

Mr. Lee: Minister, independent of line Item 01, the Agricultural Incentive Programme, is there in your Ministry or when they are processing these incentive programmes, is there a time frame that one, based on the incentive that they apply for or the subsidy, there is a response time to process these incentives?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, the digital transformation programme is meant to deal with things like this, with processes, not only in our Ministry, but in this—let me use this as the example. These are manual processes, so at a county office a claim is made by your constituent. A claim is made, it is a form, the documentation is in

paper and file is created, a paper file. It spends some time there because there is an investigation on the site, photographs taken and so on. Then it is passed from a county office to a regional office. We have two regional offices, one in North, one in south. It is passed there, it is reviewed and then it is sent to the Ministry's head office with a recommendation.

Along the way your constituent has no way of knowing where that has reached. They know that it has been submitted, but they get no feedback from the Ministry. Other times they reach out to you. Many of you write to me. A lot of times they reach out to me too, and I have to say to them I do not have access unfortunately. Our constituents do not realize that I do not have access to their personal files and their financial information.

In the digital transformation it is intended that all these paper processes move into an electronic process, where they could apply online. They could come into a Ministry office and apply, and it is something we could track. It is something that we could respond to and give them an update, or they could go. They could come into the Ministry and go on a computer terminal that is provided there and they could check it for themselves. That is across the board in all—but particularly in our Ministry, we simply do not have—it is so dependent on manual processes and paper, that we do not service our customers in the way they should be serviced.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Minister, for that information. Before you reach to that digitization process, which might be a way off, how do you ensure that there is fairness—no indictment to anyone in your Ministry—in the processing of those subsidies or incentives. Because a lot of people complaining that—just to use a local term—some people jump the line and some people get before them and they are processed? How do you ensure that there is some fairness?

Hon. Rambharat: All those allegations are possible. So, again, in a manual

process taking place in different counties, what we have found is that, for example, there is a stark difference between north and south, how they are processed and how they are adjudicated upon. That is one thing. There is an element of corruption.

We have had public officers, I do not know where the complaints have reached, who have been identified as participating from the county Caroni office. So all those things do occur, and in a the digital environment—and you say it is far away, we have a mandate from the hon. Prime Minister to complete the transformation exercises in the Ministries within 24 months. We are working towards that, because it will really improve how we do, but it would also be able to allow persons to leave an electronic footprint, to know who were decision makers on files. We could look at trends. If there are questions, who is handling a particular file, and a trend and those things that allow us to do that. But quite frankly, across the board in the public sector we have not been able to service the citizens of this country.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers.

Mr. Paray: Minister, on line Item 01: Livestock and Livestock Products Board, I know there is no allocation for it, but I think you would agree with me in saying that livestock has a serious potential, the production of livestock has a serious potential to reduce our food import bill. I do know that this particular board was disbanded sometime aback. What is your Ministry's position on bringing back this board to give some leadership and direction in this specific area, and do you have an idea if this refocusing on agriculture, will livestock and livestock products be a big component of that shift going forward?

Madam Chairman: I am not going to allow the second question, and I am only allowing the first, which is there is no allocation at all. It is really more a policy

question which I think my friend could get otherwise. But having regard to the focus I will allow it.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, there was a Bill laid to repeal that legislation which created the Livestock Products Board. In the legislation which addressed the issue of animal welfare, the one I referred to earlier, there is provision for an advisory committee in respect of the issue of animals on the whole. And we believe that that committee would be able to service the needs of the livestock sector and represent the interest. So it is not that we have abandoned the need for professional and technical advice, particularly independent advice. We have created a mechanism within the legislation dealing with animal disease and importation to allow that advice to come from there.

12.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 02: Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture. Is this part of the programme for sugarcane welfare centre?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, from time to time we have some requests that come in in particular communities for a specific intervention along the lines of this Youth Apprenticeship Programme, and that is the reason we have made that provision. But in terms of what we plan for Sugarcane Feed Centre, we have the allocation that was dealt with earlier and any specific aspect relating to youth development would be provided in the allocation for that Ministry and other funding that the Minister of Finance would make available in respect of what is the Government's plan. But this particular one deals with some—particular communities who require an intervention along the lines of the youth apprenticeship. And I said earlier when I referred to the OJT Programme, we are in discussions with the OJT Programme.

Again, in many your constituencies you have constituents who have just the lowest level of the OJT which is four CXC passes, and there is a lot of interest from those OJT participants to be exposed to training and development in agriculture so we are working with them. And last week, for example, I was with the country manager for Nestlé and they have a very keen interest in providing support for this aspect of it.

So in the area of youth development and youth involvement in agriculture, it is the 4-H programme, it is what we propose for the farm school in Sugarcane Feed Centre, it is this element of YAPA, is what we will do through the youth development Ministry and elsewhere where the Minister of Finance has provided funding including the 500 million.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, just to add to—or in addition to what Cumuto/Manzanilla had asked about the YAPA. Now YAPA back in the 2017 budget that was first announced and I stand to be corrected, was a financing—some sort of a financing incentive mechanism. No?

Hon. Rambharat: No.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Let me ask. Every year so far you have provided from that programme and it has not been utilized. Any reason why it has not been utilized? We provide, again, this year.

Hon. Rambharat: I just explained it. It is a programme that—YAPA has been around—the name YAPA has been around for 15 years. It is an old programme, but over—this provided short-term training to young persons, and what we have found was that young persons require longer-term training, particularly hands-on, So through UTT, UTT has developed that type of programme, and then we continue to expand that in what I articulated earlier.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Asked and answered already.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, Item 01: Livestock and Livestock Product Board. This, I believe, would be the board, hon. Minister, you would have appointed after that there was some court ruling for the appointment of members to fill this board. That would have happened in 2019.

Hon. Rambharat: I believe it was a 2019 judgment.

Mr. Ratiram: 2019. So there may be an actual liability for remuneration for members of that board still existing because what I am looking at here is in the 2019, I am seeing only \$318 that was actually spent. So is there an outstanding liability for the members that would have comprised that board?

Hon. Rambharat: In compliance with the court's decision, a board was appointed and the board members would have been entitled to the payment of their fee, and once it is provided, it is the Permanent Secretary who deals with that, so they would be paid. And if there is need to vire money, as I said, to settle that, it is a liability and we are accustomed dealing with that.

Mr. Ratiram: So the board—so based on that, Minister, does the board still exist? The tenure of the—

Hon. Rambharat: The term, the tenure of the board expired recently and the intention is to reappoint the board. So we are going through the process of identifying the members who have an interest in serving.

Mr. Ratiram: And does this board have the responsibility for the Aripo Livestock Station also?

Hon. Rambharat: No. The livestock board is a board that provides advice or

assists with plans to develop the sector. But over the years the private sector participation in it, the private sector has lost interest in it, so it is always difficult to source the private sector persons. And the work of the board can be done in the Ministry, the technical expertise and so on exists there, and that is the basis on which we sought to repeal the legislation and that Bill will be laid, again, in the Parliament for consideration.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. Item 06: Land and Survey Board. There seems to be some plans in the 2020 Estimates because there was a significant increase there from 1.4 million in 2019 to 2.6 million in 2020, yet the Revised Estimates reflects a significant decrease of 1.3—well somewhat close to what the actual 2019 was. However, we budget again an increase of 1.2 million for the Land and Survey Board. Can you please explain what this increase?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, the Land and Survey Board is really a board that deals with the surveying the profession, and the membership is drawn from the Institute of Surveyors and another body representing surveyors. And what is provided here by the Minister of Finance is based on their work programme and what they project to do. So it may not have been done in the last fiscal because they were not in a position to do it. For example, I will give you one example, the GIS profession is not yet recognized and that creates some problems in their industry. And the aerial photography persons, surveyors who operate via the technology of aerial photography are not registered and that provides, so they have in the last few years been telling us that they intend to deal with those issues, and the Minister of Finance has provided the allocations which will allow them to do that.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 010, Other Transfers Aboard. Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Members, we on to a new book. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers

to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, we are at—hon. Members, we will now move on to *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. 08: Agriculture Society of Trinidad and Tobago, we are at page 489. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head: 02 Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration, Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration, 09: National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation, Sub-Head 001: Personnel Expenditure. We are at page 494. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item Goods and Services.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we move on to Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 09: Rent/Lease/Vehicles and Equipment. There is an estimated figure there of 1.56. Can the Minister provide us in writing the complements of vehicle and the copies of the lease agreement?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. In 2019 actual spend it was 253,000, whereas in 2020 there was a significant increase of \$1.1 million. Can the Minister indicate what this sharp increase of Promotions, Publicity and Printing entails?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I point out, again, that the 1,157,250 was in the 2020 Estimates. It remained the figure in the Revised Estimates so that only the outturn would tell us what was the actual but we do in fact project for this fiscal an increase to 657,400 because of the work that we recognise that NAMDEVCO has to do on behalf of the farmers.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment

Purchases. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. 11: the Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago. We are at page 502. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. There is a significant increase from the actual 2019 figure to what was estimated in 2020 from 1.1 million to 2.4 million. Can the Minister indicate what this increase was for?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, the increase is twofold. One is that the Zoological Society had three or four persons who were on contract, and when the contracts expired, they continued on short-term employment, and in one case for nine years, one case for six years, so that had to be regularized so that the future payment to these persons would be reflected on the salaries bill.

In addition to that, the Zoological Society falls under the salary, the SASC and as those positions, SASC positions become vacant, based on a previous Cabinet decision, they are filled sometimes by contract because of the difficulty in finding the particular individual to fill the position. So this has to do with projections of dealing with some historical issues relating to contracts, employment and filling vacancies.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. However, for the 2020 Revised Estimates does not reflect an increase from the actual, the 2020 Revised Estimates is actually lower than the 2019 actual. The Minister indicated that the positions would have been filled and that is why the 2021 Estimates would be similar to the 2020 Estimates.

Hon. Rambharat: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister provide us with copies of those contractual positions that were actually filled?—the details of those contractual positions.

Hon. Rambharat: I will but I want to say when we say “filled”, the persons were

in the job performing the duties but without contracts which were approved by the Cabinet. And they remained, for example, this, the bulk of it was in the period 2010 to 2015 where the contracts were not renewed. They were not renewed by the Cabinet; people continued to perform the duties but I will provide the details.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. At the same time, can the hon. Minister provide us with a breakdown of the Item 28: Other Contracted Services, 300,000 there for Other Contracted Services. Can the Minister provide us also in writing a breakdown of what this line Item entails?

1.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: We still at 01.

Mr. Rambally: 01, my apologies, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Yes, that is okay. All right, so we move on. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, and I think this is where you are, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. So, can the hon. Minister kindly provide some breakdown of what Item 28 entails for the contracted services? Also, Item 12, Material and Supplies, again there was a significant increase from 3.9 to 5 million from 2019 to 2020. Can the Minister indicate what this increase was about?

Hon. Rambharat: All right. The increase has to do with—there is no actuals, so I am just going on what would have caused a projection of 5 million for the 2020 fiscal. And it has to do with the work that is being done at the zoo. The Zoo Expansion Project, and the bulk of that project, which is the new building, is covered in the PSIP, the IDF in particular. And in support of that, the zoo has incur a cost on a recurrent basis as part of that project, and if you go to the zoo you would see some of that expansion taking place which is funded out of the allocation for the zoo.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 21, Repair and Maintenance of Buildings. We see an increase from 2.9 to 5 million between 2019 to 2020, and the 5 million continues into 2021. That increase continues there. The Minister did indicate in terms of new buildings, new construction and so forth. Can the Minister provide information in writing, if there is any existing contracts for this line Item, and Item 21, Repair and Maintenance of Buildings?

Hon. Rambharat: I would do that, Madam Chairman.

Mr. Ratiram: That is it for now.

Madam Chairman: 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*, new book, we are at page 154. Consolidated Fund, Item 002, Productive Services—Sectors, I am sorry, Productive Sectors. Item 003, Economic Infrastructure. Hon. Members, Item 003 spans four pages, and for the purposes for us of, you know, ease of reference, I will therefore announce the project groups; D. Fishing, which is at page 155. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Could the hon. Minister advise if under this line Item is where the repair and refurbishment of the cold storage facility at the Orange Valley wholesale fish market exists?

Hon. Rambharat: Item 280.

Mr. Ratiram: Item?

Hon. Rambharat: Three hundred thousand is the estimate.

Madam Chairman: 280.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, under line Item 287, Upgrade of Fish Landing Sites. Any projected decision on what is happening with the Galeota Point, that Fishing Port, whether any action would be taken on it to bring it up to productive capacity in this fiscal year?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, it is an issue that fortuitously the Minister of Finance is also a civil engineer, but it is an issue that we have to deal with. We have considered it and we have gotten opinions before on the possibility of making the current landing site, which is unsafe and unsuitable, making it safer. And it is something we have to confront, and we will do it in this fiscal year, which is to determine; one, the interest of the fisherfolk community, you as Member of Parliament, and then the cost of making that facility usable.

Mr. Paray: Minister, any opportunity for a public/private initiative to get that facility, if not for fishing based on the design challenges with the piers, but other opportunities in terms of perhaps tourism, community development, something to generate activities, so at least the facility can be maintained, rather, in its current stage? It is falling apart.

Hon. Rambharat: Absolutely. You and I, we have discussed this. We had discussions with the community. We had identified an interested party who fell away, and this is something—this particular facility is perfect for that. We have to put it to use, if not as a fish landing site.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 287, Operate of Fish Landing Site. Hon. Minister, I would like to ask, if the Orange Valley Fish Landing site and the Carli Bay—old Carli Bay jetty there, if any proposed works is included in this 2 million allocation? And if not, if the hon. Minister will be kind enough to facilitate a site visit at the location to see exactly what kind of works need to be done there?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, the Member for Couva South raises his head, because he has seen me there on a number of occasions at all hours of the day or night trying to work with the fisherfolk. We have done some work in Carli Bay. What we do, we separate the two. The Fisheries Division will look and to see, sometimes it might be hygiene issues in terms of the site. Things that we could solve within the Ministry using what is allocated here, and sometimes it is a more expensive fix. And, as an MP you could assist us in getting the community together, and looking at it, a lot of these things come unto the Development Programme or in Recurrent Expenditure because of the interface between Ministers and Ministries and Members of Parliament, and we are always available to facilitate that type of thing. Particularly, in that area, we recognize that Orange Valley and Claxton Bay have been areas of focus. We have done some work in Carli Bay, and we are always available.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, you indicated that out of the \$2 million you project to spend in 2021, you spent approximately 300,000 in, I think, Orange Valley. Could you give us a clearer insight on where you intend to spend this allocation in terms of other fish landing sites?

Mr. Ramadhar: Right, I could do that in writing. But the allocation to Orange Valley is a different line Item. Orange Valley is 280, and the 2 million is under 287.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Project Group E, Forestry. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, 015, Improvement of Forest Fire Protection Capability. I think within recent times from a climate change point of view and the amount of

forest fires and so on we see, especially in the dry season on the Northern Range and so on, could you elaborate on this allocation and whether what you want to achieve will be realized through this \$1 million allocation?

Hon. Rambharat: The one million is sufficient, mainly because arising out of unfortunate death of Keith Campbell on Good Friday 2016, as Minister I made it clear that this view that Forestry Division responds to forest fires is misconceived. The Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services is the first responder and the agency that is trained and equipped to deal with forest fires. Forestry Division has a supportive function, and also where there are minor fires they have the appropriate gear and equipment. So, this is essentially for ongoing training across the board, and for replacing minor equipment, and also for helping in some of the communities like St. Ann's where we have an NGO, Fondes Amandes that has a programme of dealing with minor fires. So again, how much you spend is dependent on the particular season that we have had. We start off the year by providing for training and the equipment replacement that we normally have.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: No more questions.

Madam Chairman: We go on to F., Land Management Services. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer to Item 07, Survey and Subdivision of State Land for Distribution to Farmers, a two thousand and—2021 estimate of 200,000, sorry. Given the Government's statement of intent to increase focus on agriculture and the need for access to land for farming, does the Minister view the figure of 200,000 as a sufficient figure for this line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: It is sufficient, because you have heard me refer to—I do not think you were in the House, I remembered in your contribution you referred to

Cunjal, and when I spoke I said Cunjal is a good example, as is La Savanne. The Cunjal Food Crop Project was surveyed in 1969 and La Savanne was surveyed in 1970. So, in many cases we are dealing with projects that have been surveyed already, and we have a general survey plan, and I said earlier that it is the potential lessee who would incur the cost of the individual survey. So, in the Ministry we sometimes have to engage private surveyors to do general survey plans for us. We do that through this allocation, but it does not impair the individual surveys which is the cost borne by the potential lessee of the farmer. The farmer pays that individual cost. So, as we go through they pay that cost. We do not incur that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. So as you make reference here for the survey and the work that would have been conducted on your site visits, especially down to the Cunjal Food Crop Project, could the 62 farmers down at the Cunjal Food Crop Project expect during the course of this year to receive some sort of documentation from your Ministry to provide them with some kind of—

Hon. Rambharat: Yes certainly, we have made the Cunjal project a priority project, as we have done with La Savanne and a few others, because— So that is why I have been talking about it. We have made that a priority project.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, going back to the line Item, could the hon. Minister advise what figure was actually spent on surveying and sub-dividing state lands in 2020, seeing that no data is given here for the Revised Estimates.

Hon. Rambharat: Right, I can provide that in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: H., Research and Development. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 544:

Development and Provisions of Facilities at Marper Farm. Could you tell me what development works we expect in 2021 at the Marper Farm?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, this provision here at all these facilities, the Marper Farm for example, you have current expenditure which meets the day-to-day needs. You have the expansion of the sheds, which has been a project that has been ongoing, so you would see expansion of the facilities there. But in the context of the Roadmap exercise and the manifesto, we have targeted Marper to specialize in, apart from what they do, to also be the place where we do the planting material for the coconut industry. We have already said we are going to import the tissue from Mexico based on an agreement with the Mexican Government. The first shipment did not go very, very well, and we have to—but the production of that planting material would be done at Marper Farm. This allocation is for the preparation of those expanded areas for production. And there is also amongst the projects for the 500 million, Marper Farm is included for specific attention in terms of capacity to produce planting materials.

1.15 p.m.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, hon. Minister, and I know you know that road, it is not under your purview, but the access road is really bad.

Hon. Rambharat: Yeah, the access is—thankfully it has not disappeared. The access has deteriorated over—

Dr. Ragbir: Couple of years, yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 536: Establishment of Community Based Agriculture Programme. Can the hon. Minister indicate which communities have been identified for these programmes?

Hon. Rambharat: I would do so in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 548: National Seed Bank Project. It has been estimated at \$1 million. Can the Minister elaborate a little more on what we expect to see with the \$1 million spent here?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, I do not know, your predecessor would have received the seed packages from the Ministry under this Grow Trinbago Project. What we found is that among the households there is interest in developing their own home gardens and the National Seed Bank is the resource in Chaguaramas that develops traditional varieties in things like, corn, bodi, melongene, pigeon peas, pumpkin, hot pepper and those things. So this is to support that project and the expansion of the project to service the farmers and the households across the country.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Item 552: Development of Forage Farm at Mon Jaloux. Can the Minister advise what is happening at Mon Jaloux at this time. Last year I understand there was a conversation about the grass growing and being cut which happens on the Forage Farm. However there is no allocation there for this year.

Hon. Rambharat: Well it is not in the development, because in Mon Jaloux now going back to 2011 we have spent maybe 10 million in Mon Jaloux. And there used to be an allocation in this line Item because the workers were being paid under the PSIP and that—after the project nature ended they should have been paid under recurrent. So that expense has been transferred to the recurrent and Mon Jaloux continues to service the farmers, the livestock farmers with the Forage project. But of course as we look closer at the use in particular of livestock assets Mon Jaloux is one that I am taking a closer look to see how it could be fully utilized given the acreage that is around and given its historic use as a place where we raise livestock in the country.

Mr. Ratiram: I did not see the Mon Jaloux Farm in the recurrent so I waited at

this point in time to have a greater appreciation for what is happening there. However can the Minister advise when last there was any replanting activities or weed management activities at that Mon Jaloux Farm?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, Minister, I will not allow that here. I think the explanation given tells us that Mon Jaloux, why there is no allocation for Mon Jaloux here and that is why I allowed it. And Member for Couva North, unfortunately if you missed it there is going to be another opportunity later in time for you to get that kind of information. Anything else, Member for Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: That is all for now.

Madam Chairman: So we go on to I: Production and Marketing; J: Other Services; K: Drainage and Irrigation. Member for Caroni East.

Mr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under line Item 005, can you indicate in writing for us what infrastructure works can we expect in the Caroni/Bejucal area for fiscal 2021?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes, I would do so.

Mr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, Item 001: Water Management and Flood Control Programme. There is 3 million estimated there from a Revised Estimate of 1.2 million. Can the Minister kindly elaborate on the benefits we will see from the 3 million?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, we said that, we said in dealing with agriculture on the whole that this issue of water management is a very important issue to the farmers. Every year we have different types of issues arising and it has to do with the flow of water, the availability of water, the ability to abstract the water and rehabilitation of some of the infrastructure. So Plum Mitan is listed separately, but this has to do with the ongoing infrastructure works particularly in Plum Mitan, in

Central Trinidad, in South Trinidad where we have the infrastructure that controls water flow and water management.

Madam Chairman: K: Land Acquisitions, Item 004: Social Infrastructure; Item 005: Multi-sectoral and Other Services, and hon. Members because this Item spans three pages, I will also announce the project groups. So we are now at page 160, L: Agricultural Youth Apprenticeship Programme. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. 005: Development of Young Entrepreneurs in Ornamental Horticulture in Rural Communities. Again, can the hon. Minister provide the information into which communities this programme is to be realized?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes, I would do so in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member, are you finished? Yeah? A: Administrative Services, we are at page 161; F: Public Buildings, we are at pages 161 and 162; K: Lands and Surveys. We now go on to the Infrastructure Development Programme, at page 243. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure; Item 004: Social Infrastructure.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 77 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister; thank you Madam PS, thank you to the other technocrats from the Ministry. You all are excused.

We now go on to Head 39, Ministry of Public Utilities.

Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, \$1,944,382,285.

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

Mr. Chairman: Welcome to the Permanent Secretary and technocrats of the Ministry of Public Utilities. Right, so Mr. Minister, you have five minutes for your opening remarks, please.

Hon. Gonzales: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, COVID-19 and its

impact on our economy and way of life has heightened the critical importance of effectively providing all our citizens with efficient, quality public utility services. Access to a reliable water supply and electricity, sanitation and telecommunication services in our homes and economic spaces is now an acute necessity to sustain lives and livelihoods as we transition to the new normal and the economy is set on a path to recovery.

Mr. Chairman, for fiscal 2021 the Ministry of Public Utilities and its agencies received a reduced allocation of TT \$2.09 billion, which is 31.3 per cent less than fiscal 2020. In this regard it is to be noted that the cost to an organization on inefficiency and mismanagement is extremely high. Therefore, in the current environment, resource constraint, it is absolutely imperative that our utilities strive to eliminate all inefficiencies and perform at a much higher level of operational efficiency.

1.30 p.m.

Strategic action must be taken to maximize existing resources and achieve greater cost effectiveness. This situation calls for business reengineering, creative problem solving, stronger leadership, governance and accountability, and a heightened resolved by our utilities to meet the needs of the population especially the most vulnerable.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I want to place on record my gratitude to the Permanent Secretary and her team, Deputy Permanent Secretary and my team of dedicated public officers at the Ministry of Public Utilities who have provided me with quality service, not only to the Ministry, but to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and for this I am grateful for. I thank you.

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$1,944,382,285 for Head 39: Ministry

of Public Utilities is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, and as mentioned we are on page 38 of the *Recurrent Expenditure* booklet—page 238. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. I recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am on 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. There is an increase of \$220,000. Can the Minister indicate what are these provisions for, the increase?

Hon. Gonzales: Thank you, hon. Member. This increase would be used for payments of increments and arrears for acting appointments, and promotions.

Mr. Ram: I did hear that the—supplemental, please. I did hear that the Minister of Finance in his presentation indicated that there be no filling of vacancies. Are there filling of vacancies according to your previous answer?

Hon. Gonzales: And the answer is no.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Meteorological Services; Item 005: Electrical Inspectorate. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Under 02: Goods and Services, Mr. Chairman, 04, there is an increase in electricity provision in the 2021 Estimates, can the Minister indicate why is there an increase?

Hon. Gonzales: What number is this?

Mr. Ram: 04: Electricity.

Hon. Gonzales: Just one second. Yes, can you repeat the question? I am sorry.

Mr. Ram: Under 04: Electricity, there is an increase in the amount of \$163,000 in fiscal 2021. Can the hon. Minister indicate why is there an increase seeing that the Revised Estimates for 2020 was 337,000?

Hon. Gonzales: So the allocation in 2021 Estimates will cover all charges related to electricity supply for the head office. The cost of six metres per month is approximately \$66,600.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: As long as my colleague is—hon. Member, you are finished?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Ram: So the head office—is the head office a new building? There is an increase. There has been no increase in rates.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes. What are you asking, Sir?

Mr. Ram: Your answer, hon. Minister, indicated that the cost is associated with the head office.

Hon. Gonzales: Right. So what happened is that the allocations that we got on the last occasion, the previous financial year, was not enough and this increase is to cover the outstanding bills for the previous year.

Mr. Ram: Understood. Thank you. One supplemental please,

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up.

Mr. Ram: Would this increase, will it then cover all your arrears or there will be additional funds required to cover your arrears?

Hon. Gonzales: From what I am seeing here it should cover a significant portion. We will have some arrears remaining.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up again, Member?

Mr. Ram: Another Item, 09.

Mr. Chairman: We are in the same Item, eh?

Mr. Ram: Yes, 09.

Mr. Chairman: 09.

Mr. Ram: Rent/Lease. Sorry. 08, sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Great. Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage.

Mr. Ram: I am seeing there is a substantial increase in the amount for fiscal 2021, can the Minister indicate in a supplemental if he does not have the information here, how many properties does the Ministry currently rent or lease; and what is the associated cost?

Hon. Gonzales: So currently the Ministry rents the property at Alexandra Street; Chapmans Self Storage, Laventille. It is actually four properties. The total cost I do not have that figure with me currently, but the number of properties is four properties.

Mr. Ram: And the increase is because—supplemental please, through you, Mr. Chairman. The increase is as a result of—can you indicate?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes. So in the previous financial year the Ministry did not cover all the outstanding sums that fell due in 2020. So the increase that we have asked for in 2021 is to cover the outstanding sums due in the previous rental arrangements.

Mr. Ram: Supplemental, the same. Can the hon. Minister indicate whether this allocation now will bring all the previous years' rent to current?

Hon. Gonzales: So I am advised that by the end of this financial year we would still be in arrears.

Mr. Ram: Supplemental please. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a call for landlords to reduce their rent, will the Government or the Ministry of Public Utilities go into the landlords at these four properties for a reduction in

rent?

Hon. Gonzales: So the Ministry would normally liaise with the Property and Real Estate Division of the Ministry of Public Administration to engage in these types of negotiations. We have indicated to PRES D that our intention is to have the annual rental figures reduced significantly and to engage the respective property owners in discussions with a view to reducing the amount of rent that we incur on an annual basis.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up again, Member?

Mr. Ram: No. Next line Item please. No. 16: Contract Employment.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Ram: Can the Minister indicate as of September 2020, what is the total number of persons hired or employed on contract at the department?

Hon. Gonzales: What is the number of—?

Mr. Ram: Persons.

Hon. Gonzales: So there are currently 111 contract positions of which 66 positions are filled.

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

Mr. Lee: I am going over to page 240, Street Lighting programme.

Mr. Chairman: One second. We are in the same—

Mr. Lee: The same Goods and Services, line Item 42. Minister—

Hon. Gonzales: What number you are on, Sir?

Mr. Lee: Line Item 42, page 240.

Mr. Chairman: Page 240, line Item 42.

Hon. Gonzales: Street Lighting.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed, Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Line Item 42. Minister, the Street Lighting programme, it roughly is

around the same amount, 50 million. Even though the Revised Estimate is 41 and there is an increase of 8, well, I am sure there are outstanding payments and it will bring it back up close to the 50 million. In 2021 Estimate of the 50 million, what new locations have you identified? If you do not have it you could give it in writing.

Hon. Gonzales: I could provide that in writing. I do not have those with me.

Mr. Lee: For the fiscal year 2021.

Hon. Gonzales: So I could provide that in writing.

Mr. Lee: But a follow-up question is: Who administers that Street Lighting programme?

Hon. Gonzales: That is the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Mr. Lee: It does not fall under T&TEC?

Hon. Gonzales: We work together with T&TEC, but the Ministry will provide the funding to T&TEC to execute it.

Mr. Lee: So if one is trying to apply in that Street Lighting programme, who do they apply to, the Ministry of Public Utilities? For example, a park or a recreation.

Hon. Gonzales: Yeah, you can apply directly to T&TEC or you can write or make the application rather to the respective department under the Ministry of Public Utilities that administers the programme.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to go back to 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. I understood that the Minister has said that they are negotiating to try and get a reduction in the rent, but given the fact that companies around the world, like BP selling their head office in London as we speak, and given the COVID situation as requiring online approaches to work

where you have a reduced number of people actually congregating in an office to work, and given our challenging revenue situation, one would have expected that that negotiation would have already taken place and we would not be seeing a \$2 million increase in rent. And I think given the fact that you are asking citizens to sacrifice and given the fact that you cut already—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Question.

Mr. Charles: No, I have five minutes. Given the fact—

Mr. Chairman: Member, please, again.

Mr. Charles: Given the fact that you have cut 53 million from the School Feeding Programme, I feel that putting a 2 million increase in rent is an insult to the request that you are making to the population to sacrifice.

Hon. Gonzales: Well, if you recall—no, no, no. If you recall, Member, I indicated clearly that the increase is to cover outstanding sums from last year. It is not an increase moving forward. It is to cover outstanding sums, and I have also indicated that the Ministry is working with PRES D with a view to liaising with the respective landlords to reducing some of the rent as we move forward.

Mr. Charles: Yeah. All I am saying, Mr. Chairman, and hon. Minister, is that it should not be a case of we are negotiating and we are approaching. In budgeting, you estimate for a decline and you do the necessary work to make it—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Member. Fine. I now go to the Member for Mayaro.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, before you move on, may I intervene please?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you could come in on this particular—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, on this particular Item. May I indicate that there is not really a decline, or a decrease, or an increase, because the Actual for 2019 was \$8,383,247. The Estimate for 2021 is 8,256,000. We have said this before, that is

how it works. And so, if there is to be a decline at all, it is not already done. So you have to estimate for what you had paid previously. So you would not put a lesser figure here, and the Member for Naparima knows that.

Mr. Charles: Is that what BP—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We are not BP, we are not any of the—

Mr. Charles: And what I am saying we need to be a little more—

Mr. Chairman: Members.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, we are dealing with the facts before us, and the Minister clearly outlined that there is a process going forward.

1.45 p.m.

So we have to do what we can with what we have here. We could not put a lesser figure if the negotiation had not yet taken place.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Member for Naparima, new information or?

Mr. Charles: And that is new information. It is precisely why the new realities about COVID, that large companies have already cut rent, we are hoping to cut rent and I have little faith that—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Last comment on this particular Item.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, all I am saying is if we are estimating and something has not yet occurred, we could not possibly—

Mr. Charles: COVID has occurred. People working from home.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We could not possibly put a different figure if it has not yet occurred. You will see a different figure next year if we are successful but it depends on the negotiation and Naparima is well aware of that.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I now recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, I just want to take you

back to the line Item 42: Street-Lighting.

Mr. Chairman: I am not hearing you clearly, Member.

Mr. Paray: Yes, I am referring back the Minister to line Item 42 which is Street Lighting. Coming out of the response that you gave to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, are you aware that when citizens go to T&TEC to make an application for street-lighting, either for a new light or to repair, they are sending them back to the MP's office for a written letter which I found a bit counterproductive, you know, that you have these people have to come back to where they—especially in a constituency like mine which is geographically so large and they must come back to the MP's office for a letter. Is that something that you can look at to have T&TEC review that requirement please?

Hon. Gonzales: Well first to begin, I am not aware of that but if that is in fact the case, I will promise to talk to T&TEC so that they can give some clear guidance to applicants, for persons wishing to make access or have access so this programme so that the programme or the processes can be very clear, whether it is at T&TEC or at the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, as a follow-up to what my colleagues would have asked, line Item 8 on page 239, I believe that you would have mentioned four properties and you would have named two of them. There was an earlier undertaking to supply us with a list of the four properties.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Rambally: In putting forward that list, we would also know what is the rental value of those properties. I am asking whether or not you could put that as well along with the list of the names.

Hon. Gonzales: I can provide that.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, that was line Item 08. Mr. Chairman, with your permission, line Item 16, you would have made reference under this Contract Employment heading that, if I remember correctly, there are 66 positions filled and 44 vacant.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, 44.

Mr. Rambally: Is there an intention to fill those positions in the next fiscal year?

Hon. Gonzales: So we are working towards filling those vacancies. Currently, we have 19 positions advertised. The Ministry is going through the selection process and we intend to continue to fill those vacancies as we move along.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, just one last question by way of clarification.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, proceed, Member.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, on page 240, the same Item 42 dealing with Street Lighting, it is just a question because we are on this side faced with questions from constituents from time to time. You did make mention that a request can be made directly to T&TEC for street lighting in response to the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, as well as the relevant department within public utilities.

Hon. Gonzales: Correct.

Mr. Rambally: Is your Ministry, or at this time, are you able to tell us exactly what is the name of that department?

Hon. Gonzales: All right, so the name of the department is Sectoral Programmes and Projects at the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Mr. Rambally: Very grateful, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am back at line Item 08 Rent/Lease/Office Accommodation and Storage. Can the Minister indicate what

date will the lease for the One Alexandra Place expire, what day is the expiry date of that lease?

Hon. Gonzales: So that lease was expired on July 31st and currently PRES D which is the Property and Real Estate Services Division of the Ministry of Public Admin, is in contact with the property owners with a review to renegotiating the terms of the lease.

Mr. Hosein: So currently the Ministry is—

Hon. Gonzales: It is a month-to-month arrangement.

Mr. Hosein: A month-to-month arrangement. And you have any indication of the timeline in which these negotiations will be completed with the landlord?

Hon. Gonzales: Well, the Ministry does not normally take an active role in these negotiations, it is the premise of the Property and Real Estate Services Division. I have not been provided with the requisite information as to when or any particular timeline with respect to the conclusion of these negotiations.

Mr. Hosein: Do you know who the landlord is?

Hon. Gonzales: No.

Mr. Hosein: Are you aware that it is someone from the Cabinet—

Hon. Gonzales: No.

Mr. Hosein:—that may have a beneficial interest?

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Members, Members, please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Deputy Chairman, where are we going with this?

Mr. Chairman: Members, please. I will now move on to Couva North.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Everybody knows. Everybody knows except you.

Mr. Hosein: Everybody knows. So “yuh” fully aware that he has collected \$23 million? [*Crosstalk*] “Yuh fully aware”, I am glad to know that. [*Crosstalk*] I am glad to know that.

Ms. Ameen: No, the Minister does not seem to know. Either that or he is not telling the truth.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: This is not part of this questioning.

Mr. Chairman: Members. Okay, I now recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chair. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Members for Arouca/Maloney and Barataria/San Juan. I am now recognizing the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, through you, Chair, can you kindly advise, I am looking at Item 27: Official Overseas Travel, the actual figure for 2019 was 46,000 and it was estimated at 50,000 in 2020. Can the hon. Minister kindly advise, with the closure of our airports and overseas travel and borders and so forth, why this significant increase to 149,000 for overseas travel?

Hon. Gonzales: It is a decrease, Sir. “Yuh wanna take ah look at it?” The information I have is that it is a decrease.

Mr. Ratiram: No, what we are looking at is, the last actual figure we have recorded under this line Item is the 2019 actual. It was actually 49 in 2019 and it was estimated to be 50 in 2020. Can you indicate, hon. Minister, through you, Chair, why the significant increase in 2020 then from the Estimate to the Revised Estimate from 50,000 to 298,000 in 2020 when most of 2020, the borders were closed?

Hon. Gonzales: Okay, I do not have that information but I can undertake to provide you with further clarification on the question that you have asked.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Mr. Chairman, I want to seek clarification on one issue please. Is it that

when we have a question that we raise our hands and we are recognized by the Chair?

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Ram: Right. So I have seen a couple of minutes ago, Members interjecting on the other side without their hands raised when persons were on this side with their hands raised and I just want to seek clarification what is the protocol so that we can follow the protocol on this side please.

Mr. Chairman: One second, one second. Right. In terms of going forward, the Members will so identify—the Procedural Clerk will so identify it on a listing that is before us here who would be the next Member to be recognized in order to ask their question. The questions are posted to the Minister who is representing now, which is the Minister of Public Utilities, however any Member, Minister, can so interject to bring clarity or to bring some information on the particular topic.

Mr. Ram: I am guided please. Thank you for your clarification.

Mr. Chairman: Right, so basically that is the information. So now you, Caroni Central. Member.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With respect to line Item 34, there have been no provisions for university graduate recruitment programmes in the Ministry. Can the Minister indicate why have no provisions been made since we have quite a number of graduates from the university entering the working world or wanting to enter the working world for the last two to three years and since then, there have been no provisions or no moneys expended for university graduates?

Hon. Gonzales: So my understanding is that it is an Item—

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Sorry, Mr. Chair. The Ministry of Finance would normally provide guidelines as well as to administer this particular line Item. We have not

had any allocations from the Ministry of Finance or any indication as to what is the programme in moving forward. So I cannot provide any further information to the question that you are asking.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Caroni Central, again.

Mr. Ram: Line Item 37, please, Mr. Chairman. I see there is an increase in Janitorial Services in the amount of 522,000 for fiscal 2021. Can the Minister indicate what would account for this substantial increase in Janitorial Services for 2021?

Hon. Gonzales: So again, similar to some of the rental arrangements that the Ministry has with other service providers, it is the same reason that there are some outstanding debts owed to MTS and this increase is to assist the Ministry to cover or to pay—make some contributions towards the debts that we have carried forward from the previous year.

Mr. Ram: And once again, like I have asked before, will this amount cover the entire debt to bring it up to present?

Hon. Gonzales: No, it would not.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: If I may take you back to line Item 22 which is at the bottom of page 239, in respect of the short-term employment, are you in a position to tell us how many employees ending September 2020, how many employees are contracted under this Item?

Hon. Gonzales: As of September 2020?

Mr. Rambally: Yes.

Hon. Gonzales: There are 22 short-term contract officers currently at the Ministry.

Mr. Rambally: And as a follow-up, please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, these short-term employment, is there any intention moving forward, fiscal 2021, to make any of these persons permanent within the establishment?

Hon. Gonzales: Well no, you cannot make them permanent. If there is a vacancy in any of the established contract positions, they are free to apply, as anyone else to apply, for employment in the established contract position once there is Cabinet approval. Normally short-term employment is to cater for a short-term need of the Ministry. The intention is not to bring people under that arrangement and then to have them regularized or enter into an established contract position. But as I have said, if there are contract positions available, once those positions are advertised, those short-term employees, once they meet the requisite qualification, they can apply for these positions.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, I hear you with respect to your explanation. As an additional question to this Item, would you be in a position to tell us what categories or what departments these persons actually fill seeing that there are 22 persons?

Hon. Gonzales: Sure. I do not have the information currently but I can provide it to you at a later date.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you.

Hon. Gonzales: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 42: Street Lighting. Can the Minister advise if this figure is for repair or it also includes roll out of areas where there is no street light for new lighting projects?

Hon. Gonzales: They would include both repairs as well as rolling out of new

positions and it also covers electricity charges as well to T&TEC.

Mr. Ratiram: Does the Minister have projects already identified to be rolled out?

Hon. Gonzales: So under street lighting, the lights that we have illuminating our streets and our highways, the bill for these lights are covered by the Ministry of Public Utilities. We pay T&TEC the cost of illuminating our streets and highways and this provision here is to ensure that we cover the respective cost to T&TEC for this fiscal year.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Gonzales: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram: However, what I am asking is, for example, the road leading to the Carli Bay facilities is without light. There are lot of areas in Couva North, within my constituency and also, in other constituencies, like Tortuga and stuff in the Tabaquite constituency, there are a lot of areas that do not have street lighting.

Hon. Gonzales: I understand.

Mr. Ratiram: And what I am asking is if it is that this 50 million also include the rollout of street lighting in these areas or is there some special programme in the Development Fund?

Hon. Gonzales: Right, so the question that you are asking, it would be covered under the Development Programme. For this particular line Item, we are looking at the payment of—it covers payment of electricity charges coming out of our street lights around the country. Not only our street lights, but there is the lighting up of our parks and recreation grounds, and the repairs to parks and recreation grounds. The Ministry pays T&TEC the cost to have those places illuminated.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister, I would just like to highlight that there is a significant amount of areas in Couva North—

Hon. Gonzales: So when we get down to the Development Programme—

Mr. Ratiram:—and I would like to invite you to a site visit through the constituency to take a tour at your convenience.

Hon. Gonzales: I welcome that.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Hon. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Chair, I am seeking clarification on line Item 53, which is Refunds to WASA Re: Water Improvement Rate, and I am asking if this is—the output of this is to increase the percentage of water that reaches the customers and WASA does the work and then the Ministry refunds? Clarification.

Hon. Gonzales: So, under section 10(1) of the Waterworks and Water Conservation Act, Member, the Minister is empowered to designate an area that they call a water improvement area, subject to the affirmative resolution of Parliament and thereafter, to impose a water improvement rate on industries in that area. So, there are presently some areas where that rate is imposed. The companies, they pay the rates to WASA but it is paid directly to the Comptroller of Accounts and the Ministry would reimburse WASA from the payments made to the Comptroller.

Mr. Charles: Supplemental. The decrease, therefore, of \$23 million approximately is an anticipation of the reduced uptake by the industries—

Hon. Gonzales: Some of the industries.

Mr. Charles: Okay.

Hon. Gonzales: Yeah, it is in the Point Lisas plant.

Mr. Charles: Thank you very much.

Hon. Gonzales: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: I am moving on to— sorry, Mr. Chairman. With respect to Item 43: Security Services, can the Minister indicate, again, why is there an increase in the provision of security services for 2021, and if this is to actually, as the other line Items before, was actually to meet arrears that the Ministry has found itself in, in previous financial years?

Hon. Gonzales: That is correct. It is to actually meet arrears from the previous financial year.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. I am at line Item 42: Street Lighting. Now, Minister I am seeing each year that we spend a considerable sum with respect to the street lighting programme to the tune of 41 million last year, 53 million in 2019, and we are estimating to spend 50 million in 2021. Earlier on you said that the Ministry would pay T&TEC for all of the street lights around the country.

Now, from driving around, I notice that there are two different types of light. There are the yellow lights, which is the, I believe, the incandescent bulbs and there are some street lights which are the LED and then there are also some, which is the solar. So I saw three different types of street lights. Is it that the Ministry can look into getting more of the solar-powered lights or even the LED lights to try to reduce this cost? Because I would assume that the incandescent bulbs would actually be much more expensive to maintain and also, to pay electricity bills on a yearly basis.

Hon. Gonzales: Right. So the Ministry is embarking upon a programme to—we are looking seriously at energy efficiency and energy conservation. It is part of the light bulb initiative that T&TEC recently launched. Yes, the LED light bulb initiative that T&TEC successfully launched. The intention rather is to move away

from the incandescent bulbs because it saves energy and it reduces our carbon footprint. So what you are actually seeing then is an incremental move towards LED lights as well as solar lights, to move away from incandescent bulbs which, of course, would contribute a lot to our carbon footprint.

So moving forward, what you are going to recognize then that our new street lighting project will include LED bulbs as well as solar bulbs to move away completely from the incandescent bulbs.

Mr. Hosein: Because I notice, especially in some rural areas, where there are not electricity lines, there might be the best places to do these solar—

Hon. Gonzales: Solar—that is correct.

Mr. Hosein:—lighting. So that you can bring some sort of illumination to those very dark parts of the country.

Hon. Gonzales: That is correct.

Mr. Hosein: So, is it that this year we are going to see some more?

Hon. Gonzales: Moving forward, as I said, the Ministry is moving aggressively towards incorporating LED lights and solar lights, because once we do that, it is going to reduce the bill that we are actually paying or incurring on a yearly basis. Because, of course, you know, it is as a result of the high usage of incandescent bulbs.

As we move towards solar energy and LED lights, we are hoping to see a gradual reduction in the amounts that we are incurring on an annual basis to pay T&TEC. And it is actually pointing positively.

Mr. Chairman: Member, again, on the same line Item?

Mr. Hosein: Yeah, yeah. Supplemental.

Mr. Chairman: Again, you know, we are going into more a sort of debate, in terms of what is needed where and when it is needed, and so on. Right? We really

supposed to be looking at the estimate, but you are going in now to a little more, based on the information that the Minister may be providing. So you have a last point on this particular Item?

Mr. Hosein: Let me just ask one more question because we asked about reducing this figure, in terms of how much money we spend every year.

Mr. Chairman: Sure, sure. I fully understand. But again, this one to the other and different—

Mr. Hosein: Minister, if you have to replace— for example, in my constituency, I have a lot of issues with respect to street lighting. The incandescent bulbs, if I ask the Ministry to replace some of those lights—

Mr. Chairman: Member, again, you see, we are going into the words of the Estimates, not necessarily the particular aspect. Go ahead. I will give way. Go ahead.

Mr. Hosein: Can those lights be replaced using the LED lights, Minister, and what is the process? Because all of us as Members here would want to contribute to reducing this bill.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes. So, as I said, as we roll out the programme, once we do replacements, they will be replaced with either LED or the solar lights.

Mr. Hosein: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 43: Security Services. I know a question was asked earlier by my colleague. Would you be in a position at some point in time to give us a list of those entities that may be responsible for security services?

Hon. Gonzales: MTS; only MTS we use.

Mr. Rambally: Only MTS?

Hon. Gonzales: Only MTS.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you, Mr. Chairman, to the Minister, I just want to ask one final question.

Mr. Chairman: Member, just bring down your mike a little.

Dr. Bodoë: I just wanted to ask one final question on the issue of street lighting, Minister and that is the issue of lights remaining on for long periods of time in recreation grounds, for example, and whether you can tell us whether there are automatic timers installed in these recreation grounds and how many?

Hon. Gonzales: T&TEC is actually doing that right now, so that we can save a lot of the cost that we are incurring in having those parks lit.

Dr. Bodoë: So, that is being looked at?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Meteorological Services. We are now on page 240 and 241. I will recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Line Item 05: Telephones, please. Can the Minister explain the reasons for such a high telephone bill budgeted for financial year 2021?

Hon. Gonzales: And that is because of some outstanding bills that we have owing to TSTT and the increase that you are seeing here is to cover those outstanding sums.

Mr. Ram: Supplemental, please.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member for Caroni Central?

Mr. Ram: On average what is the Ministry's total monthly bill on landline telephones and cellular phones?

Hon. Gonzales: Yeah, I do not have that information, Mr. Chair, but I can provide it, if the Member so desires.

Mr. Ram: Follow-up, please.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed, Caroni Central, Member,

Mr. Ram: In light of the current economic situation, a 202,000 increase in allocation—

Mr. Chairman: Which line Item?

Mr. Ram: Same line Item, please.

Mr. Chairman: Same—okay.

Mr. Ram: Will consideration be given to implement measures to reduce the cost expended on this Sub-Item? And if yes, please state.

Hon. Gonzales: Sorry, Member?

Mr. Ram: Would consideration be given to implement measures to reduce the cost expended?

Hon. Gonzales: It is something that we are actively discussing in the Ministry. We are not happy with the figures that we are seeing so far. As I have indicated, it is to cover outstanding arrears but in moving forward, the Ministry is looking at other cost-cutting measures to reduce the sums that we are expending on telephone bills.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, I want to draw your attention to line Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance. There is an \$800,000 allocation. Minister, I want to know if that allocation includes the repair for the radar, that Doppler radar, that according to a newspaper report sometime in August of this year indicated that that radar has been down for 18 months. Does that figure include the repair of that radar?

Hon. Gonzales: This is minor repairs, right. So the increase in the amount that you

are seeing here is to meet payment for repairs and maintenance of photocopiers, printers and also, to meet the obligations of four outstanding overseas service and maintenance contracts for essential meteorological equipment. And yes, you are correct, it is to meet the repairs currently being done on the radar system for the meteorological services division.

Mr. Paray: I just missed that last part, hon. Minister. It is included?

Hon. Gonzales: It is included in that figure.

Mr. Paray: Okay. On line Item 21, as well, Repairs and Maintenance to Buildings, that very same newspaper report, there was an indication that the facilities where the Met office is at, there are issues with their staircases and leaking roofs, and so on. I want to know if that allocation was taking those particular Items into consideration to address that public issue that was made on the 30th of August of this year?

Hon. Gonzales: The Ministry is looking seriously at the conditions being exposed to by the staff of the meteorological services division. We are in contact with the Occupational Health and Safety Unit, as well as the OSH Agency towards rectifying some of the problems that staff members are experiencing in that building, and the allocation that you are seeing here is to have those matters addressed in this new financial year.

Mr. Paray: So, the matters of the Met office are being addressed based on that report?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, I can assure you of that.

Mr. Paray: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Chair, I am on page 241, line Item 16: Contract Employment. Minister, I see that no allocation has been made for

Contract Employment at the Meteorological Services for 2021. Can you give a reason why?

Hon. Gonzales: Can you repeat the question? I am sorry.

Mr. Hosein: Can you give a reason why no allocation was made for Contract Employment under the Meteorological Services?

Hon. Gonzales: Right. So, the PMCD of the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation, they are currently doing a restructure of the Meteorological Services Division. So, what you are seeing here is pending the outcome of that restructuring process and in that restructuring process, you are looking at established positions and contract positions as well on the system. So, pending the outcome of that review, we will be moving towards filling any of the vacancies that might exist.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And currently is the Meteorological Services— do they have a sufficient complement of staff?

Hon. Gonzales: More than sufficient.

Mr. Hosein: How many vacancies do we have?

Hon. Gonzales: I have the information—

Mr. Hosein: What is the total number of staff and what are the number of vacancies?

Hon. Gonzales: Just once second.

Mr. Hosein: Sure.

Hon. Gonzales: So, there are 66 filled—sorry. Just one second. There are 30 substantive positions which are filled. Seven are temporarily filled and then you have 13 vacant positions.

Mr. Hosein: 1-3?

Hon. Gonzales: 1-3, sorry. But again, we are not filling those vacancies because it

is pending the review by PMCD.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Hosein: And so, in the mid-year we may see a further allocation for Contract Employment?

Hon. Gonzales: If there is a need to.

Mr. Hosein: If the restructuring is—

Hon. Gonzales: Yeah, if there is a need to.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: As we are on page 241, line Item 16 and I am connecting it to line Item 22 please, Short-term Employment. As the hon. Minister now stated there were 13 and seven which is a total of 20 persons which are not on the structure at the Meteorological Services please, can he say that this line Item Short-term Employment, covers those 20 persons?

Hon. Gonzales: I cannot verify that information the—yes, oh yes, it does.

Mr. Ram: And there is an increase of 77,000 in fiscal 2021. Is it that there are other vacancies arising? Or are their terms of engagement being reviewed?

Hon. Gonzales: No, that is to cover a six-month period for the 23 persons who are on short-term employment.

Mr. Chairman: Follow up, Member? Proceed.

Mr. Ram: Next line Item please. I am at line Item 08, so I just went there because we were on that please. Line Item 08, under 002, there was an amount of five—

Hon. Gonzales: One second. I am lost.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, go ahead.

Hon. Gonzales: What page?

Mr. Ram: Yes, line Item 08. There was an allocation of \$581,000 in the fiscal year 2020 which was not used, and then I see in 2021 the same amount is now being

proposed.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Ram: Is it new office space that is being envisaged?

Hon. Gonzales: Right, so, Trinidad and Tobago being a member of the Caribbean Meteorological Organization is required to pay yearly subscription as a member. So in last year's Estimates no payment was in fact made. And the figure that you are actually seeing here is to cover the outstanding sum that as a member state we were supposed to pay.

Mr. Ram: I will want to ask the Member that I am certain that I have seen that payment towards the Caribbean initiative somewhere else as a line Item.

Hon. Gonzales: Seriously?

Mr. Ram: And I want to ask you if you are certain that that is the answer. If you could just give me one minute to look at—look at page 244, 04.

Mr. Chairman: Member, you are referencing?

Mr. Ram: I am referencing so I want to be certain that the hon. Minister is certain about his answer there please.

Hon. Gonzales: So, Member, can I clarify? Yes, one is for the yearly subscription and the other one is for the building, the rental of the building at O'Connor Street in Woodbrook, the Caribbean Meteorological Organization is housed as located at that location and Trinidad and Tobago has a responsibility to pay the rent for that building.

Mr. Ram: Okay. So there were no rental payments in 2020?

Hon. Gonzales: And that is correct.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: You have a follow up again, Member for Caroni Central?

Mr. Ram: Next line Item please?

Mr. Chairman: Item 005.

Mr. Ram: No, in the same 002 please.

Mr. Chairman: Well, yeah, proceed. Once you—

Mr. Ram: Okay, line Items 37 and 43, they are next to each other. In light of the increases there, what changes are expected in these departments please? Can the hon. Minister indicate?

Hon. Gonzales: Are you referring to Janitorial Services?

Mr. Ram: And as similarly Security Services.

Mr. Chairman: Line Items 37 and 43.

Hon. Gonzales: All right, so at 37 for Janitorial Services the increase is to cover payments for contracted janitorial services at that location. And 43 is the provision of security services at the CMO building on the said O'Connor Street as I have mentioned a short while ago. It is coming at a monthly cost of \$8,000.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Could I just reiterate that these are not increases in the true sense of the word. Because you have to look at the Actual and the projected Estimates. And in most instances they are the same figures, so it is not an increase per se. Just a general statement.

Mr. Chairman: Item—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Because we keep saying, you know, but it is not really. In this circumstance it is not really.

Mr. Chairman: Thanks for the information, Minister. Item 005: Electoral—Electrical Inspectorate, sorry. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Meteorological Services; Item 005: Electrical Inspectorate. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I just want to take it in a block, 04, 05, 06. I am trying to relate it back to what the Member for Arouca/Maloney had said just now. I know we have nothing for Revised Estimates, is it that given the timing of the closing of accounts we would then see the actual payments that we normally would pay on an annual basis to these bodies? Is that a fair statement?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, I think that is a fair statement.

Mr. Lee: So next time we would see the Actual payments?

Hon. Gonzales: That is correct, yeah.

Mr. Lee: And that would hold true also for—okay. Good, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Caroni Central, do I recognize you now? Proceed.

Mr. Ram: Mr. Chairman, it is along the same lines so that was answered there please. The question was already answered.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, okay, fair enough. Item 003: United Nations Organisations; Item 007: Households. I recognize the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 06, Minister, Utilities Assistance Programme, 4 million was the Estimate for 2020; again, it is 4 million for 2021. Now, so far in the Revised it is 410,600 would have been the expenditure to date and they would have some outstanding amounts. And I am just trying to understand why is there such a low figure in the Revised Estimate of 2020 of 410,000 given that throughout the year you would have been processing or having claims made in this particular assistance programme throughout the year? Could you elaborate?

Hon. Gonzales: I cannot explain what is the reason for a low figure. These programmes are accessed by needy citizens who wish to access the programmes for assistance. And what I can tell you is that based on the system at the Ministry of Public Utilities once applications are made, they are processed and then the

requests for the releases are made to the Ministry of Finance. So everything hinges on the response that we get from the Ministry of Finance. Once the request is made and it is deemed suitable, the necessary arrangements would be made with Ministry of Finance and everything once finances are in place, then we move forward towards processing the application and granting the assistance. So perhaps what you are seeing here may have to do with the availability of funds at the particular point in time based on the request.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, with respect to Refunds to T&TEC - Re-Rebate on Electricity Bills, are you in a position to tell us how many customers have benefited from this?

Hon. Gonzales: It is approximately 218,000 customers benefit from that rebate process. It is actually 50 per cent of residential customers of T&TEC, they benefit from that programme.

Mr. Indarsingh: 218,000?

Hon. Gonzales:—customers.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will go back to line Item 06: Utilities Assistance Programme. Can the hon. Minister indicate the number of persons benefiting from this programme?

Hon. Gonzales: So yes, Mr. Chair, through you, with respect to T&TEC we have approximately 1,003 beneficiaries and for WASA, 12,102 beneficiaries under this programme.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: On the same line Item 06: Utilities Assistance Programme, can the

Minister also indicate to us how many applications that were made and the persons did not receive the assistance?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information, I am sorry.

Mr. Hosein: Can you undertake to give us it in writing?

Hon. Gonzales: Indeed.

Mr. Hosein: And can you also indicate what benefits persons will get under this programme in terms of is there a cap in terms of the assistance?

Hon. Gonzales: Just one second. Yes, so with respect to WASA, the cap is less than 5,000. With respect to T&TEC it is also less than 5,000. It is \$5,000 and under, and there is also this solar panel assistance whereby customers who live away from the T&TEC grid they can apply for solar assistance, and the Ministry will review the application and they will work with T&TEC with respect to installing those solar panels on these residences, and the cap that we have is \$10,000.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, Minister, I know you have been dealing with this Utilities Assistance Programme. I probably would have missed it in terms of the number of persons or households which would have benefited from it. Could you just reiterate the number for me please?

Hon. Gonzales: Repeat the question, sorry.

Mr. Indarsingh: The number of households which would have benefited?

Hon. Gonzales: You are referring to the rebates?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, 118?

Hon. Gonzales: The question you asked was in relation to the number of customers who benefited from the rebate?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah, that was—

Hon. Gonzales: And I told you it is 218,000.

Mr. Indarsingh: No, that was—I already asked that. I am speaking in the context of the Utilities Assistance Programme.

Hon. Gonzales: Right, so we have approximately—

Mr. Indarsingh: And I said I probably—

Mr. Chairman: 102? Not so?

Mr. Indarsingh: Chairman, I said I probably missed it so I just wanted to get the number.

Mr. Chairman: Member, Member.

Mr. Indarsingh:—and then ask for a breakdown.

Mr. Chairman: Member, in the interest of time and everything, Member, it was clear.

Mr. Indarsingh: Allow me to exercise my democratic right.

Mr. Chairman: Nobody is stopping it, but I am saying for T&TEC it is 1,003 and for WASA it is 12,102. Not so, Minister?

Mr. Indarsingh: And would you be privileged to the information to give us a break down by constituency?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information at this point in time but what I can tell you based on the information I have before me, the vast majority of people are from your constituencies.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I still would because I need to track these things.

Hon. Gonzales: I will provide you with it.

Mr. Indarsingh: You know I am a very diligent Member of Parliament.

Hon. Gonzales: [*Laughter*] I will provide you with it.

Mr. Chairman: I understand your point, Member for Couva South, you are working. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Item 009: Other Transfers. We are now on page 245. Caroni Central, your hand is up? Proceed.

Mr. Ram: Mr. Chairman, to the hon. Minister, line Item 04, there is a significant decrease in the amount allocated to TTPost. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the effect that this will have on TTPost? [*Interruption*] Decrease, yes, what effect the decrease will have on TTPost operations please?

Hon. Gonzales: It will not have any deleterious effect on TTPost operations. As you know, the impact of COVID on TTPost as in any state agency or even private agency, TTPost is reviewing its business processes to be able to function in this very difficult time. The moneys that it normally would have received through bulk mail and all these traditional forms of mail, it has reduced significantly.

2.30 p.m.

However, I can tell you though, that TTPost is remodelling and it is reengineering its business processes whereby, it is expanding the number of services available through its courier departments. And recently, it has entered into a contractual arrangement with Ministry of Works and Transport, with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, Ministry of National Security to provide courier services to deliver passports, to deliver statutory documents under the Motor Vehicles and Traffic Act, and we are estimating then, that that can result in improve revenues for the organization.

Mr. Ram: Hold on please. Based on those very initiatives, what is the projected revenue of TTPost for fiscal year 2021?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have their projected revenue position. I do not have that information currently before me, but I can tell you again that the company is

estimating an increase in its revenue, based on these services that it has launched recently.

Mr. Ram: Does the Minister have the revenues for 2020?

Hon. Gonzales: Repeat that again?

Mr. Ram: Do you have the revenues for 2020? For TTPost?

Hon. Gonzales: It is \$60 million.

Mr. Ram: Pardon?

Hon. Gonzales: \$60 million.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chair. Can the hon. Minister, addressing Items 14 to 23?

Hon. Gonzales: 14 to 23?

Mr. Ratiram: 009/14?

Mr. Chairman: Information on all?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. 14 to 23. Can the Minister provide in writing information on all these—

Hon. Gonzales: Payments?

Mr. Ratiram:—Items?

Hon. Gonzales: That is outstanding loans.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, the loans agreement.

Hon. Gonzales: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. I am on line Item 14 T&TEC repayment of loan re: Cove Power Station. Minister, can you indicate whether or not this is a loan taken for the expansion of the Cove Power Station as announced by the Prime Minister in 2017?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, that is correct. The establishment of the Cove Power Station that has resulted, yes, it has—it was taken to improve and to expand the operations of the Cove Power Station, which has already resulted in an improved service for the island.

Mr. Hosein: Is that project completed?

Hon. Gonzales: It is completed.

Mr. Hosein: And what was the total expenditure on that project, the total principal on the loan that was taken?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have the—but I can provide it to you in writing, but I do not have that specific information at this point.

Mr. Hosein: The loans and interest payments also?

Hon. Gonzales: I am now being guided by my Permanent Secretary, the loan, the principal sum is US \$76 million.

Mr. Hosein: US \$76 million?

Hon. Gonzales: That is correct.

Mr. Hosein: I just—if you would allow me?

Mr. Deputy Chairman: Follow.

Mr. Hosein: The Prime Minister did announce that the expansion will cost \$132 million. Now, we are seeing that it is costing US \$76 million. Can you account for why there was such a higher amount taken for this project?

Hon. Gonzales: So there is an original loan, the original loan was in 2010.

Mr. Hosein: So this is the aggregate of two loans, the 76 million?

Hon. Gonzales: Right. So that loan is due to be fully paid off for in, on October 15, 2021.

Mr. Hosein: Which—so there are two loans?

Hon. Gonzales: It is the same loan.

Mr. Hosein: It is the same loan?

Hon. Gonzales: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein: Now the announcement came after 2010. So you are saying there is one loan in 2010 and then there was a refinancing of the same?

Hon. Gonzales: No. So there is no loan in 2017, Member. It is one loan and it is dated 2010.

Mr. Hosein: And that is US \$76 million?

Hon. Gonzales: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein: So the upgrade to the Cove Station, how was that financed?

Hon. Gonzales: It was taken in tranches.

Mr. Hosein: It was taken in tranches?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member Pointe a Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Minister, under line Item Other Transfers, the TTPost, 04, the 75 million subvention to TTPost, is a \$5 million decrease from the budgeted estimate in 2020. Is there any consideration given at this bulk of this funding is to really keep the operations, or to handle the operation side of the TTPost, no? The question is that given that the funding that is given here to TTPost of \$75 million for 2021 and is a decrease of 5 million from last 2020 budgeted amount, and given the state of the TTPost, how technology and times have changed, is there any consideration that this 75 million is the bulk of the funding to keep TTPost afloat? Is there any consideration in the next fiscal to look at the

rationalization of TTPost as an organization and a way forward in generating revenues outside of the subventions from Government?

Hon. Gonzales: So, that rationalization process has already started. I totally agree with you. TTPost is reengineering itself, it is changing its business model. The world has changed around the company. And therefore, the restructuring of the company to reposition it, to deal with the challenges that we are faced with, and as the reason why the company is expanding its model into courier services, because that is the direction in which we are going. And the company can attest to the fact, and I can attest to the fact as a Minister, that TTPost is already seeing an improvement in his revenue situation, since it has started expanding its services into courier services.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Chairman: Item 011: Transfers on State Enterprises. I recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: 02, Solid Waste Management Company. There is a decrease of 6.4 million. Can the hon. Minister state what will account for this decrease? And two, will this decrease have any effect on the operations of Solid Waste Management Company?

Mr. Chairman: Minister?

Hon. Gonzales: Just one second Mr. Chair. Sorry about that Member. So due to the decrease in the funding, the following measures would be implemented. We are looking at some cost cutting measures with respect to, in particular the decrease in security patrols and reduction in the rental of equipment by the company. But just to answer your question specifically, we do not anticipate that it is going to impact negatively upon SWMCOL's operation.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Mr. Chair, can I go to 06, under 011?

Mr. Chairman: I am not there as yet.

Mr. Charles: We are not there yet?

Mr. Chairman: One sec. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Minister, I do not know if you remember recently, the Government had introduced a tax on tires that are imported, and they would have said that this would have benefited SWMCOL, in terms of the reduction in the amount of tyres in terms of recycling. Is that programme ongoing right now at SWMCOL in terms of the recycling of used tyres?

Hon. Gonzales: I cannot elaborate too much on the tax per se, but what I can tell you is that SWMCOL is going to be putting a lot of focus and I am going to ensure that SWMCOL revamp or increase the measures that it has to take, to raise awareness where recycling is concerned, and to aggressively pursue the whole concept of recycling, because that is the direction in which we have to go. In support of that, the legislation for recycling will be introduced in Parliament, very soon after the budget is passed. I have already started my discussion with the Attorney General's office and SWMCOL will play a key role in that recycling process. We have to go there and I am here to ensure that SWMCOL does what it is supposed to do to lead the way, in having an integrated program for recycling in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Hosein: And right now, in terms of the operations of SWMCOL, you are saying that we are not optimum with respect to recycling at the Corporation right now?

Hon. Gonzales: SWMCOL in itself as a state agency is also going through a restructuring process, because recently the Cabinet has taken a decision for SWMCOL to be the lead agency where recycling is concerned. It was somewhat

different a couple years ago, but because of the new thrust of the Government to ensure that SWMCOL takes the lead in pursuing recycling programmes for Trinidad and Tobago, the company is actually now doing a restructuring of its business plan, to ensure that we have the necessary technical people and expert people on board to lead the recycling process.

Mr. Hosein: I am seeing a decrease in the allocation for SWMCOL and anytime I hear restructuring by this Government, we always see a loss of jobs. So I would like to know whether—

Hon. Gonzales: Which is unfortunate, restructuring does not have anything to do with loss of jobs.

Mr. Hosein: The last time they restructured Petrotrin.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, Petrotrin? Under this, Mr. Chairman, the Minister has been very forthright. The Minister has been very forthright, Mr. Chairman, and I wish the Members on the other side—

Mr. Chairman: Members.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—would allow him to complete his statement without putting other matters—

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan, please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: —which do not relate to this, before him.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I repeat, as the Leader of the House, I am making sure that Members with your guidance continue to operate in a way befitting of this Committee, that matter is not before us.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, again, Members, hold on one second. Minister, Minister, you are true with your discourse. Again, Members, we are identifying what is before us. And I think all members by now, right, are fully aware of how we are

operating, we are on day two of this particular exercise. Right, so, again. Barataria/San Juan, you have any item to discuss on the line Item here?

Mr. Hosein: I did not get a clear answer because the Member for Arouca/Maloney disturbed the answer while I was giving it— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no.

Mr. Hosein: So I did not hear the answer to the last question which I asked whether or not based on the restructuring of SWMCOL whether or not there will be a reduction in the number of employees [*Interruption*].

Mr. Chairman: Again, again.

Mr. Hosein:—at the enterprise.

Mr. Chairman: Member, one second.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, the Minister was very clear.

Mr. Hosein: I did not get the answer you disturbed me, I did not hear. I deaf?

Mr. Chairman: Members, please, please Members, please. Please.

Mr. Hosein: I asked the Member— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: So again, the Minister, I asked the Minister just now, he said he answered the question. Right, whether it was in terms of, whether it is was not along what you would have liked to hear, the Member has said he has answered the question, right?

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Chair— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Member. No, no, no, hold on, hold on, hold on. I am recognizing the Member for Couva North. I am recognizing the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Hosein: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, apply to this Committee also?

Mr. Chairman: Which Standing Order you are referring to?

Mr. Hosein: 48(4), offensive, insulting and threatening language. The Member was very offensive to me. She asked me if I was deaf. The Member for Arouca/Maloney, she needs to withdraw.

Mr. Chairman: Member, listen, listen. Members listen, on both sides, we need to be clear on achieving what we need to achieve today. We have a long way ahead of us, right Members and again, as the Deputy Chairman of this particular Committee, we are going to ensure that we complete what we have to achieve today. Right? The Minister has answered, the Minister gave a clarification and we are moving on.

Mr. Charles: If the Chief Whip on the other side is supposed to intervene, she will put up a hand, attract your attention and you will give her permission, to intervene.

Mr. Chairman: Again.

Mr. Charles: You cannot just do it spontaneously.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no, no hold on, hold on. The Member is identified, whether by hand or by registering the redness on the mic and that is how we have been operating fairly, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy, can I have your ruling please?

Mr. Chairman: No, listen, Members hold on. We cannot be going to and fro with regard to this particular matter. I am now recognizing the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy, can I at least have your ruling please?

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, just retract the statement, please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What statement? That he was—

Mr. Chairman: He identified the statement. I would not like to repeat it, but he identified the remark. Just retract it, please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That he was deaf?

Mr. Chairman: Retract, please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. If he found that offensive, I retract.

Mr. Chairman: No, Member, just retract. Hold on. Hold on. Member, retract.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I retract, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] Right. Where are we now? Now, and, again, Members, if it is we are operating strictly—yes we have to operate strictly by the decorum of the House, but if we want to organize it stringently, again, I have no harm in order to ensure that takes place here today. Okay? I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, I am on Item 02: Solid Waste Management Company Limited. Minister, can you advise if this line Item includes a study for the relocation of the Tortuga Dump?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information, hon. Member. Right. So, can I suggest that we are actually looking at recurrent at this point in time. Perhaps under DP that question will be answered.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, could I say that projects of that nature, if they exist at all, will be under the Development Programme. So the Minister cannot be asked Development Programme issues under recurrent. So, could I ask that that be done please to bring some order?

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair, same Head 02. Can the Minister indicate what as the reason for the \$6.4 million decrease between the 2020 Revised and the 2021 Estimate?

Hon. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, I think I answered the question. I think I answered that question previously. It is in relation to a decrease in security.

Mr. Chairman: That question was answered already.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, my apologies.

Mr. Chairman: 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*. 51: Water and Sewerage Authority. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Who do I recognize firstly? We are now on page 203 of the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, page 203. I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I want to refer the Minister to line Item 05: Government's Contribution to NIS at a sum of \$32,600,000 which is a 50 per cent—about 50 per cent decrease for this fiscal year coming, and the Minister would agree that an employer's contribution to NIS is proportional to the head count of the organization. The fact that there is a 50 per cent decrease in the estimate for this fiscal, does it suggest that there may be a 50 per cent reduction in head count at the Water and Sewerage Authority in this fiscal year?

Hon. Gonzales: Not the case, Mr. Chair. NIS contribution is mandatory by the law, and insofar as it relates to all employees by WASA or any state agency or the Ministry, the Government will adhere to the national insurance laws. This is an estimate, and if there is need for this figure to be revised upwards, at the appropriate time, we will return to this Parliament to ensure that we get the necessary supplementation to get additional funding for this Head.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Minister, I take that response because you are allowed to make variations as the year goes on, but if you make a bridge connection to Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, you see a similar reduction in salaries as well. So, again, are you estimating that there may be a requirement to vary salary

and wages over the next fiscal year when your head count remains the same for the entire year? So, I am just asking if it is the same reason why there is a variation in salaries and wages down by almost 50 per cent for the same fiscal, alongside the reduction in NIS contributions.

Hon. Gonzales: As I have said, in response to your question a short while ago, the same will apply for Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Mr. Paray: Thank you.

Mr. Ram: Mr. Chairman, line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Similarly, like my friend from Mayaro, my colleague from Mayaro, we have noted the decrease of almost 50 per cent when the head count would remain the same, and my question to the Minister, does this amount cater for any new negotiations with the bargaining unit at WASA?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information with me at this point in time, Member. But just to further clarify, I think the Government was quite clear, and in my contribution in this Parliament in the budget debate, as well as statements that I would have made in national media, there is a Cabinet committee that is in place that I have the privilege to chair, that is looking into the operations of the Water and Sewerage Authority. We have a mandate from the Prime Minister to deliver a report by the end of November. All right. We intend to hold fast to this deadline date. And the purpose of the committee is to make recommendations to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet with respect to making WASA a more efficient organization, one that holds fast to the principles of transparency and accountability, as well as to look at the structure of the organization to make the organization an efficiently run organization. All right. That does not suggest in any way that the estimates for 2021 is an intention on the part of the Government to reduce staff. That is not the case. We are nowhere close to being in that position,

and if there is a need for us to return to this Parliament to get additional funding, we will do so.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member?

Mr. Ram: Supplemental, please. Mr. Chairman, we have an actual amount spent in 2019, line Item 01, and a Revised Estimate for 2020. The hon. Minister is saying that there are no—barring the report being presented—plans in place now, at this point in time, for a reduction in staff. Is it not financially prudent for us in this Parliament to budget the amount that was actually spent in the last fiscal year?

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: The answer is no, because we cannot afford to subsidize WASA to the extent that it has been subsidizing. One way or another, we have to deal with this problem. Whether it will be, as I indicated in the budget statement, whether it will be by way of an adjustment in water rates or improvements in efficiency at the entity or a combination of the two. One way or the other, we have to reduce the annual subvention to WASA because the country cannot afford it. So there is no point in putting \$2 billion inside of there.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed Member.

Mr. Ram: Follow-up. Can the hon. Minister indicate when was the last time negotiations at WASA was settled, 01, salaries and wages?

Mr. Chairman: Member, I am not going to entertain that question at this time. I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: The question was asked and answered, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head—Caroni Central, you are on?

Mr. Ram: 04, please, under Goods and Services. Can the hon. Minister indicate—there is an increase of \$25 million for electricity. Can the Minister indicate what is

the purpose of this increase?

Hon. Gonzales: It is to do some upgrade to the Caroni Area Dam, the completion of the Savonetta Booster Station to service the Caribbean Gas Chemicals Limited, as well as the adoption of 10 waste water facilities from the HDC.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member?

Mr. Ram: Another Item, please, Materials and Supplies. Can the hon. Minister give—

Mr. Chairman: Which line Item, 12?

Mr. Ram: Line Item 12, please, yes. Can the hon. Minister indicate what are these Materials and Supplies that are indicated in this line Item, please? An example?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, it is normally for chemicals and supplies for water treatment, supplies for pipeline repairs and maintenance, supplies to facilitate the takeover of some of the waste water facilities that I alluded to a short while ago.

Dr. Bodoë: Through you, Chair, I just want to draw the attention of the Minister to line Item 69 which is on the next page. Road Reinstatement-WASA, with regard to the expenditure of \$20 million. Three questions, Minister: one, is this referred to the road reinstatement after WASA's waterworks are done?

Hon. Gonzales: Okay. What is the question, sorry?

Dr. Bodoë: Just to confirm that this is the work that is done after WASA digs up the road, so to speak, to repair the road.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, that is correct.

Dr. Bodoë: Second question would be, is there a time frame? Is there a standard or a time frame for when the road should be repaired?

Hon. Gonzales: There is a standard and the standard is that as soon as the road or the pipeline is repaired, the roads ought to be reinstated.

Dr. Bodoë: As soon as?

Hon. Gonzales: As soon as. All right? Whether WASA complies with those standards, well we both know the answer to that.

Dr. Bodoë: Right. And the third question would be, is there a certain standard of repair that is supposed to be done?

Hon. Gonzales: Right. I think it is a good question. In response to that, I can tell you that we are currently in discussions with the Ministry of Works and Transport to ensure that the requisite training and information with respect to road repairs under the Ministry of Works and Transport, the same standards adhered to by the Highways Division and the PURE Programme that those things will be adhered to by WASA in its road repair programme. But we have to look deeply into that to ensure that those contractors who are employed in WASA are sufficiently experienced to undertake repairs at the standard to which they are supposed to and we are working with the Ministry of Works and Transport to ensure that that happens.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I refer to Sub-Head 23, please, Fees. Can the Minister provide a listing of the persons and the entities, sorry, and the issues or the subject matter on which these fees were generated for 2019, 2020 and projected 2021?

Hon. Gonzales: Sorry, I did not have that question. I did not hear it clearly. Sorry, Member.

Mr. Tancoo: Sure, no problem, Minister. Line Item 23: Fees. I am trying to discern if it is possible for the Minister to provide some detail as to the entities which would have received these fees and the reason for the fees for '19, '20 and '21.

Mr. Chairman: Just for the record, 2020 and 2021, not 2019.

Mr. Tancoo: Correct. Okay, that is fine.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, so I can respond. Those fees are for attorneys contracted or retained by the Water and Sewerage Authority to assist it in defending the number of claims or the numerous claims that are before the courts. It is in relation to the Regulated Industries Commission fees, the Green Fund Levy, audit fees, subscription fees, licences as well as the Environmental Management Authority fees.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Would you be able to provide a listing of the attorneys who would have received those fees and the values that they would have received?

Hon. Gonzales: I can do that in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Chair. With respect to the line Item 68: Water Trucking. Minister, is this line Item for the service that WASA offers when there is no water and they offer free truck borne supply?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: And I see that there is an increase from the Revised Estimates for 2021. Is it that you are anticipating whether or not we will have some additional water shortages for this fiscal year?

Hon. Gonzales: We just want to put systems in place to ensure that in the dry season—in the approaching dry season, in the event that we have communities that are not being serviced at the level at which they are supposed to, that systems will be in place to have an efficient water trucking system operating in those communities.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 28: Other Contracted Services, we see from 2019 actual figure of 81 million, this had increased to 100 million in Other Contracted Services. Can the Minister advise what this increase represents?

Hon. Gonzales: So, the 7 million increase in Other Contracted Services, it is as a result of some expenditure incurred in software license agreements that the Authority has. So, it is to service these agreements in software license for Microsoft, Oracle, AutoCAD, and some of these software license agreements. They have not paid those arrangements over the last year and it is intended to ensure that the Authority settles the outstanding sums.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister provide, in writing, the details of the contracted services that were actually paid out for 2019 and 2020?

Hon. Gonzales: I did not get the question.

Mr. Ratiram: Sorry?

Hon. Gonzales: You are asking me to—

Mr. Ratiram: If you can provide the actual contracted services that have been provided for 2019 and for 2020; the details of these.

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Ratiram: Sorry?

Mr. Chairman:—[*Inaudible*]—2020, 2021—

Mr. Ratiram: The actual for 2019 would not be able to?— 2020.

Hon. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]—be provided.

Mr. Chairman: Member?

Mr. Ratiram: No, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, line Item 68: Water Trucking, in your response to the Member for Barataria/San Juan, you spoke about improving the efficiency in water trucking. Does the Ministry currently do any type of benchmark in terms of the length of time it takes between someone calling for the supply of truck borne water to the time that it actually comes to the home of the person making the request? And if it is benchmarked, what policy do you think that the Ministry can put in place to improve it? Because based on the cry from the public is that it takes too long, sometime five days, six days before the truck comes around, and I know that is a huge problem in rural constituencies like mine, which really depend on water trucking from time to time.

Hon. Gonzales: The Regulated Industries Commission does have standards that WASA must comply with in relation to some of the requests for water trucking services. I am aware that the authority does its best to adhere to those standards. I am not saying that they do on all occasions, but in response to your question, there are standards and the authority, on most occasions, try to adhere to the standards prescribed by the RIC.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima, you okay?

Mr. Charles: I withdraw.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, along the same line Item, are there identified or, may I say, are there established areas that the Ministry has identified for delivery of truck borne water?

Hon. Gonzales: There are no established areas. Once an area that is normally serviced by WASA, what is within the grid, they are identified customers of the Water and Sewerage Authority, they can access the service. If a particular area is affected by the water supply, they are free to call WASA and to access the water

trucking services.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chair. Item 09: Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment, from 2019 actual of 86 million, this figure has gone down to—well, there is a decrease of 41 million with respect to vehicles. Can the Minister please explain this decrease?

Hon. Gonzales: The decrease? Because as I have indicated, we are reviewing the operations of the Water and Sewerage Authority and that would include the arrangements that the utility company has with its service providers. And we are ensuring then, in that review process, that the contractual arrangements that WASA has with service providers, there are value for money, as well as looking at some cost-cutting measures as well. So we cannot continue with that huge sums, millions of dollars in paying for lease of vehicles, equipment, et cetera. And in that process to review the operations of WASA, that is one of the areas that we will be looking at to ensure that we get value for money in that particular area.

Mr. Ratiram: Sure. Minister, these vehicle lease would be for how long, three years, five years?

Hon. Gonzales: They are two-year lease arrangements.

Mr. Ratiram: Two-year lease?

Hon. Gonzales: Two-year lease arrangements.

Mr. Ratiram: So, the lease that would have been put in place—well, the lease that would have been existing in 2019 would have been put in place between 2017 or 2018?

Hon. Gonzales: Different periods. So, it is not one service provider, I am told. What the utility is doing is trying to arrange to enter into more short-term lease arrangements so that the company will not be encumbered by long leases. So

currently, as I have said, there are two-year lease contracts and as we move forward, we would be engaging in shorter term lease arrangements so that from time to time, they would be reviewed with the intention of reducing cost as we move along. So the company is also looking at cost-cutting measures to acquire its own vehicles so that they can reduce the amount of moneys that it pays in lease and rental of equipment.

Mr. Ratiram: With this decline of \$41 million in this line Item, will that, versus what was existing in 2018, would it comprise the efficient running of the company? Is the Minister satisfied with what is actually budgeted there will maintain the operations of the company?

Hon. Gonzales: So, let me assure you that we would not do anything that will undermine WASA's efficiency to provide a reliable water service to the country. So as we review the operations of the organization, the contracts that the organization has entered into over the years with a view to reducing cost, we will not negatively impact—we will not impact at all WASA's ability to provide a reliable water service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And if there is a need for us to come back and get additional funding, we will do so. But that does not in any way to be interpreted that some of the measures that will be implemented to make WASA an efficiently run organization will impact negatively on its operations to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head—it is on that line Item, Member for Caroni Central?

Mr. Ram: 003, please, Mr. Chairman. Item 02: Office Equipment, there is an increase of \$5.8 million for fiscal 2021, can the hon. Minister indicate what office equipment will be procured in 2021 to the tune of \$6 million, please?

Hon. Gonzales: Can you ask the question again?

Mr. Ram: Can the hon. Minister indicate what are the office equipment to be procured in 2021 in the tune of \$6 million.

Hon. Gonzales: Under that Item, we are looking at the rental and the maintenance of photocopiers, printers for use throughout the authority, the purchase of computer equipment and accessories to replace aging computers and equipment, IT equipment, maintenance contract, as well as telephones and accessories to be used throughout the authority.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item: 009: Other Transfers. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: 02, Deputy Chair. Minister, I am seeing that there is a jump in the allocation being given for settlement of claims by about \$19 million. Can you give us an indication of what is the nature of these claims and why such a high increase for fiscal 2021?

Hon. Gonzales: In the brief information I have, Member, there are a number of litigation, a number of matters before the courts where contractors and suppliers sue the Water and Sewerage Authority for outstanding sums owed by the Authority.

Mr. Hosein: So these are court settlement sums?

Hon. Gonzales: Say again.

Mr. Hosein: These are for court settlements, right?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, these are for court settlements. The actual figure I have is 98 matters currently before the courts. And in this fiscal, as we move forward, the sums allocated would be to ensure that WASA defend those matters, as well as to settle some of these outstanding claims that have been before the courts for the longest while.

Mr. Hosein: Sure. And I am still on the same Item in terms of the loan—

Hon. Gonzales: The loans?

Mr. Hosein: Yeah. I understand that on the 21st of May, 2020, Cabinet approved a loan to WASA from NCB Global Finance in the sum of \$125 million, at an interest rate of 6 per cent per annum for eight years. Can you identify which one of these loans was financed by NCB Global Finance?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information before me, Member, but I am sure I can provide that for you at a later date.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North, you are okay? Item 009: Other Transfers. We now move on to 55: Regulated Industries Commission. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration, and we are on page 223 at this time. Sub-Head 02: Good and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 244; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are now on page 87, and we are moving on to the *Development Programme* booklet. Consolidated Fund, page 87. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, pages 87 to 90. Hon. Members, Item 003 spans four pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. A. Electricity. Caroni Central, Member.

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Ram: Yes, please. With respect to Fuel and Energy, 05, above Electricity, seeing that it is a significant decrease in the funds allocated for 2021, what changes can we see from the Government or from the Ministry with respect to this decrease in allocation for 2021 moving forward?

Hon. Gonzales: So I do not have that information currently, Member, but it is something that I can provide further clarification to you in writing. I can commit to provide that information to you in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 581: National Street Lighting Programme. For the year 2021, the estimate of \$3 million. Could the Minister elaborate on the project for that \$3 million, what we would see happening with that \$3 million?

Hon. Gonzales: What information are you asking for, Sir? Are you asking for the deliverables for 2021?

Mr. Chairman: Item 581.

Hon. Gonzales: National Street Lighting Programme? Earlier it was identified in the operation.

Hon. Gonzales: So in 2021, we were looking at the installation of an estimated 910 LED luminaries, and approximately 60 electricity poles under this programme.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister say in what area these are to be installed?

Hon. Gonzales: It is an estimate so I do not have the area identified as yet.

Mr. Ratiram: Can you provide?

Hon. Gonzales: As soon as I have it I can.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Caroni Central, still on Electricity?

Mr. Ram: 586: Lighting of Parks and Recreational Grounds. Can the Minister firstly state if this reduction would make our parks less safe for those persons wishing to exercise? And two, what are the locations for 2021 for the lighting of parks and recreational grounds?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not agree with you with that, the allocation received is going to make our parks less safe—586, yes. But I can tell you that under this programme

the Ministry of Public Utilities has been working quite closely with our regional corporations as well as Members of Parliament on both sides of the House, and they have been doing quite a magnificent job in supporting the street lighting programmes all around the country. I want to commend the public officers as well as T&TEC in giving support.

Of course we can only do as much as we can do based on our financial circumstances, and based on the allocations made for 2021 we propose to have approximately six grounds and three upgrades that will be done around the country. I do not have the names of the proposed areas, but as soon as that comes to hand we will deal with the most critical areas. But as I can tell you under this programme we have done quite a lot. It is quite commendable.

[MRS. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

I personally have a problem with respect to maintenance of these grounds, because you expend a lot of moneys in lighting up these parks, and when you drive around they are not properly, you know, the respective bodies do poor job in maintaining the grounds, to the extent that customers or citizens cannot utilize the grounds in the way that they are supposed to. But I do not think that the allocation that we have received—I do not agree with you that the allocation that we have received in 2021 is going to make our parks less safe.

Mr. Ram: With respect to Item 593: Electrification Programme, I noticed that there is a decrease for 2021 estimates. Can the Minister indicate whether these electrification programmes are residential or commercial? And two, will this reduced allocation in the electrification programme for 2021 put those that are most vulnerable at a disadvantage?

Hon. Gonzales: They are primarily, exclusively for residential customers. And for the allocations made for 2021, the Ministry will utilize the limited financial

resources to make the programme available to those most in need.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair, going back to Item 586, lighting of parks and recreational grounds. Can the Minister provide us in writing a copy of the grounds and parks that this project will be lighting?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have the information on the grounds that we propose to light. As I said we do our due diligence. We examine the requests from Members of Parliament, members of the public, village bodies, the corporations around Trinidad and Tobago, and with the limited resources that we have we do what is best in utilizing the limited funds available.

Mr. Ratiram: From what would have been explained earlier, my understanding of what is in the Development Programme would be for specific projects and not for continuing operating expenses. That is why I am asking if what is budgeted here is being budgeted for specific projects and specific grounds.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Because the explanation that the hon. Minister would have provided, Madam Chair, through you, appears to be an ongoing operational spend.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, Minister—sorry, Madam Chair. So based on the requests we have, we have estimated that it is going to cost somewhere in the region of \$3 million to satisfy the requests that we have. But we have not settled on those areas that we intend to have those grounds lit.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, thank you. Moving on to Item 589: Public Space. The illumination of public space it was budgeted for in 2020 at 1 million. The Revised Estimates do not indicate anything there, it is nil, and the 2021 Estimate is nil also. Is it that this line Item project has more or less been fully completed?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, we have completed all the requests that were made. The

majority of the requests that we get it is usually for recreation grounds—yes, it is usually for recreation grounds.

Mr. Ratiram: What makes this line Item different from the previous line Item?

Hon. Gonzales: I am also advised that under this particular Head T&TEC will utilize some of its internal funds to satisfy some of these requests.

Mr. Ratiram: So there are no pending applications for illumination of any public space?

Hon. Gonzales: T&TEC will normally take care of that. So it will not require utilization of public funds or allocations from the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Ratiram: Moving on, Item 591: Additional transformation infrastructure to move power from TGU to the national grid, 591—

Hon. Gonzales: Yes?

Mr. Ratiram:—you have 3 million. Is that a new project or an ongoing project, and is this 3 million sufficient to complete this project?

Hon. Gonzales: My understanding is that it is an ongoing project, and the allocation that we have received—for 2020, under this project, T&TEC was able to achieve five feeders that were energized in Gandhi Village feeder, La Romaine feeder, Pluck Road, Dumfries Road and Debe campus.

For 2020, it improved reliability of supply to at least 20,000 beneficiaries in these particular areas. And for 2021, the construction of a second 220 KV double circuit line from Union Estate to Gandhi Village, and the completion of the Barrackpore feeder and the purchase of 30 to 40 MVA transformers, all under that particular project.

Mr. Ratiram: Was this \$3 million to pay outstanding debts from 2020?

Hon. Gonzales: It is to continue the projects.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, Item 601, it is identified as a new project. To the hon.

Minister, what does this project entail and what benefit can the citizens expect from this project?

Hon. Gonzales: So that is a new project to be undertaken by T&TEC, and it is to conduct an assessment of wind energy. It is a pilot project to be undertaken by T&TEC, to look at renewable energy, in particular, on this particular Head, wind energy.

Mr. Ratiram: Supplemental please, Madam Chair. Has the location been identified?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information from T&TEC as yet—one second. So in general along the east coast, the south-east coast and the south-western peninsula, and in the central area it is proposed that the equipment be purchased to measure a minimum of two sites simultaneously.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Item 581: National Street Lighting Programme. Can the Minister indicate as at September 30, 2020, how many street lighting requests would have been fulfilled following that?

Madam Chairman: Just might I ask, because the question is a bit vague, fulfilled over what period, is it the fiscal year 2019/2020 you are asking for?

Ms. Mohit: As at September 30, 2020, for that fiscal year ending. Thank you.

Hon. Gonzales: We have 197 jobs that were completed. I do not have the actual requests that were made, but just to provide some clarification, 197 jobs were completed at a cost of \$4.9 million. And these jobs were installed utilizing T&TEC's internal funds leading to the installation of 52 HPS lights, 920 LED lights and 259 lamp posts.

Ms. Mohit: Just a follow-up question. You would not have with you the pending requests?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have that information before me.

Ms. Mohit: Okay, so therefore the allocation that you have at this point you will not be able to indicate if it will fulfil your requests for this financial year?

Hon. Gonzales: So the allocation that we have, we estimate that we can do 910 LED luminaries and approximately 60 posts.

Ms. Mohit: Just one follow-up question before I complete. In terms of requests coming to the Ministry, is it that requests for street lighting need to be forwarded from MP offices to the Ministry before approval can be granted?

Hon. Gonzales: No, there is absolutely no requirement for a request to come from the MP's office. Most of the requests, I must admit, they come from the offices of Members of Parliament or councilors, but village councils, members of the public they are free to write directly or to make the request directly to the Ministry of Public Utilities or the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. But there is absolutely no requirement for these requests to come from Members of Parliament and councillors. But as I said, most of them do come from Members of Parliament and councillors.

Ms. Mohit: So I think, Minister, there would need to be some clarification in terms of your district offices and these residents, due to fact that when residents visit they have to return. But I know it will not really—

Madam Chairman: One minute please, Member for Chaguanas East. I was not sitting here for the whole time, but while not here I hear the television, and I am almost certain that this ground was covered, where the Minister said there was no such requirement. He did not know of such requirement and he would investigate it. It was with respect to people having to go to T&TEC, and when they went to T&TEC they were referred to their MP's office. I am certain this ground was covered. As I said, I was not sitting here but I heard that. Okay?

Ms. Mohit: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: I know it is a difficult process, but in the interest of time, again as I asked last week, we all have to be alert. Okay?

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Can we go on please. Item C—project C. Postal Services. Member for Fyzabad.

3.30 p.m.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with reference to 003, we are still code and S42 addressing system, I note that there is no allocation in 2021. Can you indicate the status of that project?

Hon. Gonzales: So that project has been completed and TTPost is putting the final systems in place to roll it out in this new financial year.

Dr. Bodoë: Throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, that is correct.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Similarly, please, can the hon. Minister indicate for the listings from 005, 006, 009 and 013 which projects are completed? Which are ongoing? And what is the estimate for completion of those that have to be completed? You can take them line by line or you can take them together, please.

Madam Chairman: 005, 009 you said?

Mr. Ram: Well 005, 007, 009 and 013. Yes.

Madam Chairman: Otherwise— [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ram: Yes, so he can just respond.

Madam Chairman: Because I thought I heard 6.

Mr. Ram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: So it is 005, 007, 009 and 013.

Hon. Gonzales: So 005, through you, Madam Chair, it is an ongoing project. I do not have the percentage of how far it has reached but it is an ongoing project. With respect to number C/007, it is also an ongoing project; 009 and 013 they are all ongoing projects. I am advised that 007 is in fact, yes, that is correct, it is in fact completed.

Madam Chairman: A follow-up, Member for Caroni Central?

Mr. Ram: Follow-up, please. With respect to those that are ongoing, can the Minister then provide for us in a subsequent writing the percentages completed and the remaining estimated costs for completion and when those projects will be completed, please?

Hon. Gonzales: So with respect to 013, the project is 35 per cent completed. Right. As I have said number 007 is completed but with respect to 005, I can get back to you with that information.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Major Water Sources. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to 004, the Construction of the Avocat Wells, can you indicate three things: the status of this project, the expected date of completion and what will be the total cost on completion?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not have the total cost but currently the project is 64 per cent completed. The deliverables for 2021 is the completion of the installation of 1.2 kilometres of 200 millimetre pipeline from High Life Drive to Avocat junction. And two, the installation of 1.5 kilometres of 200 millimetre main from south Oropouche junction to Tito—lamp pole number five Tito along south Oropouche

Main Road.

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry. Just for clarification, Minister. The first one, what drive was that? Where does it start?

Hon. Gonzales: Tito.

Dr. Bodoë: No. The first one. You said from a drive I did not quite get it. The first one.

Hon. Gonzales: The first one? So it is the completion of an installation of 1.2 kilometres of 200 millimetre pipeline from High Life Drive to Avocat junction.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay. That is fine. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, line Item 022: Well Development Programme. Considering the massive shortage of water that we have in that south-eastern side of the island which encompasses the Mayaro constituency, any part of this programme is looking at either the development of new wells or anything intensive maintenance to the existing wells in the area to assist with the water issues in that constituency?

Hon. Gonzales: Just one second, Member. Yes. In response to your question, the programme entails the combination of ongoing and new well development projects as part of a general work programme to increase water production in that particular area.

Mr Paray: Okay. So in Mayaro there will be some work looking at that well.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Hon. Gonzales: There is a heavy focus on that particular area to increase water production for the communities.

Mr. Paray: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Madam Chair, will the Minister indicate in respect to all the other projects 006, 010, 014, 016, 018 and 020, what is the status of those projects and when are they to be completed?

Hon. Gonzales: Could I undertake to provide that information to you in writing, Sir?

Mr. Ram: Certainly.

Madam Chairman: In terms of 016 there is no allocation. There has been no allocation in 016 since the year 2019. So I do not know—

Mr. Ram: Is it that it is completed? That is why I asked for the status, please.

Hon. Gonzales: So that project is completed, through you, Madam Chair, at 016 Four Road Service Reservoirs.

Madam Chairman: In fact, none of the Items that the Member has asked from 006 to 016—

Hon. Gonzales: They are all completed.

Madam Chairman:—no allocations this year at all.

Hon. Gonzales: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So that I will not allow that under this process. The Member can ascertain that under another process.

Mr. Ram: I was simply asking please, Madam Chair, whether these projects were completed or whether we will see allocations next year?

Madam Chairman: Maybe you can ask—you did not ask that. You asked the status. So if you wish to ask if they are completed, I will allow you to ask that.

Mr. Ram: Can the Minister indicate whether projects under line Items 006, 010, 014, I think you answered 016 already, 018, 020 have been completed? And if not, when is the projected completion date for those?

Hon. Gonzales: They have all been complete.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: B: Local Water Sources. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, there was an allocation in 2020, and can the Minister indicate what was the purpose for this skills training and whether or not it is something that the Ministry of Public Utilities will continue into the future? Or is it a project that has been shelved?

Hon. Gonzales: We have not received allocation for 2021. It was intended that the project would involve the development of an apprenticeship programme for the youth of Trinidad and Tobago for the development of skills and implementation of activities to reduce water loss and water conservation. We have no allocations for 2021 and therefore we will not moving ahead with this intended project.

Madam Chairman: C: Transmission and Distribution Mains. F, Other Water Projects. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, can you confirm that this Item 007: Non-Revenue Water Reduction Programme refers to the repairing of water leaks and so on?

Hon. Gonzales: The project involves the replacement of high leakage mains and the procurement of related equipment to deal with leakage.

Dr. Bodoë: Could you indicate what the 2 million allocation for 2021, what the programme of works will be in terms of which areas?—the particular area of projects.

Hon. Gonzales: No. I do not have the areas with me at this point in time but I can provide that information to you at a later date.

Dr. L. Bodoë: Can you provide the same information in writing perhaps as to what the allocation in 2020 was spent for? Which areas?

Hon. Gonzales: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, it was answered.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you. We go on to I: Water and Sewerage. Item 004: Social Infrastructure; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: I am looking at, Madam Chair, at Items 047—

Madam Chairman: You are between pages 92 and 93?

Mr. Ram: I am at 92, please.

Madam Chairman: Right. 047.

Mr. Ram: 047, 049, 051, and I would like to ask the hon. Minister, why it is that no money has been allocated towards the better plan as the last few months has proved very difficult for many citizens not only in Caroni Central but many parts of Trinidad and Tobago? So the question is: Why has there been no moneys allocated towards these particular line Items?

Madam Chairman: Member, again, if I am not mistaken, there has been nothing allocated to any of these since the actual of 2019, and I think here we are dealing with projects. Nothing has been allocated since 2019 where there is an actual. So I am not going to allow that broad policy question on us examining the details of expenditure. Yes, Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, can I then ask, for these projects, whether they were completed or not since there were no allocations?

Madam Chairman: Well, I think that answers—your question in itself answers itself.

Mr. Ram: So would the Minister indicate, please, whether they were completed or

not?

Madam Chairman: Well, and I guess my answer says, regrettably no.

Mr. Ram: They have not been completed?

Hon. Gonzales: They have not started. No allocations have been made over the years.

Mr. Ram: They have not started?

Hon. Gonzales: No allocations were made over the years. They are awaiting consultancy reports and then a programme of works will be developed.

Mr. Ram: So all these projects, through you, Madam Chair, have been at the stage consultancies only and no actual implementation?

Hon. Gonzales: What is the question, Sir?

Mr. Ram: Whether these projects, have any execution done on them in the last two years, 2020—

Hon. Gonzales: They are not projects as yet. We are awaiting consultancy reports, and depending on outcome of the reports, a programme will be developed for implementation.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: I move to line Item 061 under Community Water Improvement Programmes. Can the hon. Minister indicate the locations of these projects under this line Item?

Hon. Gonzales: In time but I can provide that information to you in writing.

Madam Chairman: Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: That is that, I am on to the other one H when you—

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we have done Administrative Services, Metrological. Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: There was an estimate of 2.7 in 2020. Was this equipment ever

acquired? And why not if so?—since the useful equipment in determining our weather patterns.

Madam Chairman: Where are you? At 006?

Mr. Ram: 006.

Hon. Gonzales: Right. So this project involves the procurement of GOES-16 receiving system inclusion of installation, warranty, training and maintenance. However, subsequent to approval being granted by the Cabinet to acquire the system, it was discovered that the metrological division in Tobago has a system that the Piarco office can make use of, so there is absolutely no need for the Piarco office to obtain its own GOES system. They can share the information with Scarborough or rather Tobago, and that is how we propose to move forward. So there is absolutely no need for us to acquire a separate GOES system service for Piaro, the information can be shared.

Madam Chairman: G: Sanitary Services. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, with respect to line Items 015, 017 and 019, can the hon. Minister indicate whether these projects—what is the status of these projects, please?

Hon. Gonzales: Two placed on hold pending the receipt of funding.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Just on a point of clarification with respect to Item number 013 under Sanitary Services. Will this—013, please. Will this project, is this project—does this project pertain to recycling water?

Hon. Gonzales: No. No. No. Not at all.

Mr. Ram: These are SWMCOL projects?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, they are SWMCOL-related projects to improve its recovery and recycling facilities. It is not to recycle water.

3.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so we go on to the Infrastructure Development Fund, we are moving to page 207. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. And hon. Members, this Item spans two pages, and I will therefore announce the project groups. B. Local Water Sources; F. Other Water Projects. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, Item No. 012: Upgrade of Petrotrin Guyaguayare Water Treatment Phase 3. I see there is an allocation of \$1 million. I note they have been working on that project for quite some time. Could you give us a little update as to where we are? If it will be completed in this fiscal year, and what benefits we can expect from that improved facility in the Petrotrin area in Guyaguayare?

Hon. Gonzales: One second, Member. We complete this project in this financial year. All right, the description of the project is that it is being undertaken to improve the water and treatment processes, the chemical treatment and to replace the under-sized equipment as a result of the additional raw water supply in the area. It will result in an increased supply of 1.25 million additional gallons of water to service this particular area. The status is that it is in its planning stage, and we intend, we propose rather, to have the project completed in this financial year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Minister, there is an ongoing issue with the current supply where we have to shift the supply to service the industrial area in Galeota Point from time to time. That creates quite a bit of hardship for the constituents. Will this particular facility resolve that problem where you can service both the communities and the industrial sites simultaneously?

Hon. Gonzales: For this project, to resolve that particular issue that arose, by

sending the water, I think, to the Galeota area, once this project is completed the problem that you alluded to will be addressed.

Mr. Paray: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 010: Refurbishment Works at Caroni Water Treatment Plant, I see 2 million has been allocated for fiscal 2021. My question is, would this complete the works on the plant?

Hon. Gonzales: What is the question, sorry?

Dr. Seecheran: Would this allocation of 2 million in fiscal 2021, would the refurbishment works be completed with this allocation?

Hon. Gonzales: Yes, we expect to complete that refurbishment work in 2021. It is a critical project for the Water and Sewerage Authority, and we believe that with the allocations that we have received it will go a long way in allowing the Water and Sewerage Authority to make some advances in completing this project in 2021.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: G. Sanitary Services; I. Water and Sewerage. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 39 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister, thank you PS, and thank you the representatives from T&TEC, WASA and the other representatives from the Ministry. You all are excused.

Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport, \$2,417,253,141.

Madam Chairman: Use the time to become oriented, we are on page 257 of the Recurrent Expenditure Estimates.

Hon. Member: What page?

Madam Chairman: 257.

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

Hon. Sinanan: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Works and Transport is responsible for providing physical infrastructure and transport service required for the social and economic development of the country. The Ministry covers maritime transport, aviation, coastal protection, planning and implementation of road and drain infrastructure, construction, maintenance and mechanical service issues, enforcement of laws under the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, traffic warden service as well as the traffic management measures. Having regard of the uncertain times in which we are operating, the Ministry will ensure prudent and financial management by closely monitoring project execution with a view to re-prioritize expenditure as required to maintain value for money, and address emergencies as they arise. In particular, we will seek to work with the technocrats of the Ministry of Finance to ensure that adequate funds are available for the Ministry's ongoing and planned work during the financial year. I stand ready to provide information on activities, programmes and projects under the Ministry of Works and Transport's schedule fiscal 2021, either at this time or in writing as may be required. Thank you, Madam Chair. We look forward to the questions.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

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

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,417,253,141 for Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the*

Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly, and the Draft Estimates of Development Programme. We shall now proceed to consider the Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure.

As I said we are on page 257. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Highways. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under Highways, line Item 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., 2021 is estimated at 87 million. Could you say the number of staff that this number represents?

Hon. Sinanan: Highways Division, the permanent establishment, 1,936.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Minister. Minister, under Highways Division and same line Item 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., approximately over 1,900 individuals, you expended 87 million in 2020, approximately, the Revised Estimates. During the COVID time, how was the Highways Division staff utilized during the period like say March, April, May? Were they considered essential? I just wanted to have an idea how that 87 million was expended in 2020.

Hon. Sinanan: They were on rotation, so we had staff coming in on rotation to make sure we maintained the social distancing and so on.

Mr. Lee: So there was still work going on in respect to highways?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, to some extent. Yes.

Mr. Lee: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Minister, you indicated that there are 1,936 staff on the establishment, can you let us know how many vacancies are there?

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, could I provide you with that information?

Mr. Hosein: Do you have how many contract officers are in that Division?

Hon. Sinanan: The contract employees, Highways Division—we had 21

vacancies, so I could correct that there for you, and the number of contracted employees on the highways—

Madam Chairman: Item—is the Member for Barataria/San Juan asking that, it might assist the Minister in being able to answer—

Mr. Hosein: I think that may fall under 02, when we get there. The Sub-Item 02: Goods and Services, so I will ask it when I get there.

Hon. Sinanan: We have 28 positions.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, under 01, Highways Division, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I am taking into consideration the public outcry in terms of sometimes the potholes on our roads and so on, and I know there is a shortage of road officers at the Highways Division, timely reporting would assist the Ministry in terms of getting these patches done. Is the Ministry planning to address this issue in this fiscal year? I mean, it has been ongoing for years, but it is getting worse and worse now. Any idea of the Ministry addressing road officers to fill those areas?

Hon. Sinanan: We have been. Most areas have been completed, and we intend to complete within the next two months.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Traffic Management. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item again, Wages and C.O.L.A., 14,600,000. I just seek clarification, Traffic Wardens fall under this line Item, the Traffic Wardens' salaries?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Lee: Okay, thank you.

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

Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Minister, again, line Item 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., could you just state the number of employees in the Drainage Division?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Mechanical Services. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Also, Minister, [*Inaudible*] under the same line Item.

4.00 p.m.

Hon. Sinanan: So we have that broken down into the different areas: Drainage North is 31, Drainage Central is 42, Drainage East is 6 and Drainage South is 10.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Mechanical Services; Item 007: Maintenance, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre? Item 008: Construction, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 01 or 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., 8.8 million and 01 is 5.2 million. Could you just, for my clarity and information, what does that Division do, the Construction Division?

Hon. Sinanan: What is the question? Can you just repeat that question?

Mr. Lee: 008: Construction Division; line Item 01: Salaries is 15.2 million and 02: Wages and C.O.L.A. is 8.8 million. For my own clarity, that division called construction, what is their role within the Ministry?

Hon. Sinanan: That is furniture—

Mr. Lee: A specific type of construction?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah. They are part of the furniture branch.

Mr. Lee: Wood-working then?

Hon. Sinanan: And they provide the regulatory function for the public buildings and so. So when we have to inspect buildings after earthquakes and so, that will be

the division that we will call out.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 012: Unemployment Relief Programme. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you indicate to this House, how many members by the geographical locations— I know that the URP is split into various areas, how many persons are currently on the URP programme?

Hon. Sinanan: That is not under this Item, eh.

Mr. Hosein: Under Salaries and Cost of Living, sorry, 01.

Hon. Sinanan: Now, this is the public service.

Mr. Hosein: This is the programme to—

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, but this is the public servants work—

Mr. Hosein: I agree. I will ask when we get to that Item.

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, yeah.

Madam Chairman: Item 014: Transport; Item 015: Maritime Services. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Highways. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Under Highways, Minister, line Item 12: Material and Supplies. The Revised Estimate in 2020 was 197,000; the Estimate for 2021 is \$2 million. The question is, the materials and supplies are that directly linked to the 1,900 employees that you have approximately in the Highways Division to be able for them to do their jobs, their work, do you think that is a sufficient number? We are seeing that in 2020, the Revised is 197,000. Could you explain how would they be able to function without the materials and supplies over 1,900 individuals? Are we getting value for money on the production aspect of the Highways Division?

Hon. Sinanan: Right. This allocation here is mostly used for the asphalt plant, for

things like bitumen and so, for the patching. So, this is geared towards that. And the Highways Division, they have other work that does not include material and services, more like the cuttings and so, vegetation control.

Mr. Lee: All right, so my question is—

Hon. Sinanan: Well, like everything else, obviously, we would want to get more but then they will have to tell us where to take it from. So yes, the money might be, you know, looking a little bit short but it is what we have to work with.

Mr. Lee: All right. I understand that Minister but it is in relationship to last year's question, similar, by another Member of Parliament, whether or not we are rationalizing the productivity-wise of the 1,900 workers and the limited amount of materials that is being provided, if they actually have sufficient materials to do the work, to be able to give the country an eight-hour day?

Hon. Sinanan: What we do from time, we would supplement. Once we utilize the funding available here, we will supplement and then go back to the mid-year review.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Can I ask another question, Chair?

Madam Chairman: Sure, you can.

Mr. Lee: Under line Item, Minister, 28, under Other Contracted Services, you might not have it but the 35 million that is estimated in 2021, I know it has declined from your Estimate of 2020. But if you do not have it, what type of contracted services that you envisage for 2021? You can give it in writing.

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Lee: That is it. I rest.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 16: Contract Employment. With the proposed increase there, is it anticipated that new positions

will be filled?

Hon. Sinanan: It is not an increase if you look at the figures. This is to just fill the existing—

Mr. Rambally: Existing.

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Rambally: Okay, thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, just one question on— following up on line Item 28, I know hon. Minister, you undertook to provide something in writing. Would it be possible to give us a guide in writing as to the process of issuance of these contracts?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, sure.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Traffic Management; Item 004: Central Planning Unit; Item 005: Drainage. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, we are at page 267, 268.

Mr. Lee: Minister, under Drainage, 005; line Item 09: Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment, 2020 the Revised was 5.3 million and then 2021 is 20 million. What kind of heavy equipment is this 20 million being catered for?

Hon. Sinanan: For the desilting programme.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 16: Contract Employment. Are you able to tell us how many persons are employed under this Item?

Hon. Sinanan: Okay, we will provide you with that in writing, if you would allow.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, hon. Minister. If I may just ask, you know, crave your indulgence, if there are other persons who the Ministry intends to take on as well in fiscal 2021 could that be listed as well?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Line Item 28: Other Contracted Services, for 25.5 million. You can provide the list of the services that is envisaged for 2021 in writing.

Hon. Sinanan: So, what we have there is 14 walling and paving projects at various water courses across Trinidad.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Mechanical Services; Item 007: Maintenance; Item 008: Construction; Item 009: Environmental Health and Safety Unit. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, again, at Item 16 with the Contract Employment, would it be possible to have the number of persons employed under this—

Hon. Sinanan: Nineteen, 19.

Mr. Rambally:—on contract at the Unit.

Hon. Sinanan: Nineteen employees.

Mr. Rambally: Sorry.

Hon. Sinanan: Nineteen employees.

Mr. Rambally: Nineteen. And is there any anticipation of employing new persons in fiscal 2021?

Hon. Sinanan: No, not at this time.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Traffic Warden Unit. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister line Item 16: Contract Employment, 23 million. Could you identify—well firstly, in 2020, how many—I guess this line Item is in respect to traffic wardens, correct, Minister? How many traffic wardens

were employed in 2020 and what is the number for 2021?

Hon. Sinanan: We have 686 at this point in time. But we do have a high rate of attritions so we sought to take on 100 at a time because of the training process.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Unit; Item 012: Unemployment Relief Programme. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Now, Minister, earlier on I asked about the employment and the number of persons in the programme. There are two line Items I was looking for and it is not here, which is short-term employment or contract employment. I am not seeing it so I do not know whether or not I can ask for— Madam Chair, those two Items are not here, so I wanted to know how many persons are in the programme currently? I thought it would have been—

Hon. Sinanan: There is an unemployment fund and the programme is funded from that.

Mr. Hosein: But should there not be a specific line Item for us to account for the short-term employment at least?

Hon. Sinanan: Well, unfortunately, it is not accounted for like that. The public service arm of it is accounted separate and the unemployment fund funds the programme, which includes the monthly-paid and the contract employees.

Mr. Hosein: So, basically—but can you tell me then, how many persons are in the programme?

Madam Chairman: But it would not be under this Item, because this is Goods and Services. And if I understand what the Minister says is, that matter that you wish to interrogate does not come from this. It comes under a specific fund and the employment that you are looking at as contract employment would be under that. It

will not be under any line Item here.

Mr. Hosein: Or anywhere else?

Madam Chairman: I did not get the impression of anywhere else but I know it is not under here.

Mr. Hosein: Because I even checked in the—without anticipating—

Madam Chairman: You know, again, I guess the Minister of Finance may help us here. Some things are moneys appropriated and so on, and I guess the Minister of Finance, we can ask for his intervention just to explain.

Mr. Imbert: Could he repeat the question?

Madam Chairman: The Unemployment Relief Fund, I am being told does not come from moneys appropriated. Where is it accounted for?

Mr. Imbert: It would not be accounted in these documents. It is a charge on oil companies. There is a tax on the price of oil. I will find out exactly where it is recorded and submit the information.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: The Director of Budgets has confirmed that the unemployment fund is a special fund that is not appropriated and will not appear in these documents. Okay? But I will get the relevant document that it appears in, so you will know where to look for it.

Madam Chairman: Item 014: Transport Division. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 08: Rent, an increase in 623,000. Could the Minister indicate why this increase?

Hon. Sinanan: Allocation to be used for payment of rent for the Point Fortin Licensing Office.

Mr. Charles: The Point—

Hon. Sinanan: Point Fortin Licensing Office.

Mr. Charles: In the context of our straitened circumstances, and I know that there are a number of buildings in the ex-Trintoc area, is it, you know—I am just concerned that we are spending increased moneys, given our circumstances, when I think alternative arrangements could be made that are cheaper.

Hon. Sinanan: I could give you the assurance that at the Ministry of Works and Transport, we do look at rental expenditure and wherever we can save, wherever we can go into the Ministry of Works and Transport's compound, we do. And if there is an appropriation here, it is because we would have checked the relevant areas, because we have been moving out of rental expenditure over the last two to three years and moving into properties owned by the Ministry of Works and Transport.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Charles: I understand because I am seeing—

Hon. Sinanan: But I will take your point and we will ensure—

Mr. Charles: I am seeing in Unemployment Relief just above, same 08, an increase and increase, and I agree with you that rent is one of the areas that we want to look at to cut back expenditures given our circumstances. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 015: Maritime Services; Item 016: Procurement Unit. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Chair. Minister, 016 is your Procurement Unit and under line Item 16: Contract Employment, budgeted for this year is 500,000. Now, I have heard you over time that your Procurement Unit is a very important unit for you, but I am trying to correlate these Goods and Services expenditure to permanent staff unless they are under the Contract Employment, can you guide me if this Contract Employment cost of 500,000 is for your Procurement Unit staffing?

Hon. Sinanan: So we have done the recruitment and we are about to bring on the staff there. Twelve staff.

Mr. Lee: To specialized procurement?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Lee: And they will fall under Contract Employment?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Lee: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Minister, is this Procurement Unit part of the procurement office that we were told is underfunded, or is it a standalone unit?

Hon. Sinanan: This is a unit at the Ministry of Works and Transport. This is the Ministry of Works and Transport Procurement Unit.

Mr. Charles: Procurement Unit. And it has no dotted line relationship with that office, the procurement office?

Hon. Sinanan: And that office is an independent office. That is an independent—

Mr. Charles: Well, I have to ask it.

Hon. Sinanan: That is an independent office, but we will follow the guidelines—

Mr. Charles: Of that office?

Hon. Sinanan:—of that office.

Mr. Young: Madam Chair, may I assist here to assist my colleague? As you are aware, Member for Naparima, the legislation sets out and there is only one required office for each procurement unit as per the legislation. What Cabinet did on the guidance of the Ministry of Finance is we decided, okay, each Ministry must have a procurement unit, and depending on the size of the Ministry, state enterprise, et cetera, it would determine the composition and size of the procurement unit per Ministry, per statutory authority, et cetera. So you would see

in the various Ministries that there would be some line Item there for the coming in of the various procurement units.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 276. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Highways; Item 003: Traffic Management; Item 004: Central Planning Unit; Item 005: Drainage; Item 006: Mechanical Services; Item 007: Maintenance. We are at page 278. Item 008: Construction; Item 009: Environmental Health and Safety Unit; Item 010: Traffic Warden Unit; Item 011: Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Unit; Item 012: Unemployment Relief Programme; Item 014: Transport; Item 015: Maritime Services; Item 016: Procurement Unit. We are now at page 281. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organization; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to the Trinidad Transport Board, this is listed as a non-profit organization. Can you just explain what benefit that 330,000 allocation brings to the Ministry of Transport; what is the role and what benefit they bring to us?

Hon. Sinanan:—item for the board members, and the transport board monitors the importation and the approval of heavy vehicles and the routes that they can work on.

Dr. Bodoë: But it is a non-profit organization.

Hon. Sinanan: Yes. It is a regulatory agency to monitor the heavy vehicles that are imported.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, under 09: Debit Card System, could you just give us a little clarity or explanation as to what this really

entails, this Debit Card System?

Hon. Sinanan: You would recognize some time ago the programme moved away from cheques and they use a debit card system. So if you work in the URP you get a debit card and the money goes straight to your account and then you withdraw on the debit card. So this is to facilitate that debit card service.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, just as a follow-up on this. Is it that all persons who are under URP would benefit with this Debit Card System where you have—

Hon. Sinanan: Yes. Once you are employed in the URP you are paid under the debit card system—under the fund.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Minister, just to be clear, the \$2 million we are allocating under this line Item for the Debit Card System, that is to pay for the actual cards and the service—

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, that is the service to the bank.

Mr. Hosein: Who is the service provider?

Hon. Sinanan: I think it is FCB at this point.

Mr. Hosein: FCB?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: And another question on line Item 12: Fuel Relief Grant to Maxi Taxi Owners. From this \$3.2 million how many persons would have benefited?

Hon. Sinanan: I will have to furnish you with that information.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Item 008: Subsidies; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. We go on, this is a new book. Sub-Head 06. [*Interruption*] You have a question? Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Item 004: Statutory Boards.

Hon. Members—*[Interruption]* Well, we developed that in the new book. Okay? So hon. Members—page 381. That is Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, page 381. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Is this where you are, Member for Barataria/San Juan?

Mr. Hosein: The Civil Aviation Authority.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Passenger and Cargo Terminals; Item 003: Airports Operations; Item 004: Runways, Taxiways, Grounds and Car-Parks; Item 005: Security. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Passenger and Cargo Terminals; Item 003: Airports Operations. We are at page 383. Item 004: Runways, Taxiways, Grounds and Car Parks; Item 005: Security. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at Item 28: Other Contracted Services. I note that there was a drop in the 2020 Estimate for \$6 million, 6.5, but it went back up to 36 million in the Revised Estimate, and then it is dropped again. Can the Minister indicate what would have caused this increase in 2020 from 6.5 to 36 between the Estimate and the Revised Estimate?

Hon. Sinanan: This was as a result of the reduction in the security services because of the COVID situation.

Mr. Tancoo: I am not sure I understand.

Hon. Sinanan: There is a reduction in—

Mr. Tancoo: There is a reduction between 2020 and 2021. My query, however, is there was an Estimate of 6.5 million in 2020, then a Revised Estimate which means that you would have then paid more money; you are budgeted to pay more money than initially estimated. There is a \$30 million increase between the Estimate and

the Revised Estimate for 2020.

Hon. Sinanan: Okay. I now understand what you are asking for. Let me just get that information and if possible I could furnish you with that.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Anything else, Member for Oropouche West?

Mr. Tancoo: No, more. Thanks.

Madam Chairman: So, Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Similar kind of question. In 2020, there was an Estimate of 1.5 million and a Revised Estimate of 8.795 million. I am just curious as to what would have caused this drastic increase between the Estimate and the Revised Estimate? Would the Minister be able to provide that to me in writing, Sir?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item—Member for Chaguanas—excuse me, Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you again, Ma'am. The 2020 Estimate was \$160 million for Depreciation, line Item 01. I have noted a \$50 million difference—

Madam Chairman: Oh, you are in Other Transfers? You are in Item 009.

Mr. Tancoo: Oh, I am sorry. I thought you reached there already. My apologies.

Madam Chairman: So I will call it because I do not believe there are any other questions. Item 009: Other Transfers.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister provide a clarification, 01: Depreciation, as to why there was a \$50 million decrease between 2020 and 2021?

Hon. Sinanan:—a reduction in the value of the equipment; value of the assets.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, that is fine. That is fine. Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Any other questions, Member for—

Mr. Tancoo: No, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we go on to 50 - Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. We are at page 396. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. General Administration, 001. 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and I see 38 million has been allocated for 2021.

We have heard in the public domain that the Port Authority—

4.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Page 396. I am sorry.

Mr. Charles: I will wait, 396.

Madam Chairman: Page 396. Port Authority, General Administration, 001, 01.

Mr. Charles: “Yuh have it?” Yeah, the question is for 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, 38 million has been allocated but we are hearing talk in the public domain about selling of the port or leasing of the port or so. What is the thinking behind this allocation? Is it an intent to retain staff or while you sort out whatever plans you have forward, you allocated as such?

Hon. Sinanan: There is a process that has to happen at the port and until then and when that happens, the port has to operate so the staff has to be paid, so this is to ensure that the port operates until such time.

Madam Chairman: Item 002, Engineering Division; Item 004, Marine Division; Item 005, Wharfs Division; Item 006, Cruise Ship Complex. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services. Item 001, General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam. I am at Sub-Item 11, Books and Periodicals, I

note that there has been a phenomenal, a \$659,000 increase in expectation to spend under this Sub-Item. Can the Minister indicate why that is so? That is a very sizeable amount to spend on books and periodicals.

Hon. Sinanan: This includes IT-related subscriptions for various systems and technical support which are estimated at 0.6 million.

Mr. Tancoo: So these are not—

Hon. Sinanan: And to put in new systems as well.

Mr. Tancoo:—books and periodicals, these are licences and so on?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes and a new IT system.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may continue, Item 23, Fees. There is close to \$2 million increase in the allocation for Fees. Can the Minister provide a list of these fees and who the beneficiaries are?

Hon. Sinanan: It is an increase for provisions of court settlements based on on-going legal cases which are not settled as expected in the previous financial year. It is a provision for on-going matters.

Mr. Tancoo: So these are legal fees?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister provide a list of the attorneys or companies that are receiving these fees?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Item 29, Losses on Foreign Currency Conversion, there is nothing allocated before 2020 and we see an estimate of 980,000, nearly “ah million dollars”. Is there an expectation of turbulence in the foreign exchange market? It seems to be a significant amount.

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, this is for the acquisition of the new crane that we expect to have installed at the port.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, just as a follow up. Why would there be a loss in conversion? Has the exchange rate initially proposed fallen?

Hon. Sinanan: There is a variation based on when the down payment was made which would have been say about six months ago.

Mr. Tancoo: But this is budgeted for current fiscal.

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah.

Mr. Tancoo: Six months ago would have been the previous fiscal for which there was no allocation.

Hon. Sinanan: This is 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Correct.

Hon. Sinanan: So it is a projection in 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: So we are projecting that there is going to be a loss on the foreign currency conversion?

Hon. Sinanan: Let me just correct this figure on this here. Let me let the financial expert answer that one.

Mr. Manning: Yes, through the Chair, it is the difference between when the project was initiated to when you are paid so that is why there is a loss because there may have been a change in the exchange rate.

Mr. Charles: Could you tell us in what currency the crane was purchased and therefore what fluctuation would allow for such a significant increase?

Mr. Imbert: It would have been purchased in euros so that is why you have the fluctuation.

Mr. Charles: But is the Minister saying that the fluctuation in the euro market is significant enough—this is not the purchase price, this is only the fluctuation. You

are saying enough to make “ah million dollars”?

Hon. Sinanan: This is over an 18-month period.

Mr. Manning: That is why we have derivative markets with forward rates because rates change all the time.

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister tell us the cost?

Hon. Sinanan: The value of the crane is in excess of €10 million.

Mr. Charles: So essentially you are saying that when you purchased it and now, there has been a fluctuation in the euro vis-à-vis the Trinidad currency to justify this million?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Charles: Well, could the Minister tell us and provide us with the cost that we paid at the time and with the down payment we made, what was the market rate between the euro and the TT dollars then and what it is now? You can do that in writing.

Mr. Imbert: The exchange rate is in the public domain. The Member can gain access to that. That is not required here.

Madam Chairman: I think what the Member wants were two things. The Member wanted the cost in euros and the exchange rate that was operated at the different times. Is that it?

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Item 002, Engineering Division; Item 004, Marine Division; Item 002, Wharfs Division; Item 006, Cruise Ship Complex.

Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases. We are at page 399. Item 001, General Administration; Item 002, Engineering; Item 005, Wharfs Division; Item 006, Cruise Ship Complex.

Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007, Households; Item

009, Other Transfers.

52, Public Transport Service Corporation. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure. We are going on to page 416. Item 001, General Administration. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under Salaries and Cost of Living, I see an increase of 2.1, 2021 is 18.6 estimated and that is an increase of 2.1. This increase given the whole issue about freezing the hiring at this point in time given the economics, this 2.1 increase is designed for either arrears in salary or could you clarify, especially with PTSC? Page 416.

Hon. Sinanan: Just give me that line Item again.

Mr. Lee: Page 416, line Item 01.

Hon. Sinanan: This is for the monthly-paid employees assigned under the general admin.

Mr. Lee: Why is there an increase of 2.1 million estimated for 2021 given the whole issue about a hold on hiring at this point in time?

Hon. Sinanan: That is not for public—

Mr. Imbert: Let me just clear this is up, Madam Chairman, if you will allow me. This is coming up all the time and it is getting a bit ridiculous now. The freeze on filling vacancies refers only to establishment posts in the public service. I have already said this in this debate—in this committee, sorry. It does not apply to the contract positions, it does not apply to state enterprises. It is simply establishment positions of public officers in the public service.

Mr. Charles: Personnel Expenditure, Salaries.

Madam Chairman: Yes, just a follow up to that, yes.

Mr. Charles: Salaries would refer to permanent persons in the public service. This is 01 as my colleague asked, these would refer to permanent people.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So I think what the Minister said, if I recollected well, the freeze only applies to permanent positions in the public service.

Mr. Imbert: Correct.

Madam Chairman: It does not apply to contract positions and state enterprises.

Mr. Imbert: Correct.

Madam Chairman: So the PTSC is not public service.

Mr. Imbert: Is not the public service.

Mr. Charles: Never was.

Mr. Imbert: What is wrong with this man? [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member, Minister of Finance, you were doing admirably well today with tolerance. Okay? Minister of Finance, please.

Mr. Charles: We are seeking clarification.

Madam Chairman: Yeah, but Member, while we may seek clarification and I think you all are entitled to seek clarification and I think the Ministers are duty bound to respond. I think all of us here have a certain sort of understanding of certain things and therefore if we are looking at an entity that is state enterprise or a statutory body and we are not cognizant of the fact that it is not a public service permanent position, it may say something about our alertness. Okay. And as I keep saying, this is very tedious but we have to summons all that is within us to be alert. Okay?

Mr. Charles: It is important for the population to understand that the freeze—

Madam Chairman: No, no, Member, one minute, please. The point is that I am regrettably not part of the conversation but I will also give guidance, all right and while it is yes, the public is listening, I am sure the public understands the difference between a state enterprise and a Department of the Government, a Ministry. Okay, so I really do not want us to really look at our public in that kind

of light which might be implied from your statement. Okay? So let us go on.
Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would just like if the hon. Minister could just kindly provide some clarification on the Item 01. The increase of the 2.1 million, is that increase to pay outstanding liabilities or is that to fill new vacancies within the organization?

Hon. Sinanan: There are no major outstanding liabilities, so there will be some positions to fill. There are minor outstanding liabilities but it will be for some positions to be filled.

Mr. Ratiram: Just a follow up. Would the hon. Minister be able to provide us, perhaps in writing of the positions to be filled and the terms of reference for those positions?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Madam Chairman: So Item 02, Vehicles and Equipment Maintenance. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 02, can the Minister explain what the 1.5 increase in this line Item is for?

4.45 p.m.

Hon. Sinanan: It is not an increase. The original budget was actually 45 million. We used 41.5, and this year the estimate is 43. So if you look at the original estimate, which was 45, it is actually less than the original estimate.

Mr. Ratiram: Just a follow-up to that. As we are going back, Minister, the 2019 actual figure was 35 and you said they used 41. So that was an increase of 6 million here. Can you kindly explain where that increase was realized?

Hon. Sinanan: It is under the daily-rated and we can provide the details for you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Property Development Services. Item 008: Transit Express Commuter Services. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration, page 417. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you again, Ma'am. Minister, the same question with regard to fees. I am trying to figure out if these are legal fees. It is a sizable jump from 2.5 million in 2020 revised to 11 projected for 2021. That is an increase of about 300 per cent. Is there a particular reason for this, Sir? Sub-Item 23, please.

Hon. Sinanan: These are auditing fees, legal claims. Again, some legal claims and consultants and outstanding moneys owed to the Securities and Exchange.

Mr. Tancoo: All right, so again can I ask the Minister to provide that in writing; a listing of the entities to which this money would be paid and for what purpose?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. A similar question with regard to insurance; that is Item 61. Again, there has been an increase of \$3.8 million. Would the Minister be able to provide an indication as to why we have gone from revised 6.5 to three estimated 10.3?

Hon. Sinanan: It is an increase in the property coverage, the number of buses and an increase in the employees' medical plan.

Hon. Sinanan: Thank you very much, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 16: Contract Employment. The 2019 actual figure for contract employment was 3.6 million and it was then estimated for 2020 of 7.3. Can the hon. Minister advise if there was a change in the structure, or there were new contract positions that was actually recommend, proposed and filled?

Hon. Sinanan: It is an increase in contracted positions including the Mechanical

and Engineering Unit.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister also provide us with the details of all the contracted positions that were filled in 2020?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram: And the new positions that were—are these contracted positions new positions created or they are positions that were on the structure that were filled via contract?

Hon. Sinanan: They would be on the establishment.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Vehicle and Equipment Maintenance. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 12: Materials and Supply. Can the hon. Minister explain to us what are the material and supplies that this line Item is used for?

Hon. Sinanan: That is an order for 267 CNG buses and oil for 280 diesel and 67 CNG buses. There was an increase in the first quarter with 220 diesel and 130 CNG buses. CNG versus diesel, there is a saving that is estimated of 4.3 million.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, through you, as we move to CNG what we would expect to realize is a decrease in the fuel cost. However, what we are seeing here is an increase of 14 million in this line Item.

Hon. Sinanan: Because it is an increase in the amount of buses and they have projected an increase.

Mr. Ratiram: Those buses would be CNG buses or—?

Hon. Sinanan: It would be a combination.

Mr. Ratiram: A combination. Can the Minister provide us with how many additional buses we are talking about?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram: Also, maintenance of vehicles, there has been an increase of 19 million in the maintenance of these vehicles. Can the Minister please explain this increase?

Hon. Sinanan: This is for the increase in the periodic maintenance and with the addition of new buses, an increase in the running cost and other repairs in the fleet.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Port of Spain Transit Centre. Item 006: Health Transit Unit. Item 007: Property Development Services. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. With regard to Item 43 under this Sub-Head, that of security services, I know that there has been a \$6.8 million increase between the Revised Estimates of 2020 and the budgeted figure for 2021. Can the Minister indicate what would have constituted the reason for such a significant increase?

Hon. Sinanan: That is the same amount from the original estimate of 2020. It is an ongoing contract with the security providers. It is not an increase. It is the original budgeted figure for 2020.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay. Well then, let me ask the question a little bit differently then. Why then would the figure have fallen from the Estimate of 21.8 million to 15.6 as the Revised Estimate?

Hon. Sinanan: Because we do have some outstanding bills from that year.

Mr. Tancoo: But if you have an outstanding, that figure should have gone up rather than decrease. Or is it that you have an outstanding in 2021?

Hon. Sinanan: 2020. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Tancoo: Is the Member for Port of Spain/Morvant engaging in line Item—?

Mr. Young: First of all, Madam Chair, if I may intervene, there is no Port of Spain/Morvant, as far as I am aware. There is a Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. I was just making the observation with respect to the proposition that one

can have an advance owing in 2021, and we have not reached there. So I was just wondering whether that is how business was done between 2010 and 2015, the prepayment of contracts.

Mr. Tancoo: Allow me to clarify, Minister. Allow me to clarify please with my question; to repeat my question. The Minister of Works and Transport indicated that there were some outstanding balances which would have affected the value here. The value went from an Estimate of 20.8 million estimate to a Revised Estimate downwards of 50 million for 2020, which is the last period. If you have outstanding, that figure should have gone up, not down, hence my question of whether or not we had advanced those outstanding into 2021. Outstanding means that something from previous is being pushed forward. It is very straightforward, very simple.

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, and the answer to that is yes, that we had some outstanding bills, so when you bring it forward that is where you get back to the original figure.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Sir. Maybe you may want to clarify with your colleague.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: The actual figure for this same line Item in 2019 was 14 million and if it is that there is an outstanding of 6.8, keeping it where it was at 21 million, it basically implies that there has been an increase from the 14 million to 21 million. Can the Minister advise if a new security contract has been issued to facilitate this increase?

Hon. Sinanan:—[Inaudible] negotiations so, no. The answer to that is no, there was no additional security contract.

Mr. Ratiram: So then that 2019 to 2020 would have been an increase with the previous security contract.

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, to my knowledge there is no expected increase but I

can get the information and pass it to the Member.

Mr. Ratiram: Not expected. What I am referring to, Minister, if I may explain once more. The figure in 2019 was at 14 million, whereas in 2020 and in 2021, it has gone to 21 million. So there is an increase there from the actual figure that was paid out in 2019. If there is no new security contracts, is it that the rates have been revised upwards to facilitate this increase of \$6 million?

Hon. Sinanan: So, Madam Chair, I would clarify the information and submit to the Member.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Also Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance to Buildings. There has been an increase of 2.5 million. Can the Minister indicate what this increase is going to represent, if the buildings to be repaired have already been identified and the projects have been identified?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, the projected cost includes cleaning materials, general upkeep, minor repairs to buildings of all depots and one million for the implementation of the PTSC and environmental plan and other major repairs would be conducted under the PSIP.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister provide copies of the contracts under this line Item?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 008: Transit Express Commuter Services. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you again, Chair. I am at Head 28: Other Contracted Services. I note that there has been a \$15.8 million increase between the Revised Estimate for 2020, and the Estimate for 2021. Can the Minister indicate what would have caused this increase?

Hon. Sinanan: This line Item represents a provision for the Ministry of Education School Transport Service Vote. This is utilized to pay school transport providers. Revised Estimate 29 million was due to the closure of the primary and secondary schools as a result of the COVID-19. So this will be a projection going forward.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 08: Rent lease, Office Accommodation and Storage, there is an increase of 261,000. It was nil in 2020 and in 2019. Is that a new facility that is being rented?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, this is a rental storage facility for archives and the records.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister also provide a copy of this new contract, please?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 02: Office Equipment. The actual spend in 2019 was \$512,000. Whereas it is estimated in 2021 for 2.2 million. Can the Minister kindly explain this significant increase?

Hon. Sinanan: That is for the upgrade of the purchase of computers, fire extinguishers and laptops.

Mr. Ratiram: Also, Other Minor Equipment has increased from 82,000 in 2019 to 2.1 million in 2021. Could the Minister kindly explain?

Hon. Sinanan: That is for Wi-Fi equipment for approximately 140 buses of the existing fleet, the automated ticket machines, specialized tools for the engineering and property development department.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister indicate how many of those buses have Wi-Fi

capability?

Hon. Sinanan: I will have to provide that for you.

5.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I note that there is a consistent budgeting of near \$4.5 million for severance pay to operational staff. Is it that staff are continuously being severed?

Hon. Sinanan: No. Through you, Madam Chair, this is the severance for employees who have retired.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers; 57: Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority. We move to page 429. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 01: Salary and Cost of Living Allowance. There has been an increase of \$13.979 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate if this is for outstanding liabilities or new vacancies that are going to be filled?

Hon. Sinanan: Increments payable and proposed recruitment for critical position in fiscal 2021.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister provide copies of those new positions to be filled?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: On line Item 01 also, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, can the Minister indicate whether or not there is any intention based on the increase also to revise the wages of some of the air traffic controllers based on the fact that they are still operating on a 2011 salary and they are not unionized?

Madam Chairman: We are talking about wages or salaries? Because I am not

seeing wages under—

Mr. Hosein: Salaries and Cost of Living.

Hon. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as Minister of Works and Transport I cannot speak to that. That is before the HRS Committee at this point in time.

Mr. Hosein: It is before which committee?

Hon. Sinanan: HRS Committee.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 08, again, \$1.5 million estimated for 2021. Can the Minister indicate what that is in respect of? And again, I understand the commitment he would give to closely look at rents.

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, through you, we will furnish the Member with that information.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North. Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 27: Official Overseas Travel. While the borders would have been closed for most of this year and may remain closed for some time, there is an increase of \$7.3 million for Official Overseas Travel. Can the Minister kindly explain this increase?

Hon. Sinanan: Actually it went down. It went down this year from 9.4 million to 1.6 million. And is now estimated at 9.

Mr. Ratiram: Yeah, that is the Revised Estimates.

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah.

Mr. Ratiram: The Revised Estimate would have been less and I guess that—

Hon. Sinanan: Going forward, but during the COVID period it went down from 9.4 to 1.6.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, so at a figure of 1.6 what I am seeing here—

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah.

Mr. Ratiram:—is an increase 7 million to bring it back up to—

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, it is a reduction during the COVID period and it is anticipated that it will go back to post-COVID. It will go back to its original post-COVID.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Pre-COVID.

Hon. Sinanan: Post.

Mr. Al-Rawi: No, pre—

Hon. Sinanan: It will go back to post. Yeah, it will go back up post-COVID.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, if I may continue?

Madam Chairman: Please, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 28: Other Contracted Services. The Actual spent for Other Contracted Services in 2019 was at 2.4 million and that has now increased in 2021 to an estimate of 14 million. Can the Minister kindly explain what this increase represents?

Hon. Sinanan: This is anticipated for a number of upgrades to the air navigation system. So this is an estimate, the cost of the upgrade to the air navigation system.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and Other Functions. For 2019 it was at 781,000 and we see it has increased in 2021 to 3.5 million. Can the Minister explain what functions we are looking at?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah. In 2020 it was 3.8 million, it went down to 40. Again, because of the COVID and it is anticipated that post-COVID you will go back to the original which is less than the original 2020 Estimate.

Mr. Ratiram: And when the Minister expects in this post-COVID period to commence?

Hon. Sinanan: If I had the answer for that I would not be sitting here.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 007: Households. Hon. Member, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book. Consolidated Fund, Sub-Head 09: Development Programme. We starting at page 109. Consolidated Fund. Item 001: Pre-Investment. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Madam Chair, just when you get down to Administrative Services—so that we can bypass that. Development of a National Transportation Plan.

Madam Chairman: But all of that is under Pre-Investment.

Mr. Lee: Okay, I will ask the question. Minister, under Administrative Services, 001: Development of a National Transportation Plan, in 2020 you had envisaged to spend \$1 million, nothing was spent and we come back with that. Could you tell us what is this National Transportation Plan that you plan to develop in 2021?

Hon. Sinanan: Okay, it is the National Transportation Plan to deal with air, sea, and land transportation. It encompasses everything. The terms of reference was completed and it is before the Cabinet.

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Sinanan: Sorry?

Mr. Lee: When do you expect that plan to take fruition this year once Cabinet approves it?

Hon. Sinanan: It is before the Cabinet at this point in time.

Mr. Lee: And this million dollars is for consultancy services?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, to engage the consultant.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Economic Structure. Hon. Members, Item 003 spans five pages therefore, I will announce the project groups. A: Drainage and

Irrigation. That is where you at, Pointe-a-Pierre? Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Major River Clearing Programme, 2020 you spent as far as the Revised Estimate 7.3 million. Could you give us an appreciation of what Major River Clearing Programme that was done in 2020? And the 10 million that is planned to be spent in 2021, what major river?

Hon. Sinanan: The Caroni River Rehabilitation and Improvement, the status report on that it is 90 per cent completed. The irrigation and drainage structures in the Caroni irrigation area phase 2. Felicity pump house. Those are the projects under that.

Mr. Lee: All right. So, in 2021 you will continue—

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, those projects will continue.

Mr. Lee:—those projects that have not been completed and what new projects have you identified to be started this year?

Hon. Sinanan: The embankment work on the Kelly Trace, the Sheldon Trace, St. Helena upstream and downstream, Piarco Bypass Road bridge, Church Street, Kelly Village, Caroni Village and El Socorro South.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Next line Item.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Item 001: Major River Clearing Programme. Minister, the expenditure on this programme, can you just confirm whether or not the works that are being carried out under this programme is based on the recommendations of the Royal Haskoning study on the Caroni River bridge for flood mitigation?

Hon. Sinanan: The Royal Haskoning study indicated several areas for work to be done on, and it did not give us an operational plan. They indicated—so what we are doing right now as we speak, we took out certain aspects of the Royal Haskoning study and that is what is being implemented. And we are were working

with the CAF, the Andean Development Bank, who have taken all the studies and are creating now a national drainage and flood plan. So, the answer to that is yes, the work that is coming out it came out from the Royal Haskoning Study.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And on Item 009: Programme of Upgrade to Existing Drainage Pumps and Gate Inventory. In my constituency, Minister, you know the El Socorro South, the pumps are not operating to full capacity. I see an allocation is being made for \$15 million for this year. Can you indicate whether or not there is any intention of the Ministry to replace the pumps at the El Socorro South area? Because those pumps cannot—if you repair it they would just work at bare minimum capacity. The pumps are in dire need of replacement and I want know whether or not this allocation will go to the replacement of any of those pumps?

Hon. Sinanan: Well, we do have a programme for the upgrade of the pumps and gates and the El Socorro area is part of that programme.

Mr. Hosein: So we are confirming this year we should get a replacement of those pumps?

Hon. Sinanan: It is a programme, so the drainage department, they are working on a programme on all 13 pump sites, and the El Socorro is part of that. But as I said, it is a three-year programme.

Mr. Hosein: So what then are the works that will be done in the El Socorro South area?

Hon. Sinanan: Okay, in 2019/2020 the following contracts were: Upgrade to the Tulsa Trace pump house, Sathoo Trace, structures at Bamboo 1, St. John, structures at the Trinidad point, St. Augustine, Caroni irrigation. In 2021 the Bamboo, the gate structures at St. Helena, the Bamboo pump house, Sealots pump house, the Moruga pump house, and the Williams Street pump house.

Mr. Hosein: But what are the works going to be—

Hon. Sinanan: So that is what is programmed for this financial.

Mr. Hosein: What works are going to be done to the El Socorro South pumps for this year?

Hon. Sinanan: I will give you that in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, in terms of the same line Item 001, in the Caroni River bank is there a particular approach that is being taken in terms of where the works are carried out? Or is it that works have started from one part and it is just continuously going along the Caroni River bank?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah. The phase one it is a continuous work on certain sections of the Caroni River that are in critical need of repair, then we go into a phase 2, and hopefully a phase 3. The idea is to look at the entire Caroni River because as you will accept, it is a very critical river to move the water through and take it all the way down to the Beetham.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, thank you. Just as an aside, Minister, this is a matter in which I have written you on behalf of Chaguanas West, so you know, I would appreciate at some point whether you can take me upon my offer.

5.15 p.m.

There are certain parts of this embankment in Caroni that have been severely compromised, which is why I asked the earlier question. So I know it may not have been brought to your attention or, it will receive attention in due course. But I would appreciate if you could take me up on that offer.

Hon. Sinanan: And then the plan is to look at the entire Caroni River at all the points that would have been breached and so far, what we saw the areas that we have attended to, we have not had any breach or any flooding in those areas. So the

intention is to treat with the entire Caroni River, but again, it has to be with the—based on the availability of funding.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Sir, I know you mentioned the St. John's Trace gates for 2019/2020 and I know that some work had started, but can you confirm whether this allocation will ensure that those gates are repaired? Whether the work will be completed during this financial year?

Hon. Sinanan: Well, the plan is to utilize the funding that we have available and then to go back in the mid-year review, if we do need additional funding. I can tell you now the gates are approximately 30 per cent, construction is at 30 per cent right now.

Dr. Bodoë: And the target for completion? Target date?

Hon. Sinanan: I will have to get the exact targeted date for completion.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I appreciate your candour in this question. As well, similar to my colleague from Fyzabad, I also have gates which are outstanding for quite a few years actually, in the constituency of Oropouche West, which also are in dire need of repair. Can I assume that this—that there will be consideration and allowing these funds for treatment of that desperately needed work?

Hon. Sinanan: As I said through you, Madam Chair, we do have a programme to upgrade all the pumps and gates. And I give you the assurance that all pumps and gates are being looked at, but we looked at them on the critical—those that are most critical. As I said, the Tulsa Trace is about 30 per cent completed, we are in El Socorro, the Sadhoo Trace Pump House; that has started. Work is ongoing at most of the pump houses and in 2021, we intend to start work on the ones that have not started as yet.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, it is not the pump house, I think you are talking about the gate in El Socorro South.

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, the Tulsa—

Madam Chairman: It is the Member for Oropouche West. Barataria/San Juan had had his turn and if he wished, he can then join the queue. Okay, Member for Oropouche West, are you on please?

Mr. Tancoo: One last question, Ma'am. And the Minister indicated that he had hired a group which was working together, to put together all former plans. Is that correct, Sir?

Hon. Sinanan: Not quite. We did not hire the group, the Andean Development Bank saw it fit to bring in a consultant to assist us with that. The cost of that has been borne by the Andean Development Bank and they are in the process of evaluating an international tender for a consultant to work with us, all costs to be borne by the Andean Development Bank.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Minister, is it safe to assume that the breach that occurred on the Caroni River bank in 2018, has that been fully repaired in the Kelly Village area?

Hon. Sinanan: We would have been working on the Caroni River in several areas, several points. Which specific breach you are speaking about?

Dr. Seecheran: Well, as far as I know, there was a breach around the Sieunarine Trace area. Has that been repaired?

Hon. Sinanan: I would have to check on it, I cannot—there were several breaches on the Caroni area about 2018.

Dr. Seecheran: So for line Item—

Hon. Sinanan: We would have repaired on that project which is an \$18 million project—

Dr. Seecheran: Right.

Hon. Sinanan:—several of the breaches, but I mean, I would have to check to see specifically which one you are speaking about.

Dr. Seecheran: So for line Item No. 003, could we get all the projects that happened there and in writing please?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 001: Major River Clearing Programme.

Madam Chairman: Could the Minister of Finance and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance stop disturbing the Minister. Thank you very much. The Minister sought my protection. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, under Item 001: Major River Clearing Programme, through you, Madam Chair, I would like to seek from the hon. Minister, within the constituency of Couva North, I know that some works would have been executed during the course of this year. And I must say that we do appreciate the response of the Minister to assist with the clearing of a portion of the Diana River, however, like clearing a portion of the Diana River, which most likely would have been budgeted here, the area cleared, there is a gush of water and then it backs up and causes flooding. Could the Minister advise if this Vote of \$10 million includes the completion of that project, to have the river cleared straight out to the Gulf?

Hon. Sinanan: Ongoing project. So work will continue on the Diana River improvement, there is a phase two which will prevent the erosion and flooding and

the health hazard in the Chase Village area. So yes, there is ongoing work on the Diana River.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much. And also the Honda River?

Hon. Sinanan: The Honda River, there is also work to be done on the Honda River.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Project P. Coastal Protection; A. Air Transport; B. Bus Transport. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under Bus Transport, Development of a Passenger Facility at Rio Claro. Only \$9,000 was spent in 2020. Could you tell us the status of that facility at—Passenger Facility at Rio Claro?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, there is a challenge on the site where there is a pan theatre and we are working to have that removed. So, there is some challenge on the site.

Mr. Lee: We expect some work, something to get started this year?

Hon. Sinanan: We are working to have the problem resolved.

Mr. Lee: No problem.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: With respect to the Cleaning of Electrical Power System, is that at Port of Spain Depot, Minister?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, Port of Spain. Yes, Port of Spain Depot.

Mr. Ratiram: The electrical connection near the Port of Spain, is that a temporary connection that they would have gotten and continued to be extended, or has the system upgraded to meet the requirements of the inspectorate?

Hon. Sinanan: And there is a tendering process and design for installation of a new electrical busbar, replacement of the derelict panels, wires and breakers. So it

is a contract to replace the entire system there. And the replacement of three transformers.

Mr. Ratiram: Well, that is not budgeted for in this year. Fiscal. So that most likely we will have to go into 2022.

Hon. Sinanan: We got \$700,000.

Mr. Ratiram: Would that be sufficient, Minister?

Hon. Sinanan: It is sufficient to start the project.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, Item 049: Acquisition of a Global Positioning/ Automatic Vehicle Location System, the GPS system I believe that is for the buses?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Is that project completed and are all the buses outfitted with GPS units?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, it is an ongoing project and we do have some funding under the recurrent.

Mr. Ratiram: All right, I notice that there is not anything identified here for this project. You are not taking into consideration especially recently we saw persons taking buses and driving out of the compound.

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North, are you finished? Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Madam Chairman, at 080: Upgrade of Priority Transit Mall Facilities at San Juan, Curepe and Tunapuna. Minister, I saw that \$768,000 would have been spent under this line Item in 2020. And there is an estimated \$1 million in 2021. Can you just give me a list of the upgrades that would have been done to the San Juan Transit Mall for 2020, and what is going to be projected to be done for 2021?

Hon. Sinanan: The activities include the tendering process and selection of a contractor, completion of the differently abled access at the San Juan and Curepe washrooms, an upgrade to the San Juan and Curepe Malls. So yes, there is work programmed for those areas.

Mr. Hosein: When is the work expected to be completed?

Hon. Sinanan: We are in the tendering process now, so I cannot give you a date when it will be completed but—

Mr. Hosein: Not before the end of this fiscal year.

Hon. Sinanan: We could submit that in writing to you but I cannot tell you at this point in time when it will be completed because we are in the tendering process now.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Asked and answered already, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Minister I am at line Item 061: Purchase of Engineering Fleet Maintenance System by the PTSC. You paid 563-odd thousand dollars on 2019 but budgeted \$2 million in 2020. Unfortunately, you only spent a quarter of that and you have not budgeted any money for 2021. Has that project been scrapped especially given—bearing in mind that you have purchased 100 new buses? The project was completed—

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, it was completed.

Mr. Tancoo: So instead of a \$2 million Estimate in 2020, the project was completed with \$475,885?

Madam Chairman: I do not think that, Member, from all that I have heard for this entire day, I do not think that would be a correct conclusion.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: I know you asked similar questions for the day. I do not think from all that you have heard and that I have heard, that would be a correct conclusion. I am sure the answer to that will come at the closing of accounts. This is an estimate that was re-estimated, that was done during the course of the year.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: So to say that that was all that was spent, I think would be misleading yourself. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Item 078: Refurbishment of Work Areas of the PTSC. Minister, within Chaguanas, any works identified for that area? Just to add, the terminus in Chaguanas is at the flyover where there are taxi stands existing, et cetera, which poses a serious issue there which you are well aware of. Can you just indicate?

Hon. Sinanan: 078: No, this is not for that purpose. This is for the tendering process, completion of the yard surface and upgrade, [*Inaudible*] and the store area at the San Fernando administrative building. This is not for Chaguanas. Sorry.

Ms. Mohit: Would it be looked at in the future?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Just a follow-up, Minister, to that Item 078: Refurbishment of Work Areas of the PTSC. Can you identify when this project is going to be completed, this line Item?

Hon. Sinanan: I would have to submit that information for you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much. Also—

Madam Chairman: Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: “Yep.” Design and Construction of a Deluxe Coach Service, Item 074: Design and Construction of a Coach Service Lounge (PTSC - South Quay, P O S). There is not anything budgeted for this 2021 fiscal term and the PTSC Lounge has been demolished from where it was on St. Vincent Street. Now I understand there is not any PTSC Lounge anymore. Can the hon. Minister indicate what are the plans for the Deluxe services that the PTSC would have been rolling out?

5.45 p.m.

Hon. Sinanan: Okay. So that project is being revisited by the board of the PTSC, but there is an area that is utilized now by the Deluxe Coach.

Mr. Ratiram: And this area is located on the platform?

Hon. Sinanan: On the compound.

Mr. Ratiram: All right. Item 070: Design and Construction of a New Passenger Terminal Depo at Sangsters Hill Tobago. It was estimated in 2020, \$5 million. There was not anything in the revised estimate. Were any activities completed?

Hon. Sinanan: Again, they are in the tendering process for the consultant service for the project implementation.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister advise when this project is proposed to be completed?

Hon. Sinanan: I will have to get that date for you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Road Systems Operations and Services. Roads and Bridges. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. This is particularly curious. You had an estimate of \$20.75 million budgeted for what you would have catered for, very important works to be done on roads and bridges throughout the country, but you only spent

\$337,000 of that. Can the Minister indicate which bridges and roads were scheduled to be done and, therefore, which you propose to do in 2021? You spent none of the money allocated under this Head for 2020. Is it that bridges that you initially considered—bridges and roads that you initially considered were no longer relevant in 2020?

Hon. Sinanan: They are projects and we do have a BLT Programme, and under the BLT Programme, they would take the responsibilities for the bridges. I think we did something like—we identified 62 bridges that we were actually paying attention to. We have 18 ongoing and plans to start an additional 12 in this financial year.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: H. Sea Transport. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Minister, I am looking at 827, and the first question is, is this the crane that was referred to when we talked about the loss in conversion or this is a new crane?

Hon. Sinanan: This is the crane.

Mr. Charles: This is the crane. So we can work out the—right. So, I am going to spend close to 52 million. We have also, 840: Expansion of CCTV at the Port, 4.5 million and also Acquisition of Specified Equipment for the Port of Port of Spain. Were these major upgrading of the Port contemplated prior to the decision to lease the Port or is this an attempt to upgrade it to make it more acceptable to possible customers?

Hon. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Port plays a very important role for us in Trinidad and Tobago. It is our main port, and this project and the continuation of the maintenance and keeping the Port as an ongoing concern has to continue.

Mr. Charles: Agreed.

Hon. Sinanan: Once we establish, first thing, it is model and then we get a partner, then we can think in terms of not funding anything at the Port or whatever model goes forward. But, at this point in time, the Port has to continue and the equipment at the Port, we have to continue to, at least, upgrade the important ones.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Item 844: Acquisition of Specified Equipment for the Port of Port of Spain. I see that it is a new project, but I am just curious as to what "specified equipment" means?

Hon. Sinanan: It is equipment specific to the Port.

Mr. Tancoo: Are they screens, loaders?

Hon. Sinanan: There are two empty container handling handlers and one reek stack at a cost of \$3.9 million.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The question, line Item 824, Minister, Removal and Disposal of Wrecks and Derelict Vessels within that. I am assuming it is the basin out there in the Gulf. The \$4 million you spent in 2020, the question is, how many wrecks were removed? And then you have another 4 million budgeted for 2021. How many wrecks you expect to remove in 2021?

Hon. Sinanan: Okay. Through you, Madam Chair, I would have to get the overall number and have it sent—

Mr. Lee: Madam Chair, another question. Line Item, Minister, 828: Dredging of Government Shipping Service Basin: Madam Chair, 36.9 million was spent in 2020. Over the past couple—2019 was 20 million. So it has been an ongoing project and only \$2 million has been budgeted. Could you give the status of the dredging in that particular area? Has it been completed or close to completion?

Hon. Sinanan: The dredging has been completed of the GSS Basin. It is now to a

depth of eight metres. So yes, the dredging has been completed.

Mr. Lee: Now, that particular area, silts up quickly over time. Now, for that kind of money that we have spent over the last couple—or three years, how long does that depth would last? If you do not have it now, you could always send it to me.

Hon. Sinanan: I think it is on an average of every seven years, somewhere around there, that it is to be cleaned.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Line Item 828: Dredging of Government Shipping Basin. Minister, this is the dredging that has to be done for the passenger ferries to Tobago also?

Hon. Sinanan: This is a normal dredging for all vessels.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. I know that there was some specific dredging that had to be done for the *Jean de la Valette* and I believe with the arrival of the other vessels. It was recommended by the Port of Authority in a JSC report. Can you say whether or not that dredging has started?

Hon. Sinanan: It is not for any specific vessel. It is the dredging for the basin. That dredging has been completed, and it will allow these vessels to be able to berth.

Mr. Hosein: So then it applies to the passenger ferries also?

Hon. Sinanan: It applies to all the vessels that would be using that berth or the basin.

Mr. Hosein: Can you indicate to us who is the contractor for the dredging?

Hon. Sinanan: That contractor was Dutch Dredging. Dutch Dredging. It is a company out of Holland. Right? It is Dutch Dredging. It is an international company.

Mr. Hosein: Are you aware whether or not there were any sub-contracts?

Hon. Sinanan: Dutch Dredging is international. I think it is the No. 1 company in

the world. So, I mean, it was public knowledge when they came in, they brought in some vessels. I think the one that worked here was the first time—it actually was a brand new vessel. And I do not know any contractor in Trinidad, any local contractor, who could have afforded a vessel like that to do that type of work. I do not know if there are any local contractors who do that type of work.

Mr. Hosein: But you are unaware whether or not any local contractor was—

Hon. Sinanan: I do not have knowledge of that. The contract was awarded to Dutch Dredging. I would not know if they hired any local persons.

Mr. Hosein: Can you then give us it in writing, if you do not have it now, whether any local contractors were also involved in this dredging?

Hon. Sinanan: If the information is available, I will ask the port to facilitate us with it. I know the contract was awarded to Dutch Dredging.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, line Item 824: Removal and Disposal of Wrecks and Derelict Vessels. Could you just identify what was the disposal method? Were the scraps sold, the vessels?

Hon. Sinanan: I will put that in writing.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Hon. Sinanan: I would have to get that information from the Port.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Item 838: Purchase of two (2) Vehicle Scanners was estimated in 2020 for 15 million, but no moneys was spent and is being estimated again for 25 million. Can the Minister advise the status of this project?

Hon. Sinanan: Okay. So, it is estimated, this process to start, the tendering process to start in this financial year. The money in the last financial was vired to other areas within the Port.

Mr. Ratiram: From the project plan, how long it will take to have this project completed?

Hon. Sinanan: Because the tendering process has now started, I would not want to give a commitment on the completion date.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. Item 842: Purchase of Two (2) Baggage Scanners. Again, was budgeted in 2020 for a million, no moneys was spent and it is being estimated again for another million this year. Can the Minister say when this project will commence and possibly be completed?

Hon. Sinanan: Again, the tendering process for this is about to start and once the tendering process would have started, then we will have an indication as to the completion date on it. We are about to start the tendering process for this.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Asked and answered, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: I. Administration. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Madam Chair, Item 020: Expenses of the Programme Management Unit, known as PURE, and 13 million has been allocated. Is that in respect of the administrative cost, because it is under "administration" or is it for the work to be done?

Hon. Sinanan: The expenses for the unit. This is not for the work, not for the paving work and so that they do.

Mr. Charles: Minister, given the quantity of work and the condition of the roads in Trinidad and Tobago, do you think that the unit is adequately resourced—and I am talking from an HR perspective—to handle the plethora of work on any road in Trinidad and Tobago at this point in time?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, the answer to that is, yes.

Mr. Charles: So if that is the case then, are they resourced, as you say, to deal

with, and you know, St. Croix Road, Garth Road, Guaracara, Ben Lomond. I get licks every day.

Hon. Sinanan: Okay. Just now, again, this is the cost of the unit. This is not the money allocated to them for the project.

Mr. Charles: Right, agreed.

Hon. Sinanan: The unit is funded as a unit.

Mr. Charles: But they are staffed with the requisite engineers, civil engineers, et cetera.

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, they are.

Mr. Charles: To your satisfaction?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. I am at 012: Procurement of Critical Heavy Equipment Emergency Response and Flood Relief. Minister, can you indicate what particular equipment was procured for this line Item?

Hon. Sinanan: What number is that?

Madam Chairman: 012: Administration, page 114.

Hon. Sinanan: The equipment referred to here is an amphibious piece of equipment that we have used to go into channels that unfortunately in the past we could not have gotten into. It is an amphibious.

Mr. Hosein: And currently is that piece of equipment operational?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, it is.

Mr. Hosein: It is?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Thanks.

5.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: My question was also on line Item 012—

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite, if you maybe can talk a little more into your microphone.

Ms. Haynes: Sorry, my question was—thank you, Madam Chair. My question was also on the line Item 012. So this is not an emergency response to the flooding, this was to get to the channels?

Hon. Sinanan: Actually, this equipment would have been on the books to be purchased maybe for about 10 years. Right? Yeah, just about 10 years and finally, we were able to purchase this piece of equipment last year. It was on the books to be purchased, I think, for the last 10 years.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, this Item spans two pages, therefore, I will announce the project groups: P. VMCOTT; A.—sorry, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Could the Minister advise the construction—Item 001: Construction of Facilities San Fernando and Tobago, 500,000, can the Minister kindly explain what facility we are speaking of here, the construction of which facility?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah. The signage at San Fernando and in Tobago, the—similarly, in Tobago, it is signage and upgrade of the existing facilities.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 002: Expansion of VMCOTT Facilities at Beetham. I see it has been an ongoing project from 2019 to 2021, it is at 500,000. Can the Minister advise what facility and when this project is expected to be completed?

Hon. Sinanan: It is new signage and compressor work at the Beetham facility.

Mr. Ratiram: So, it should be completed at the end of this fiscal term?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes.

Madam Chairman: A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings.

Infrastructure Development Fund, page 216. Item 001: Pre-Investment; Item 003—
sorry, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Between A. and H., are we going there?

Madam Chairman: Yes, because once you are under 001: Pre-Investment.

Mr. Hosein: Sure. Can I ask a question on 001 then, Feasibility Study for Fast
Ferry Port in Toco?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Yes. Minister, I see that there is an allocation of a Revised Estimate
of \$17 million for a feasibility study and then an Estimate of 7.7 to be spent in
2021. I know that there was a study done in 1991. Is this an updated study that is
going to be done on the port now?

Hon. Sinanan: That is the Geotechnical Investigation Services, the EIA contract
award and the EIA submissions to the EMA.

Mr. Hosein: So this is not for a feasibility study?

Hon. Sinanan: No.

Mr. Hosein: And what is the status of the EIA, Minister?

Hon. Sinanan: It is an ongoing process, consultations have started and
submissions to the EMA have also started.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 001: Comprehensive National
Drainage Development Study, it was estimated for 5 million in 2020, but there was
not anything in the Revised Estimate. Is it that the accounts are still to be
consolidated and the project has been completed or is it that it never got off the
ground?

Hon. Sinanan: It is the Andean Development Bank, and rather than utilize our

funding to do exactly what they are doing for us, this project has been put on hold and basically, we are working with the Andean Development Bank to facilitate us on this project at their cost.

Mr. Ratiram: Could the Minister advise when that development bank project—that study might actually be completed and available?

Hon. Sinanan: Well, there was an international tender on that project—have been completed and they are at the stage of evaluation as we speak. So we expect a report shortly from them and an award to the consultant.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister. I will greatly appreciate it if you give me a copy of the report when it is available.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Hon. Members, Item 003 spans three pages, therefore, I will announce the project groups: A. Drainage and Irrigation; I. Water and Sewerage; N. Other Services. Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, if the Minister could provide me with the expected completion date of the project and also, with regard to the scope of the project, because—

Mr. Chairman: That is in 003?

Ms. Benjamin: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Sinanan: Okay. Thank you. Madam Chair, we will submit to the Member. We will submit the information in—

Madam Chairman: In writing? Yes, anything else, Member for Moruga/Tableland?

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Chair. Chair, I am interested with regard to the scope, because it was brought to my knowledge that the scope has been altered a little

which would affect the flooding in the Gran Chemin area. So once the Minister is willing to provide it in writing, I would wait on such.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Barataria/San Juan. We are on N.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you, 003, again, construction of the fishing port at Gran Chemin. Madam Chair, I want to ask through you to the Minister, the design of this port is really for the majority of the port to be on water and there would be need for access to where the port is through private lands. I want to ask whether or not the land acquisition has been completed for this port?

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, I do not have information that the Member has, that the majority of the land has to be on water. We do not have that information at all.

Mr. Hosein: In jetties, that is the design I saw. I do not know if the design has changed.

Hon. Sinanan: So, in terms of the land acquisition, there were two parcels of land that went through the process of compulsory land acquisition.

Mr. Hosein: And who are the owners of those?

Hon. Sinanan: I do not have the owners, but I think it is about—I think, it is two lots, or something like that. It is not significant land.

Mr. Hosein: Two lots?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, it is two parcels. I do not have the owners—

Mr. Hosein: Is it Apex?

Hon. Sinanan:—but the process will be through compulsory land acquisition.

Mr. Hosein: Is it Apex, is the owner of the land here?

Hon. Sinanan: Again, I have no information on the owner.

Mr. Hosein: And the reason for that land is the—

Hon. Sinanan: Clearly, the Member has more information than I do.

Mr. Hosein: And the reason for that is for access to the port or is it for part of the

port?

Hon. Sinanan: Again, my information is that there are two pieces of land acquisition which I have already started and that process is ongoing. I do not have the land owners.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. We are going on. P. Coastal Protection; D.—Member for Mayaro, Coastal Protection?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, Item 023: the Mayaro/Guayaguayare Coastal Management Programme, I see an allocation for \$4 million in fiscal 2021. Can you give us an idea of exactly what it is that the Ministry will be engaged in towards bringing that protection programme on stream in that very sensitive area in Guayaguayare?

Hon. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair, I will provide the scope to the Minister in writing.

Madam Chairman: To the Member.

Hon. Sinanan: To the Member, sorry.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. D. Roads and Bridges, Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at Item 247, that is Road Construction/Major Road Rehabilitation - PURE. So over time, as we look at the Estimates and then the subsequent expenditure, we are seeing quite a substantial sum being in the Estimates and then, significantly less being spent in 2020. So we have an Estimate for 75 million in 2021 and coming from a constituency with road works being very high priority, infrastructure works being very high priority, can the Minister tell us how this 75 million will be utilized and if you intend to utilize what is allocated or go with significantly less by leaving some of the road works—

leaving it incomplete?

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, through you, this year they propose, at the PURE— will be the ongoing works at the Moruga, the Brian Lara—sorry, the San Fernando Waterfront. Those are— the PURE programme consists of several projects and it is throughout Trinidad. So what we will have to do, if you want a specific project—is it that you are asking for a specific project or you want to get a listing of all the projects that PURE is engaged in?

Ms. Haynes: Well, if we could get the list of all the projects, we will be happy with that. That works for me.

Hon. Sinanan: Well, again, there would be several projects that are required to be done, but it is based on the funding that is available. And then, again, PURE would look at the priorities in terms of the most critical areas, and that is what we have to do.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Hon. Sinanan: If I am to give you a listing of the amount of work that has to be done. It will be about 500 pages.

Ms. Haynes: No problem. Well, I was asking specific to my constituency but I was trying to save you having to go through that across the board on this side. But—

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah. It is impossible to actually give you a listing on the work to be done at this point in time.

Ms. Haynes: So the genesis of my question is that a sum is usually allocated and less is spent, but there are road works that need to be done across the constituency of Tabaquite. I know you would have seen that for yourself in your recent visit. So, I have a responsibility to the people that I represent to say that we have to bring the fact that our road infrastructure has been severely neglected and we would like that

this allocation be spent across the constituents. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member, the point has been made. Yeah?

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, I take note of what the Member is saying. I take note, “I eh accept it”.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Hon. Sinanan: I take note but I am not accepting it.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I see we have landslip repairs at the cost of 25 million from 1.9; that is good. I just want to be a bit selfish and say, I have so many landslips in my area, in Cumuto/Manzanilla, especially in Bon Air Road, so I hope that the focus for 2021 would be a lot of the rural communities. Thank you, Minister. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Okay. So now that we all had an opportunity to do a little venting, I think we could resume our composure. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Yes. Thank you. My question was also on the Landslip Repairs Programme, again, similar concern as the road rehabilitation, which is that 25 million has been estimated for 2021. Again, it was a very significant concern in the constituency of Tabaquite.

Mr. Young: Put in a request for me too.

Ms. Haynes: I will try, right. But right now I would like to advocate for the constituents of Tabaquite and the severe landslips that we see. I sent you a letter just last week Friday on the Caratal landslip. It is very, very bad, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Hon. Sinanan: Sorry.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I could just say, as a Member of Parliament myself, having written to the Minister of Works and Transport for

many years, that we too struggle with a number of things, but we understand that this is an island-wide addressing in a very difficult time, and that whilst there was an immense amount of work—Madam Chair, we spent billions on box drains for five years in the period 2010 to 2015, billions, and it could have been invested in Cumuto/Manzanilla, San Fernando West, all of our places. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Chair, I would like to say to the Minister of Works and Transport, thank you for whatever little we get. We will make do for now and continue forward. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

6.00 p.m.

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chairman, if I can address this situation. We do have a landslip programme, and we do have competent technical staff who look at all the landslips and they determine the most critical. The money that we have may sound like plenty, but it has to be shared across Trinidad and Tobago. It cannot just be spent in one area by who makes the most noise. [*Desk thumping*] So we do look at all the landslips, and the experts at the Ministry of Works and Transport will determine which landslip should be dealt with in an instance of an emergency. Thank you.

Mr. Lee: Minister, line Item 284: Churchill Roosevelt Highway Extension to Manzanilla, 164 million was spent in 2020, 75 in the next fiscal. Could you give us the status and update of where we are as far as a project is concerned, as far as completion?

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, on that project, package 1(a) and 1(b), we do have ongoing works, and in fiscal 2021 we expect work to start on other packages. The intention is to utilize the funding that we were allocated at this point in time, and going forward we look forward to the mid-year review for additional funding. But

package 1(a) and 1(b) have been significantly advanced, and we expect them to be completed in this financial year and start three additional packages: phase one, phase two and phase three, and each phase has several packages. But the intention is to actually reach to Sangre Grande sometime in this financial year.

Mr. Lee: Next question. Line Item 289: Construction of the Valencia to Toco Road. The status with that, 87 was spent and 55.

Hon. Sinanan: Again, the PURE Unit would have started construction from the Valencia junction all the way up to the Toco Road junction. We have eight packages there, and construction is apace on all eight packages. Once that is completed then we move from that area all the way to Toco where we expect the Toco port to be operationalized. So the project is an ongoing project with eight packages being constructed as we speak.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Another line item, Chair. Line Item 291: Sir Solomon Highway Extension to Point Fortin. Could you tell us when that project is carded to end or when that total stretch will be completed?

Hon. Sinanan: Again, through you, Madam Chair, we are expecting completion on that project some time in this financial year. Unfortunately due to the loss of time through the COVID, most of the dry season work would have been delayed, but we do expect completion sometime in this fiscal year.

Mr. Lee: The 55 million that is estimated for 2021 will take us to the complete total of that project?

Hon. Sinanan: We have a proposal now at the Ministry of Finance. We intend to utilize this money immediately and then have discussions with the Ministry of Finance on any additional funding that is required.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Ms. Benjamin: Madam Chair, I will just like to go back to the landslips. The

Minister had visited on the 13th of February, 2019, in Lengua Road where there is a landslip affecting seven homes. I will just like to believe that this allocation will facilitate that roadway being fixed and those seven households being saved.

Apart from that statement, 288, if the Minister could provide an update on the construction of the Moruga Highway, and also if a scope of works could be provided indicating which sections of the scope has been completed. And if the Minister could indicate the expected completion date of the project.

Hon. Sinanan: Again, through you, Madam Chair, the Moruga upgrade road has been significantly advanced. There are several—I think it is about 31 landslips that we are dealing with on that road. As the Member of Parliament you would accept that the structure of that road, the terrain, is very challenging for us, because we actually started I think with 21 landslips. At this point in time we have in excess of 35 landslips that we are working on. But we continue to put a lot of attention on the road. The construction has not stopped. The construction continues and we expect that based on the availability of the funding, that project should be completed at the end of this financial year.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Minister. But if I could get the scope in writing because I know it has changed significantly, and then we have contractors stalling on certain of the landslips, which is proving to be an inconvenience to some of the citizens, so I would appreciate such.

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Chair, I just want to raise something under 276: Landslip Repairs Programme, something that the Attorney General said. I am seeing that the allocation here is only 25 million, but had we saved \$23 million in the rent, then the Minister may have had some more money in order to fix the landslip in Cumuto/Manzanilla, San Fernando West and Moruga/Tableland. And also he made

a comment about the box drains. Madam Chair, you would realize that if you have the proper infrastructure of the roads then there will not be landslips. So we are very proud that we built box drains all over Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Madam Chair, I thank the Minister for when he said—I noted when he said that the PURE administratively was well equipped to deal with the various road problems. And I note that the Attorney General, San Fernando West, in his intervention, said that there are problems throughout the country.

Madam Chair, I drive a RAV4, and so I am able to feel the potholes on Garth Road, St. Croix Road, Guaracara Road from Ben Lomond to Williamsville, and I think the Minister would know that it is serious. The residents of the area are up in arms and indicating that they need some sort of attention. I am talking to them here today to let them know that I have done what I am supposed to do, to draw it to your attention. Could the Minister give us an indication of when attention will be paid to these roads, and are they listed in the number of roads that he has listed to repair?

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chairman, if you could tell me what line Item that is?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, if I may—to alleviate the Member's concern—sorry, I heard what the Member said about his RAV4 and the potholes. Maybe you should buy a Benz from New Zealand. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Minister.

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, I do not know how to respond to that, if it is a line Item, [*Interruption*] but what I could give the Member—

Madam Chairman: Could we have some order, please! I believe the Member was addressing his concern for his roads under 247: Roads and Bridges.

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, through you, again the PURE Unit and the Highways Division, the Road Maintenance Division, they would look at the entire

country and they would be able to identify, based on the funding available, to ensure that the most critical roads are attended to. Again, it is all based on the funding that is available. Every area has a unit. The unit, they would send to the Highways Division the most critical roads in their areas. The Ministry does not discriminate. We look at the entire country and we identify the most critical areas, and based on the funding available the programme continues.

So I give you the assurance that the Ministry of Works and Transport we do not discriminate. We have work going on, on all quarters, and that is why in the budget it was quite easy for me to indicate that we have work going on in the east, the west, the north, the south and even in central.

Mr. Charles: Minister, I know you do not discriminate but could you give me the criteria for determining which are the worst roads in Trinidad? Because I could tell you, and you know, that Garth Road will qualify as the worst road in Trinidad and Tobago, and should be on your list.

Hon. Sinanan: So what we do, we do a conditional survey at the Ministry and that would identify to us the condition of all the roadways under the Ministry of Works and Transport, and based on that conditional survey the technical team and the engineers will then identify, based on the budget that is available. However, this year we intend to do a lot more maintenance utilizing our Agua Santa plant, and to try to utilize the funding that we have, as far as possible. Again, I give you the assurance that at the Ministry of Works and Transport we do not discriminate.

Mr. Ratiram: Under 275: Bridges Reconstruction Programme, there is a 50 million allocation there. Can the hon. Minister advise if the bridges have already been identified for the spending of this 50 million, or the Ministry is still in the process of identifying these bridges?

Hon. Sinanan: We do have a programme, the Landslip and Bridge Programme.

We have identified 62 bridges that need attention, and that programme has been ongoing. About 25 have been completed. So we are in the process now of the design and tendering for an additional 12. So every year we try to do 12, and again it is based on how critical the bridges are, because we cannot do all the bridges at one time. Bridges are very expensive, especially now where we are actually getting some weather pattern, that we have to move in one in 50 year storm to a one in 100 years. What that simply means is that the cost of the bridges will go up. So we try to do at least 12 new bridges every year, and these bridges would have been identified in advance.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister. I would just like to make representation on behalf of the folks for the Raghunanan West Bridge. If the entire project cannot be completed, if a Bailey bridge or a temporary bridge can be considered in the interim, until funding is available for the entire project to be executed. That is Raghunanan Road, West.

Madam Chairman: The Minister of Finance, do you wish afterwards to make an intervention?

Mr. Imbert: Please.

Madam Chairman: No, no, after the Member is finished, would you like to make a statement? Is it a question or an explanatory statement?

Mr. Imbert: Neither.

Madam Chairman: Which question, Minister of Works and Transport? I will call you after I call the Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I know my colleague is celebrating Items 276, the 25 million projected for estimates for 2021. However, I saw an estimate for 2020 for \$15 million of which only 1.9 appears to have been committed for the 2021 revised estimate—sorry, 2020 Estimate. So there was an estimate of 15 million of which

only 2 million was actually spent on this very critical infrastructural works called “landslip repairs”, under the Landslip Repairs Programme. Can the Minister indicate why that nominal sum compared to the budgeted was actually spent? Is there a reason why more landslips were repaired?

Hon. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair. I did indicate we have a Bridge and Landslip Programme, so that money would have been transferred into that programme. So it is not that the money was not utilized, it is just that it was transferred to that programme. That unit actually undertakes the major bridges and landslip. So it was not that the money was not utilized, it was just transferred out of that Vote into the Bridge and Landslip Programme.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I am all right.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I would just like to ask the Minister if the bridge that the residents of Diego Martin North/East have been asking for, for the last four years will be built before those bridges asked for by those people who have just arrived in this place? [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East, [*Crosstalk*] if we could have a little order, please. I would just like you to rephrase your terminology by “those people” you have just—and could you say—

Mr. Imbert: I would ask the Minister, that the bridge that the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East has been requesting of him for over three years for the people of Blue Basin would be built before the bridges that have just been requested by the hon. Members who have just arrived in this Parliament a few weeks ago. [*Desk thumping*] I would like the Minister to answer that. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, through you, the same answer I gave to the—
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: What is that?

Hon. Sinanan:—that the bridge will be looked at in terms of our programme—

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East—

Hon. Sinanan:—and based on its criticality, we will ensure that it is completed to the satisfaction of your burgesses. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Tunapuna. Okay. So can we go on Road Systems Operations and Services. H. 3C Transport. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am looking at line Item 834 Purchase of a New Inter-Island Ferry and 838 Purchase of Two Interisland Ferries. I know we have the *Buccoo Reef* and the *APT James* but what does line Item 834, is it a third ferry?

Madam Chairman: But there is not any money budgeted—

Mr. Hosein: There is—

Madam Chairman:—under that 2021.

Mr. Hosein: There is a Revised Estimate of 15 million for 2020. So I want to know whether or not are we going to—what that payment was for?

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, that is an outstanding to NIDCO for the *Galleons Passage*.

Mr. Hosein: The *Galleons*. So we have completed payments of the *Galleons*?

Hon. Sinanan: We have completed payments a long time ago. This is a reimbursement to NIDCO.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And also the two ferries, when is it expected to arrive?

Hon. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, one vessel is expected closer to the end of this month 2020 and the next vessel sometime early in 2021.

Mr. Hosein: How long have these vessels been delayed?

Madam Chairman: Member, I am not going to allow that under this type of exercise that we are involved in. Okay? Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Item 844, Construction of the La Brea Dry Dock and Associated Facilities. I saw that 515 million, sorry 550,000 was spent and nothing, no Estimates, nothing in the Estimates for 2021. Is the project completed? Or they have given up or the status? Please.

Hon. Sinanan: 844. This line Item is for the TOR and the EIA. So this line Item is for the TOR and EIA, for the EIA. Sorry.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Just for clarification, Minister. Is this the port, the dry dock, sorry, that was supposed to be constructed by the Chinese company?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: And this was announced two years ago on the basis of a joint venture?

Hon. Sinanan: This is the project.

Mr. Tancoo: All right. Thank you, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: I am on 832, Major Asset Renewal of the Water Taxi and Fleet of Vessels. I noticed that there was an Estimate of 5 million in 2020 and only 251,000 was spent. And then there was a next Estimate of 5 million for 2021. Are we expected to get new water taxis this fiscal year?

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, you cannot buy new water taxis with 5 million. This is for repairs.

Mr. Hosein: We would be lucky if we can get back 5 million for the *MV Su* that the PNM bought. And now I want to—and also I want ask on line Item 838 the

purchase of the two interisland ferries. Whether or not any adjustments will have to be done to the port to accommodate these two vessels in Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Chairman: I am not going to allow. This is about the payment for the purchase of the ferries. Okay? Maybe when there was a question about dredging, maybe you might have qualified under there. Item 004: Social Infrastructure, page 220.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 43 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much, Minister. Thank you Madam PS, representatives from Airport Authority, Port Authority, Civil Aviation Authority, et cetera. You all are relieved. Thank you very much.

Head 80: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, \$159,764,606.

Madam Chairman: Head start, we are starting at page 410 of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

I will now invite the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to provide further information on the Estimates of expenditure for the newly created Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. This Ministry is mandated to provide leadership and strategic direction for the tourism, culture and the arts sectors, formulate policy to guide the development of these sectors, collaborate with all stakeholders on related matters and to facilitate and monitor the offer and access to incentives in accordance with the Tourism Development Tax Act, the Corporation Tax Act and the tourism accommodation upgrade programme.

The Ministry continues to be responsible for the management, maintenance

Head 80: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (cont'd)

and upgrade of five sites, namely Maracas Beach Facility, Vessigny Beach Facility, Las Cuevas Beach Facility and the La Brea Pitch Lake Visitors Centre, along with the performance spaces NAPA and SAPA.

The Ministry implements its mandate with the support of state agencies, statutory authorities and similar bodies as follows. Tourism Trinidad Limited, the marketing and development arm of Trinidad tourism, the Naparima Bowl performance space in San Fernando, Queen's Hall the performance space in Port of Spain, and the National Carnival Commission that has responsibility for Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. The Ministry is also directly responsible for the National Steel Symphony, the National Theatre Company and the National Philharmonic Orchestra.

To achieve its mandate, focus will be placed on the continued development of Trinidad and Tobago rich and diverse cultural heritage as culture as a means of human development contributes to promoting greater tolerance which has a strong unifying effect on our society.

Tourism and culture are powerful drivers of economic activity but the benefits of closer links between culture and tourism go beyond the economic to provide to the visitor an enriching, authentic, cultural experience, an opportunity to appreciate cultural diversity and to establish new cultural ties.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on global travel, tourism, hospitality and entertainment, this Ministry will continue to work towards developing high-value products and services through the implementation of the Ministry's programmes and projects and to position the sectors for post-COVID-19 recovery. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 80 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$159,764,606 for Head 80 Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and we are at page 410. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration, Item 002: Culture Division, Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Item—Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Hon. Minister, can you indicate to the honourable Chamber here, how many people are considered under this term contract employment? And what their positions may be?

Madam Chairman: Item 16?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Mitchell: At present there are 11 contract employees.

Mr. Tancoo: And their positions, Sir?

Hon. Mitchell: I do not have the positions with me, I can provide that in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Just to continue on Item 22: Short-Term Employment, I am also concerned about the same sort of information, the number of persons and what their particular roles were or are?

Hon. Mitchell: These at the Ministry now, 28. These include liaison officers at the sites and attractions. Liaison officers and some seasonal employees are paid under this Vote.

Madam Chairman: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Ma'am. Madam Chair, I saw that 2020 Estimates was 4 million. Right?—and in the revised—

Madam Chairman: Tell me what Item, please?

Ms. Benjamin: Short-Term Employment.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Benjamin: Right. And I saw the Revised Estimates reflected an increase in 800,000, and in 2021 they went back to the 4 million. If the Minister could explain the need for 800,000?

Hon. Mitchell: In 2020, 4,880,000. Is that what you are talking about?

Ms. Benjamin: 4,800,000.

6.30 p.m.

Hon. Mitchell: All right, well, it would go back down because of the seasonal arrangement with respect to these employees. So, these employees— when it is cruise season, we would employ some tour guides, for example, and, well, the cruise industry is battered and there is no cruising happening at this time, so there is no need for the additional \$880,000. This would be sufficient for us in the current fiscal.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, if you would permit me.

Madam Chairman: Go ahead, Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: With regard to the 05: Telephones, I saw an increase— I do not know if I read the Estimates correctly, because I know we are pulling from— this is the merge of two Ministries, right? We have—the Estimates for 2021 reflects 1.2 million and I saw previously, if the correct transfer was done with regard to me and my calculation, it was 500,000, so I do not know if there is a spike there? If you are seeing what I am seeing?

Hon. Mitchell: Yes. Well, consequent upon the realignment of the two Ministries,

we expect additional phone lines, additional telephones, additional infrastructure.

Ms. Benjamin: While I accept that, Minister, I did not see that reflected in new locations. I only saw five—we have not reached that Head as yet, but with regard to Office Accommodation. So I did not see any like new accommodations being sought, so I was kind of—as to why the spike in the telephones?

Hon. Mitchell: At the head office, we expect to utilize an additional floor. Presently, the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation is looking at that relocation. So, with that additional floor, as well as additional work assignments, we expect that the Estimates under telephones would be increased.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: No, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Line Item 08: Rent, 550,000. Could you tell me where that is in respect of what building? And just today, I went to the Integrity Commission on the 14th floor and coming down, the elevator stopped and I saw a number of empty floors. Have you looked at vacant places before going into a rental situation?

Hon. Mitchell: These—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. Member for Naparima, you are talking about Tower D? Are you talking about Tower D?

Mr. Charles: I am talking about?

Madam Chairman: Tower D?

Mr. Charles: I do not know the name of the tower.

Madam Chairman: That is where we were.

Mr. Charles: That is the Tower where—

Madam Chairman: That is where we were.

Mr. Charles: That is where I was, yes.

Madam Chairman: I think all of us who sat here before—

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—knows that that has gone to the Judiciary. I will excuse the new Members—

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—but all of us who sat here—

Mr. Charles: Knew that it was?

Madam Chairman: That has gone to the Judiciary.

Mr. Charles: The Judiciary, yes.

Madam Chairman: You sat and learned that right here.

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Charles: No, but I am stating that—

Madam Chairman: No, no, I want to ensure.

Mr. Charles: No, I am stating— let me rephrase. There are a number of vacant government buildings, have you looked at those before going to rent?

Madam Chairman: His question is, with respect to rent and asking the Minister to identify the building, eh. Yes. Minister.

Hon. Mitchell: Madam Chair, in addition to your answer, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts does not go out to look for accommodation itself. We rely on the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation to do so.

Mr. Charles: I worked in a government Ministry and we would go out and advise, but go on, where is the place, please? It is not a passive relation.

Hon. Mitchell: The warehouse storage space at 23 Trade Zone Complex in San

Juan, rental of office space for tourism office at the Cruise Ship Complex, rental of the tourism office at the airport, and rental of car park spaces at the Hyatt car park.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima, that is it? Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, line Item 62, the World Trade—sorry, the World Tourism Organization expects a surge in travel within the next year, year and a half, as soon as the COVID-19 restrictions starts to loosen. I am noticing the \$6 million allocation in terms of your promotions and publicity, is there anything specific that your Ministry is looking to engage differently, you know, in a post-COVID arrangement? Anything different in your promotion strategy going forward to position Trinidad and Tobago for that surge that should come at some point in time down the road?

Hon. Mitchell: Well, certainly. This line Item here is shared between the Ministry and the Tourism Trinidad Limited. With respect to your specific question, the TTL is certainly looking at digital marketing channels, more cost efficient, and they are looking at that to reach potential visitors in a more targeted way. For example, in terms of their new destination websites, their Facebook pages, as well as destination apps. So we are looking at using the digital marketing channels more.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Culture Division; Sub-Head—yes, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, and only \$25,000 to promote the brand TT, or is that somewhere else, the allocation for that Item?

Hon. Mitchell: To promote what, I am sorry?

Mr. Charles: The 25,000, are you satisfied that that is enough for promotions?

Hon. Mitchell: Yes, this Vote is just used for advertisings. For example, if they advertise for contract positions, et cetera, that is what this Vote is used for.

Mr. Charles: It is not for advertising, say in, foreign markets destinations?

Hon. Mitchell: No. The Vote that the Member for Mayaro just questioned on, that Vote is used for that.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Culture Division. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organisations; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Yes, Madam Chair. You are going a lil fast, 009; 01: National Days and Festivals, right. I just wanted— if the Minister could provide—I know it might be hard to say how much groups or who would have benefited from this, but if we could get an indication, because if I am to speak from my constituency, I know that there are a lot of groups that would have applied and were turned down, so if you could get some sort of accountability from this line Item? I do not know how you are going to respond but—

Hon. Mitchell: There are 184 organizations that received support under this line Item but I could provide a breakdown in writing, should you require one.

Ms. Benjamin: I would appreciate.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair, if I could just ask for the benefit of our constituents and the public, if you could provide the requirements? Because as the Member for Moruga/Tableland indicated, groups would have applied and been turned down, but they have no explanation about whether they met the requirements or not. So, we would appreciate if you could provide the requirements to qualify.

Hon. Mitchell: It is outlined on the website but I could provide that for you, if you require it.

Madam Chairman: So, I think we have gone back, and I would just ask Members

to pay acute attention. Okay. So we are at 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. And Members we are going on to a new book. Hon. Members, we will now move on to *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. 20 - Queen's Hall. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, we are at page 533; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, we are at page 534; Item 007: Households. 21 - Naparima Bowl, we are at page 539.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, we now at page 540; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

We move on to page 545, 22 - National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Madam Chair, you may have to forgive, right, because when we were in the Recurrent, you moved a lil fast, I wanted to ask the Minister pertaining to the National—

Madam Chairman: Member, we are now at 22 - National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is why I have been calling pages and I have been saying “new book”.

Ms. Benjamin: My apologies. Could I get an update with regard to Short-term Employment?

Madam Chairman: Where are you, at Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure?

Ms. Benjamin: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Could you identify your Item number— the line Item number?

Ms. Benjamin: 22, we are on National Carnival Commission, right? Page 545.

Madam Chairman: 545. We are at 01; Item 001. So you may be ahead of us. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. This is where you are? Okay go ahead, please, Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: All right. If I could get some clarification with regard to the Short-term Employment for the NCC, seeing that we would not have Carnival, and how is this to be utilized? If the Minister could put some clarification.

Hon. Mitchell: But if you look at the Vote, you would see that there is a significant decrease. Similarly, under this Vote, it is used for a lot of seasonal short-term employees. There is no Carnival so, therefore, this Vote at a decrease of 2,869,780 would be sufficient.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Minister. And if, with regard to Promotions, Publicity and Printing, if you could explain, there is some significant—with regard to the allocations— the revised allocations for 2020. Well, I know it was not utilized— certain parts were not utilized, and then I see in 2021, I know there is a decrease, but seeing that we are not going to have—well, the statement was made that we may not have Carnival, as we know it, and if we are to take the route of a virtual carnival, would not more funds be required underneath this line Item with regard to promoting?

Hon. Mitchell: No, this line Item is for advertisement, print, radio. It is not for promotion.

Ms. Benjamin: All right. Well, I know when we were under Recurrent you said that one was totally for overseas. So I am just trying to figure out how are we

addressing the gap with regard to the no Carnival? Is any provision being made to advertising or filling the gap?

Hon. Mitchell: Sorry, could you repeat?

Ms. Benjamin: With regard to not having Carnival Monday and Tuesday, are we looking to purchase any specific air time, any radio time, any Netflix? How are we promoting? How are we filling the gap? Is the Ministry going to facilitate the virtual route? I am just trying—I went through the Votes and I was trying to ascertain if it was allocated under anyone of the line Items, and I could not find such.

Hon. Mitchell: This line Item could certainly be availed for that sort of virtual route that you are talking about. Having spoken to the Chairman and the CEO at NCC, this line Item will also be utilized for the creation of a Carnival website in the upcoming fiscal.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you.

6.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine. No? Okay. So we go on, Member for—just now, I have to get this right. Member Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Yes, please. Thank you, thank you, Madam Chair, 002, I am looking at Item 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage. Can the hon. Minister indicate where the NCC is renting, how many buildings and the locations, please?

Hon. Mitchell: Under this line Item it is for the NCC Head Office, I believe that is in St. Clair; NCC warehouse; the TUCO's Head Office; the Carnival Institutes Office and the Carnival Institutes storage space as well as the Northern Region Pan Trinbago Office. Those are the items that, those are the accommodation that come under this line Item.

Mr. Ram: Supplemental please. Will the hon. Minister through his good office

make representation to the Minister of Public Administration to seek a decrease in rental accommodation for the next fiscal year?

Hon. Mitchell: Yeah. Under this administration, under this current Prime Minister, that has actively been pursued since 2015. So that is a mandate of the Public Administration to reduce rental cost all round.

Mr. Ram: Supplemental, please.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Based on your figures here and your assertions I am going to point you to the figures 2019 Actual, 4.08 million; 2020 Revised, 4.9; 2021 Estimates, 4.9. So to me it is clear as day that that is not a reduction. So I wanted to point that please, Madam Chairman.

Hon. Mitchell: The increase there is to pay arrears.

Mr. Ram: Pardon.

Hon. Mitchell: Arrears in rent.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007: Households; Item 008: Subsidies. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* and this is a new book. We are at page 171, Development Programme Consolidated Fund, page 171. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at Item 001; Tourism Sites and Attractions Upgrade. If the Minister could just give us some insight into what the proposed upgrades, where you looking at for fiscal 2021.

Hon. Mitchell: Well, it is a continuation of projects from the last fiscal. This is the Las Cuevas Beach Facility; Manzanilla Beach Facility; Vessigny Beach Facility and the La Brea Pitch Lake Facility as well as Paramin look-out and the Galera

Light House Restoration Project.

Madam Chairman: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. If the Minister with regard to 001 would not mind providing us with an update of the status of the various projects itemized. And also I would like to move on to 002.

Madam Chairman: Yes, you may.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. With regard to the Development of the National Tourism Policy, right, 2018, I see itemized here, I saw with regard to the Revised Estimate if I am correct I think only 51,000 was utilized. And I see we are asking back for the million in 2021. If the Minister could provide an update with regard to the policy if it was done, if it is being outsourced.

Hon. Mitchell: Well, there is a Cabinet appointed committee charged with revising the National Tourism Policy. The \$51,000 was spent on three consultations that were hosted in Tobago in December of 2019. The project continues, it should be completed by the end of November and the additional allocation here will form the budget for the sport tourism master plan as promised in the manifesto, which the Ministry is currently planning to undertake.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; Infrastructure Development Fund and we are going on to page 249, Item 004: Social Infrastructure.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 80 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister, thank you PS and other technocrats. You all are excused. Head 48: Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Head 48: Ministry of Trade and Industry, \$199,727,369.

Madam Chairman: Members, so that we can get a little head start, we are starting

at page 285 of the *Recurrent Expenditure* books. I will now invite the Minister of Trade and Industry to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you very much. The *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure and Development Programme* for the Ministry of Trade and Industry for the financial year, 2021, have been prepared taking into consideration the Government's national development strategy, *Vision 2030*. The allocations proposed for the Ministry of Trade and Industry will assist in executing its work programme and work plan which were completed taking into consideration the relevant 2020 manifesto imperatives of governing administration and tenets of the Roadmap to Recovery Report, the Roadmap for Trinidad and Tobago, transforming to a new economy and a new society and the measures outlined in the budget statement. Thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 48 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$199,727,369 for Head 48, Ministry of Trade and Industry, 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 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 003. Member for Mayaro at 001.

Mr. Paray: 002: Weights and Measures.

Madam Chairman: Right so I would call Item 002: Weights and Measures Inspectorate. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just noticed this critical component of the Ministry for Weights and Measures, there was no allocation. Is that unit disbanded or is it no longer operational?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: It is disbanded.

Mr. Paray: It is disbanded.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Mr. Paray: Who has replaced in terms of that service?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: So the work is now undertaken by the Bureau of Standards.

Mr. Paray: Okay, okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division; Item 004: Research and Planning; Item 005: Consumer Outreach and Protection Unit. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 05: Telephones. In fiscal 2019 there was an increase in the allocation for this Sub-Item of \$769,000. At a meeting of the Standing Finance Committee in 2019 the Ministry stated that the increase in the allocation was due to significant outstanding balance in fiscal 2020 as stated here. There is another increase of 450,000. In fiscal 2019/2020 were all the outstanding balances paid off?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: No, there is still some carry over, so therefore the increase is to settle the amount due for payment of arrears of telephone and Internet services.

Mr. Paray: On average, what would be the monthly total bill for landline telephone and cellular phones if you have that information?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: I would have to send that for you.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: I will have to submit that.

Mr. Paray: Madam Minister, what mechanisms are in place to minimize

unnecessary and excessive use of phones at the Ministry?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: That is standard.

Mr. Paray: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Weights and Measures; Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division; Item 004: Research and Planning; Item 005: Consumer Outreach and Protection Unit. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, we are at page 290. Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 003: United Nations Organizations; Item 007: Households; Item 008: Subsidies. Member for Mayaro, we are at page 291.

Mr. Paray: Sorry Ma'am, 009, just jumped ahead quickly.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you. Minister, Item 01: Financial Assistance to ExportTT. Could you explain this capital injection to ExportTT, what would we expect over the next fiscal year to assist in, in the sector?

7.00 p.m.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: I am referring to the specific line Item—

Mr. Paray: Sure.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon:—and there is an increase there—yes of 96—and that is due to the recruitment of another body and an accounting officer from August 2020.

Mr. Paray: Okay. Minister, line Item 08: Operations of the Trade Facilitation Company in Cuba. Could you give us an idea of the current value of trade that we have with Cuba at this time?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: TT \$20 million in 2019.

Mr. Paray: Okay. Line Item 16: the Fair Trading Commission. I know this is a relatively new unit. Have they done any arbitrations in regard to issues under the

Fair Trading Act so far in terms of their existence?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: So it is not entirely new, but it is that parts of the Fair Trading Act had been proclaimed before and now in February of this year the remaining parts of the Fair Trading Act came into force. So you asked about work done thus far. So they have received and dealt with three merger approval applications and they also continue to receive and investigate complaints of anti-competitive practices. They would have held regional merger workshop and that is the first of a kind that we have had in the region. Then, of course, they have had a breakfast seminar for the business community to inform them of the full proclamation of the Fair Trading Act and to address their concerns. So they are pretty much involved in educating and training, and as I said thus far when I opened on this particular Item they actually received and dealt with three merger approval applications.

Mr. Paray: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, with the same line Item, Fair Trading Commission, they have been investigating complaints?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: They have dealt with three merger approval applications and they continue to receive and investigate complaints of anti-competitive practices.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central, you want to ask a question here?

Mr. Ram: Can the hon. Minister indicate if there are any standards in place in terms of turnover of, let us say a complaint?

Madam Chairman: What Item you are on?

Mr. Ram: Same Item please, 16.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: You are asking about the Fair Trading Commission whether there are standards. I could not tell you if there are standards. What I can tell you is

that the board is in place, it is very effective. The CEO or the managing director is also very effective. I know they attend to matters. They do not have a whole of matters before them. Everything is done with alacrity, and I can tell you, for instance, with regard to—there is something I want to bring to your attention. I can tell you they are already looking at hosting a session on the Fair Trading Act for stakeholders involved in the marketing distribution and retail sale of diesel and gasoline. So that is to ensure that competition is maintained and protected in this particular sector. So I am saying that to you to tell you that they are on the ball. In fact, if you had read the newspapers within the last two weeks or so they put out a statement on that. So they are on the ball and they are responding, and they understand their place in today's marketplace.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, Line Item 30: Overseas Market Promotion and Development, and I assume it is a specific thing for the local manufacturers. There is a \$50 million allocation. Could you give us some explanation as to the purpose and the trajectory of this investment of this allocation?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: I can tell you that we are quite excited about this. We thank the Ministry of Finance for understanding the needs of the manufacturers that this is in fact a sector that can grow. They have done exceedingly well over the years. They have hired more than 50,000 people, they are contributing our GDP substantially, 19 per cent. The idea is to grow their sector, and this is about as the title says, Market Promotion, Development and so on. A large part of it is about certification for all of our food and beverage and other industries that require some kind of product compliance, and that is necessary to ensure that they can indeed penetrate markets where there are varying standards by the particular countries. It

is about the expansion of co-financing programmes. As it is we do some co-financing programme for exporter.

Now we are going to expand bearing in mind that we have a substantial number of exporters, manufacturers who export, small and medium size. So when you look at the bank there are about 184 manufacturers that export over a million dollars and within that bank of 184, 120 of them are under 25 million. So the idea is about co-financing, assisting them with the certification programmes, market access, establishment of another TFO, looking at the particular markets that we want to grow and financing the trade attachés that are necessary and so on, building capacity in Tobago for their few exporters but absolutely necessary to help build their capacity and so on. But I will speak to it further in the Senate.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, is this facility going to be working in tandem with the work of our foreign embassies, their trade offices in foreign embassies, or it is a separate unit together or a separate operation outside of the scope of our embassies?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Funds that are available for use, but there must be a nexus. For the industry to do well there must be cohesiveness between the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association. All of our embassies aboard, some of them if they are in a market that is attractive and where we could do a lot of business, you may have a trade attaché. For instance, Cuba we felt it necessary because it is very bureaucratic to put a trade facilitation office. So these are the kinds of considerations.

Mr. Paray: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. This is a new book. Item 004:

Statutory Boards. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Review and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. 44 - Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards. We at page 439 of that book. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration, page 439. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item: 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, we at are page 440, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item 010: Other Transfers Aboard.

We now move to page 445. 45 - Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. New book, Sub-Head 09. We go to page 119, Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line 304, could you give us a little bit of information about the export capacity building? Is this is a continuation of an old programme and what would have been the accomplishment of that programme so far; and what can we expect going forward with the \$5 million allocation?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: So yes, it is the continuation of an existing programme and there are several components in it. For instance, it includes an export competitiveness project, a training programme for exporters, a co-financing in a number of areas like product registration, trademark registration, product testing, website and e-commerce development, and translation and interpretation services.

Then, of course, there are exporter forums, service exporters' activities, Tobago programmes, and for the first time there is a new exporter development programme as well.

I can tell you the achievements, for instance, one firm completed the process of certification, four firms are enrolled in the process of doing it, 15 firms would have implemented their export support plans, and 19 training programmes were completed for export training. There were 26 students graduating from the export academy, four information dissemination seminars, and 11 companies benefited from co-financing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line 026: Gateway to Trade. Can the hon. Minister say what it entails, Gateway to Trade?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Which is this?

Dr. Ragbir: Gateway to Trade, 26.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Right. The Gateway to Trade is a programme for exports of services. We are developing the—as you know the services industry— Just now, let me catch myself. The service industry contributes substantial amount of our GDP. What we have found is that even though it contributes substantially we are not exporting enough. So we see it as a niche area to grow, and there are several programmes we have developed and one is the services global which really is a training programme which would allow firms, especially small and medium size ones, to upskill themselves and get ready for exporting their services. And that is in a range of areas.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I am looking at line Item 007: Establishment of Research and Development Facility, it is \$2 million, is that a new

area of new research that this unit is looking to go into? What are those?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Not at all. So we have done research and development at ExportTT. It has been for the last year and it is fairly successful, and it is a programme that we really want to push to encourage research and development in several areas at the age of idea development, at the stage, sorry, of idea development, at the stage of prototype development and, of course, at the stage of commercialization.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Madam Chair, line Item 016: Enhancement of the Single Electronic Window. Now, Minister, for the last five years we have been seeing quite a bit of money being put into this facility. We have \$30 million for this fiscal year. Are we anywhere close to completing this product to its finality, to get the benefits that we should be getting with a completed project?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yes. Well, I can tell you it is made up of several components and there have been some consultancies within there that have already been executed. It is a \$25 million IDB loan which has been reduced I think by a small per cent. I can tell you the exact thing. But it is important and I will tell you that the development and implementation of the automated construction permit system was done through this programme.

7.15 p.m.

So if you are asking about major items, that is perhaps one of the more significant ones. And in so doing, there was another component as well which involved the digitization of all of the key records for the Town and Country Planning Division to ensure that that entire construction permitting system is fully electronic.

In addition, there were a number of other programmes but there are some

larger ones now. You would recall in the beginning when we started these kinds of SEW services, there were smaller services and we have about 46 of them running at the same time, these are much larger. So for instance, another programme which we are now doing is the port community system which allows for the interoperability between the systems of Port, Customs and the Ministry of Trade. So that is another big programme.

Another big programme, of course, you hear a lot of complaints about Customs and so on and business processes, a large one concerns border agencies involved in trade and so we have reengineered the business processes. It is quite substantial and that is another programme that we are working on. In addition, there are a number of other pieces of legislation that we are also attending to that have come out of this because we have had to source the external assistance in developing some particular pieces of legislation and so on. So there is a lot going on still.

Mr. Paray: Are you— [*Inaudible*] —the completion of the build-out of the various packages?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: I think I can see this being in another year and a half.

Mr. Paray: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. At line Item 19, 21, 23, the Music Industry, Film Industry and Fashion Industry.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: We are at page?

Madam Chairman: At 019, 021 and 023.

Mr. Hosein: You are with me, Minister.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah, I am.

Mr. Hosein: Good. Music industry, Film Industry, Fashion Industry. Can you just

give us some insight into where these moneys have been allocated?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Right. So let me start with the development of the Music Industry. So as you know, Trinidad and Tobago has been designated by UNESCO a creative city of music in 2019. That fitted well into the programme which we had started before, the Live Music District. We are continuing with that. So there is a four-year programme that is aligned to the City of Port of Spain designation.

Mr. Hosein: This is the Live Music District here?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yes—but no, separate and apart from that, we were designated by UNESCO as a creative city of music and within that is the Live Music District. In addition to which there is a something called a music tech platform and one of the significant achievements under that—and I spoke about it in the Lower House—was the international standard recording code which enables recordings to be uniquely and permanently identified so that is one of the achievements that we have done under the music tech platform. That is a game-changer for our local music industry.

Mr. Hosein: And this is for all genres?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: And this is for all genres and for all music produced in Trinidad and Tobago and there are great benefits to have in this new CTISRC code so that we can measure and track and index and manage all our song recordings and so on that originate in Trinidad and Tobago. Also, there is the music export academy which involves workshops and webinars and trade missions and research designed to foster the business development of music. There is also the artiste portfolio development programme which is one designed to get artistes ready for international export.

All in all, through these programmes, we would have assisted more than 200 musicians in the last fiscal year.

Mr. Hosein: But, Minister, I am seeing a very small amount spent which is less than half of what was allocated. What was the reason because you called out so many programmes and so many persons benefited?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: But COVID is an intervening factor because we have lost a number of months and we have had to do some activities virtually whereas the cost would have been higher, COVID has caused us to do much of it virtually and it is less expensive.

Mr. Hosein: I know that but when you look worldwide, you would have seen so many other countries, for example, I do not know if you looked at—there was a concert in Italy that raised funds and stuff like that. So maybe although we had COVID, some of this money could have still been allocated to some of those artistes because although they are isolated at their home, it does not stop them from producing.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: I know and so we had an online Facebook live music district, some three sessions and in one of them, you would have had about 97,000 people looking on. So artistes were still involved during COVID, but what I said is that it is less expensive. “You pay your artiste, they perform go online and the audience enjoys” so it is not as expensive as if we are putting on a physical show.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: So that is with regard to music. Would you like to hear about the others?

Mr. Hosein: The film will be the same, almost identical to music.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Well, there are other programmes that are tailor-made for the development of the film industry.

Mr. Hosein: What I am interested in is the fashion industry because that has the largest expenditure which was 3.3 million in the Revised Estimate of 2020 and I

am seeing 3.5 million now being allocated for 2021. Who is the beneficiary of these funds?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Well, the beneficiaries will be designers and people involved in the industry and I can tell you that you are looking at more than 200 people who would have been assisted in the last fiscal year and we expect to assist a similar number.

Mr. Hosein: So 200 persons would have accessed 3.3 million?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, because a lot of it is training and development and readiness for an export market. It is the value chain investment programme which is at four different stages and of course with the top tier where designers are ready for the export market and it goes right down to the lowest tier where we work with NEDCO to do programmes which would help with the training of those that are now developing their businesses: the costing and pricing, record-keeping, taxation, marketing strategy and so on.

Mr. Hosein: Is the bespoke tailoring part of the—you know the UTT has the—is it part of this also?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, but the bespoke certificate programme is already complete and that is finished and we have now morphed into the Train the Trainers programme in ultra-bespoke tailoring. That is ongoing and it will be completed in fiscal 2021 and the idea behind that is that you can actually train persons—so who can train others. So it is a train the trainers programme and we see the whole development of the tailoring industry and garment producers for men's clothing?

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Question asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon.

Members, Item 005 spans two pages therefore I will announce the projects groups: B, Bureau of Standards; A, Administrative Services. Infrastructure Development Fund, we go to page 222. Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Ms. Benjamin: Madam Chair, before you move on, I had my hand up with regard to 008, Inward Investments in Non-Petroleum Initiatives.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so just one minute. Are you at Item 005?

Ms. Benjamin: 121, yes.

Madam Chairman: Right. So you are at Administrative Services?

Ms. Benjamin: Yes. I wanted the Minister, if she could provide some—

Madam Chairman: So just one minute, let us just let the Minister because we have moved on. I am going to go back but just so that the Minister locates herself because it could be that I cannot see you from the position that I am sitting in. So Minister, we are going back to page 121, Administrative Services. I believe the Member is at 008. Yes?

Ms. Benjamin: Yes. Minister, I just wanted an update with regard to this initiative. What is being done? What it entails?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Okay, so this is primarily for the development of the yachting industry, so the activities under this project are aimed at increasing yacht arrivals and of course, this will contribute to the GDP and increase foreign exchange earnings.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Madam Chairman: So we move on. So we are now at Infrastructure Development Fund, Item 005, we are at page 222, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, on line Item 306, New Economic Zone Development, right. During the Minister of Finance's budget presentation, he

spoke highly about these new economic zones and I am surprised that there has been no allocation here for the 2021 budget. Any reason for that?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Because this requires legislation so we have prepared it. It is at the level of pre-LRC. It has to, therefore, come back to Cabinet. Go to LRC, come back to Cabinet and then of course, it has to come to the both Houses and so it is just with the transition, I did not put anything yet until of course the Bill is passed.

Mr. Paray: In terms of the locations and so on these zones, do you plan to use the existing facilities like of the e TecK Park and so on for these zones?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Well, it depends. I mean, it is very developmental so the focus is very much on the new areas that we have planned for development like manufacturing, agriculture and so on but it also has the traditional flair to it which is where free zones—the typical free trade zones. And so there are several types of zones and activities included under the scheme and it will encompass some of the parks.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 293, there is a large increased allocation for 1.499 million to 12.293 million. Can we expect what sort of changes during this project?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: This is for the completion of a building at e TecK Park, it is for the Alutech industry and it is a research and development facility and manufacturing facility and it involves the last phase of the project. So it is the installation of farms, landscaping, testing and commissioning. It is the end-stage of the building.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Minister, with regard to 305, the Moruga Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park, I know that it was stated in the media that two of the shells have been rented or allocated. If I could be provided with who are the two persons or if the four shells have been rented out.

I would like some clarity also with regard to, I know it is just a shell right now. Would the Government be outfitting the shell or the persons who they are allocated to have that onus on them?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, so the building is complete and three shells have already been earmarked. Two of those have already been signed. One is for pepper processing. The other one is for root-crop processing and the third one is for the processing of the Moruga hill rice. And so that is where we are with it. You asked me a second part of that question?

Ms. Benjamin: Yes, with regard to getting the persons or the companies or associations or farmers that accessed these shells.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah. So whether or not, the outfitting will have to be done by the persons who enter into the lease arrangements and who occupy.

Ms. Benjamin: Minister, just for clarity, right, with regard to the Moruga school, would that be incorporated into this?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: No, no, no, that is a project under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries I believe. No, actually it is under the new Youth Development, under Minister Hinds.

Ms. Benjamin: Could I be provided or if you have the answer now with regard to those three persons? I know it may not be wise to name but you put it in writing.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: I will not name—sorry?

Ms. Benjamin: In writing, could I be provided—?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: No, I do not know that I will name. They have entered into

lease arrangements and I would not expose.

Ms. Benjamin: Okay. Thank you, Madam Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 48 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, PS. Thank you other technocrats and you all are excused.

7.30 p.m.

Head 09: Tax Appeal Board, \$5,332,300.

Madam Chairman: Members, we are at page 44 of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. I now invite the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, I propose to be very short. The Tax Appeal Court, as we all know is one of the significant revenue earners for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago responsible for the consideration of all issues that go before them as a court of superior record. They are at the cusp of some major reformation and redevelopment. In fact, we have draft legislation soon to come to the Parliament, and the hon. Minister of Finance has undertaken that in the event that they should require further funding to backend the amendments that we intend to do, that at the mid-year we shall certainly be engaged in that. I rest on an opening statement.

Question proposed: That Head 09 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,332,300 for Head 09: Tax Appeal Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

And as I said before we are at page 44. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration, page 46. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households, page 46.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 09 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Attorney General. Thank you, Registrar and other representatives from the Tax Appeal Board.

Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board, \$2,758,255.

Madam Chairman: Members, we are at page 52 of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Public Service Appeal Board was established under section 130 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to which appeal shall lie from such decisions against public officers. The Appeal Board consists of a Chairman who is appointed by the President, after consultation with the Chief Justice, and two other members who are also appointed by the President after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

The Chairman must be a judge or former judge or a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who has held office as a judge of a court, having unlimited jurisdiction in civil and criminal matters in some part of the Commonwealth.

The Public Service Appeal Board handles appeals for any decision that was given by a Service Commission or any person to whom powers of the Commission have been delegated as a result of disciplinary proceedings brought against a public

officer.

Question proposed: That Head 12 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,758,255 for Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

We are at page 52. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 12 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, representatives from the Public Service Appeal Board.

Head 03: Judiciary, \$445,717,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Judiciary, of course, is one of the central pillars of our system of democracy. It has undergone significant reformation and development in the last five years, and this year represents a continuation of that. In particular, Madam Chair, it actually carries us to the further divisioning of courts as we move beyond the Family and Children Division, and the Criminal Division into subset divisions of the Civil Division, that is probate and small claims in particular. We also are pushing the continued reorganization of the Magistracy, and the rollout and further migration of our e-

services and digitization.

Of course, Madam Chairman, there is an infill programme, a development of accommodation, and there is a significant increase and continuing move, in terms of staff and adequacy of people to actually operate in these systems.

Over the last couple of years, we have seen over a thousand jobs created at the Judiciary. We have seen several courts delivered and there has been a very, very successful rollout of the virtual appearances and migration born in the whole divisioning of courts. Needless to say, Madam Chair, the whole electronic payment structures and full operationality of the Judiciary has actually, in its work getting to today's date, been very, very useful if not fruitful in the whole COVID pandemic.

The developmental programme is a robust one and should take us well into the measures necessary across the whole judicial landscape. I thank you for this opportunity to make a brief opening statement.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Attorney General.

Question proposed: That Head 03 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$445,717,000 for Head 03: Judiciary 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 10. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: Judiciary Trinidad, Item 002: Judiciary Tobago. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: Judiciary Trinidad, Item 002: Judiciary, Tobago. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: Judiciary Trinidad. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies, Item 007: Households, Item 009: Other Transfers, Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 2. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans two pages. I will therefore announce the project groups. A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings.

Infrastructure Development Fund, we go on to page 183. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 03 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Attorney General. Thank you, Court Executive Administrator and thank you all other representatives from the Judiciary.

Hon. Members, this Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Tuesday the 20th day of October, 2020, at 10.00 a.m. Please reach home safely. Good night.

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