

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 22, 2020



APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2021) BILL, 2020

[Fifth Day]

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

[Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George]

1.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Good morning. The meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will resume. We are at Head 18, the Ministry of Finance.

Head 18: Ministry of Finance, \$6,259,047,762.

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

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Finance has the responsibility for the collection of revenue and the raising of funds by way of loan financing, the supervision of all state enterprises that are companies and their subsidiaries, the release of funds for expenditure and the approval of all matters of a financial nature. The divisions within the Ministry of Finance include the Customs and Excise Division, the Inland Revenue Division, the Valuation Division.

The Ministry of Finance is also responsible for economic management, fiscal policy, and some aspects of monetary policy in consultation with the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Finance also has oversight responsibilities for the entire financial sector, including banks, insurance companies, and other financial institutions, with the exception of credit unions which are supervised by the Ministry of Labour.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

UNREVISED

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

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$6,259,047,762 for Head 18, Ministry of Finance, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the follow 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 83. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon, everybody. I refer to Sub-Head 04: Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers. Minister, we are seeing an additional spend of 900,000 above what was budgeted for 2020. Can you indicate what accounted for this increase?

Hon. Imbert: Arrears of payments for previous years.

Mr. Tancoo: Follow-up. Then, can the Minister indicate why we have an Estimate of 500,000 for 2021, when the Actual in 2019 would have been 1.1 million?

Hon. Imbert: I am advised that we do not have any arrears due in 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay. Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. Can the Minister tell us what the purpose of the committee envisioned here is and who were the persons serving on the committee?

Hon. Imbert: We will provide you with a list.

Mr. Tancoo: Sub-Head 23: Salaries - Direct Charges. Minister, we have an Estimate of 551,000 in 2019, but we have doubled from 2019 to 2020 and Estimate in 2021, can you indicate why that has happened?

Hon. Imbert: Could you just repeat the question, please?

Mr. Tancoo: Sure, Minister. I noted that we have had a doubling of the heading—sorry, the allocation under 23: Salaries - Direct Charges, we have had a doubling from 551,000—

Hon. Imbert: What would have happened is that additional persons would have been employed during the period, but we will get further details for you.

Mr. Tancoo: So would that carry through as well to Sub-Head 24: Allowances? Does that justify the tripling of the figure?

Hon. Imbert: Well, both of them are tied together, they deal with the same people. So we will get details for you, but what would have happened is that additional persons would have come on board.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Under—Madam Chair, are we moving on to 002?

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Budget Division.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I have a similar question with regard to the allowances for monthly paid officers, we have a doubling of the figure between 2019 into 2020 and 2021. Can the Minister account for that increase?

Hon. Imbert: The general answer I am getting is that there was an increase in personnel, but I will get further details for you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Customs and Excise Division. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I refer to Sub-Item 03: Overtime - Monthly Paid Officers. Minister, I have noticed a \$40 million allocation, on average \$44 million in 2020, 2021. Can the Minister indicate why we have been paying such a

significant sum in overtime, and whether there has been any provision or any attempt made to control the level of overtime?

Hon. Imbert: This is consistent with answers I have given previously. The Customs Division has to balance between containing expenditure within reasonable levels and providing access after normal working hours for the business community and persons who import goods. As I indicated, quite often flights will arrive after 4.00 p.m. and again, at the port ships may arrive at 1 o'clock in the morning, and our business people are very concerned to be able to have immediate access to their goods so that they do not incur additional charges, charges of demurrage, charges of port rent, and so on.

You also have examination of containers at the port with respect to the container examination station where containers are selected at random and are completely unstuffed to determine whether there is contraband in them or whether the goods inside match the bill of lading and the manifest, and so on. So that customs officers are required on a daily basis to work overtime to facilitate the smooth flow of goods in and out of our ports, both our airports and our seaports.

Customs officers are also required, with the bonded warehouse system to visit bonded warehouses at times that are appropriate for industry, and quite often these times would be outside of normal working hours. So there is always a requirement to balance the need to contain expenditure with the need to provide regular and easy access for the business community.

One of the problems we have as a country is our low ranking on the scale in terms of ease of doing business. You can adopt an approach that you want to stay within regular working hours, but that is tantamount to “cutting off your nose to spite your face”, because, yes, you might contain expenditure but then you would

incur a lot of indirect economic costs in the economy because goods are delayed and businesses cannot get their materials and cannot create economic activity. So it is always a balancing act.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. I raised that because this overtime is in fact two-thirds of the value of Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances, so it is a fairly significant amount of overtime being incurred. But allow me to proceed, please. I am trying to get from you, Sir, now, the number of customs officers—sorry, the number of employees of the Customs and Excise Division and whether there are vacant posts, and if so, how many?

Madam Chairman: Under what Item you are asking that, Member?

Mr. Tancoo: I could pick it up at 01.

Hon. Imbert: That will be provided.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Minister, same Item, follow-up question, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living, and my colleague drew your attention to the fact that the salaries, that overtime is about two-thirds the salaries, 44 as opposed to 60 million. Is consideration being given to increasing the number of employees in the Customs and Excise Division so that you reduce the overtime if you introduce a permanent establishment that can operate on a shift system that would require—that would give coverage, 24/7 coverage and reduce the overtime at 03? And if this is being considered in the context of the Revenue Authority that you are proposing.

Hon. Imbert: Are you finished?

Mr. Charles: It is 01—

Hon. Imbert: No, are you finished with the question?

Mr. Charles: Yes, I am finished.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you. The filling of posts in the Customs and Exercise Division does not fall under the control of the Ministry of Finance. These are all establishment positions who fall under the Service Commissions. This applies across the board in all Government Departments where the rate at which the Service Commissions fills vacancies is way below any acceptable rate. This is something that has bedeviled all governments, not just this Government, previous governments before us. A lot of these key and critical divisions like Customs are only filled at about 50 per cent of the approved posts on the establishment, and no matter how governments plead with the Service Commissions, which is an independent commission appointed by the President, to expedite the filling of vacancies, for one reason or another, the vacancies are not filled in a timely manner.

So that, yes, of course, and we intercede with the Service Commission on a regular basis and we ask them to do whatever they can to fill the posts. Of course if we had more customs officers then we could have a greater output during normal working hours, but it is not up to us. And that is one of the reasons for the approach to this Parliament to create a Revenue Authority as a statutory authority so that that problem of delay—a perennial problem that has occurred for at least for the 29 years that I have been in this Parliament, I have confronted this problem—so that that problem of having to wait on the Service Commissions to fill these establishment posts will no longer be a problem. It will be a statutory authority and it will have the power to fill its own positions and attract qualified staff.

1.45 p.m.

So that we have to wait until the Revenue Authority is put in place before we can get any sort of increase in the rate of filling of these critical posts, because the Service Commissions is a constitutionally appointed commission, appointed by the President. We have no control over them, except to plead with them.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I want to carry you to 21: Government's Contribution to Group Pension- Daily-Rated Workers. This line Item, I do not know if this will be in relation to the pronouncement that you made last year, that this PNM intends to solve this long outstanding problem once and for all. Could you tell us what is the status of this? Because I see an allocation of \$20,000. Is this the Government's contribution to the daily-rated pension plan?

Hon. Imbert: There is a plan in this fiscal to finalize that matter. We have received submissions. We have gone a long way towards finalizing the details of the proposed pension plan for daily-rated workers. How much it would cost, what the levels of contribution from employer and employee would be. What the Budgets Division did to keep this matter alive was to put a nominal figure in that line Item, which will be supplemented as soon as we reach agreement with the National Union of Government and Federated Workers, which I am very hopeful can be done before the end of this fiscal year.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, information coming to me is that the said union that you have indicated, or just referred to, they have written to you, they have written to the Prime Minister without success in relation to coming to a conclusion on this particular matter.

Hon. Imbert: Is that a question?

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I am asking.

Hon. Imbert: You are asking me if I know whether they have written—

Mr. Indarsingh: You have said that you have received submissions. I am asking you, has the union written to you and the hon. Prime Minister on about three occasions, and there has been not any convening of any meeting, or you have acceded to their requests as it relates to the finalization of this line Item, which when you spoke in relation to this line Item in the last budget. I thought with your excitement, you would “have fell” over the table in relation to the finalization of this.

Hon. Imbert: Could you phrase that in the form of a question?

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, I am simply asking whether you have acceded to the union’s request on three occasions in terms of their correspondences to you, to meet and treat with respect to the finalization of this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: That is the question?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: When I checked the file, I discovered that there had been discussions throughout the 2010—2015 period with the former government, of which you were a part, hon. Member, and despite the fact that the President of that union was a UNC Senator, during that five-year period that the NUGFW tried to get the former UNC administration to finalize the pension plan for its workers, there was no progress made whatsoever. I am confident that if all goes according to plan, this would be finalized in this fiscal year.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Inland Revenue Division. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I refer to Sub-Item 04: Allowances- Monthly Paid Officers. I note that there has been a drastic increase from 795,000 in 2019 to an estimated 2020 figure of 2.2 million, which then doubled in fact, greater than— the actual spend

was 4.2 million in 2020, which is the same figure carried over into 2021. Minister, can you advise why we had this 3,500 per cent increase between 2019 and 2020 into 2021?

Hon. Imbert: This is projected expenditure. It is not—I think I heard something about 1,000 per cent increase. Did I hear that?

Mr. Tancoo: There was a 3,500 per cent increase between 2019 to 2020 revised, and that is the same figure that went into 2021.

Hon. Imbert: 3,500 per cent? That would mean it went up 35 times.

Mr. Tancoo: Let me say it differently, Minister. It went from 795,942 to \$4.222 million.

Hon. Imbert: So, it did not go up 35 times?

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you for your correction. Can you still explain why there is such a significant increase?

Hon. Imbert: So, let me just clarify. There was not a 3,500 per cent increase.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. So what, Sir, was the reason for this increase?

Hon. Imbert: That is the expected expenditure at the Inland Revenue Division, and you have to recall that during this period of COVID-19, we issued \$3.5 billion in VAT refunds, and another \$500 million in individual income tax refunds and other refunds. This meant that the Inland Revenue Division had to prepare individual payments for thousands of individuals taxpayers on an accelerated basis. I think the last time I looked at it, perhaps over 20,000 individual taxpayers and companies were dealt with in an expedited manner. And while I am at it, I want to congratulate the Inland Revenue Division for the fantastic work they did in being able to issue \$3.5 billion in VAT refunds in such a short space of time, in such an efficient manner. [*Desk thumping*]

So that during 2020, there would have been increased demands on the division and a requirement for them to work extra hours, and to work above and beyond the call of duty. This is a projection as to what the cost is expected to be.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, line Item 21: Government's Contribution to the Group Pension- Daily-Rated Workers. Could I get an update based on your pronouncement in last year's budget that the daily-paid workers in the public service, with an appropriate minimum length of service, be eligible for the minimum public service pension of \$3,500?

Hon. Imbert: What line Item, please?

Mr. Indarsingh: Line Item 21. Did any of the employees in the Board of Inland Revenue qualify or benefited from this announcement that you made?

Hon. Imbert: So, you are dealing with line Item 21?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: You are aware, of course, that the provision to provide a minimum monthly pension upon retirement of \$3,500 is associated with monthly-paid officers? It has nothing to do with daily-paid officers. You are aware of that?

Mr. Indarsingh: I am aware—

Hon. Imbert: So why are you asking?

Mr. Indarsingh:—of the pronouncement that you made in the 2020 budget presentation, when you stated that:

“...I...propose that the daily-paid workers in the public service with an appropriate minimum length of service be eligible for the minimum public service pension of \$3,500.”

I am saying to you, I am just asking or seeking your clarification, based on your pronouncement, has it been implemented and if any of the employees in the

Board of Inland Revenue, from a daily-paid point of view, have benefited from that announcement?

Hon. Imbert: Well, I think it would be pellucidly clear that daily-paid workers in a Ministry are not unique to any division. I think it would also be pellucidly clear that if there is a pension plan for daily-rated workers, it would be applicable to all daily-rated workers. I think it will also be pellucidly clear if I say that I am hopeful that by the end of fiscal 2021, which is September 30, 2021, that we can finalize and implement the pension plan for daily-rated workers, that the plan has not yet been finalized. And I think it will also be pellucidly clear, since the plan has not yet been finalized, that no worker could possibly have received a pension as a daily-rated worker. I think that is obvious.

Mr. Indarsingh: So, it is pellucidly clear, Minister, that you mislead the daily-paid workers?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, I am not going to allow that, and just retract that. I am not going to allow that. The Minister was very clear. You asked four questions with respect to this, he was very clear.

Mr. Indarsingh: But, Chair—

Madam Chairman: Member, I am not just—

Mr. Indarsingh: Chair, I am following up on something—

Madam Chairman: Member, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh:—that the Minister made a pronouncement in relation for the benefit of workers in this country—

Hon. Imbert: Madam, may I ask for a ruling, please?

Mr. Indarsingh:—and I am seeking—

Hon. Imbert: May I ask for a ruling please, Madam Chairman? May I ask for a

ruling?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, I have said that I would not allow that as a question, I will not allow as a statement and I have ask you to retract.

Mr. Indarsingh: But, Madam Chair, what was unparliamentary about that?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, I am giving one opportunity to abide by what I have just ruled—one opportunity. I have asked that you retract that statement.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, I—

Madam Chairman: Okay, Member, if you are not going to abide unreservedly by the ruling, I will then ask you to leave.

Mr. Indarsingh: But I was in the process of making my withdrawal or retraction, and I said, “Madam Chair”, and you did not allow me to finish.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, if you are making a retraction, make it very quickly and without any preamble or qualification.

Mr. Indarsingh: I retract, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Member for Oropouche West.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Tancoo: I am returning to 04: Allowances- Monthly Paid Officers.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima, I would like to hear a Member of your own team, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma’am. I am returning to Sub-Head 04: Allowances- Monthly Paid Officers. The Minister indicated that the increase allocation in the revised 2020 to 4.2 million was as a result of increased payments to monthly-paid staff who were involved in the preparation of VAT refunds, as part of the Government’s COVID response. Is that correct, Sir?

Hon. Imbert: And other things.

Mr. Tancoo: Can then the Minister indicate what then is the reason for this continued allocation of the same figure into 2021 Estimate?

Hon. Imbert: Because we intend to go on a collection drive in 2021. There are a lot of outstanding taxes to be collected. There is a lot of tax leakage, and we will be very aggressive in tax collections, legitimate tax collections, in fiscal 2021. So we thought it appropriate to put an appropriate figure there.

Mr. Tancoo: Is this figure then going to be based on ex gratia payments?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister indicate, based on his comment, how many VAT refunds are outstanding?

Hon. Imbert: No, but I will get the answer for you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. I am moving on to Item 29 on page 86. Similar query, the actual spend in 2019 was \$6,556, but we then had an increase estimated and spent in 2020, which carried into 2021. Can the Minister indicate why we had such a significant increase?

2.00 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: I assume you are referring to line Item 29.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Sir.

Hon. Imbert: I would assume but I will get the information for you. That is the extra work that was done during 2020.

Mr. Tancoo: Just for clarification, Minister, and just if you could assist me please. You are very soft spoken today, so I can barely hear what you are saying all the way down on this side. I will appreciate if you speak a little louder please, with the Chair's permission, of course.

Hon. Imbert: I am sorry, was that a question? Was it a question?

Mr. Tancoo: Move on, Sir.

Hon. Imbert: You want me to move on? I cannot move on unless you ask a question.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Treasury Division. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Minister, in 2020 you estimated \$3.9 million to be spent on Item 05: Government's Contribution to NIS. Your actual spend, based on your Revised Estimates is \$9.4 million. Can the Minister indicate what promoted this increase between Estimates and the Revised Estimates in 2020?

Hon. Imbert: Certainly. The National Insurance Board has been quite aggressive of late in collecting outstanding payments, and there are quite a few private sector and public sector agencies who are in arrears. And there was an additional payment made to the National Insurance Board for past-due payments in this fiscal in that division.

Mr. Tancoo: What period would these arrears have been incurred, Minister?

Hon. Imbert: I am sorry, you were a bit muffled there. Could you repeat?

Mr. Tancoo: I am trying to discern, Minister, for what period these arrears would have been accumulated? And further—

Hon. Imbert: Oh certainly, we will provide you with that information.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 008: Investments Division; Item 009: Central Tenders Board; Item 010: Valuation Division. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I refer to Sub-Item 03: Overtime Monthly-Paid Officers. I note that there is an Estimate and a Revised Estimate of \$1,700. I am trying to figure out if that was a nominal sum put in there, or if that was an actual

figure?

Hon. Imbert: We will provide you with that information.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal; Item 01: [*Crosstalk*] Okay. Couva South, you have something on 011?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Just to find out, the remuneration to board members 06, Minister. Do you have a full complement of board members at this particular time?

Hon. Imbert: I believe we are at the statutory requirement but I can find out for you if there are any vacancies on the board. You will know that there is a minimum threshold.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes. That is why—

Hon. Imbert: I believe we are because the board is functioning as far as I know but I will get clarity on that for you.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Item 014: Financial Intelligence Unit. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, 1.6 million. And the question I am asking the Minister is that, given the importance of the FIU—an increase in importance—is the Minister satisfied that 1.6 million is adequate to meet the needs of the FIU given that Investments Division the salaries are 8 million, we look at others and we see it is 9 million, et cetera, but this is 1.6. Are you satisfied that this is enough to meet the remit of such an important agency in the Ministry of Finance?

Hon. Imbert: You may not be aware, Member, but the Investments Division, for

example, has to supervise approximately 100 state enterprises or subsidiaries and this include entities as large as Heritage Petroleum Company Limited, National Gas Corporation, et cetera, and therefore the responsibilities of the Investments Division are immense and therefore, it is not a good comparison to look at whatever is allocated for the Investments Division which has this responsibility for 100 companies and then look at the Financial Intelligence Unit and say, well their allocation is less but they are equally or more important—

Mr. Charles: Or the Valuation Division of 9 million.

Hon. Imbert: Yes. The Valuation Division had the responsibility to value thousands of properties in Trinidad and Tobago, thousands on an annual basis. So again—and they are also engaged in preparing the valuation roles for property tax and we are at looking perhaps 1 million registered properties that they have to deal with, so that it is not an apples and apples comparison. I am advised that this allocation is adequate however, this is one of the divisions where we always ensure that they have sufficient funds for their operations, and if additional funds are required, additional funds will be provided, money will be vired from another Vote to provide for whatever expenditure they have because the FIU is important to us.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Minister, the FIU is not responsible for monitoring issues like money laundering, following where money is obtained, et cetera, and any discrepancy in the ethical operations of businesses and individuals throughout Trinidad and Tobago and therefore, their remit is significant also? And therefore, the staffing, I come back, you say it is adequate, well I take your word for it. Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: So that was not a question.

Madam Chairman: Item 017: Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Minister, I turn your attention Sub-Item 05: Telephones. I note that there has been increase from 965,000.30 in 2019 to 1.5 million in 2020 to a projected 4.5 million in 2021. Can the Minister indicate what accounts for such a drastic rise in the Telephones requirements?

Hon. Imbert: Payment of arrears.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Minister, I notice it is \$15.9 million and it is the second largest Item—well it is significantly high, 15.9 million. The question I would like to ask is, what efforts if any and if applicable are being made to reduce the need of physical storage through the use of ICT in the context of COVID and the requirement for workers increasingly to work from home?

Hon. Imbert: We are constantly digitizing our records but by law physical copies are required for production in court for evidence. So that for a period of time in the case of the Inland Revenue, I think you go back nine years, and in criminal matters there is no limitation period at all. So we have to maintain both digital copies and paper copies for significant periods of time.

However, the digitization allows the paper copies to be stored off-site locations which attract a lower rent than the high-priced rentals for buildings in Port of Spain and so on, and quite often these documents are stored in warehouse accommodation, secure warehouse accommodation at much lower rents. So the point is that, of course, we would like to go to complete digitization but for court purposes paper records are essential.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister provide a list of all spaces rented and the monthly rent for each?

Hon. Imbert: Certainly.

Mr. Charles: And the tenants involved—landlords involved. Sorry.

Hon. Imbert: The tenants?

Mr. Charles: Landlords. Sorry.

Hon. Imbert: With respect to the spaces rented, of course. With respect to rent, yes. And once we get clearance on who the landlords are, no problem there either.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you, Ma'am. Minister, I am at line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. In the explanation column I see that there is a breakdown of legal counsel and advisory services in the sum of \$10 million, and consultants to the Ministry of Finance also at \$10 million. Minister, can you give us an indication of who the consultants that have been hired for the last fiscal are? And who do you intend to hire for this fiscal?

Hon. Imbert: We can certainly do that. But I must tell you that the Ministry of Finance provides assistance to other Ministries with respect to the engagement of consultants. By way of example, the Ministry of Finance engaged one of the top oil and gas law firms in the world to assist the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the empowered negotiating team in its negotiations with major oil companies such as Shell and BPTT, and that bill was paid by the Ministry of Finance. It is not unusual.

Under the UNC a lot of bills arising from other Ministries were paid by the Ministry of Finance. A lot of work actually emanated from then Attorney

General's Office under the UNC, and the Ministry of Finance was made to pay the bill. So it is not unusual for the Ministry of Finance to pay bills for other agencies.

In addition, we also hired some very, very experienced financial consultants, experts who assisted us with our ratings during the COVID period resulting in, I have to say, the fantastic performance in terms of maintaining our credit ratings in the midst of a collapse of countries worldwide. Trinidad and Tobago was able to maintain its ratings, so that is the kind of thing that we spend money on. It is well worth it because if you get a rating downgrade, for example, you can get an extra percentage increase on your interest rate for loans and that could cost the country hundreds of millions of dollars.

In addition to that, these lawyers who assisted the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, helped us to recover \$2 billion in moneys from the oil companies. So we in finance are of the view that the hiring of these experts is value for money, you get it back tenfold but we will provide a list.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, I have no argument with you hiring experts. Now, I am seeing that your Estimates for 2020 was 39 million and your expenditure was only 15 million, and then you estimated 30 million to 2021. Is it that this \$30 million is to pay arrears or outstanding invoices from the last fiscal?

Hon. Imbert: Not necessarily.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. So all of the invoices would have been cleared?

Hon. Imbert: There may be a small arrears but it is a projection going forward for the engagement of consultants. Again, we will have to hire financial experts to assist us with our credit ratings. We believe this is absolutely essential. It has worked very, very well, it was something that we tried out as a country for the first time engaging an expert financial consultancy firm to help us with our credit

ratings. It worked extremely well, so we will be continuing with that, there may be some small arrears but we are going forward with similar type consultancy arrangements in the future.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. I refer to Sub-Item 23: Fees. I note that the Minister has added an explanatory note which says that it includes provisions for analytical services. Can the Minister provide an indication as to what these analytical services are? Who provides them? If this is the name of a company? And for what period this was done?

Hon. Imbert: This would be a myriad of services including legal services, so we can provide you with a list.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Can you indicate whether this service was included in the 2020 Estimates of 24 million, given that only 16 million was spent?

Hon. Imbert: Well, when you do these budget Estimates you are not sure exactly how much you would spend. The Ministry is a target for litigants, I think we have been sued about 12 times since we came into Government arising out of budgetary measures, you know, we increased taxes on motor vehicles, we put on the online tax, we put taxes on tyres. For quite unusually we have been sued for imposing taxes. If we won every single case by the way. So you make an estimate and as you go forward the actual expenditure unfolds. So that we are simply making an estimate.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Tancoo: So Minister, can you then provide a detailed breakdown just like you would be doing for 2021 in 2020?

Hon. Imbert: I did say I would provide a list and you would get a list.

Madam Chairman: Item 002, Budgets Division; Item 003, Customs and Excise Division. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, I would like to draw to your attention line Items 12 and 28. I noticed today on the newspaper there was a report that the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Limited and CARPHA is conducting some seminar in terms of guidelines towards the reopening of borders. I am looking at the allocation for Materials and Supplies and Other Contracted Services, and questioning whether consideration has been given to the Customs and Excise to provide them with funding that may assist with the preparation for opening our borders, issues like infrastructure adjustments at the arrival hall, baggage room, baggage room handling, physical distancing, passenger flow and so on. Has that been taken into consideration in this appropriation for Customs and Excise, Minister?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Paray: So, we do expect to have the borders open sometime during this fiscal year?

Hon. Imbert: What was the question?

Mr. Paray: If you do expect to have the borders open?

Hon. Imbert: Now, I am afraid that borders is not me.

Madam Chairman: I will not allow that under this at all.

Hon. Imbert: Sure, that is Prime Minister and Minister of National Security.

Madam Chairman: Item 0—Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Under Customs and Excise Division, I am looking at Sub-Head 06: Water and Sewerage Rates. We went from 15,000 in 2019 to 150,000 in 2021 Revised to 500,000 projected for 2021. Can the Minister

indicate why we have had such a running increase, and whether this is based on an assumption that there would be higher water rates in 2021?

Hon. Imbert: We would get an explanation for you. Could be payment of arrears, could be occupation of new buildings. We will get it for you.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, follow-up as well on 08, Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. We had an Estimate of—well, we had a Revised Estimate of \$4 million in 2020, but we have now increased to \$10 million projected for 2021. Can the Minister account for this increase? A \$5.8 million increase.

Hon. Imbert: This is a projected amount for archiving of important documents. As I indicated earlier, we have to maintain paper documents for investigations, for prosecutions, for matters that are before the Tax Appeal Board, all that sort of thing.

Mr. Tancoo: Following up, Minister, on Sub-Item 28, Other Contracted Services. I note for 2021 you have a provision of \$6 million allocated for payment to service from Columbus Communications. Can the Minister indicate what service was provided, or what service is envisioned to be provided by this entity?

Hon. Imbert: If you look at the right hand side of the bottom you would get some clarification.

Mr. Tancoo: That is the source of my question, Sir. The service for Columbus Communications is \$6 million, and I am asking what service is being provided by Columbus Communications?

Hon. Imbert: I believe Columbus Communications—[Inaudible]—ICT company, therefore I suspect it is Internet services.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan? Item 004, Inland Revenue

Division. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I am looking at Telephones. We moved from 2.8 million, 2.9-odd million in 2019 to 2.5 million Revised Estimates 2020, and we then increased—we doubled to 5.472 million, estimated for 2021. Can the Minister account for that 100-plus per cent increase?

Hon. Imbert: Payment of arrears.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, I am at line Item No. 16, Contract Employment. Minister, I saw that the Actual spent for 2020 Revised Estimates was \$11 million. Minister, there is one complaint, and I could declare my interest in terms of conveyancing, in terms of the time that it takes to get back deeds from the Stamp Duty Division. For example, is there any intention of the Ministry to hire additional staff so that this service can be provided in a much quicker time, because I know that there is some land reform coming?

Hon. Imbert: Well, you know, in the spirit of the general freeze on establishment positions we would try to contain expenditure on contract employment as much as is possible. But where there are critical areas certainly the Government would be minded to increase the contract employment to deal with urgent matters. So, I have taken note of what you said and we will do what is required to be done.

Mr. Hosein: I appreciate that, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 005, Treasury Division; Item 008, Investments Division; Item 009, Central Tenders Board; Item 010, Valuation Division. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Sub-Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence. We have a Revised Estimate in 2020 of 2.26 million, but an estimate of 7 million

projected for 2021. Can the Minister account for this \$4.7 million increase?

Hon. Imbert: That would have to do with our intention to step up and accelerate field visits to properties for the population of devaluation roles for the collection of property tax.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, Ma'am? Sub-Item 16: Contract Employment. You have a \$17 million increase. Are they both related to your Travelling and Subsistence?

Hon. Imbert: What we did in 2020 is we brought on a significant number of field officers in the process of getting ready for the collection of property tax. There are two stages; you have to send people out to visit the properties to do an examination, et cetera, determine the physical dimensions and the nature of the buildings, whether they are two storey, single storey, how many rooms they have, et cetera. So that is one aspect of things. And then when that is done, that information has been to be collated and then used to put a value on the property in terms of capital value and annual rent, well value and so and so. What we did in 2020, we brought on significant number of staff and that is the cause for the increase. These are mainly field operatives who are out in the field visiting properties and gathering information.

Mr. Tancoo: Moving on to Sub-Item 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. I note that there has been a \$5 million increase in this allocation for 2021. Can the Minister indicate why this has happened?

Hon. Imbert: Again, the additional staff required additional accommodation.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister provide a listing of the areas?

Hon. Imbert: Sure. Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Minister, based on your answer on line Item 16: Contract Employment, you said that this would have been a figure based on the Government's intention for property tax. Can you just give us a breakdown of all of the positions that were advertised and currently filled for the positions to establish or to implement the property tax regime? How many field officers? How many valuers?

Hon. Imbert: We have a total of 333 contract positions, and we will get a breakdown for you. Okay?

Mr. Hosein: Okay. And, Minister, can you when you are giving me the breakdown, indicate how many valuers have been hired who are RICS certified? Because I know that the policy of the Ministry, again with the Stamp Duty Division, is that you only accept valuations from RICS certification. So I want to know whether or not this same standard applies for the property tax?

Hon. Imbert: Of course, and that is one of the problems we have. A lot of those positions are establishment positions not contract. Those would be public servants that have to be engaged by the Service Commissions. That is one of the areas that we are having a little trouble with because of the paucity of availability, the lack of availability of persons with those skills. You would find a lot of these people prefer to work in the private sector. It is much more lucrative for valuers to work in the private sector because, you know, they get paid for everything that they value. So that it is an area where we are having some trouble attracting qualified staff, but I will provide the information you require.

Mr. Hosein: Because I believe if you set a valuation for somebody's property it must be done by a certified—

Hon. Imbert: I would not want to give you a yes or no answer on that. What I do

know is that the Valuation Division has to value the properties, and there is a legal framework for that. But I would not want to give you a yes or no answer to your statement.

Mr. Hosein: And you will say that is based on the establishment valuation?

Hon. Imbert: The valuations are usually done by persons who are permanent public servants rather than contract valuers. In fact, it is something we are looking at to see if we can outsource and bring in private valuers to do it on a job basis. This is a technique used in the auditing of the financials of state enterprises, because in that case the Auditor General is limited in terms of capacity, and quite often state enterprises are audited by private auditing firms and then the Auditor General would simply review and sign off, and we may have to use a similar approach to the valuation of properties, get qualified, chartered valuers to come in, do the valuations for us and then the Commissioner of Valuations would—sorry, yes, Commissioner of Valuations would review and sign off, and that may speed up things. So, it is a “lil” complicated, but I will provide you with the information.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Hosein: Ma’am, I had one more question before—

Madam Chairman: I will come back. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Minister, Item 17: Training, and I see 1.9 million was spent in 2020, and the Estimates for 2021 is 663,000, a decrease of 1.3 million. Minister, in the context of your response to Item 16: Contract Employment, and the fact that you are allocating 17 million increase to recruit contract positions. Given that these contract—persons who are contracted have to be trained, could the Minister

explain that significant decrease in the training budget?

Hon. Imbert: Most certainly. The training is done by and large by The University of the West Indies. You may or may not know, there is a department of surveying at The University of the West Indies. So when we brought in the field officers they were trained by personnel from UWI, and most of them have been trained already. So that our training requirements going into 2021 are significantly less than in 2020, because they have been trained. So, that is why the number is less.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, back the line Item No. 16. You indicated that there was about 300-plus field officers who are coming on board to pursue the valuations. Can you identify, you know, is this number sufficient to complete the amount of homes to be valued in this fiscal to be able to trigger that tax?

Hon. Imbert: Well, we are using a variety of approaches to assemble and gather the information. Field visits, of course, are required, but you also have databases that would have information on properties and so on. So it is a multifaceted approach. If we require more staff we would approach Cabinet to get permission to recruit more staff in fiscal 2021.

Mr. Paray: Minister, can you indicate what are the number of homes that must be valued before you can trigger that tax?

Hon. Imbert: I would not want to give an exact answer at this point in time.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Paray: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: I would not want to.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you Ma'am. Sub-Item 22: Short-term Employment. We have moved from 341,000 in 2019 to 1.28 million in 2020, but we have increased significantly to 8 million projected for 2021. Can the Minister indicate whether this too is related to the property tax roll out?

Hon. Imbert: We are looking at bringing on very senior people. A short term contract is up to six months. So that you do not need these very senior people to come on for longer than that. But we would need the significant amount of them and this is what that provision is for, to bring on board chartered valuers who might work for the Ministry for a three-month period or something like that. So that is why that has gone up like that.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Hosein: On line Item 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation. I keep seeing an incremental increase in the expenditure from 2019, from six million to 10 million and now an estimated of 16 million for this fiscal year. Can you just give us an indication of how many buildings, these I know, one is in my constituency I believe.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan, you know today is a particularly short day?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: I would like everybody to pay attention.

Mr. Hosein: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: That was given as a commitment to one of your Members already.

Hon. Imbert: Asked and answered already.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Hosein: And just to follow-up on a question that the Member for Mayaro would have asked. Minister, I know you do not want to say how many homes have been valued, but can you give us an indication of the percentage of properties that have been valued thus far?

Madam Chairman: Minister—

Mr. Hosein: Because I know by law the 50 per cent will trigger.

Madam Chairman: Minister and Member, I am not going to allow that question. That question was asked in another way you are asking for percentages, the Member for Mayaro asked for the number.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am—

Madam Chairman:—and the Minister said that he would not answer that.

Mr. Hosein: But Ma'am—

Madam Chairman: He may not have said it that way but that is the long and short of it.

Hon. Imbert: That is what I was going to say.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, respectfully, it is a different question.

Hon. Imbert: No, but I “cyah” provide the information at this time.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: I do not want to talk out of turn.

Mr. Hosein: Sure.

Hon. Imbert: I might give you a wrong number. They are valuing properties every day, you see. So they might have done 1,000 yesterday, I do not want to just talk out of turn like that.

Mr. Hosein: “Yuh talk 'bout it outside”.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal; Item

014: Financial Intelligence Unit. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 16: Contract Employment. Could the Minister, well there is an increase to one million, but I suspect seven million is the standard expenditure in this item. What do these contract employees do and in what areas?

Hon. Imbert: Financial Investigators and Financial Panelists, the people that you ask to make sure were at work.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I refer to Sub-Item 23 on page 100. Fees, we have move from 212,000 to 500,000 Revised Estimate for 2020, to \$1.9 million in 2021. Can the Minister provide an indication as to what these fees are and to whom?

Hon. Imbert: We will provide a list.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Imbert: The services that the unit would need to employ would be quite varied in terms of legal services and other expert advisory services. So we would provide you with a list.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. Item 017: Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Budget Division; Item 003: Customs and Excise Division; Item 004: Inland Revenue Division; Item 005: Treasury Division; Item 008: Investments Division; Item 009: Central Tenders Board; Item 010: Valuation Division; Item 014: Financial Intelligence Unit; Item 017: Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001: Regional Bodies. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I refer to Sub-Item 12: Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility. I note that there was an allocation of 53.9 million in 2020, but a spend of only 39 million. Can the Minister indicate why?

Hon. Imbert: We are constantly reviewing the risk profile in this Caribbean Catastrophe Insurance Policy. I am trying to get the best arrangement for Trinidad and Tobago. We were very fortunate some years ago, when there was a terrible flood, to recover almost \$50 million as a payout from this agency. There were some issues when the earthquake came recently where the parameters that had been established were a little too high, the threshold was a little too high, so we have done some revision and this represents the policy premium payment for this particular fiscal year.

If you look at it over a period of time we considered the payment quite worth it. I mean, like any insurance policy you are not sure what the outcome will be, but that is the payment for the insurance policy, it insures Trinidad and Tobago against natural disasters, including tropical storms, hurricanes, and earthquakes and there are triggers that will determine how much the payout will be in the event of a natural disaster.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I wanted to ask a question on International Bodies.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so we now at Non-Profit Institutions. You have anything there?

Mr. Charles: Would you allow me?

Madam Chairman: We are at Non-Profit Institutions. Do you have anything there?

Mr. Charles: No, I have nothing there.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am at line Item 18: Salary Relief Grant, \$226 million spent in 2020. Minister, can you give us a breakdown of how many persons access the grant and how many applications were made and those persons that did not access the grants.

Madam Chairman: Is the information about accessing the grants not in the public domain? That is in the public domain.

Mr. Hosein: Yeah, but—

Hon. Imbert: On the website.

Madam Chairman: And in terms of the question with respect to how many people access the grants, I will only allow that question if you are asking in respect of a particular period, because I think that is also on the Parliament record up to a particular date.

Mr. Hosein: There is only one period, Ma'am, which is 2020.

Hon. Imbert: No, I gave—

Madam Chairman: 2020 has many months within it.

Hon. Imbert: I gave an update in the budget statement.

Madam Chairman: So when I said period I did not necessarily mean year. But there is information on the Parliament record—

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—up to a particular date. So if you are going to ask me after—ask the Minister—

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, Ma'am—

Madam Chairman: Both of us cannot speak at the same time. So if you are

asking the information with respect from the last date that is on the Parliament record to now I will allow.

Mr. Hosein: Well, I will ask that question.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so what is the question?

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister say how many persons accessed the Salary Relief Grant from the last day you give an answer to present date.

Hon. Imbert: I made a comprehensive statement in the budget statement on the 5th of October.

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: So that you are asking for that information after the 5th of October?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: I will provide it to you.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, would you then allow the question of how many persons made an application for the grant, because I do not know if that is in the public domain.

Hon. Imbert: That is also in my public statements.

Mr. Hosein: And how many persons did not have approval for the grants?

Hon. Imbert: That is also in my public statements.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you give us the answer please?

Hon. Imbert: What is the answer? What are you asking?

Mr. Hosein: Can you give us the answer as to how many persons applied for the grant and how many persons—

Hon. Imbert: I am saying that I have made public statements regarding how many people applied.

Mr. Hosein: Well then, can you give us to presently?

Hon. Imbert: I am not finished, Member. I am trying to answer you. You are asking multiple questions while I am speaking. Could you allow me to answer your question?

Mr. Hosein: Well, I wish you would.

Hon. Imbert: What I am saying is that I have provided statements in this Parliament and outside of this Parliament, quite recently, as to the total number of applications for the grant, the total number of successful applications, the total number of payments, the total value of the payments and the total number of unsuccessful applications. So as the Chairman has quite correctly pointed out, you have to give a timeline. When exactly do you want an update on this to be made; from what date.

Mr. Hosein: From the 5th of October, to present date.

Hon. Imbert: Certainly.

Mr. Hosein: And also Minister, can you then tell us whether or not all the applicants who have applied for the salary relief grant, whether all of them received the three payments of \$1,500.

Hon. Imbert: Obviously not, because not every application was successful. My understanding is—

Mr. Hosein: I asked about the successful applications.

Hon. Imbert: I do not remember you using the word “successful”.

Mr. Hosein: Well I am urging you to remember it now.

Hon. Imbert: That is okay. I am just saying I do not recall that. Perhaps I was not hearing you properly. What you are now telling me is that you are saying you would want to know whether the successful applicants received all three payments. Based on the last communication I received from the unit the answer I believe is,

yes. But I can certainly check that for you and see whether there were some applicants who were successful who did not receive all three payments and I will provide you with that information.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 21, the COVID-19 Support that you have budgeted 200,000,000 for this fiscal year, is it a blanket support or is this specific to certain items?

Hon. Imbert: I have given a comprehensive list in the budget statement. That is a preliminary point I am making. In the budget statement I gave a complete comprehensive list of all the different types of COVID-19 relief support that were given by all arms of Government. So it is not just finance, social development, Office of the Prime Minister, et cetera. But within that complete list I indicated that we had allocated 200 million for the credit union movement in two parts.

The first 100 million was for their members to lend them up to \$15,000 as a short term concessional loan and the second 100 million is for small businesses, because we have entered into a partnership with the credit unions to lend money not just to their members but their members who are small business people. And that is why there is \$200 million here. What the credit unions have told us is, it is taking a little while to get their members to get involved in the process and submit the necessary application and provide all the necessary—[Crosstalk] Hold on, I am just getting a little disturbed here by the noise down there. So what the credit unions have told us, the members are a bit slow off the mark. I guess it will accelerate, we hope it will and this is why we put \$200 million in anticipation that they will get their act together and we will start to see a large number of

applications coming in, because we want to partner with the credit unions.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Salary Relief Grants that fall outside of the last fiscal into this fiscal, would that be part of this COVID-19 blanket?

Hon. Imbert: There is supposed to be an allocation for all types—this is a sort of catch all allocation here, not just for the credit union movement, but also to deal with any residual applications that have “crossed over” from September 30th into this fiscal.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma’am. Again, staying with Item 18: Salary Relief Grant. I would like to remind the Minister of my request made in my budget response for a geographic breakdown of the recipients of this Salary Relief Grant.

2.45 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: This is a little difficult you know because the way—Member for Couva South, please, I am dealing with the other Member down there. It is a little difficult because the database which the unit is using focuses primarily on the national insurance number of the applicants. It does not focus on their address. So that there is no filter or search feature within the database that could take a person’s address and then zone it into a municipal region or another type of a territorial area. So is a little difficult to tell you that. It would take a long time to pull out all those addresses because you are talking thousands, 50,000, more than 50,000, and disaggregate them and say all right this one is from Penal/Debe, and that one is from Siparia, and this one is from Diego Martin. We have not gathered the information in that way. So it is kind of hard to give that information and

certainly cannot give it at this point in time.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, the form which is required to be filled out actually has address and location, street address including village, town, city as a requirement of the application, and that form I believe is computerized, and therefore, searching it should be a relatively simple process.

Hon. Imbert: That is not how the database is set up at all. All we were interested in is whether the person qualified in terms of providing the necessary information as to loss of employment, whether they met the qualifications in terms of being a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, age, being under 65 and so on. The database is not configured to search people by address. You are wrong.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I am referring you to Item 20: Humanitarian Assistance to Trinidad. Can you clear up, Sir, whether that is an incomplete heading?

Hon. Imbert: That was an announcement made by the Prime Minister that we would be providing money, sending money to the missions overseas, the foreign missions; Trinidad and Tobago foreign missions. We sent US \$200,000 to five foreign missions and that money is in the bank accounts of the foreign missions overseas and it is available to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are suffering hardship. They apply to the High Commission or the Embassy as the case may be and there is a process; and the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs manages that side of things and they will determine whether the person qualifies for assistance and then they will get a cash pay out to help them with whatever issues they are facing overseas.

Mr. Tancoo: Follow-up, Minister. Can the Minister indicate the number of persons who have benefited from this programme and for which area?

Hon. Imbert: I cannot. I will have to get that information from the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, but I will undertake to get it from the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. All we have done in the Ministry of Finance is made the money available. This is not a programme of the Ministry of Finance. Unlike some of the other Items here, we have direct control and responsibility for them, in this case, we simply made the money available to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs for onward transmission to these foreign missions. So I will get it from the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Okay. Item 06: Food Price Support Programme. And I see 2019 is 153 million and pre-COVID, in the 2020 Estimates, 175 million and it went up to 314 million—I think that had to do with COVID—but in 2021 Estimates there is a 121 million decrease. Minister, if the decrease is a result of the fact that the high expenditure in revised expenditure in 2020 was a result of COVID, if it was, and given the fact that COVID is still with us and the consequences of COVID are still around and the fact that there would not be a vaccine until at best the end of the year, could the Minister explain the rationale behind the \$129 million decrease in the Food Price Support Programme?

Hon. Imbert: This, believe it or not, is food cards, and the Ministry, again, simply provides the money. This is a programme that is managed by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. You would have heard the Minister of Social Development and Family Services during fiscal 2020 indicate a number of

programmes where additional food cards were distributed to deserving recipients, and that is the reason why the original allocation of 175 million increased to 314. This is direct response to COVID, the food card distribution that took place in the fiscal year. We do not anticipate that level of additional food card distribution to take place in fiscal 2021 because this was when there was a total lockdown of the country.

We have put a number in here and we will work with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and if as we progress through 2021 we need to supplement this Vote we will supplement it. But this is driven by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services who would come to Cabinet and seek additional funding as the case may be, seek Cabinet approval to distribute additional food cards and so on, and the money comes out of here. So all we act is a kind of a conduit to provide the money to Social Development and Family Services for these food cards. So really the question of how many food cards there should be, how much it should be and so on, that is a matter for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and we will work with them—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Chair, may I just make a small intervention please? I heard the hon. Member—

Madam Chairman: Member, Minister of Finance is not yet completed.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Oh sorry.

Hon. Imbert: I was not. So anyhow just let me finish this quick. So we will work with Social Development and Family Services to see whether they need additional funds for additional food cards and it will be supplemented if required.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Health—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam—

Madam Chairman:—you wish to lend some assistance?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes. Both the Opposition and the Government should be speaking on one of the same voice. I heard the Member said there is going to be a vaccine before the end of the year—

Mr. Charles: At best.

Mr. Deyalsingh:—at best. Madam Chairman, those types of statements do not add any useful thing to the conversation about COVID, please.

Madam Chairman: Yes, and we hear you. I do not think the Member for Naparima was making any pronouncement on a date of a vaccine. I think he is just echoing that might be the best case scenario. I think is what I understood him to say, best case. All right? Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: No, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Ma'am, I took the time to refresh myself of the Minister's public statement and in the budget statement he indicated that \$129.8 million—

Madam Chairman: Member—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Hosein: I am on line Item 18 please, Salary Relief Grant.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Yes. So the Minister in his public statement during the budget debate indicated that \$129.8 million was spent in Salary Relief Grants. When I look at the book I am seeing that \$226 million was spent, so that means that there is an unaccounted \$97 million under this Item.

Madam Chairman: But has the Ministry of Finance not already undertaken to give you an update with respect to his last statement and current?

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, I will be very shocked if \$97 million in grants were given out

from the 5th of October to the 22nd of October.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So Member for Oropouche West—

Mr. Hosein: I would like to know, Ma'am—

Madam Chairman: I am now recognizing Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Hosein: I would like to know whether—

Mr. Tancoo: Item 009, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I refer to sub-Item 23: Caricom Development Fund. I note that there has been a 75 per cent, sorry a \$75 million increase in the spend under this fund. Can the Minister indicate why?

Hon. Imbert: Trinidad and Tobago has found itself in an unenviable position where we are the major contributor to Caricom, and its agencies, and its programmes, and its funds—and this fund is a Caricom fund—and the other territories, not all of them, are up to date and the fund was struggling, and they visited us and asked us to assist, and this is why you see that expenditure there.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Ma'am, I turn to Item 39: Office of the Procurement Regulation in which there was a \$25 million Estimate for 2020 of which only \$18 million was spent. Can the Minister indicate what is the status of this Item—

Hon. Imbert: The expenditure?

Mr. Tancoo:—and how soon—sorry?

Hon. Imbert: The expenditure?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Sir. Why was there a decrease?

Hon. Imbert: It was only an Estimate. That is what the Revised Estimates is.

Mr. Tancoo: Then can the Minister indicate whether the Office of the

Procurement Regulator under whom this falls directly, whether it is up running and fully functional for the staff and fully equipped?

Hon. Imbert: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister indicate whether the Office of the Procurement Regulator under whom this institution falls, the regulation, whether it is up and running and functional for the staff and fully equipped?

Hon. Imbert: As far as I know the regulator has made public statements that he has managed to recruit the vast majority of the staff required for the functioning of the organization. That is my understanding.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam. Minister, just two line Items, 40 and 41 on page 107—line Items 40 and 41. You would have budgeted 25 million each. Based on the Revised nothing has been neutralized. I know, for example, 40 would have been the responsibility of the Housing and Urban Development Ministry and also the business stimulus I am assuming would be the Ministry of Trade and Industry. I know you are just the executor for the fund, do you know if any company would have accessed any of those two stimulus programmes?

Hon. Imbert: Well, I will have to get clarity on whether there should be a nil figure here, or a small amount. But what we have discovered is that the incentives that were designed were insufficient to motivate private sector construction, and this is why you would see in the budget statement we are putting in some additional incentives to get the public sector involved in housing construction in particular. This figure is there in the expectation that in fiscal 2021—as I say I cannot tell exactly what the result was in 2020. I will get clarity. I am seeing they have a zero here. But there may have been some payments which we will pick up

in the closing of the accounts and so on. But what I can tell you is that we discovered that the incentives that we provided, together with the incentives already in place under the UNC administration, were insufficient to motivate the private sector to get involved in any meaningful way in housing construction.

So we put additional incentives into this budget. You will see that in the Finance Act as we go to debate that, and therefore, that is why we have left this allocation at 25 million in the expectation that there will be a much greater utilization of this facility in 2021. And this one, what this is, is the facility whereby the Government establishes a price for a private sector house and certain basic design details, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, that kind of thing; and where if the private sector can bring in these units at that price to these designed details, they get \$100,000 grant to offset the cost of construction. And they have told us they need a little bit more in order to motivate them to put their money at risk especially during this COVID period which is very uncertain for the real estate market. So we are hopeful that we will, with the additional incentives that we are putting in, be able to utilize this money in 2021.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Madam Chair, can I just ask—

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

Mr. Lee:—another question?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Lee: On page 108, Minister, Other Transfers, line Item 44. Line Item 44, 268,875,000 was expended within that COVID period and I am assuming for the loan guarantee facility.

3.00 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: Well, the way it was done— Sorry, you go ahead and finish your

question.

Mr. Lee: My question would be if that 268 million was expended, could I be provided, not the names of the people, or anything—just like, for example, the sectors, for example, the manufacturing sector within the small and medium, how many companies would have accessed it, what would have been the highest amount loan in the manufacturing retail, et cetera.

Hon. Imbert: Right. Now, I did give some details with respect to this matter in the budget statement. I did indicate how many loans had been granted. But the way this thing was done is that a loan was raised by the Government in the sum of \$268,875,000 and put in an escrow account. Because remember this is a loan guarantee programme. So the businesses go to the banks, they borrow the money based on a government guarantee and it is only when they default on the loan, then the banks can access this 268 million which is sitting in an escrow account.

So that even though loans would have been granted, I do not think any of them are in a default position yet, so this entire amount would be still there in the escrow account waiting for—and we hope there will be a low default rate with these loans. Okay? And these are the loans where the Government pays the interest for the first two years and they—

Mr. Lee: So this is just like a security that the Government is providing?

Hon. Imbert: Yes, that is right. That is right.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. I am on Item 42: Fiscal Incentive Programme for Farmers. Minister, I know in your last budget in 2019, you announced the 25 million facility and I believe it was \$100,000 can be accessed per farmer. I saw that

only \$1 million was spent which means roughly about 10 persons would have benefited for the entire year 2020. Can you give a reason why we have such a low number of persons accessing this grant?

Hon. Imbert: Again, the Ministry of Finance only provides the funding, the policy and the operationalization of the facility is done by the Ministry of Agriculture. But let me just explain. This is the \$500 million for agriculture so that this is not going to be spent simply on that incentive programme, in fact, that is a very small part of it. This \$500 million is for a range of expenditure items that the Ministry of Agriculture will incur in this fiscal year including construction of access roads, improving irrigation for farmers, providing land tenure for farmers, upgrading markets and all of the infrastructure requirements that the Ministry of Agriculture would need to kick-start agriculture as well as subsidies, grants and so on. So this is a very broad-based and comprehensive programme now as compared to the narrower programme which was simply the \$100,000 grant for farmers.

With respect to those details, I would have to get that from the Ministry of Agriculture. We do not manage that programme.

Mr. Hosein: Because it sounds very good but it is whether or not it could be done—

Hon. Imbert: What is different—

Mr. Hosein:—because what we see from the last year is that just only 1 million—

Hon. Imbert: I understand but I want you to understand that this is not the same programme.

Mr. Hosein: I understand that.

Hon. Imbert: This is now a very comprehensive programme involving all aspects of expenditure in the agriculture sector and it is not just giving cash grants to

farmers. It is the provision of infrastructure and upgrading of facilities.

Mr. Hosein: Then, Minister, this is such a big allocation, I am sure that it was disaggregated in terms of what you estimate to spend on, so a portion will be spent on leases, a portion will be spent on roadways, access roads. Can you give us a breakdown of what is estimated to be spent from the 500 million?

Hon. Imbert: I cannot give you that now because the way we structured this—and I have said this in the public domain that we would now wait on the Ministry of Agriculture to approach Cabinet with specific programmes for access roads, irrigation, upgrading of markets and the Minister of Agriculture is already in the final stages of approaching Cabinet for a disbursement for access roads which might be \$50 million or something like that so I cannot give you that kind of breakdown at this point in time. What I can tell you are the categories of expenditure.

Mr. Hosein: And Minister, just to be clear—it is probably some administrative issue—why was this \$500 million not allocated to Agriculture and placed in Finance?

Hon. Imbert: Precisely for the reason I have just explained. We had agreed that we are going to give a \$500 million boost to agriculture but the projects have to be fleshed out. If we had put it into the Ministry of Agriculture, they would then have to establish line items for each project, put a number to it and then if they had underestimated or overestimated, they would have to engage in a series of virements and transfers and so on. This allows maximum flexibility. It is a pool of money available, the Ministry of Agriculture just simply comes to Cabinet and says “we need \$50 million for access roads” and we in Finance provide the \$50 million. It is a much more efficient approach to dealing with this particular

initiative.

Mr. Hosein: So as it stands, there is no concrete plan in how this 500 million is going to be spent.

Hon. Imbert: There is a concrete plan if you read our manifesto. If you go in the agriculture section in our manifesto, you will see the complete plan for the disbursement of these funds. And further, if you go and read the final Report of the Roadmap to Recovery Committee, you will see even further elucidation on our—*[Interruption]* Madam Chairman, why is he talking while I am talking? Madam Chairman, could I ask that this particular hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, would you please allow me to finish?

Mr. Hosein: I was not speaking, Minister. You are probably hearing things.

Hon. Imbert: So, Madam Chairman, through you—

Madam Chairman: I think it is because your mike is on.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, through you, for those who wish to know, the Roadmap for Recovery Report has a comprehensive plan for the development of the agriculture sector. The *PNM Manifesto 2020/2021* has a comprehensive section on our kick-start stimulus for the agriculture sector and this allocation flows directly from those two seminal documents.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Just to indicate to the Minister I have no intention of reading the PNM Manifesto and also, I do not buy his statement that they have a plan because had they had a plan, we would have seen the individual line items under the Ministry of Agriculture as the Minister would have indicated.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan, this is not the place for that. This is not that type of debate, okay, so this is not a place for that. Member for

Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 22. Given that the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has performed excellently and that they deal with a scarce, vital and depleting resource, moneys we left, why would we want to interfere with the operating expenses of such a vital institution that has performed—

Hon. Imbert: Line Item, please.

Mr. Charles: Line Item 22.

Hon. Imbert: On which page, please?

Mr. Charles: On page 107.

Hon. Imbert: In the back?

Mr. Charles: An institution that has performed, I would say is the best performing part of the Ministry of Finance.

Madam Chairman: Under Other Transfers.

Hon. Imbert: What is the problem, Member?

Mr. Charles: Could you explain the decrease in the operating expenses? Is it a reduction in the personnel or—?

Hon. Imbert: Well, you have to understand that the fund managers operate independently of this Parliament so that this expense that you are seeing here is not directly associated with the managers of the fund, this is just administrative. This is just the board and other administrative expenses at the level of the Government. But the expenses for the management of the fund are taken out of the fund itself. So the fund managers will—

Mr. Charles: All right. Could you give a reason—

Hon. Imbert: Could I finish, Member for Naparima?

Mr. Charles: Oh, sorry.

Hon. Imbert: So the fund managers will invest in equities, they will invest in short-term instruments, they will have yields on their investments and they get their fees and their expenses paid from the yield on those investments. It is not a line item here.

Mr. Charles: So this is administrative fees?

Hon. Imbert: Government administrative expenses.

Mr. Charles: So the question is: What administrative changes required a reduction in the allocation?

Hon. Imbert: Well, if you look at it very carefully, you would see 2019 Actual was 1.5 million.

Mr. Charles: Yeah, but Actual 2020 was 1.9.

Hon. Imbert: Member for Naparima, I am still attempting to answer your question. So if you look at 2019 expenses, you will see 1.5 million, you will see the 2020 Estimate, 1.984; Revised, 1.984; 2021, 1.734. I do not think this adjustment is significant, I do not think it would affect the efficiency of the fund.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I am referring to Item 45. I know we dealt with Item 44 before but I am trying to find out if the Minister could advise the number of applicants and the number of beneficiaries of this Grant Facility to Small and Micro Businesses.

Hon. Imbert: I would love to assist if you could give me the page that you are on.

Madam Chairman: Page 108.

Hon. Imbert: "You gone to 8 now." All right.

Madam Chairman: Line Item 45, it is still under Other Transfers.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Hon. Imbert: Again, this is being managed by the National Entrepreneurship Development Company which reports to the Ministry of Labour so I will have to get that information from NEDCO for you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Just seeking a clarification. Can I ask a question under line Item 17, Treasury Division?

Madam Chairman: We have not reached there as yet.

Mr. Hosein: It falls under Transfers.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Treasury Division.

Mr. Hosein: Line Item 17, the GATE programme. Minister, I saw that for fiscal 2021, there is a cut in the GATE programme by \$35 million. Is there any intention of the Government to reduce the number of programmes that would be GATE funded for fiscal 2021?

Hon. Imbert: GATE is under review.

Mr. Hosein: It is under review by whom?

Hon. Imbert: The Government.

Mr. Hosein: And when are we expected to get a report on the review?

Hon. Imbert: Shortly.

Mr. Hosein: And the terms and the conditions of the committee discussing the review, what are those terms and conditions?

Hon. Imbert: There is no committee.

Mr. Hosein: There is no committee. So which department of the Government is reviewing GATE?

Hon. Imbert: The Government is comprised of the Cabinet of Trinidad and

Tobago and the Ministry with responsibility for education is the Ministry of Education. So the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will be advised by the Ministry of Education and then the Cabinet will take a decision. GATE is under review. Not only GATE but many other things are under review.

Mr. Hosein: So we may see a further reduction in the number of programmes that are going to be GATE funded because there is a decrease in the expenditure.

Hon. Imbert: I cannot give you any more information other than those four words: GATE is under review.

Mr. Hosein: GATE is going to be cut.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I seek clarification on line Item 57 firstly, Caribbean Airlines Limited. Is that the subvention for the air bridge?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Minister, 2019, you had 40 million that you paid for the subvention; 2020, we had 77 million being paid. I know between March to presently, there has been a curtailment of the number of flights to Tobago on the air bridge, so I am wondering if that might have been an arrears that was owing previously because the number of 77 million should be much lower if it is current.

Hon. Imbert: Just one second, please. The question of the loss that Caribbean Airlines incurs on the air bridge is something that has troubled many governments, not just this one, the one before. If you look at Caribbean Airlines financial statements, you will see they make money, or before pre-COVID, they were making money on virtually every route except the air bridge and in fact, what Caribbean Airlines was doing was using the profits it was making from its

international routes to pay for the losses it was incurring on the air bridge because the air bridge is a very expensive operation because these are short runs, you know, 20-minute journey, a very fast turnaround.

And the airfare that is currently charged cannot support the level of expenditure required to maintain that sort of air transportation arrangement between Trinidad and Tobago. So, for years, Caribbean Airlines has been carrying losses as a result of the air bridge. So, what the Government decided to do is to increase the amount of money that we give to Caribbean Airlines for providing this service. So that is why it went up.

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Lee: So, it is like an additional subvention?

Hon. Imbert: Additional subsidy, yes.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Can I ask a next question, Madam Chair? Line Item 80, Minister. Could you help me? Is this company closed? In 2019, there was no expenditure or subvention. Two million was expended in 2020. Nothing in 2021. So this human capital development—

Hon. Imbert: The Government agreed to wind up the company in 2016. So, it is in the process of being liquidated and you know these things take a long time.

Mr. Lee: But that falls under your Ministry?

Hon. Imbert: What happens at the Ministry of Finance is that whenever the Government takes a decision to wind up a company, a board is appointed—comprised primarily of public servants and the company is transferred to the Ministry of Finance. So, it is not an operating company. It is not an active company. All the Ministry of Finance would be doing is settling matters that would allow the proper winding-up of the company.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. And would that also apply to line 83, the Seafood—

Hon. Imbert: Yes, same thing. Again, that company is being wound. And again, TIDCO— as we see the next one, 84: TIDCO, it is the same thing.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I am referring to Item 57. We are going back to Caribbean Airlines Limited. Just for my clarification, Minister, is this company currently making a profit or not making a profit?

Hon. Imbert: Well, it was making a profit before COVID. Obviously now, the company cannot be making a profit. It is obviously incurring far more expenditure than its income because it is not flying. I mean, the flights are very, very limited.

Mr. Tancoo: Further clarification, Minister. These allocations are for compensation for the loss being made on the sea bridge or overall loss?

Hon. Imbert: I do not think Caribbean Airlines operates the sea bridge.

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry, the air bridge.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, it is the air bridge.

Mr. Tancoo: So, in 2019, the airline received \$40 million for compensation for the air bridge; in 2020, 77 million, and for 2021, \$64 million for the loss incurred as a result of the air bridge.

Hon. Imbert: What is the question? Because I think that was asked and answered.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, the reason I am asking the question is because I believe that a bonus was paid for successful, profitable operations to a senior executive member of Caribbean Airlines Limited.

Hon. Imbert: What is the question? Just assist me. I am sure I can answer the question if you just phrase it as a question.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, based on your answer that Caribbean Airlines Limited is making a loss, had been making a loss— sorry, had been making a profit pre-COVID, and is now making a loss, and that we had \$77 million being allocated for the compensation for the loss as a result of COVID and the sea bridge— sorry, the air bridge, I am curious as to why then a bonus was paid for successful operations of Caribbean Airlines to senior executive members.

Hon. Imbert: That is it? “Yuh finish? Question done?”

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Sir.

Hon. Imbert: All right. You are mixing things up. This payment is for the loss that Caribbean Airlines incurs on the air bridge. The cost of the ticket on the domestic air bridge cannot compensate for the expenditure that this airline or any airline would incur on ferrying people back and forth, from and to Tobago, on the air bridge. So, the Government, all successive Governments, have agreed to compensate Caribbean Airlines for flying the air bridge, for managing the air bridge, for operating the air bridge, and incurring a loss because the income from the tickets is woefully inadequate in terms of the expenditure.

What had happened is in previous years, Caribbean Airlines was being asked to shoulder a very large portion of that loss, even though Governments were aware that it was costing them far more money to operate the air bridge than they were receiving, by way of ticket income. So, this Government decided to increase the amount of money we give them for operating the air bridge. I am advised it is still not even enough, so they would still incur a loss on the air bridge. But it is a smaller loss than it was before. This is why the amount has gone up.

With respect to Caribbean Airlines as a whole, it was making a profit prior to COVID. In fact, it had declared \$100 million profit prior to COVID for the last

operating year. Obviously, with the borders being closed, the airline has no more income. We decided as a Government to maintain the staff on full salary for the whole six months between March and September. All during that period, the airline, obviously maintaining its expenditure on salaries and wages and lease payments for aircraft, et cetera, obviously, it would be in a loss position.

The matter that you are raising is with respect to the previous year where the airline had made a profit of \$100 million.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, new book; 07 - National Lotteries Control Board. We are at page 147. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I note that there has been an increase in the allocation by \$1.3 million. Can the Minister indicate—

Madam Chairman: Which Item are you on?

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Hon. Imbert: What page are we on?

Madam Chairman: We are on the books dealing with—

Hon. Imbert: Oh, Statutory Bodies.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: I am so sorry. Could you repeat the question please?

Mr. Tancoo: Sure, Sir. Sub-Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance; 2019 Actual, 4.1 million; 2020 Revised, 4.1 million; 2020 Estimates have now gone up by 1.36 million. I am trying to discern what is the reason for that increase?

Hon. Imbert: I do not have those details with me. I will obtain them and provide them.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Again, similar sort of situation. In 2019, we had \$38,875.

Madam Chairman: Where are you?

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry. Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence.

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Hon. Imbert: We have \$38,875 spent Actual; 2020 we had a revised, 272,993 but it is now increased by 195,000 over the Revised Estimate for the previous year.

Hon. Imbert: I do not have those details but if you look at the original Estimate, you will see it is 518,760—

Mr. Tancoo: Which is significantly higher than 2019—

Hon. Imbert:—which is more than 648, but I do not have details with me as to why it has gone down to 272 and up to 468. But this is really based on expenditure on travelling officers within the National Lotteries Control Board, which would vary from time to time. So it is not a static figure.

Mr. Tancoo: So, Minister—

Hon. Imbert: It would go up and down.

Mr. Tancoo: Well, it can, so I am sure. But we went from 38,000.

Hon. Imbert: Well, I will provide the information. What I am trying to tell you is that it depends on the number of travelling officers within the organization—

Mr. Tancoo: I look forward to that information, Sir.

Hon. Imbert:—and the claims they will make for travelling and subsistence, and so on. It depends on how many field visits they would make. It goes up and down, so I will get the information for you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Minister Sub-Item 16: Contract Employment. We have gone from \$318,000 in 2019 Actual to a Revised Estimate of 245,900 in 2020, but an increase to \$4.6 million in the Estimate for 2021. Can the Minister account for such a significant increase?

Hon. Imbert: I would have to provide you with that information. Because there was a provision of 4.8 so the board clearly intended to engage personnel, key personnel—I guess personnel like corporate secretary, and so on, who are contract officers during 2020 and may not have been able to achieve that and therefore, they have a similar allocation going forward in 2021. But I will get the details for you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Moving on to Item 23: Fees. In 2020, you had estimated to spend 1.8 million but you actually revised that figure to \$3.8 million, with a projected \$2.9 million to be spent in 2021. Again, can the Minister provide some clarification?

Hon. Imbert: I would get it for you. But I would think this would include legal fees.

Mr. Tancoo: In which case, Minister, if you can also provide a breakdown with regard to the number of entities which would have received these payments and the volume—the names and volume of the legal entities receiving payments?

Hon. Imbert: I will get as much information as I can and provide whatever is possible, taking into account confidentiality.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Moving on to Item 28: Other Contracted Services. We have moved from 2.1 million in 2019 Actual to 2.3 million Revised

2020, to 4.9 million, an increase of roughly double. Can the Minister indicate, again, why this has happened? What had prompted this doubling of Estimates for payment under contracted services?

Hon. Imbert: Again, I would provide you with the information.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I am moving on the line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. We have an Estimate in 2021 of 26 million, up from 23.2 million in 2020. Would the Minister be in a position to provide a breakdown of the companies or entities which would have received payment under this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: Most certainly, but you will be aware that this organization does engage in a lot of publicity and promotion. It is one of the features of the organization and I will provide you with the list.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Minister. Just one final one on this page. Line Item 66: Hosting of Conference, Seminars and other Functions. We have seen this Sub-Head in other Ministries cut significantly. However, we are estimating to spend \$2 million under this Head in 2021, having spent 1.8 in 2020. Can the Minister provide a similar breakdown as to what costs were incurred here and by which company?

Hon. Imbert: Certainly.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: That is it?

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now return to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 109.

3.30 p.m.

Members, just bear with us; let us just give you the correct guidance. Okay, so Members we are at page 46. Okay, so we are at Sub-Head 09: Development Programme. Consolidated Fund, page 47. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Based on the blocks because I am seeing A, F, and L, I want to ask a question on—I think that will fall under Multi-Sectoral.

Madam Chairman: So, we are at—when you look at page 47, okay, 003 is the Economic Infrastructure and we have A. Air Transport, okay. And then on the page 48, we have 005: Multi-Sectoral and that is where we go to A, and F, and L.

Mr. Hosein: Sure.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we are at 003: Economic Infrastructure. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. On Air Transport, could we ask the Minister to update the Committee on the status of this project, the construction of terminal and associated facilities? And what exactly would be the use for the \$101 million—what happened in 2020 with \$101 million?

Hon. Imbert: The project to construct a new terminal building at Crown Point in Tobago was suspended because of COVID-19 like most other major construction projects. Work resumed within the last few months as you had the reopening of the economy, in particular the construction industry. This project involves the construction of a completely modern terminal that would have loading bridges for wide-bodied aircraft and so on. It is a design build, so that the first part of the project is the design of the new terminal building, and the second part is construction. During 2020 a lot of design work would have been done and some

construction work has commenced.

Dr. Moonilal: 101 million was also for the acquisition of lands?

Hon. Imbert: It is not. A separate facility, a separate financing facility was procured in the sum of \$300 million which is available for land acquisition. So land acquisition is paid out of that separate financing facility.

Dr. Moonilal: Could you undertake to provide us with details as to the acquisition of lands and the cost paid by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Imbert: Certainly, but that is in the public domain because from time to time there is a joint press release coming out from the Minister of Finance and the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly. Most recently, a couple weeks ago where we gave an update on the number of properties that have been acquired, the area, aggregate area in terms of square feet or acres as the case may be, or hectares, and the value of the acquisition so far. So that is in the public domain, and we can—

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]*—*can place that on the public record of Parliament rather than through press releasing.

Hon. Imbert: Member for Oropouche East, Member for Oropouche East. I am still completing my response to your question. So, as I indicated some details are in the public domain. We will endeavour to provide you with as much information as we can with respect to detailed particulars of the acquisitions that have taken place so far, bearing in mind our obligations with respect to personal and private information. We will provide you with as much details as we can.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans two pages, therefore I will announce the project groups. A. Administrative Services. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, I am at 057, Establish—which should be Establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. Minister, I see that there is an allocated amount of \$4 million for 2021, \$3 million spent in 2020, and 2.2 million spent in 2019. Now, there is no legislative framework for this revenue authority, what is the Government spending money on, on this line Item having regard to the fact that there is nothing in law called the “Revenue Authority”?

Hon. Imbert: The expenditure is on the team of consultants who are designing the organizational structure for the revenue authority, the practices, the rules, the protocols, the organizational requirements, the assessment of the staffing needs, and all of the systemic information required in anticipation of the creation of a revenue authority. A revenue authority does not just drop out of the sky one day. A lot of proprietary work is required.

Mr. Hosein: Hon. Minister, can you indicate who this is the consultant or consultants?

Hon. Imbert: It is a team of consultants, we can provide you with that information.

Mr. Hosein: And can you also provide us with the amount of money paid to each team?

Hon. Imbert: This is what this was spent on.

Mr. Hosein: No, for each team, a breakdown of each team, how much was given to each?

Hon. Imbert: I said it is a team of consultants. The expenditure you are seeing here would be the expenditure on the team.

Mr. Hosein: Then can you give us a list of the team members.

Hon. Imbert: I said I would do that.

Mr. Hosein: And also how much they are being paid?

Hon. Imbert: I said I would do that.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. And I am at line Item: 062; Establishment of the Office of Procurement Regulator. Minister, I notice that there is no money being spent for 2021. Is it that the office is up and running and just waiting on the full proclamation of the legislation?

Hon. Imbert: This is an example of a project that has moved out of Development into Recurrent. Quite often projects commence and are funded under the Development Programme and when they have reached a point where they can be operated, the expenditure then move to Recurrent. The—*[Interruption]* Member, what is that? I am still completing my answer.

Mr. Hosein: Sorry.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you. So that this is a feature that you will see throughout the documents. When you have a new project it is put under Development Programme because it is a capital expense. When you get to the point where the organization or the programme can be operationalized it then moves to Recurrent. So that this is why you would see no expenditure under the Development Programme, but you would have realized from a question from one of your colleagues that there is expenditure allocated under the Recurrent expenditure for the Office of the Procurement Regulator.

Mr. Hosein: The can you give us an indication of a time line for the full proclamation of the Public Procurement Act?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, could I get a ruling on that please?

Madam Chairman: I would not allow that question under this Item. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Madam Chairman, I am at 045: Whistle Blowing Technologies. Minister, there is an Estimate for half a million dollars here, would you indicate what exactly this is to do? Bearing in mind the Government's policy of suppressing, intimidating, and harassing persons who are whistleblowers and leak information in the public domain? For example, over the Delcy Rodríguez visit and the letter that followed from the Immigration Division? But what is this Whistle Blowing Technologies about? Thank you.

Ms. Cudjoe: Madam Chair, 48(6).

Dr. Moonilal: What?

Madam Chairman: Overruled. I will allow the Minister of Finance to answer when you are finished with your—have you made a question as yet?

Dr. Moonilal: Let me repeat it.

Madam Chairman: No, you do not have to repeat. Just tell us the question.

Dr. Moonilal: The question is: what really is this Whistle Blowing Technologies Vote about?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Imbert: This, again, is one of these expenditure Items that is not managed by the Ministry of Finance. That is simply an allocation that will be made available to the government department that will be in charge of this area of responsibility. This is not a Ministry of Finance programme. It is simply money there, which will be then provided to the relevant government department that will be in charge of this area of activity. So I am sorry. I am in no position to answer those questions that you asked.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chair, could I just ask the Minister: why do you have this in a section Head 18: Ministry of Finance, if the Minister is not prepared and not

equipped and not with information to explain [*Desk thumping*] a line Item under his Ministry? This is not another Ministry we are dealing with, this is Finance. And the Minister is not prepared and I think this is, Madam Chairman, contempt for this Committee. Which is another matter but [*Desk thumping*] I just register my very deep concern and ask the Minister the question: why are you not prepared to explain line Items under your Ministry?

Madam Chairman: Okay, so I would want to say with respect to contempt for the Committee I think for all the newer—all of us who are new—here we have seen that in a lot of instances the Minister is a facilitator but not the actual executor. It is not just in whistleblowing; I have heard it in other aspects, and I have had no charge with respect to contempt. I think for all of us that are new because you have made the point this is a new Parliament. So for all of us who are new we have to understand that sometimes the Minister does not have the information. We have seen it a lot with the Tobago House of Assembly, okay. But the Minister would give an undertaking to find out where necessary. Okay, so that, I find— [*Interruption*] just now, the Minister has not answered your question—I find the charge of contempt unfounded. Minister of Finance, I believe there is a question for you to answer.

Hon. Imbert: Oh, certainly. And I find the beating of the desks in support of the Member for Oropouche East a bit disturbing. The fact of the matter is that I— [*Interruption*] And Madam Chairman, may I speak? I did not say a word when they were carrying on. Can I speak? Thank you.

Madam Chairman: I just want to say one thing though, is that sometimes it is really something to note that the things we accuse one another of we all practise it. So that comes back to my overriding statement about tolerance. Member for Diego

Martin North/East.

Hon. Imbert: And if I speak for myself this morning I have been extremely tolerant and peaceful, and I am sure even you, Madam Chairman, would recognize that. So coming back to this point now, I answered a question earlier on from the Member for Naparima with respect to food cards, and I pointed out that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services manages the policy and the distribution of food cards, and we simply provided the money. We are our facilitator as Madam Chairman has put it so excellently.

Similarly, with respect to GATE we are simply provider of funds and that is a matter that is managed by the Ministry of Education. And this is just another example of a programme where the Ministry of Finance just like the \$500 million for Agriculture, where all we do is we are the repository of the funds and we provide them on request from a Ministry. So this is just like so many other line items in the Ministry of Finance allocation, and which I might say, Madam Chairman, is not new. And I am not new, and the Member for Oropouche is not new. And he knows because he was in a Government where his Minister of Finance put similar allocations in the Ministry of Finance and acted as a facilitator. And therefore, maybe he has forgotten what happens under the Ministry of Finance allocation when he was in Government. But this is perfectly routine and there is nothing sinister here.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East, are you finished?

Dr. Moonilal: I would not pursue this matter.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Line Item 014: Upgrading of Information Technology-Inland Revenue Division. This falls directly under the Minister. We

have an Estimate for 2020 of \$5 million of which only 3.2 was actually expended. Can the Minister indicate why this particular Head was under-funded?

3.45 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: As a result of COVID a lot of projects had to be put on hold and only just recently we have the full complement of staff coming out to work, people on rotation, people working from home, so that a project like this would have been affected by COVID, so we would not have spent as much as we plan to spend or expected to spend.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Asked and answered, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: 065: Upgrade of Security at the Ministry of Finance. We have a Revised Estimate of 4 million. Can the Minister indicate what exactly is constituting this upgrade of security?

Hon. Imbert: Cameras.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: F. Public Buildings; L. Customs and Excise. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I see that no money has been drawn down on 2020. That is line Item 004 for the drug interdiction - dogs and nothing for 2021. Is it that this has been stopped, disbanded?

Hon. Imbert: I do not have those details. I will speak to the Comptroller of Customs and provide the information. And I can assure you that if this is an item that requires expenditure, we will supplement by moving funds around from some other area.

Dr. Ragbir: Asked and answered, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we go on to the Infrastructure Development Fund at page 188. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Hon. Members, if we could revert to the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* at page 109. Sub-Head 07: Debt Servicing; Item 001: Interest - Local Loans; Item 009: Interest on Overdraft. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I refer to the Revised Estimate. So the difference between the Estimate of 250 million for 2020. I notice that there has been an increase of 850 million into the Revised Estimate. Can the Minister indicate the reason for this increase in 2020?

Hon. Imbert: It is very difficult to estimate the interest on overdraft because that depends on revenue. So if we have better than expected revenue, we have less need to utilize the overdraft at the Central Bank. If however, there is a revenue crunch then you have a greater need. And you would realize in COVID we had a significant reduction in revenue of \$10 million and—\$10 billion sorry, and therefore we would have had to rely upon the utilization of the available overdraft facility at the Central Bank far more than we had anticipated at the beginning of the fiscal year.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: Principal Repayment – Local Loans.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 18 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities, \$40,000,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister of Finance. For the guidance of Members, page 122 of the current books is where we will start.

Hon. Imbert: This is not really an institution on its own. This is a responsibility of the Ministry of Finance and this allocation is simply to make provision for the payment of government pensions and gratuities for contract officers for most agencies are paid out of this Item.

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

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of 40 million for Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of the Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Line Item 16: Retiring Allowance to Legislature Service, Madam Chairman. Minister, I see an increase in your 20—not increase really, but in 2020 it was 13 million and in 2020, the revised moved to 38 million and in 2021 it stays at \$38 million. Could you just elaborate on this line Item for us please?

Madam Chairman: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: I am a little intrigued why the Member of Parliament for Couva South would want to invite commentary on this matter. After all, you are one of us, eh. This was the result of the improved arrangements we made for pensions for retirees, retired parliamentarians. I think you should let sleeping dogs lie. Because this is what this was. Remember, we came to this Parliament, we had a lot of debate. And this is to assist persons, you know, persons were retired a long time ago, who were on very minimal pensions and we have significantly enhanced their pensions now. So that is why it went up. Okay, so I think you just leave it. Okay?

Question put and agreed to.

Head 20 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: And if I may be forgiven, I did not thank the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. I thank the Minister of Finance, I thank—this is the Comptroller of Accounts and all other functionaries of the Ministry of Finance. Thank you. Okay, so PS Investment, Comptroller Accounts and the other Accounting Officer. I thank you very much and you all are relieved.

Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister, \$471,111,325.

Madam Chairman: Members, we are at page 55 of the recurrent book. I will now invite the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister to make a brief opening statement for maximum of five minutes, Minister.

Hon. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Office of the Prime Minister, OPM, is responsible for the provision of professional and coordinated support services to the Prime Minister in the execution of the business of Government. The OPM's portfolio currently includes the Central Administrative Services of Tobago (CAST) and operates as a national focal point for ecclesiastical affairs, gender affairs, child affairs, and HIV/AIDS coordination. Recently, the portfolio was augmented to include Government communications,. Synchronized with *Vision 2030* and the Roadmap to Recovery, OPM has charted a way forward, bearing in mind the new and emerging impacts of the global socio-economic turbulence of the past decade, now exasperated by COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the OPM will prioritize activities, programmes, projects that promote efficiency and partnership building to ensure that despite resource constraints, the well-being of the people of Trinidad and Tobago is safeguarded.

In closing, I would like to encourage members of this Parliament and the nation to work with us as we forge ahead.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 13 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, this sum of \$471,111,325 for Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister, is comprised of moneys proposed to expenditure on the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure at page 55. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Gender Affairs Division; Item 003: Communications; Item 004: Government Printery; Item 005: National Archives.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Gender Affairs Division; Item 003: Communications; Item 004: Governmental Printery; Item 005: National Archives; Item 006: Freedom of Information Unit; Item 007: Office of Information Commissioner. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, with respect to the Office of the Information Commissioner, if the hon. Minister will be kind enough to indicate whether or not this office is currently vacant or whether it is filled and how many persons currently occupy this office?

4.00 p.m.

Hon. Young: It is currently vacant. The Office of the Information Commissioner is currently vacant, and I do not think that the legislation with respect to this has been fully proclaimed as yet.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Ma'am. Hon. Minister, in light of the answer you have provided, can you indicate what is the intention for this Office—in terms of the mandate—of the Information Commissioner?

Hon. Young: The mandate is as per the legislation which it comes under.

Mr. Padarath: Sorry?

Hon. Young: The mandate is as per the legislation where the body was created.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you. Just to assist, I had informed—I said it in Parliament several times that the Data Protection Act has to be amended and that the Information Commissioner, which is the functionary under the Data Protection Act, and also certain aspects of government management of its records, et cetera, has to be managed. So just putting that on the record that the filling of this position requires certain amendments to be made to the law, and that those are before the Office of the Attorney General right now.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Communications; Item 004: Government Printery; Item 005: National Archives. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organizations. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, line Item 01, under 003: United Nations Organization; UN International Children Emergency Fund. There is a very small increase of 3,471, but if the Minister would be kind enough to indicate under this particular line Item, what is the mandate with respect to the amount allocated to this UN International Children Emergency Fund, please?

Hon. Young: It is not a mandate. Ma'am, the way these international bodies and other regional bodies that the Government contributes towards, all it is, is this

would be the sum that is allocated to Trinidad and Tobago by these bodies as our contribution for the period, and it is for UNICEF, in particular.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: International Bodies; Item 005: Non-profit—International Bodies?

Ms. Mohit: 005, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, Item 01. Minister, can you provide—I see that there is a significant increase of 9.3 million—any details as to why and provide to us a breakdown of these bodies who would receive contributions via this Head?

Hon. Young: So what this was, Ma'am, as has had been announced by the Government and the particulars provided, this was a decision taken by the Government, by the Cabinet, in the midst of the handling of the global pandemic. It was felt that to put a sum in the Office of the Prime Minister to work along with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services at the time and distribute it in a pro rata basis according to the number of—to various religious organizations in the IRO and also other smaller religious organizations, to get them to assist persons on the ground, because they had a much wider reach, in addition to all of the other social grants and programmes that were being provided by various government Ministries at the time.

Ms. Mohit: Just a follow-up question, Madam Chair. Minister, would you be kind enough to provide to us a list of the bodies and how much they would have received?

Hon. Young: That information is in the public domain. That information had been

provided as I said already.

Ms. Mohit: The amount?

Hon. Young: Yes, with the various amounts, correct.

Madam Chairman: The amounts and the institutions are in the public domain.

Ms. Mohit: I know the institutions.

Hon. Young: And what happened for the first time as well is, there was a requirement with all of these bodies that they sign a contract and that they provide us with the report as to how the money was spent, et cetera.

Madam Chairman: It is also on the record of this Parliament. Item 007: Households.

Ms. Mohit: No, I am not done.

Madam Chairman: You are still on non-profit?

Ms. Mohit: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Sorry, Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Item 05: St. Dominic's Children's Home. Any reasoning for that 4.5 million decrease?

Hon. Young: Yes. What has happened here is that the church that was formally responsible for the St. Dominic's Children's Home asked the Government to take over the full management of the home and, therefore, instead of providing the church as was previously done with a subvention, this is the sum of money that the Government will utilize to run this home.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Minister. Going down to 07: Contribution to Non-Profit Institutions - PRP - Child Development. There is a \$315,000 increase. Can you provide to us the reason for this increase, whether there are any new institutions and a breakdown or list of these institutions to receive funding?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: This allocation is for all the initiatives coming out of our Child Affairs Department. In light of what I would have mentioned in my contribution in the debate about trying to increase the number of programmes coming of Child Affairs. This allocation is for that purpose.

Ms. Mohit: And Items 09 and 10. They both would have received—well, there are decreases appearing here on the books. Any reasons for those decreases: St Michael's and St. Jude's?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: At St. Michael's the institution was closed. However, we still have staff that we have to pay until we finalize arrangements with CPO. And for St. Jude's, this facility now falls directly under OPM, so we are going to have to make do with the allocation that we have.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam. 007; 03: Children's Authority, a 1.1 million decrease. Seeing that, you know, Children's Authority plays a critical role at this point, could you Minister explain the reason for the decrease?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: We will have to examine our spending trend throughout the fiscal and most likely come back at the mid-year.

Hon. Young: Exactly as we were saying yesterday, this was a Budgets Division allocation, so this is how much was provided. And as the Minister who is in charge said, we have already had the discussions with the Ministry of Finance, and we have been told we can vire money. Also, if there is a need in the mid-year review, we can approach the Ministry of Finance.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, same line Item 03: Children's

Authority, to my colleague from Tobago East. I know on the last day I had raised this particular issue of the operationalizing of some of the other offices that are outside of the head office of the Children's Authority. I just wanted to have an idea from the Minister whether or not all the sub-offices of the Children's Authority are functional and are properly staffed?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: All the sub-offices are, indeed, operational and adequately staffed. However, we would seek to increase recruitment in this fiscal. What we are trying to do is to ensure our frontline staff, that we ramp up the amount so that we could respond more quickly towards the calls coming in from the public. But all our offices are open and we are adequately staffed for the time being.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, just one follow-up with respect to this line Item 03: Children's Authority. I know some time ago you opened the Ste. Madeleine Centre, and one of the challenges that we have had with respect to some of the rural areas that these centres service are issues that arise sometimes in the night and during the weekends. How does the Children's Authority provide for that especially in these rural areas?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: As I would have mentioned before, we intend to increase the staff in terms of our first-line responders. However, if—depends on the call coming in, if it is an emergency, a child is in immediate danger, the emergency response team would go out immediately regardless of where the location is. So we do send officers out even in the rural communities.

Mr. Padarath: And this is outside of the operation hours of an 8.00 to 4.00 environment?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: The emergency team is 24/7.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just a quick question, if the Minister would indicate the status and the work for the Citizens' Initiative Fund which had I think \$400 in 2020 and now an Estimate of \$65,000.

Hon. Young: The money under this is being utilized based on requests from citizens. There is a special unit at the Office of the Prime Minister, and the disbursement of those funds is guided by a policy approved, an approved policy rather.

Dr. Moonilal: But what is it for specifically?

Hon. Young: This fund is a fund under the OPM. Sometimes needy citizens come and there is a policy—I do not have the policy in front of me—but they may fall under it and they may get some level of assistance for medical emergencies and, obviously, other small instances like that.

Dr. Moonilal: Finally—I do not want to go too far on that—is there a form to fill out or is it just a walk-in system of citizens?

Hon. Young: Everything under this administration from 2015 to do with the Office of the Prime Minister is done with a level of accountability. So, yes, there are forms to fill out and will have to go through a process and a procedure.

Dr. Moonilal: And are those forms, Minister, available at the Office of the Prime Minister?

Hon. Young: Yes they are.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, line-Item 12: Response to HIV/AIDS. Now, I know there has been some discussion in the public domain with respect to Government's position. In the response to HIV/AIDS, we had a public statement by the Member for St. Joseph as it relates to the medication and so on. The long and short of the

question is, what really would account for the allocation here of 588,800, because it is just under a line Item that is pretty much blanket that says, "Response to HIV/AIDS". It does not give an indication of what really it is.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: So, this would be for all the programmes and projects coming out of the National AIDS Coordinating Committee Secretariat and the committee as well. In the last Parliament, I would have laid the National HIV Policy as a Green Paper. The work is continuing on that policy. As well as under this line Item, we will use to do work with NGOs working alongside the Response to HIV as well as using that as well to assist organizations in public education and sensitization.

Mr. Padarath: Sure. Minister, if you will allow me just to follow-up with you in light of that answer. Again, juxtaposing that against the position adopted by the Member for St. Joseph with respect to PrEP, and it is in the public domain. Could the hon. Minister indicate whether or not this is a position that has been adopted by the National AIDS Coordinating Committee or is this particular line Item in line with the position adopted by the Member for St. Joseph or is it a personal position of the Member for St. Joseph or if that is the position of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago? Line Item 12.

Madam Chairman: I am not going to allow this under this line Item, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: But Madam, it is very specific. It says Response to HIV/AIDS. That is the context in which I am raising this question.

Madam Chairman: And Member for Princes Town, I have just ruled. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Just to return to the Citizens' Initiative Fund. Could the Minister

undertake with the help of the public officers to supply us with a copy of the application form so that Members can also be aware of it and share in the event that citizens require emergency assistance?

Hon. Young: Any citizen—I will state it here, as we are on the public record and for the population, any citizen that thinks that they want to access this fund can attend at the Office of Prime Minister and seek the form for the fund. But I have no problem in us getting a copy of the form and providing it to the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite. I hope this is not a question about the form, because we are dealing here—

Ms. Haynes: It is just to reiterate, because I wanted to bring to the Minister's attention, there is some difficulty for some people to get to the OPM, so if we get the copy of the form, we could house it at—

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards & Similar Bodies. Members, we are going on to a new book.

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*. 53 - National Library and Information System. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 5. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. We are at pages 5 and 6. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 6. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

4.15 p.m.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 15, Item 004: Social Infrastructure; Item 005—004? Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item C., 084: Refurbishment of Two (2) Safe Houses, 2020 Estimate of 790,000, then the Revised Estimate was that of 98,000, and now the 2021 Estimate, 725,000. Madam Chair, can the Minister explain as to why this project is moving into 2021 and the funding allotted in 2020 was not utilized?

Hon. Young: Yes. Yes, Madam Chair, it has to do with procurement. It also has to do with the fact that COVID came along and put a stall on the works, so the works will continue in this fiscal.

Ms. Mohit: This fiscal year. Would this be completed in this fiscal year, a follow-up question?

Hon. Young: Well, we certainly hope so.

Ms. Mohit: During the refurbishment these houses would not be operational?

Hon. Young: These houses will not be—what?

Ms. Mohit: Operational. Is it that—

Hon. Young: No.

Ms. Mohit: No. Good. Madam Chair, Item 085, is it that this is completed?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Yes, it is.

Ms. Mohit: Yes?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Yes, it is.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. 088: the Establishment of a National Children's Registry, can you indicate the—well, 2020 Estimates, 1.3 million, but the Revised Estimate was

nil, and now the 2021 is 1 million. Can you indicate to us the start date and what is the objective of this establishment?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Okay. So we are currently in the build phase of this particular project. It is to create a national children's registry so we would have every child in Trinidad and Tobago identified with a unique code that would follow them throughout life.

Ms. Mohit: I did not get the last part.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Every child in Trinidad and Tobago would have a unique identifier code that would follow them throughout life in sync with Government's digital thrust.

Ms. Mohit: Did you state the start date by chance?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: We started this in the fiscal before this last.

Hon. Young:—the tender proposals are being evaluated.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. Madam Chair, 093 to 096—sorry, 093: the Conduct of Key Research Studies by Children's Authority, 2020 you had an Estimate of 400,000 but the Revised Estimate was nil, and then in 2021 no Estimate. Is it that this project is on hold?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Yes, it is.

Ms. Mohit: Yes, it is? Okay. Any reason for?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: We have to prioritize.

Ms. Mohit: Prioritize, okay. 094 to 096, are these projects on hold as well?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: The national child policy was already laid as a Green Paper. In terms of 093.

Ms. Mohit: 094, 095—

Mrs. Webster-Roy: In terms of 093, 4 to 5; 5, the Children's Authority was

provided with an allocation of 1 million to meet the cost of all digitalization projects listed for fiscal 2021, and we are going to seek the support of UNICEF to assist us to continue the work.

Hon. Young:—103, so what happened is the Budgets Division at the Ministry of Finance, in consultation with the OPM, decided for those line Items you just referred to, to give one pot of \$1 million, which is at 103, the Record Management System (Phase 2), and it would be utilized the way the Minister has just indicated.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. Also Item 104: Establishment of Two Reception Centres. Is this project on hold? I saw a 3 million allocation for 2020, but Revised, nil, and 2021, nil.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: This is currently on hold.

Ms. Mohit: And 101: Case Management Database Software, is this project—I noticed in 2020 the \$1 million Estimate—

Hon. Young: That is what was just described, that also falls under the whole digitization programme.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Thank you, Sir. All right. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you. Hon. Minister, just to go back to line Item 084: Refurbishment of Two (2) Safe Houses, I know in the past two budgets we got an announcement that there would be five safe houses the Government was looking at. Can you indicate whether or not these other three have been shelved or whether or not they are on hold, or what was the reason for not having five and only two?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: We were only able to complete and operationalize two. The other three, the work is being done through a different Ministry for us in terms of the refurbishment work.

Mr. Padarath: So those other three are ongoing?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Yes, they are ongoing, but we were able to operationalize two. We cannot give the locations.

Mr. Padarath: I understand. And also line Item 095: Digitization of Adoption Records, there is no Estimate in 2020 or Revised Estimate. Is this project completed or is it going to be part of the thrust going forward with the digitalization of other public—

Hon. Young: Exactly. As we just explained, that is part of the whole digitization process where we would just put a lump sum of \$1 million.

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Hon. Young: All of those various line Items there are on the digital side, so from 094, all the way down, are now covered by that \$1 million.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. Minister, in light of—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Member, could I just—

Mr. Padarath: Sorry.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Member for Princes Town, could I just indicate that what we are trying to make sure is when we digitize the Government services that they are all compatible, because we did have a series of projects going on and they were not necessarily compatible. So iGovTT will be looking at all of the projects to ensure that they are all compatible and then we will be farming out to the different Ministries. So wherever you see digitization, and if you do not see a figure or if you see what seems to be a small amount, it is because of that. So there is an overall plan.

Mr. Padarath: Sure. I understand, Minister. The point that I was trying to get at though is with respect to the digitization of the adoption records, this would have

started either 2018 or 2019, having seen a figure reflected here and I just wanted to find out. Now, I understand the Member for Arouca/Maloney's point of integrating it into the thrust going forward, I wanted to know what would have happened to the work here prior.

Hon. Young: The work was started. The work is a continuum and it is going to be continued exactly as we just said, the whole digitization process. And as the Member for Arouca/Maloney who is in charge of Planning and Development is saying, one of the mandates, and in this particular area is to ensure that the work that was ongoing is all built into a platform that can be utilized throughout.

Mr. Padarath: That is what I was getting at. Thank you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And remember too, the first part of projects of this nature would be scanning the records, so that would have been this first part of this process.

Madam Chairman: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would just like to seek an update with regards to 107: Establishment of Drug Rehabilitation Centres. I see that nothing is allocated and only 1,000.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: It is on a different line.

Ms. Benjamin: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Infrastructure Development Fund, page 185, Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, Item C., 005: Outfitting of Three Safe Houses, I noticed 2021 no allocation, were these the three that you were just referring to earlier?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Thanks a lot.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Minister, line Item 017, a new project, the Establishment of Two (2) Drug Rehabilitation Community Residences in Tobago. Can the hon. Minister indicate whether or not—sorry—the location for these two in Tobago, whether it has been identified as yet?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: No, the location was identified but I cannot really give out the location.

Mr. Padarath: For Drug Rehabilitation Community Residences?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Yeah.

Hon. Young: The Cabinet only today took a decision with respect to one of them and the project is going to be pursued and go ahead, but we do not want to be advertising the locations for these houses for obvious reasons.

Mr. Padarath: One other question, Minister, with respect to the establishment of these Two (2) Drug Rehabilitation Community Residences in Tobago, is this a project that would be undertaken by UDeCOTT under the OPM?

Hon. Young: Yes.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Item 020: Construction of Chaguanas Library, if we can have a start date for this project.

Hon. Young: So, Madam Chair, what you will see is you would see that we have allocated a sum of money, \$10 million for this particular project. The building is

60 per cent complete, so when you talk about a start date and being the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East, go and look for it, it is 60 per cent complete. Scope of works, the project schedule and cost for the completion of works, the fit out of the library was completed by MTS, and the funds will be used to complete this. So hopefully very soon in this fiscal it would be completed.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. I know that it was on hold, so maybe I should have said restarted.

Hon. Young: A restart date.

Ms. Mohit: Yes. I do apologize.

Hon. Young: Okay. Understood.

Ms. Mohit: Thanks a lot.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 13 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, PS. Thank you, other representatives from the Ministry. Thank you, Minister of State in the Ministry.

4.30 p.m.

Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$640,134,970.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we are starting at page 247 of the Draft Recurrent Estimates.

I will now invite the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Khan: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is responsible for the overall management of the oil, gas and minerals sectors in Trinidad and Tobago. The Petroleum Act and regulations bestow about the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries the responsibility of the

overall management of the oil and gas sector in Trinidad and Tobago as regulator.

Pursuant to the Petroleum Act and regulations, the Ministry has responsibility also for the execution and supervision of exploration and production licences, production-sharing contracts and to ensure the investment levels are maintained in the industry.

The capital investment is very large, but it is undertaken not by the Government nor the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, but by foreign multi-national energy companies, domestic private energy companies and state energy companies. Similarly, under the Minerals Act and regulation, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is responsible for the regulations of the mineral sector.

In addition, we also have line responsibility for power generation. Despite the significant contributions of these sectors to GDP, revenue and foreign direct investment, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has a relatively small budget allocation. This operational expenditure, however, is covered by the petroleum in-posts.

Allocation of Recurrent Expenditure for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for fiscal 2021 is just around \$642 million. The allocation for the Development Programme is a mere 9.27 million, of which 1.27 million is funded under the Consolidated Fund and 8 million is to be funded under the IDF. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries stands prepared to optimize the use of the allocated resources in fulfilling its role and functions on behalf of the citizens and for the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Chairman, my colleagues, I thank you for your attention.

Question proposed: That Head 40 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$640,134,970 for Head 40, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items, to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure, page 247, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, I am at line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. Now, while I know this encompasses a wide range of services, can the Minister just account for the additional 5 million in the revised estimates, for 25 million in fiscal 2021, please?

Hon. Khan: Basic expenditure; largely the purchase of software at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. Bearing in mind the Ministry is a fairly high-tech Ministry when it comes to that. Just for the record, our industry is based on seismic acquisition, seismic processing and seismic interpretation. These activities take place on workstations which have very, very high-end computers, and run on very, very sophisticated and expensive software.

We monitor the oil companies. They have their own patented software. We have open work software, and we have to do that in order to make sure that when they come to us for approvals of certain projects, we have our work and our background work done in a proper way so that we can evaluate it properly. So it is a small sum to pay, but it is in the context of grand scheme of expenditure in the exploration and production business.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you very much.

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; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 01—Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—Item 001: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Mr. Lee: Minister, two line Items. First one would be National Quarries Company Limited, 06. No allocation—2.5 was given to them this 2020 fiscal. No allocation for 2021. Is National Quarries Company now self-sufficient or—

Hon. Khan: By and large it is fairly self-sufficient. Certain months they have an operating loss, but by and large they are below the watermark, so to speak. I see the Minister of Finance looking at me. The issue is that the potential exists in the company. It calls for some restructuring and some capital injection to get some of the basic equipment they need to run the quarry.

There is a great demand for quarry aggregates in the country now, both from the limestone quarrying point of view, which is what they call “crusher run” in highways construction, and sand and gravel. So as we speak, we are looking at the National Quarries, its management and its operation, and this year we plan to take some serious restructuring action in that company.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. And the next line Item, Madam Chair, 07, interest payment on Petrotrin receiver purchase facility up to 349 million. Could the Minister explain? It is a new Sub-Item, I do not know if the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries could add some clarity.

Hon. Khan: He would be able to talk about it; that is the Petrotrin loan.

Mr. Lee: Page 250.

Hon. Khan: Page 251.

Mr. Imbert: Which line Item?

Mr. Lee: Line Item 07.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, we are investigating it. It arose from the restructuring of the loan facility, the 850 million loan facility, where Petrotrin paid it off it. It arose from that. We are investigating it to see whether this is the correct amount. That is the purpose of the investigation, to determine whether this is the correct amount or not. Because we as a government had undertaken to give some assistance to Petrotrin. This arises from overdue payments and past-due payments for petroleum subsidy over the years. You know, for many, many years governments, successive governments had not paid Petrotrin the full amount of subsidy on petroleum fuels, so we had agreed to make good, make Petrotrin whole to allow them to go forward to obtain the financing from the foreign investors, to refinance that 850 million. So what we are actually investigating is the quantum. This is what we have been advised, so we put the figure in, but we will be investigating the amount to see if it is actually 340.

Mr. Lee: Just for clarity, Minister, the wording here “Petrotrin receivables” is what the Government owes Petrotrin per se.

Mr. Imbert: You see, what we did, we really gave a lot of concessions to Petrotrin to get them out of that \$5 billion hole they were in. We have not called upon them to pay all of the taxes, unpaid taxes, because for years Petrotrin was not paying SPT, was not paying petroleum profits tax, was not paying royalties; they just could not. But they were carrying on their books, in addition to their liabilities to the Government, run up to about \$4 billion, they were carrying an amount owed by the Government to them as a receivable. So rather than press them for the liability,

which we know they could not pay, we decided to assist them with the receivable.

We are hopeful that in due course as the successor—well not successor, I do not want to call them that, because I might fall into a legal trap if I use that terminology—the companies that have come out of the restructuring, Heritage and so on, as they become more and more profitable we are hopeful that we will recover that \$4 billion that is owed to the Government in SPT and royalties and so on. But we decided to help them out by giving them the receivable for the petroleum subsidy by way of a loan. Okay? So this is the payment on that loan.

Mr. Lee: So the 349 is on the books of Petrotrin and you are investigating whether or not that is a—

Mr. Imbert: Whether the amount is correct. It is just the amount we are investigating to see if it is really 340. But that is what they have made available to us, so we took it at face value, but we will audit it.

Mr. Lee: Minister, the line Item 03: Environmental Indemnity to PowerGen. You anticipate an increase of payment of 12.5 in this fiscal. Could you just identify?

Hon. Khan: I do not want to get too political, but it is something UNC should not talk about at all, because you all put us in this environmental liability with PowerGen in specific terms under a contract. The State is now responsible for all legacy environmental issues related to PowerGen—clean up at the Penal power plant. And this increased cost here is for the environmental remedial work when we dismantled—*[Interruption]*—the environmental liability work when we disbanded the Wrightson Road power station. The dismantling of that should start in the next three to four months.

Mr. Lee: When is it carded to start, Minister? I did not hear.

Hon. Khan: Right now they are quietly removing the asbestos. It is very a secure

site because you know asbestos is a very poisonous substance. We have a specialist contractor removing the asbestos. That contract should be completed by the end of this year. It is being safely disposed of, and early next year we will be awarding other contracts for the dismantling of all the towers and the building.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we will move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 95. Item 005: Multisectoral and Other Services.

Ms. Haynes: Madam Chair, this includes Sub-Item 003 under Administrative Services?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you can go ahead.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. Minister, the actual spend on this renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives in 2019 was about 5.9 million, but in 2020, our Revised Estimate is only about 500,000, and now we are estimating 1 million in 2021. Could you give us an idea of what these initiatives are and how—

Hon. Khan: It was a solar lighting project for basketball courts and children's play parks and what have you. We have done a lot of it already and we are just winding down in this fiscal year.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Pointe-a-Pierre?

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Yes you can.

4.45 p.m.

Mr. Lee: Minister, under Equipment and Vehicles— sorry, G., the line Item 001, the radar for detection of oil spills. I know last year, in the SFC, I had asked you the question. I saw you—well, this this year— well, last fiscal, you spent 2 million. Could you give us an appreciation as far as the detection, the radar, what is the status?

Hon. Khan: Well, it is being installed in Point Gourde—Point Gourde in Chaguaramas. What this radar system does is that it picks up micro ripples on the surface of the ocean. The theory behind it is that if it does not pick up any micro ripples, the chances are that it can be an oil spill because the oil spill will stop the micro rippling, and it is a first pass to as a pre-warning system, so to speak. So then, once the radar picks that up, you send the coast guard immediately to check. The chances are, it may not be a spill but, at least, it is a first filter for early detection of oil spills. We plan to—that radar takes care of the Chaguaramas area and this year, we will be installing one on Tower C, that is the building that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is in and that will cover the Port of Port of Spain and its immediate environs. It is a very good technology and it is relatively cheap.

Mr. Lee: A supplemental. Minister, the present radar that is covering the Chaguaramas area, who mans that radar?

Hon. Khan: The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, in conjunction with the coast guard.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 40 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister; thank you, PS; thank you, other representatives of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. You are excused.

Head 65: Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, \$259,426,950.

Madam Chairman: Members, we are on page 319 of the Recurrent Estimates. I will now invite the Minister of the Foreign and Caricom Affairs to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Ministry of the Foreign and Caricom Affairs is keenly aware of the need for stringent management of the financial resources in its allocation for 2020/2021. Such awareness is heightened in the context of the economic constraints, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a negative impact on the operations of the Ministry especially some of our overseas missions, the staff of which have tried to maintain an appropriate level of activity and service provision in some environments of very high infection rates while protecting themselves and their families from falling victim to the disease.

In these circumstances, Madam Chair, the Ministry recognizes the requirement for a more strategic approach to managing our relationships in the sphere of operation, particularly those which require engagement beyond our borders.

While the Ministry has always worked toward careful management of financial resources, the current situation, combined with the reduced allocation for fiscal 2020/2021, warrants a sharpened focus and more precise alignment of activities with the country's economic and social development priorities to ensure that our work impacts the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

The changed global environment in which the Ministry must function in the

foreseeable future has brought with it the need to adjust methods of work as we engage with stakeholders and partners bilaterally and multilaterally, and with regard to the provision of service to clients, in person and online.

Madam Chair, although there are adjustments to be made, the Ministry will seize the opportunity to make more efficient and cost-effective use of technology to continue its activities and to improve services to our customers, who we recognize have also had to adjust their own activity and access to services.

It is anticipated that although the operating environment is challenging on several fronts, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs will deliver its mandate successfully and deliver excellence on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 65 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$259,426,950 for Head 65: Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wish, Minister, to welcome you to the position and look forward to your success in the new post. Item 28: Remuneration to Cabinet Appointed Representatives to Trinidad and Tobago. In 2019, there were no representatives, and so we were told. And in 2020, the Revised Estimates indicated that there are no representatives. Could the Minister indicate, in the

context of this allocation of \$800,000, if there is a rethink or is there an intention to appoint Cabinet-appointed representatives?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, through you, I wish to thank the Member of the Committee for his welcome. I would just want to correct him briefly, this is Remuneration to Cabinet Appointed Representatives for Trinidad and Tobago, not to Trinidad and Tobago. And this reflects an allocation for— a provision for the non-resident ambassadors. And I know the Member would be familiar with the concept of non-resident ambassadors, none of which were appointed in the last term but a modest provision has been made here should the hon. Prime Minister, in his wisdom, determine the need for appointment of such ambassadors.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Items 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and there is a standard 20 million. Given the freeze, the stated freeze on public service hiring, is the Minister satisfied that the current complement of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs is equal to the task of the Ministry carrying out its remit?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, which line Item? Sorry, I just need to be—

Mr. Charles: 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, 20 million.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Okay. I believe that it was a general question and I appreciate what I interpret to be the intent of the Member's question.

Mr. Charles: Is the 20 million adequate in your view?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, Madam Chair, as I said in my initial remarks, the allocation overall to the Ministry, and it is not unusual for Government Ministries to receive less than they would have requested. We are confident that with the prudent management of the Ministry of Finance and the excellent relationship with

the Minister of Finance, the Ministry will not be short of the required resources throughout this fiscal year. We are confident on that.

Mr. Charles: On 01, again, a follow up. Could the Minister give us an idea of vacant posts and the permanent posts to which this figure applies?

Madam Chairman: Vacant posts and the permanent posts. You are asking the establishment?

Mr. Charles: The establishment.

Madam Chairman: And then you want to know how many positions are vacant.

Mr. Charles: Thank you.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you for the question. Madam Chair, may I indicate that the response will be provided in writing to the Committee as soon as possible.

Madam Chairman: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam Chair. May I also join in welcoming the hon. Minister back into this House? He has been absent for a while and we welcome him. We look forward to working with him in his new posting.

Minister, on the same Item of Salaries, Wages and COLA, would the Minister be kind enough— I remember in October 2019 in SFC, the Minister for Foreign and Caricom Affairs indicated that the overseas missions had been operating at a sub-optimal level of staffing and that efforts will be made, using the fiscal 2020 allocation, to remedy this. However, when we look at the fiscal 2020 Revised—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. One minute please, Member for Siparia. I think your question, if I understand it well, will most probably be under 002: Overseas Missions. Right now, we are under 001: General Administration.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You are totally correct. 01/002/01: Salaries and Cost

of Living Allowance.

Madam Chairman: Right? So, can I ask you to wait until I call that Item? And I will call—Member for Princes Town, are you under 001: General Administration?

5.00 p.m.

Mr. Padarath: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Yes, please.

Mr. Padarath: Hon. Minister, allow me to also congratulate you on your appointment. I have served in this Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a prior incarnation and I understand some of the challenges that exist at this Ministry. Under line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances, could the hon. Minister indicate the figures here reflected? What is the current complement of Foreign Service Officers on the establishment at the Ministry right now that would benefit from this line Item? Specifically Foreign Service Officers?

Madam Chairman: Would that information not fall within the general question which Member for Naparima asked for the details and the Minister undertook to give it in writing? So he will give the complement of staff and the posts, and those that are vacant with bodies and without bodies. That is what I would understand would be the details that were undertaken right there.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Interpretation of what I have committed, a full schedule which includes the vacancies—

Mr. Padarath: Which includes the Foreign Service Officers.

Hon. Dr. Browne:—Foreign Service Officers, et cetera. The Committee would be provided.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 002: Overseas Missions. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam, and I repeat our welcome to the hon. Minister

back into the House of Representatives. I was pointing out that in SFC 2019 the then Minister told us that the overseas missions had been operating at a sub-optimal level of staffing, and efforts would be made to use the fiscal 2020 allocation to remedy this. However, we note that the Revised Estimates is even less, as noted here under the Item—is even less than what was initially estimated. So the question is this, Ma'am. The total staff complement of the Overseas Mission was then identified as 220; 76 home-based staff sent from headquarters to the overseas missions, and 144 locally recruited staff. Minister, can you tell us what was the total number of persons employed at the various overseas missions as at September 30, 2020?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, those figures will be provided in an overall schedule. I am sorry to be repeating myself, but when I made the commitment to your colleague, Member, it would be for a comprehensive breakdown of the staffing within the Ministry, which of course includes the provision to overseas missions as well.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So you would deal with the staffing across the board in the Ministry?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Across the board.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can I ask another question please? What was the increase in staffing over the course of fiscal 2020 given that you are sub-optimal? The Minister then said he would seek to remedy that in some way. What was the increase in staff, if any, during the course of 2020? And I am asking specifically for the overseas missions.

Hon. Dr. Browne: The question is, what was the increase in staff?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Um hmm. I am putting this against the background—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Is that asking for a quantum or a qualitative response?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Sir. Yes, Sir.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, I have already committed to providing the Committee with a comprehensive schedule of staffing across the board. If the Member is asking for the staffing of the last fiscal year so that she can do a comparison between the two that can also be provided.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: My follow-up question would be whether there was such an increase given the commitment made in the last Standing Finance Committee last year about doing better with the staffing. The further question will be, was that done at all? And if it was done, how could it have been done where you have the Revised Estimates are even less than the original Estimates?

Madam Chairman: I think, Member for Siparia, even though I understand your trend, I think until the both sets of information, both sets are provided, then the consequential questions cannot really be answered, because that is the foundation. I am seeing—

Hon. Dr. Browne: From here you can analyse increase, decrease, and you know, follow up from there. But, I think it would be, if there are further questions along the same line, it would be very difficult for us to engage on this line Item without having a mapping of the figures so that it could be fleshed out. And that will be provided to the Committee.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:—answer for all our questions. There was a commitment given in the SFC last year about dealing with the staffing. I really would appreciate in your response, as you have indicated that this could be dealt with. Was there an increase? If so, how much? And how is that achieved with a lower amount in the Revised Estimate? I would appreciate your answers when you

get them please, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Anything else, Member for Siparia?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Ma'am, given the freeze in filling vacancies for established public service posts, does the Ministry intend to hire on a contract basis if you need additional staff, again, based on the sub-optimal operations happening?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Are you referring to Overseas Mission or Headquarters, or both?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Sir, I am still on the same line Item.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Okay. Madam Chair, Overseas Missions do benefit from the recruitment of contract positions, the filling of contract positions, and that will continue as the need arises and as determinations are made of where that type of support is required.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Ma'am, further question, the Development of Standardized Human Resource Policy Guidelines for Overseas Missions was identified as a priority initiative to strengthen capacity in the Ministry. Would you be kind enough to tell us the status of the development of these policy guidelines?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes. Madam Chair, that work is ongoing and remains a priority of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Would you be kind enough to tell us, when you say that work is ongoing, can you kindly be a bit more specific as to what the work is?

Hon. Dr. Browne: That involves the development of a number of protocols and policies that would assist our human resources department to adequately manage staff, monitor performance and do the other requirements that are necessary for human resource management. You can imagine the difficulties of being thousands of miles away from staff members who would be reporting to headquarters and the

HR parameters around that. Part of the improved performance of the Ministry involves some of those—the provision of some of those guidelines and tools from our HR Division to assist with improving the functioning of Overseas Missions.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair, question asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I am dealing with the Item 01. Could the Minister indicate how many Missions are at the moment headed by IROs and/or FSOs, Foreign Service Officers?

Madam Chairman: Member, I am sure that is going to come in the heading.

Mr. Charles: No. I am trying to get a sense of how many public servants are operating as Heads of Missions? It is of numbers of officers on contract or what. It would not answer this question.

Madam Chairman: Well, 001, are not officers on contract. 001 would be your permanent establishment.

Mr. Charles: Well the question is, how many persons to which this applies, 01 applies at present, are functioning as Heads of Missions?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Could you repeat please? There was a little interruption.

Mr. Charles: Yes. How many—well it would be FSOs—under 01 are operating now as Heads of Missions? In other words, in the Canadian—

Hon. Dr. Browne: I understand the question. Thank you. Thirteen of our Overseas Missions are so headed, as queried by the Member.

Mr. Charles: Well, the Minister, would you indicate how many are headed by contract IROs, even though this applies to FSOs? I think the country would need to

know—would be enlightened.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Okay. I would check that information, Madam Chair, and I will provide it to the Committee.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 002: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Minister, line Item 16 under Contract Employment. And this is just to follow up on something that was said by the Member for Naparima, just for your clarification. Under Contract Employment there is an allocation of 4.5 million, and again, having understood the challenges at the Ministry with respect to the Foreign Service Officers coming in via the foreign service exams and so on, and there being a freezing of all public service positions, could the hon. Minister indicate under line Item 16: Contract Employment, this 4.5 million, does it represent any plan for the Ministry to bring in any additional contract officers in the position of International Relations Officers in light of the shortage of Foreign Service Officers?

Mr. Al-Rawi: The answer is yes. This is a provision that would assist the Ministry in catering for payments to IROs and other contract officers within the Ministry.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, one of the points that I am trying to get at is that it is the exact same figure from the Revised Estimates of 2020. The question really is whether or not there will be any additional officers that the Ministry will engage in taking from this financial year in terms of the challenges that we have with the Foreign Service Officers via the exam and the shortage of Foreign Service staff?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes, we anticipate some increase utilization of the opportunity to hire contract officers. If there is a requirement for further funding, as I had indicated before, we have the opportunity to vire funds or approach the Minister of

Finance in the midterm review. The Minister has given an overall commitment to give appropriate consideration to requests from all Ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. And I understand the intent of the question.

Mr. Padarath: So, Minister, in effect you are confirming that there are plans to have an intake of International Relations Officers in light of the shortage of the FSOs in this financial year?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes. The Ministry is certainly not denying itself any of the opportunities available given the financial constraints. And yes, we would utilize that opportunity as well.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, Item 25: Audit of Overseas Missions. Would the Minister explain why no audits were done in—given that this is a critical function in terms of the expenditures of taxpayers funds, why no audits were done in 2020? And could he give a—well, first.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Member, what I can tell you is that is an area of attention for this current fiscal year driven by the need to do business properly, and I can assure that the auditing and monitoring of financial activities at Missions would be a priority. If the question is with respect to 2020—

Mr. Charles: That is the follow-up question, 2021, which Missions are scheduled for auditing?

Hon. Dr. Browne: No. That decision has not as yet been made, Member, for this fiscal year.

Madam Chairman: Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Thank you again. Item 17, Training. Minister, I saw no

training was done in 2020 and 150,000 allocated for 2021. Is the Minister satisfied that that is sufficient for the requirements of the Ministry? And if so, you could tell us in what areas this 150,000 refers to?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes. Chair, this represents training across the board. It is a small allocation, but once again, we are grateful that the Budgets Division has given us a training allocation, and should that be insufficient we do have that overall proviso of the ability to approach the Ministry of Finance and request some additional release in the midterm review.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Charles: Could you tell us Minister, who conducts the—the bodies that conduct the training and/or the areas in which you plan to train in 2021?

Hon. Dr. Browne: That is a very broad range, Madam Chair, and I would commit to providing that to the Committee in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at line Item 63: Repatriation of Nationals. Can the Minister tell us under what circumstances this allocation is generally used?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Member. This was a Vote that was previously held at the Ministry of National Security and it was brought over to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. So the circumstances as requested by the Member would be particular emergency circumstances, such as a robbery, a sudden death of a head of household while travelling with small children. There is this line Item which provides for repatriation under those specific types of circumstances.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Persons who are stranded abroad would be accommodated under this Vote to come back home.

Hon. Dr. Browne: What we have been doing and the Minister of Finance was proactive enough to have recognized and received some of our signals of concern from nationals who were deemed to be stranded abroad due to COVID-19. And there was a special release of funds to provide for assistance to those nationals through our overseas missions. That would not be reflected in the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs allocation here. That was a special release from the Ministry of Finance. So the two do not necessarily fit in terms of what you are asking.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:—accommodated through this Vote, is that what you are saying, through this Vote or was it done elsewhere? Is that what you are telling me?

Hon. Dr. Browne: No, I am saying that there was a special release from the Ministry of Finance to cater for assistance to overseas nationals who find themselves in distress due to the policy decisions that have had to be made within the COVID-19 circumstances. And over 250, I do not have the exact figure, a significant number have already received financial assistance in that regard and the Minister of Finance has signaled an extension of this programme, so further nationals can be assisted. The Government is not unmindful of their circumstances.

Madam Chairman: Just a minute please, Member for Siparia. The Minister of Finance wants to lend some assistance.

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, we were not graced by the presence of the Member for Siparia earlier. But when we were going through the Estimates of Expenditure for the Ministry of Finance there is a line Item called Humanitarian Assistance to Nationals Residing Abroad, \$7 million, and that is designed

specifically to provide financial support to persons who may be stranded overseas or find themselves in difficulty as a result of COVID-19. But that is a Ministry of Finance allocation which is disbursed on the instructions of Foreign Affairs. So we just facilitate the funding but we do not decide who gets it. That policy decision is taken by Foreign Affairs. And the moneys are already abroad in the bank accounts of five of our overseas missions, five major capitals.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: How many persons would it accommodate?

Mr. Imbert: As I said that the policy is implemented by Foreign Affairs, we just provide the money. [*Crosstalk*] Well, that line Item has already gone.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is over 7 million administered by Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Imbert: I know but it is not in Foreign Affairs' expenditure.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Vote is not there.

Mr. Imbert: No.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can I then ask for the years we go forward, so none was expended from this Vote in the last fiscal. As we go forward I see 100,000 has now been allocated. Hon. Minister, 100,000 for the thousands stranded abroad to be repatriated, I do not know what that could accomplish or if we will go back to the facility from Finance. Your Vote is 100,000 and we were told by, I think the Minister, there are thousands of stranded nationals abroad.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of National Security.

Mr. Young: The answer to that is just today Cabinet took a decision with respect to the replenishment of that sum of money. If I remember correctly the Minister of Finance could give us the exact figure, it is either US 1 million or is it—

Mr. Imbert: One million.

Mr. Young: How much?

Mr. Imbert: One million.

Mr. Young: One million US dollars—[*Crosstalk*] correct—has been allocated. Cabinet took that decision today and that is the money that will be used by the missions that we had identified earlier on to continue to help and assist for the repatriation process continues.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you for your intervention—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Siparia.

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

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member for Naparima.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sorry, please, Member for Naparima. Again, the Minister indicated that there was \$7 million, is that what was approved today or was it approved sometime before Minister, because I am now being told \$7 million which is US \$1 million approximately. Is this in addition to the 7 million you had mentioned before?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Member for Siparia, I do not know if you have been following what was said earlier, three months ago there was the approval of and special allocation of these funds released by the Ministry of Finance. Today Cabinet approved an extension of the administration of this relief to overseas nationals until the end of December, until December 31st. So there are still funds available which we will be utilizing now that Cabinet has done the approval we will be utilizing to render assistance. But bear in mind that the 100,000 you are seeing here is separate and apart from that million US dollars. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Members, I do not want us to continue, it is not a debate that we are entering in. So again, let me hear your comment, Member for Siparia, and dependent on your comment, I will give way to the Government side in order to

make a statement.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is a question, Sir, to the hon. Minister. Would the Minister tell us what is the criteria for using that allocation for stranded nationals. Is there any criteria being administered by the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs? And how can persons access it? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay again, hold on, hold on one second. Again, Member for Siparia, right, again, we have already identified and dealt with that previously, right, and again, we are not going to continue the debate over talking on both sides with regard to this particular aspect. So I will now recognize the Member for Couva North. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, line Item 34: University Graduate Recruitment Programme. Now, Minister, you may not have been in the House or a Minister at that time but this programme was promised every year from 2015 to 2020. The question that I have—and since then, the idea seems to have been abandoned, but if we look at line Item 34: University Graduate Recruitment Programme and coming from that field is that it is a specialized area. Is there any plan or recommendation from the Ministry with respect to revisiting this programme or instituting a similar programme to this seeing that this one has been abandoned?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Mr. Chair, this programme does not originate within the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. It is my understanding that this line Item is found in Ministries across the board and this is not a programme that has been continued or extended at this time. That is my understanding of the circumstance.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Minister. In light of your Ministry being a specialized area within the public service, in the field of international relations and foreign

service, this particular programme will be most beneficial when you look at across the Ministries that it may be most beneficial to this particular Ministry. And therefore, I am asking whether or not the Ministry has recommended or the Ministry is revising or revisiting this particular programme in terms of recommending to Government or Cabinet for it to be instituted in light of this specialized area that the Ministry focuses on. That is the question.

Hon. Dr. Browne: If I—

Mr. Chairman: Member, it is the same question I think you are putting forward in a different format. I do not know, Minister, you care to comment?

Hon. Dr. Browne: I am not sure if the Member needs any assistance, but what we are describing is a dormant programme. If the Member is asking if the Ministry is mindful of the training needs and the importance of developing high level offices, the Ministry is very mindful, we have a training budget and I would not want the Committee to become fixated on this University Graduate Recruitment Programme. There are many other opportunities that we are utilizing to train, develop and identify high level staff. So I think I understand the intent but this is a dormant programme.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North, I recognize you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, I would like to bring the Minister's attention back to line Item 63: Repatriation of Nationals. Hon. Minister, in 2019 we spent \$74,000. Can the hon. Minister kindly advise how many persons applied for assistance and how many received assistance out of this spend in 2019?

Hon. Dr. Browne: How many people applied for repatriation assistance? Mr. Chair, I certainly do not have that information before me but I can provide it to the Committee in response to the question from the Member.

Mr. Ratiram: And what about how many received assistance out of this spend.

Hon. Dr. Browne: He would get a schedule of the application and the disbursement of that quantity, the 74,000. The Committee will be provided with it.

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram: I also see in 2020, no moneys were spent even though 100,000 was budgeted under this line Item, no money was spent here for 2020. Can the hon. Minister kindly advise possibly in writing how many persons would have applied for assistance for 2020 also, if any at all?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, I may be able to answer how many qualified persons, how many persons who are qualified for assistance applied and that would be zero. But I would provide the Minister with any information—[*Crosstalk*] that might assist him in—

Mr. Chairman: Member, Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Oh, what a terrible—Member, sorry, Chairman—with any information that might assist that is before the Ministry that might assist him in understanding this particular line Item for fiscal 2020/2021.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Item 002: Overseas Missions and we are on pages 321 and 322. I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. In 2019, the then Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs indicated during the budget discussions that work progressed on the reestablishment of a High Commission in Guyana as several potential properties were visited. Minister, with respect to the rent I see no increase—and therefore that suggests—from say Revised 11 million, to Estimate 11 million in 2021. Could the Minister indicate to us if this includes any provision for new missions especially that which was promised in Guyana.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes, Member—Chairman, I know experienced Members would understand and the Member who asked the question is highly experienced, would understand that what we are seeing before us is a reflection of the decisions of the Budgets Division in the Ministry of Finance. So I think that must be taken into consideration in referring to these line Items. So because the Member may see a particular Estimate here, that does not necessarily reflect the intention of the Ministry. The Ministry remains committed to the development of the premises for the High Commission in Guyana. That is actually ongoing as we speak. Options are being considered and once again if this provision is insufficient for those needs, the Ministry has the opportunity to do a degree of virement. Guyana has our attention and we have prioritized the advancement, certainly in the current term, the advancement of the High Commission there.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister give us a status report of where we are, compared to what your predecessor promised in respect of that High Commission in Georgetown?

Mr. Chairman: I would not entertain that question at this time, Member. Again, we are going into the operational and debate issues. Follow-up, I want to recognize Siparia. Okay, I will recognize Siparia. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Chair. Page 321 still under 02/002/ 28: Other Contracted Services. I note that in 2019, the actual expenditure on this Item was 796,859; the 2020 Estimates, original 2 million and then revised, 2 million. Would the Minister be kind enough to tell us what contracted services this expenditure was made on?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Sorry. Chairman, the Member's speaking level is a little low,

but I think I have understood the gist of the question. In terms of Other Contracted Services, that is similar with other Ministries, things like landscaping, maintenance of elevators, air condition. You know, there is nothing exotic under that particular allocation.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister, but there has been, in my respectful view, something that is a large increase for that Item. It was 796 actual in fiscal '19, but we have now jumped to \$2 million for fiscal '20 and then, we are projecting another 2 million for '21. So, I would be obliged if the hon. Minister would kindly provide some details as to what it is rather than landscaping—and what did you say, something about elevators?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Maintenance of elevators, air-condition units. Government Ministries, as the Member is fully aware, rely on contracted stakeholders to provide a range of support services to the operations of the Ministry. The Member would bear in mind, Chairman, that the Ministry has moved premises from the Waterfront location and now has its own compound in St. Clair, which requires a certain degree of support. There is no landscaping in a Waterfront Tower, inside of the tower. Now, there is a property to be maintained and these are—and you would notice there is no increase for this fiscal year. It is the same as the last fiscal.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yeah, but that was an—sorry, Sir, if I may?—increase over the previous year. Well, you have given an answer. Would you kind enough to provide us with the names of the persons and/or companies who have been contracted and for what purpose under this Item?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Mr. Chair, if the Member is asking for a list of all the contractors of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, every effort would be made to provide the—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, Sir. I am asking—

Hon. Dr. Browne:—with that specific request.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:—under this specific Item 02/002 and—

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]—particular Item, Mr. Minister.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:—28.

Hon. Browne: Certainly.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: In fact, this speaks to, Sir, Overseas Missions, eh. 002 is Overseas Missions. So the issue of landscaping, and a new property and so on, would not arise under Overseas Missions.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, Overseas Missions also have—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Landscaping.

Hon. Dr. Browne:—property to maintain and so on. So, Mr. Chair, as I have indicated to the Member, she would be provided with a schedule, a listing of the contractors that fall under the line Item at question.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, 08. Could the Minister give us a listing of buildings that are leased by the Ministry, both locally and abroad?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Chairman, as the Member for Siparia indicated, this section is Overseas Missions. So, if the Member is asking for a listing of all the rental properties under our Overseas Missions, that certainly can be provided.

Mr. Charles: And a follow-up. Has the Ministry or is the Ministry conducting cost benefit analyses options, rent lease as opposed to purchase options?

Mr. Chairman: I will not entertain that question, Member. I will now recognize Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you. Minister, line Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings. Now, under this Ministry we would have embassies, consulates, high commissions as well as the homes of ambassadors, et cetera, in various countries. Can the hon. Minister undertake—I know you may not have the information with you now, but if you would give us an undertaking under line Item 21, the repairs and maintenance of these buildings, which buildings these would be in terms of our overseas missions, in terms of the embassies, consulates, high commissions, residences of ambassadors; and the cost towards repairing and maintaining these buildings in the last financial year?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Mr. Chair, the Member may be aware that every building requires maintenance and upgrade wherever they may exist, both overseas and in Trinidad and Tobago. So, I am not completely clear on what he is asking.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, I think I am being very specific because this is 002: Overseas Missions as the Member for Siparia indicated. Now, under line Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance for Buildings, so I do not see what is the complication in terms of asking for which buildings whether it is embassies, consulates, high commissions, residences of ambassadors, et cetera—

Hon. Dr. Browne: All buildings require maintenance.

Mr. Padarath:—that would have benefitted from line Item 21, and if he can provide us with a list of those and the amounts that would have been spent towards repairs and maintenance. It is very simple.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Member. Thank you, Member.

Mr. Chairman: So that will be provided?

Hon. Dr. Browne: I will provide the information. I could tell you now, all buildings require maintenance, but we will provide the list.

Mr. Chairman: You will provide the information. Lovely. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 322; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Overseas Missions. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 323; Item 001: Regional Bodies. I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 01. Thank you, Chair. Could the Minister explain the decrease in the allocation to the Caricom of 13.4 million? Is this—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Okay. Mr. Chair, my understanding is that there were some arrears in the last fiscal year which have been paid off up to the third quarter, and what appears to be a decrease, simply represents in the last fiscal, the provision for the payment of arrears to this regional body.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Chairman. 04/001/03: Grenada Consular and Trade Office. I note an allocation of 491— I am sorry, 3 million. Would the Minister kindly advise what does this expenditure entail and what is the mandate of this Consular Office?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Three million?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am sorry, 491. 2021, 491.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, Mr. Chair, this Grenada Consular and Trade Office, I am surprised the Member does not recognize it. This certainly existed and was funded under previous administrations, including the administration that she led, and this was established about 15 years ago. It is located on Henry Street and it is part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago's assistance to the nation of Grenada by the maintenance of a small trade office in Port of Spain, and that continues and we continue to provide support in that way.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Would you be kind enough—I am asking for the

breakdown of the expenditure. I am happy we are helping Grenada. I have nothing against that. So, would you be kind enough to provide us—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Sorry. Mr. Chair, just to be clear, is she asking for a breakdown of the expenditure of the Grenada Consular and Trade Office?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Minister, I am.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, Member, this—you are referring to the activities of a sovereign state. They do not report. This office does not report to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. So, to give a breakdown of their activities or their work plan, et cetera, there may be some challenges in approaching them in that regard. This is a small sum that is, on an annual basis, provided as support for the office and for the nation of Grenada.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, Minister, do they ask for this money and you just send a block cheque to them for almost half a million dollars?

Dr. Rowley: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, I was the Prime Minister. I am asking this Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Please, Members.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Minister needs to account to this Parliament.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Chair, to assist the Member—

Dr. Rowley: Do not answer it.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, you have a comment, Sir?

Dr. Rowley: I am advising the Minister that the question is coming from a Prime Minister who handled the very said thing and she is not to behave as though it is something new. Fifteen years this has been going on. So these questions are completely to give the wrong impression that there is something new going on, and

underhand going on here.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No way. No way. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Look, look, look, we are in Standing Finance Committee and there is expenditure for last year's fiscal and this year's fiscal.
[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay. All right.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, no amount of shouting down. The question is being asked for a breakdown.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Minister then said—

Mr. Chairman: Member.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The further question was how is it transacted? I am being told well you were Prime Minister. Yes, I was.

Mr. Chairman: Fairly understood, Madam.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, the breakdown, how does it operate? We ask you for the money, you send a cheque. That is what I am asking. This is half a million dollars.

Mr. Chairman: And again, the Minister has identified it may be problematic in order to give an actual breakdown based on what is submitted to them—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman:—and he has follow-up statement now.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: But I asked the follow-up question.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Hon. Dr. Browne: As occurred during the United National Congress

administration, which Member led—well, leads, this line Item represents payment for rent and the electricity in support of this organization. I believe that will assist the Member. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, if you do not want to get in to—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies, page 323; Item 003: United Nations Organizations. Member for Naparima—

Mr. Charles: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman:—we are on Item 003?

Mr. Charles: Yes. 05: International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. I see that nothing was paid in 2020 in the Revised Estimates and it is surprising because an election was due in that year to replace Justice Lucky and that represented 20 years of a Trinidadian being a judge on ITLOS, and for the first time, we were replaced by a Jamaican, and the question I asked: Why would you not make a payment when we knew that there was a critical election coming up at ITLOS?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne: There is no link within the speech made by the Member, but what I can say is that appropriate provision is made and obligations under this line Item will be met in this fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member for Naparima?

Mr. Charles: No, not a follow-up, Sir. Another Item.

Mr. Chairman: Additional question?

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed, once we are within the same—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Charles: Will not be the same.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, so let me call it first. Let me call it first.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, before you go on—

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Minister of Planning and Development.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—Mr. Justice Lucky had come to the end of his term. So that carrying on about 20 years we were there and so on, and so on, he had come to the end of his term.

Mr. Chairman: No additional comment please. No additional comment. We now move on—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you do not want any more comment to that?

Mr. Chairman: No. No more comment in this, Mr. Minister. I think the Minister was clear in his discourse. Item—*[Interruption]* Hold on. Naparima, before I call, you have another question on this particular Item?

Mr. Charles: You are talking 0—yes I do, on 08: International Criminal Court.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Charles: And I see the expenditures are in the range of 675 in 2019 actual; Estimate in 2020, 730; in 2020, the Revised Estimate is 780. So we are talking about 670 to 800,000 and I see an expenditure of 400,000, and I wish to remind the Minister, before I ask the question, that we have an election coming up to replace Justice Geoffrey Henderson on the International Criminal Court, a position that we have held for the past 10 years and this \$400 does not seem adequate to the fees.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Four hundred thousand.

Mr. Chairman: And your question?

Mr. Charles: So the question is: Is this 400,000 adequate to our fees at the ICC for fiscal 2021?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Mr. Chair, there is vast difference between \$400,000 and \$400. I want to assure the Committee that the Government takes very seriously its responsibilities to the ICC, and will be, in this fiscal year, meeting all of its commitments. The assurance is given. [*Desk thumping*]

I can further indicate that Trinidad and Tobago is advancing a candidacy and our diplomatic efforts are channelled in that regard for the ICC.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Charles: It is good to know that what is happening here and what is happening with the ITLOS is not happening with the ICC. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Item 007: Households, page 324; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Different book. Sub-Head 09: Consolidated Fund, page 136. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 136. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am looking at the Item 009 on page 136, Development of a National Diaspora Policy. I think this was a new project in fiscal 2016. It goes hand in hand with a project from the Ministry for establishment of the national diaspora unit, but I note that there is no expenditure for fiscal 2020, none for 2021. Would you be kind enough to tell us what is the status of this diaspora project?

Hon. Dr. Browne: What line Item?

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 009, page 136.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes, Chairman, through you, this is an active programme. A draft policy has been received by the Ministry. It is being reviewed at this time. We

continue to engage with the consultant. It is not deemed that further expenditure is required at this time. We are working on it now and if further funds are required in pursuit of this policy, we are assured of the ability to vire funds. It would not be a huge sum, we are assured of the capacity to vire sums for this.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: 066, please. Same page. Establishment of an Embassy in Qatar. I note the allocation for fiscal 2020 was not utilized and I note there is no allocation for fiscal 2021. Is this project to continue? Is it abandoned for the embassy in Qatar? What is the status please?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Mr. Chair, we do not use the word “abandoned” in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: De-prioritized. Is it de-prioritized?

Hon. Dr. Browne: This is a project that has been suspended due to—the Minister of Finance has given the background—the exigencies of the COVID-19 situation and there have also been changes in the Middle East. So this is something that the Government has suspended for this fiscal.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: De-prioritized as this time.

Hon. Dr. Browne: There you go.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Chair. I refer to F. 064: Re-establishment of a High Commission in Guyana, and note nothing was spent in 2020 and no moneys allocated for 2021. I remind the Minister that he told me that the development of the high commission was ongoing and receiving the active attention of the Ministry. In that context, could the Minister explain no allocation for 2021?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Mr. Chairman, the Member himself referred to, under the Recurrent, the allocation for the Guyana high commission. So to go to the DP and

focus exclusively on that sum to say that there is no activity in Guyana, I think it is really a misinterpretation.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Chairman, the Member for Siparia already raised the issue. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Infrastructure Development Fund, we are now on page 232 and I recognize the Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am looking at Item F. Public Buildings. I note that in fiscal 2020, the last financial year, \$5 million was allocated but the Revised Estimate, nil. There is nothing there. And then as we go forward only 500,000 is projected for fiscal 2021. Would the Minister be kind enough to tell us what is the status of this project and what remaining work needs to be done with the 500,000 for fiscal 2021?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes, Mr. Chairman, as I indicated previously, there was a move to the St. Clair location from the Waterfront and there is some spatial adjustment within the building that has to take place. We are continuing to adjust the new premises to suit the best functioning of the Ministry, so there is a small allocation there to assist us in that regard.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: May I continue, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Member for Siparia, I recognize you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you. Would you be able to tell us why this \$5 million that was allocated for the last fiscal was not utilized? Is it that it was no longer necessary to do anything in outfitting the building and so on?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne:—the date of my arrival, I will attempt to get some information

on that, Member, and provide it to the Committee.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Government is always in continuity, Sir. Thank you very much.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Sorry? Not the UNC Government.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 65 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, hon. Minister, and also thank you to your Permanent Secretary and all the senior technocrats of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. Thank you for your presence this afternoon.

Head 07: Statutory Authorities Service Commission, \$6,523,465.

Mr. Chairman: I would like to welcome the Executive Officer and her senior technocrats from this particular Commission. Welcome. Mr. Minister, five minutes or less.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you very much. The Statutory Authorities Service Commission is an independent body that was established by Act No. 16 of 1966 of the Laws of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Like other service commissions, the Statutory Authorities Service Commission has its origin in the British civil service tradition based on the principle that appointments, promotions, dismissal and discipline of officers should be insulated from political influence.

The Commission comprises six persons: the Chairman, a Deputy Chairman and four other members. The permanent establishment of the Commission comprises 34 positions. The Act gives the Commission the power to appoint persons to hold or act in offices and to transfer, promote, remove and exercise disciplinary control over the persons so appointed. The Commission regulates its

own procedure with the consent of the Prime Minister and has formulated regulations for the purpose.

Question proposed: That Head 07 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$6,523,465 for Head 07, Statutory Authorities Service Commission is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 35. I recognize the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Lee: Through you, Chair, to the Minister, I just want you to look at page 35. I do not know if those numbers there in the Decrease column are errors, it is like \$4, \$1, \$3, \$2.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Pages 35 and 36. I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 17: Training. The 2020 Revised Estimate was 2.9 million, however, there is a decrease in that line Item down to 1.4 million. Can the hon. Minister advise if this will be sufficient for the plans for fiscal term 2020 by the Commission?

Hon. Imbert: Should be. The Commission is responsible for four corporations: the two city corporations and the two borough corporations or three borough corporations I think, and as a result is responsible for training municipal police for those corporations and the bulk of municipal police has already been trained so this is just the remaining batch of recruits that need to be trained in fiscal 2021. [Crosstalk] The SASC is not responsible for Couva.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. When the hon. Minister of Local Government was here, he

advised that in 2021, we were looking at an additional 300 municipal police for the regional corporations. The intention was for 750. Can the hon. Minister advise based on that?

Mr. Chairman: Again, it is in relation to the same Item on Training?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, on training. The Minister said that most of the training has been completed and I am just drawing the Minister's attention to the information that was presented previously by the Minister of Local Government. The intent for—

Hon. Imbert: Could you tell me what line Item you are dealing with please?

Mr. Ratiram: The same line Item, Minister.

Hon. Imbert: All right. So for clarity, the Statutory Authorities Service Commission is responsible for the Arima Borough Corporation, the Point Fortin Borough Corporation—*[Interruption]* Please, thank you. The Port of Spain City Corporation and the San Fernando City Corporation. It is responsible therefore for training of municipal police for those four corporations. It has no responsibility for the other 10 local government bodies. So could you frame whatever question that you have in the context of training of municipal police in these four corporations?

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 36. Item 001: General Administration. Page 36.

Ms. Ameen: I thought you were going to allow for the Minister to respond with regard to the training for the municipal police officers that fall within those municipalities that are staffed by this service commission.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: But as far as I am aware, I think the Minister did.

Ms. Ameen: Yes the Minister provided information, which is to list the

corporations, those cities and boroughs that fall under this Service Commission, but that does not answer the question. The question really had to do with the training of the municipal police officers.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, hold on, Mr. Minister. Again—go ahead.

Ms. Ameen: So I appreciate the Minister's guidance, but the question had to do with the training of the municipal police officers that fall within those corporations.

Mr. Chairman: And again, based on the Sub-Head that we have identified here today, Statutory Authorities Service Commission, where it has been identified, but the actual information on that training would have had to come from the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. Madam MP.

Ms. Ameen: I am aware that the municipalities are responsible for some of the training as well and that is what the Minister told us.

Hon. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, may I get a ruling, please? Are we not on 03?

Ms. Ameen: But if the Minister is not willing to share the information.

Hon. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, are we not on 03?

Mr. Chairman: Fair enough Member. We will proceed.

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: We are on 03 as far as I know.

Mr. Chairman: Thanks, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Imbert: You are welcome.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 37. Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 07 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, executive officer, and also to your senior technocrats at the Commission. Thanks for coming.

Hon. Members, we now go to Head 75: Equal Opportunity Tribunal.

Head 75: Equal Opportunity Tribunal, \$2,176,600.

[MRS. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

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

Hon. Imbert: The Equal Opportunity Tribunal is a fundamental judicial arm of the State's apparatus to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different status by prohibiting victimization and discrimination on the basis of race, religion, sex, ethnicity, origin, disability and marital status.

It is the guardian of human rights and the only anti-discrimination court in the English-speaking Caribbean. It performs a regionally unique quasi-constitutional function. A critical distinction between the High Court and the Tribunal is that while the High Court can only guard discrimination between persons and the State, the Tribunal has exclusive expansive jurisdiction to provide remedies from discrimination by private individuals, private companies, as well as the State.

Question proposed: That Head 75 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,176,600 for Head 75: Equal Opportunity Tribunal 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 shall now proceed to consider *the Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. We are at page 362. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001:

General Administration. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 16, though it is not necessarily a significant increase, is there an addition to the amount of persons employed under this Head?

Hon. Imbert: Yes. There is a plan to increase the number of persons employed by the Tribunal in 2021.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, and the next question really is tied in as well. We will come to line Item 22. But keeping on line Item 16, are you in a position to say how many additional persons will be captured by this increase?

Hon. Imbert: Approximately six.

Mr. Rambally: Six persons.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, in as much as I am on this line of questioning, in terms of line Item 22, hon. Minister, what we observe is that between the revised amount for 2020 and the Estimate for 2021, is this really—does this translate sorry, into any significant decrease in the amount of persons who have been employed this last fiscal year?

Hon. Imbert: What is being explained to me is that the Short-term Employment facility is utilized temporarily until the persons can migrate into the longer-term contract positions. So that is why you would see a variation in the amount spent on short term. So persons will be brought on, on a short-term and then they will get a longer-term contract.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, thank you. Madam Chair, I just have two others and they are very short.

Hon. Imbert: Go ahead, "nah".

Mr. Rambally: In terms of these two items, do we know the population that is captured under Item 16?

Madam Chairman: Population?

Hon. Imbert: Number?

Mr. Rambally: The number of persons employed.

Hon. Imbert: Seven persons and they are seeking to fill about 11 vacancies.

Mr. Rambally: In terms of moving forward, in terms of these 11, possibly 12 persons, it is anticipated that they will sufficiently cover the work that the EOC is directed on.

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Rambally: Yes. Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: 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 75 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Registrar and other representatives of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal.

Head 01: Office of the President, \$13,270,300.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we are at page 1 of the Recurrent Estimates. I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening estimate not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the Office of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is quasi-ceremonial in nature. Many of the roles and functions of the President are enshrined in the Constitution but there are some

others that are not expressly stated in the Constitution.

Some of the main functions of the President include: the Head of State; Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces; Executive Authority of Trinidad and Tobago; custodian of all state land; appointment of the Prime Minister; appointment of the Leader of the Opposition; appointment of Senators, Ministers; assent to Bills; proclamation of legislation; the power of pardon; proclamations generally; National Awards; receipt of Ambassadors and High Commissioners for presentation of credentials; dissolution of Parliament; appointment of Commissions of Enquiry; and many other things.

There is the appointment of the Chief Justice, the Ombudsman, members of the Election and Boundaries Commission, members of the Environmental Commission, Auditor General, Integrity Commission, Judicial and Legal Service Commission, Law Reform Commission, Police Service Commission, Public Service Commission, Salaries Review Commission, Teaching Service Commission, Equal Opportunity Commission, Public Service Appeal Board; appointment of the President of the Industrial Court, appointment of Justice of the Appeal and puisne Judges, appointment of advisory committees, appointment of Tribunals and Statutory Boards.

As a result of these functions and duties and responsibilities, the President is required to have administrative support and this is provided by the Office of the President.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 01 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$13,270,300 for Head 01: Office of the President 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 shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Tobago Services. 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 01 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Secretary. Thank you, other representatives of the Office of the President.

6.15 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$41,394,343,424 be approved as a grand total.

Question put and agreed to.

Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the House.

Madam Chairman: This Committee meeting is now adjourned. The House will resume.

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

6.19 p.m.: *House resumed.*

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I wish to report that a Bill entitled an Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago, for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2021, was considered in

Standing Finance Committee and passed without amendments. I now beg to move that it be read a third time and passed.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Question put: That the Bill be now read a third time.

Hon. Member: Division.

Madam Speaker: So, hon. Members who are accommodated throughout the Parliamentary Complex will be allowed a maximum of three minutes to return to the Chamber to vote. The Leader of the House and the Chief Whip will be asked to use their electronic means to summon their respective Members to the Chamber. And as Members know, at any time before the vote is actually declared any Member who comes in will be allowed to vote.

The House voted: Ayes 22

AYES

Imbert, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Robinson Regis, Hon. C.

Young, Hon. S.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Manning, Hon. B.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe, Hon. S.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Forde, E.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

Richards, K.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L.

de Nobriga, Hon. S.

Scotland, K.

Monroe, R.

The following Members abstained: Mr. D. Lee, Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC, Ms. K. Ameen, Mr. R. Charles, Dr. R. Moonilal, Mr. R. Paray, Mr. R. Indarsingh, Dr. L. Bodoie, Mr. S. Hosein, Mr. B. Padarath, Ms. A. Haynes, Mr. D. Tancoo, Ms. M. Benjamin, Ms. V. Mohit, Mr. D. Rambally, Dr. R. Ragbir, Mr. A. Ram, Dr. R. Seecharan and Mr. R. Ratiram.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, on a division 22 Members voted for, no Members voted against, 19 Members abstained, the Motion is carried. [*Desk thumping*]

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):
Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjournment

2020.10.22

Adjourned at 6.26 p.m.