


**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, October 11, 2021***APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2022) BILL, 2021**

[Third Day]

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

*[Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George]***10.00 a.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will now resume. Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 81(2) and (8), the Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements, along with the Appropriation Bill, have been referred to this Committee for consideration. The documents before the Committee therefore include the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly, Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, and the Appropriation (Financial Year 2022) Bill, 2021.

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

The proposed work schedule. Hon. Members, you are reminded that the Committee agreed to meet as follows: today, Monday, October 11, 2021 at 10.00 a.m.; Tuesday, October 12, 2021, at 10.00 a.m.; Wednesday, October 13, 2021, at 10.00 a.m.; Thursday, October 14, 202,1 at 1.30 p.m.; and Friday, October 15, 2021, at 10.00 a.m.

**UNREVISED**

Hon. Members are also reminded that the Committee must consider a minimum of eight Heads of Expenditure today in order to complete its work programme in the five days allotted.

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

1. The Head and the amount to be appropriated will be announced by me as Chairman.
2. The Minister will then be given the option to make a brief opening statement.
3. The Chairman will then propose the question that the sum proposed stand part of the Schedule.
4. For each Head of Expenditure, the Chairman will call the Sub-Head followed by the Item. I will not call the Sub-Heads. Discussion can ensue on the Item called on the relevant Sub-Item, and clarification sought. Once the Committee moves to another Sub-Head, questions from a previous Sub-Head will not be entertained. And for further clarification by way of example, under Recurrent Expenditure if we were dealing with Personnel Expenditure when we move on to Goods and Services we will not be reverting to Personnel Expenditure.
5. The Chairman will repeat the procedure for the Development Programme.
6. Once this is concluded, the Chairman will then put the question that the sum stand part of the Schedule.
7. The procedure will be repeated for each Head of Expenditure.

Speaking time: Hon. Members, in accordance with the Standing Order 45(1), the speaking time in Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on

each intervention. Members are reminded we have invited accounting officers and technocrats to arrive at specific times during the day so we must make every attempt to adhere to the agreed schedule.

We now move on to Head 28, the Minister of Finance. Ministry of Health, I am sorry.

*Head 28:* Ministry of Health, \$5,439,087,690.

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

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning to you Madam Chair, and all Members of this honourable House, and ladies and gentlemen of the public who are listening and viewing. A very pleasant good morning. Madam Chair, for the second consecutive fiscal year the Ministry of Health, as you would have known, is still being faced with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the features of this Government's response as the Heads would show is the setting up of a parallel health care system. So over the past fiscal we have been running basically two health care systems. Why? We set up the COVID facilities of 1,022 beds so we could isolate and treat positive COVID-19 patients which enabled us to keep the traditional health care system going. We were able to protect that system as opposed to other countries where persons could not access care in their traditional systems.

Things are not perfect. I do not think things are perfect anywhere in the world in health, but in Trinidad we are in a relatively good position. The return to normalcy in the traditional health care services has begun in recent weeks where we have started back things like elective surgeries and so on. As the number of vaccinated persons goes up and cases come down we could have a total return to normalcy, but of concern is that we still have a seven-day rolling day average of

over 200 cases.

At this point in time before I close, it is my duty once again to thank all health care workers, nurses, doctors, lab techs, patient care assistants, cleaners who played a very important role in sanitization, security guards and everyone, every single category of worker who gave of their best during the last fiscal. So with those few words—and I also want to thank the private sector, our volunteers and everyone who came out, the Chambers, everyone who came out to support this Government's efforts in the past fiscal, and, Madam Chair, with those few words I think we are ready to start.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

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

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,439,087,690 for Head 28: Ministry of Health is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the follow Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and we are at page 180. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, Madam Chair, to the Minister with respect of line Item 14 on page 180, the remuneration for Members of Cabinet appointed committees. Minister, can you indicate why that additional \$588,490 is required?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you. So there are approximately nine committees under this Head. One of the main areas of expenditure is the clinical assessment

committees, as you know, that will sit and adjudicate on things like dialysis and for cancer treatment and so on. So it is to pay them and the other committees.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East. Okay. So can we—Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Under 01: Salaries and Cost of Living, there is an allocation of \$25 million, Minister, which includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents. Could you inform this meeting how many vacant posts with incumbents currently exist?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will have to get that for you in writing, Member. We will try to get that for you.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And taking into consideration that the Minister of Finance when he presented the budget presentation indicated that a commitment to commence negotiations for workers in the public sector, could the Minister inform this House what are the outstanding periods as it relates to salaries for officers within the Ministry of Health?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I would ask that the Member direct questions on collective negotiations to the Minister of Finance. And if you want to do a catch-all question, I will give an omnibus answer to all of that.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Chair, I have listened to the Minister of Finance but it is my duty-bound responsibility to ask the relevant line Ministers who have public servants under their charge and to get the desired information from the respective line Ministers because there are different categories of employees, there are different unions, and there may be different periods as it relates to the outstanding

collective bargaining process.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, may I come in here? The Member for Couva South, an experienced former trade unionist, junior Minister in the Ministry of Finance previously, knows that the remit must be given to the Chief Personnel Officer to commence negotiations with all public sector trade unions. That comes from the Ministry of Finance. The Members knows that. And therefore I am asking the Member again, any questions with respect to collective agreements in the public sector, direct all those questions to the Minister of Finance because the respective line Ministers have no responsibility for those matters. That is a CPO matter.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay? So Member for Couva South in terms of the question, are you directing it to the Minister of Finance, and Minister of Finance in the interest of time if you can answer the question please?

**Mr. Imbert:** What I will do is I will get the CPO to do a complete list of all outstanding collective agreements and provide it to the Opposition.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much. Madam Chair, a comprehensive list with the respective collective bargaining periods.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you.

**Mr. Imbert:** Certainly.

**Madam Chairman:** All right? So we go on to Sub-Head 02. We are still on Sub-Head 01. Item 004: Vertical Services, page 181; Item 005: North West Regional Health Authority; Item 006: North Central Regional Health Authority; Item 007: Eastern Regional Health Authority. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister of Health. What I want to ask basically, for the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the allocation 2022,

there was a paltry increase of \$215,740. With the construction of the Sangre Grande Hospital would we say that is too small amount compared to the other RHAs?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Hon. Member, this does not yet include staffing for that hospital in this fiscal. That will be made in another fiscal. This is just sufficient now to meet expenses for employee increments and so on. So it does not take into consideration what you are asking.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, Minister, would you be in a position to provide for each of the RHAs the number of vacant positions in the vertical services? Are you in a position to—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** [*Inaudible*]

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, could you inform this meeting if there are any outstanding payments as it relates to allowances and increments for employees within the respective regional health authorities?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** As I indicated to your colleague from Cumuto/Manzanilla, that is exactly what line 007, Sub-Item 01 was for.

**10.15 a.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Item 008. Item 009. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam. I am noticing an increase, a significant increase under the heading 05, Telephones, of close to \$1 million. Can the Minister kindly

advise why we have such a substantial increase?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you. As you could imagine, the COVID-19 pandemic would have demanded that certain goods and services for the delivery of care to patients actually be increased, one of those in fact was telephone services. We had to employ literally hundreds of persons to do contact tracing, track positive patients at home and so on. Okay? Thank you.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Minister. Just a follow-up.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Madam Chair, through you, Minister, line Item 28, Other Contracted Services, the projected increase requirement for \$5,700,000. Can you indicate what other contracted services this would involve?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So those contracted services, again, due to COVID-19, were to facilitate the transport of patients by GMRTT for COVID-related matters.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. 22, Short-Term Employment, an allocation of 10,500,000. Minister, could you give a breakdown of the classification of jobs that have been recruited or will be recruited as it relates to this allocation and how many in each classification?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So the current number of short-term employees is 71. We will be engaging other short-term employment in areas like Insect Vector Control Division, Trinidad Public Health Lab, Queen's Park Counselling Centre, facilities management, corp. coms and so on. So those are the departments but I do not have the numbers that we are going to be employing but those are the departments under which we will be employing short-term contracts as need be.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Chair, could we get the Minister to give us this information in a very clear manner?



**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Which information is that? I thought I was— I gave you the departments but we do not have the actual numbers as yet because it is an as-needed basis.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Well, Minister, if you come to this meeting this morning to provide the country with a sense of transparency and accountability as it relates to the allocations that we have before us, I would expect that you would have the desired information, else we will be wasting our time here this morning in terms of your Government's commitment to ensure that there is transparency and accountability in terms of how the moneys will be spent for fiscal 2022.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So, Madam Chair, in all accountancy, transparency, I have given the departments, the actual numbers will be on an as-needed basis. That is what I said clearly.

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

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Member for St. Joseph, this is line Item 21, there is an increase of \$276,233. Can the hon. Minister provide the list of public health facilities which will be targeted for repairs and maintenance due in fiscal 2022?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you. So this line Item is dedicated almost entirely to the repairs and maintenance of the Couva facility where we are treating our COVID patients because that facility for COVID, it is under heavy use and will need some on-going maintenance and that is what this line Item is almost specifically for, for Couva.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Minister. To add to that, can I ask—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sorry, and also at head office.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Yeah. To add to that Minister, can you tell this House here the

procurement process for the selection of contractors for repairs and maintenance of buildings, maybe in writing?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. Yeah, we could get that for you. Thanks.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to line Item 16, Contract Employment and I see the sum of \$117 million is allocated there for 2022, having spent a similar amount in 2021. So three questions I want to ask out of that initially. What was the total number of persons employed on contract at the Ministry as at September 30, 2021; what would be the ratio of contract staff to officers in established public service posts at the Ministry; and the third question would be what contract positions will be created for the 2021/2022 fiscal year?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. So these positions are to fill those at places like the Blood Bank, the Quality Department, Tobacco Unit, Internal Audit, Facilities Management, Project Management, Epidemiology. The total number of contract positions is 343. This also includes contract positions for interns, right, where we currently have 371 interns there, and also for foreign medical recruitment. So that is what this is used for and the other questions, we will try and get it for you.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to go back to the question with regard to Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings, line Item 21. The Minister indicated that a substantial part of this is for the Couva facility, the Couva children's hospital. However, I note that in 2020, 21 million was actually allocated for—was the actual expenditure, 21.5 million was the actual expenditure for repairs under this Head. I am now seeing 11 million, 50 per cent of what was

actually spent in 2020. Is it that the Minister is confident that we have sufficiently spent money for repairs of buildings and everything is fine at this point?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, on the very important allocation of \$117 million for Contract Employment. Minister, in his budget presentation and taking into consideration the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association highlighted that many nurses lack job security despite being essential workers in the fight against COVID-19. The Minister indicated in his presentation that temporary nurses, their contracts would be regularized by the end of December 2021. Could you inform this meeting how many nurses are to be regularized?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. So Madam Chair, this is not for the recruitment of local nurses. I was very clear in my response when I said this was for the recruitment of foreign nurses from Cuba. The Member is not au courant with the niceties of these line Items. Nurses are hired under the RHAs. This has nothing to do with what the hon. Member is trying to allude to.

**Mr. Imbert:** May I also come in, Madam Chairman? May I point out that this Item is General Administration and therefore, General Administration would not normally apply to nurses employed within the RHAs. I am not sure—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am guided. Madam Chair, I am in search of answers for nurses.

**Madam Chairman:** So Item 004. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Sorry, I put up my hand for Sub-Item 37. Can I go back? That was on Janitorial Services. That is page 184.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Dr. Ragbir:** May I?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, you may.

**Dr. Ragbir:** All right, thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, this is under Janitorial Services, does this allocation include spending on sanitization initiatives related to COVID-19?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No, this does not.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodo:** Thank you. Madam Chair, through you to the Minister, line Item 39, Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Which one? 39?

**Madam Chairman:** We are on page 185 before Vertical Services.

**Dr. Bodo:** 185, sorry. Line Item 39, Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies. I just wanted not to miss the opportunity, Minister, because traditionally, this expenditure Item has been about 600,000 so I just wanted to ask whether that line Item still is for the provision of drugs and supplies to all the RHAs because I note the amount here of 241 million as opposed to previously being in the region of 600 million. So I do not know if you may want to answer that in relation to a line Item further down or whether you are prepared to answer that now, Minister.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah. So this line Item, it does refer to NIPDEC, the PAHO Strategic Fund and for the expanded programme on immunization for both pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical. So that is what this is for. And also for vaccines.

**Dr. Bodo:** Right, so is that further supplemented later down in the budget?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It can be yes and has been in previous years as you know,

through the Ministry of Finance.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right. I will have a further question later down.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Same line Item 39, I am just curious why there has been a 33 million-dollar decrease in the allocation for Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay, so one of the reasons is that we are rationalizing what is called our VEN List. As the doctors would know, the national formulary is based on something called a VEN List, V-E-N, where drugs are classified or stratified as being vital, essential or necessary. Over the years, this VEN List has grown out of the needs of Trinidad and Tobago and part of the remit of this Government was to rationalize that.

We have taken that VEN List. In 2016, there were 857 items in the VEN List. In 2017, it was reduced by 57 items to 800 and that is what we are doing. Taking off duplications, triplications, quadruplications where you have the same drug because people come to the Drug Advisory Committee and the Tenders Committee and advocate for their brand and it does not serve the public interest well. So that is one of the reasons. And in the case of HIV/AIDS drugs, we have been able to save over \$70 million by going to the PAHO Strategic Fund as opposed to the direct distributors. So it is a matter of rationalization and using alternate sources of procurement.

**Mr. Tancoo:** If I may with a supplemental, Ma'am.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Minister, would you then say that NIPDEC is—part of the

rationalization exercise is to ensure that we have no drugs that are expired or that we make sure that we have sufficient supply prior to drugs being expired and therefore there is some sort of check and balance to ensure that we have a running tally of drugs approaching expiration?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes we do but you will have to realize that no public health care system or private health care system can exactly predict drug consumption down to the last vial, last tablet, there will always be some expiring drugs. Because if you try to do a just-in-time system for drugs, you will run out. You have a hurricane, you have an earthquake, you need drips, are you going to wait then to order drips? You have a pandemic, are you going to wait then to order drugs? So whilst we try to minimize wastage, the world now is suffering from the adverse effects of just-in-time delivery. You are seeing it all around the world. So you must have a strategic stock of key drugs, especially on the VEN List, the vital and essential. *[Interruption]* And vaccines alone, yes.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Ma'am. Hon. Minister, can I therefore appeal to you to provide to this Chamber, this meeting a listing of the drugs which have expired over the last year and have had to be returned or disposed of and a dollar value for them please?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We could attempt to do that.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you.

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

**Dr. Seecheran:** Good morning, Minister. Line Item No. 39 as well, you indicated that this allocation here in the previous year was to acquire drugs, including vaccines. I am asking does this include vaccines under the COVAX initiative as

well as the vaccines acquired through Sinopharm?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay, so yes, the vaccines bought under the COVAX initiative are included here, also the Johnson & Johnson vaccines and some of the Sinopharm vaccines but those are the subject of non-disclosure agreements so I cannot disclose price.

**10.30 a.m.**

What I can tell you, the AstraZeneca vaccines we purchased, of the 108,000-odd, three tranches of 33,800 roughly, Trinidad and Tobago would have paid for two of those tranches, a total of US 300,190.94. The third tranche was paid for by CARPHA under a grant from the European Union. So that would give you some idea of what we have paid for, for the AstraZeneca vaccines.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Minister. Supplemental question, so you are saying—is the Johnson & Johnson under nondisclosure agreement as well?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, that and Sinopharm. We are also purchasing—in all transparency—some Sinopharm vaccines through COVAX, roughly 60,000 doses. That I can disclose. That is not subject of a nondisclosure agreement, for US \$388,095.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, could you indicate when these nondisclosure agreements would expire with regard to Sinopharm?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I do not have a date for that. That will be the subject of legal cover.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, I know, on the same line Item 39, we have spoken about drugs and vaccines, but it is also other related materials and supplies. Can you confirm whether that would include consumables for use in surgeries and the

clinics, and so on, or does that come directly from the RHA allocation?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It will be a mixture of both, as you know. It will be a mixture of both. We do provide some to the RHAs and the RHAs do also do some procurement of their own.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yeah. I am raising that in the light, Minister, of reports from the antenatal clinics where I am being told that the supplies for the glucose tolerance test in pregnant women, that test has been suspended. Can you shed some light on that, or can you give the assurance that those tests will be continued?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will try to find out what is the position with that.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you for raising it.

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

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister, same line Item, you indicated, hon. Minister, about the VEN List, very essential drugs. With that in mind, is there a place, or is there a role and function that you are thinking about adding or deleting some of the drugs in the CDAP system?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No. So, we are constantly reducing the VEN List to give the patient the best value for money, whether we add—and we have added some drugs in the past, especially for, as the Member for Fyzabad would know, especially to treat postpartum bleeding in women, which saves women's lives. So it is not a matter of taking out drugs, rationalization means looking to see what we need at the best price to get give the best patient outcome. So we take away drugs, as I explained to the other Member.

Sometimes you have the distributors that come to your tender meetings and they all have the same brand of the same drug. And in the past, you would end up



with five brands of the same drug. Rationalization means cutting that down to maybe two. So it is a mixture of taking off things that are unnecessary and putting on things which impact positively on patient outcomes.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** You are welcome.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, you have outlined and given some information as it relates to this whole question of the acquisition of vaccines, and so on, and the types of vaccines that have been acquired by the Government and also gifted. Are you in a position to inform this meeting about the expiration dates of the respective vaccines?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So let us start with AstraZeneca. AstraZeneca, as we have said from day one, traditionally comes with a very short expiry date. The current stock of AstraZeneca expires between October and November 2021, this month-end and next month-end. The Johnson & Johnson vaccines, they expire in 2023, together with the Sinopharm, around June 2023. The other brand, which is the Pfizer, the Pfizer vaccines came with an initial expiry date of November 2021, which is this year. However, WHO and PAHO have extended that now by three months and they will now go—so we can use them until February 2022.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Has the Government taken any decision as it relates to vaccines that are not utilized, what will be done with it?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So, as I have indicated, and as the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs indicated in his contribution, he gave a detailed analysis of the countries and the amounts that we have so far sent to other countries and what he expects that is in the pipeline so we do not have wastage, especially of the

AstraZeneca vaccines.

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

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, it is good to see you are using your WHO protocols conveniently.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, I resent that statement. We have been using our WHO protocols consistently, not conveniently. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Seecheran:** I will have to disagree but let us move on.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** My colleague is entitled to his opinion.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South, everybody is entitled to their opinion. Let us get on with the matter.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much.

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

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, line Item 39. Has an allocation been made for vaccine acquisition from the current stock or future stock for a possible third booster shot that may be required from most of the population this year?

**Madam Chairman:** So, while I would have given some latitude because of the importance of vaccines, these are policy questions, which should have been dealt with in the debate. Okay? So, Member, I will allow you another question based on this not, but I am not going to let us use our limited time into extensive excursions into areas that are not allowed under the Standing Orders.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Madam Chair—

**Madam Chair:** Member—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—my colleague had three days—

**Madam Chair:** Member—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—in the budget debate to ask those questions.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for St. Joseph, let us proceed.

**Dr. Seecheran:** I did ask the question while I made my contribution, Minister.

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

**Dr. Seecheran:** No, problem. Minister, well it is similar to the last question. I will ask it, I do not know if it would be allowed. Minister, has an allocation been made for possible acquisition of the new antiviral drug by Merck for the treatment of COVID-19?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, can I have the line Item, please? Can we deal with line Items only?

**Dr. Seecheran:** That is line Item No. 39 that is to acquire drugs and other related materials and supplies for the country.

**Madam Chairman:** The question has been asked under line Item 39. I will allow it.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Madam Chairman, it is quite amazing that as a medical practitioner, supported by two other medical practitioners, we have been consistent in saying that we will follow WHO guidelines. [*Desk thumping*] The drug being spoken about by my friend is in clinical trials at this point in time. It has not yet been approved by WHO for the treatment of COVID. And that is why I said, we apply the WHO guidelines consistently, not conveniently, as my colleague tried to allude to. And he should know that, because he has two eminent doctors at his disposal who can tell him that that drug has not yet been approved by WHO. So the answer is no.

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

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, the reason why I ask the question is because you are running into the same mistake you made last year where—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, can I have a ruling on this please?

**Dr. Seecheran:**—we were not able to acquire vaccines. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I would like a ruling on this, please.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, this would be a life-saving drug—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am asking for a ruling, Madam Chairman.

**Dr. Seecheran:**—those that are not vaccinated. We have a high degree of vaccine hesitancy and uptake in this country. We are under 40 per cent fully vaccinated.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, can I get a ruling on this please, Madam Chairman?

**Madam Chairman:** Firstly, Minister of Finance, Members are not only allowed to ask questions, they are also allowed to make comments up to five minutes. Okay? I have allowed the initial question, which was whether the particular drug would have been included under drug supply. Okay? The Minister has answered. The Member has made a comment. It is not a question, we can move on.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Can I ask another question?

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. Minister of Health, do you want to respond to the comment?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, I would like to respond. You see, if we had taken the advice of colleagues opposite, we would have brought hydroxychloroquine and killed people. We are applying WHO guidelines consistently.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, if you are applying WHO guidelines consistently, why are you vaccinating children between the ages of 12 to 15?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman—

**Madam Chairman:** Member, are you—you have made the point. Do you want to ask something else? Because we are not going to use this forum for a back and

forth about whether WHO guidelines have been consistent, inconsistent, convenient, and so on. Okay? Do you have something else you would like to address?

**Dr. Seecheran:** I would just like to say, Minister, you are not applying WHO guidelines consistently. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. All right. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Items 15 and 21, the questions would be basically the same. There is a substantial jump between what was the Revised Estimate in 2021 and what is being proposed to be done in 2022. Both line Items are Repairs and Maintenance. One is for equipment, one is for buildings. Can the Minister indicate what specific repair and maintenance work is scheduled, which would have accounted for this substantial increase?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So, Repairs and Maintenance, you do not incur the same expenses every year. You maintain something now, you would do something now, you may not need the same amount next year. For the line Item 15, that was mainly for lab equipment and security systems. If we need more, but there is an actual increase, so we have no problems with that. For 21, it is an increase of 1.8 million. That is general repairs and maintenance at all our vertical services buildings, like insect vector, and so on. That is adequate for now, and we see no problems with it.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Can the Minister provide then a listing to the honourable Chamber here of the specific buildings which would be repaired and/or maintained under this Head?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. It is easily available, we would provide it. Thank you.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Minister.

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

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, going back to line Item 39: Drugs and Other Related Material and Supplies.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Is there any allocation or provision to purchase additional test kits for COVID-19 by the Ministry?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, if we need to; if we need to. We have a very good supply of test kits now.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Could I ask what is the inventory like?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I would have to get those details to you.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005, Item 006, Item 007, Item 008, Item 009. Sub-Head—Member for Oropouche West, I am sorry. I did not see you.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam. Item 009, I am noticing line Items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 we had no, actual expenditure in 2020. We had no Estimate and no Revised Estimate for 2021. But we now have an Estimate—

**Madam Chairman:** One minute, Member. You are saying Items 15 and 14?—10, 11, 12, 13, and 15?

**Mr. Tancoo:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** No. 14? 10, 11, 12, 13, 15.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Correct.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, great.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Correct, Madam, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 15. All of those Items were zero in 2020 and in 2021 Estimates and Revised Estimates, but there is now an allocation for them. Is there a specific reason for that? These would be Office Equipment, Periodicals, Materials and Supplies, Maintenance of Vehicle, Repairs

and Maintenance of Equipment.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So, this was because in previous years we have gotten the money under verticals but now we have a special allocation for NDAP.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 03. Item 001. Item 004. Item 009. Sub-Head 04. Item 001.

**10.45 a.m.**

Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Minister, under 003, United Nations Organizations: 02.

**Madam Chairman:** Nobody under 001? Item 003, Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Yes. World Health Organization regular budget, could you just give us some information as to why there is a decrease of 1.3 million in the 2022 Estimate?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So our actual expenditure for 2021 was 2.5 million. If this amount proves to be inadequate, we will come back at the mid-year review for additional funding. Okay?

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you. On the same heading but 001: Sub-Head; International Atomic Energy Agency. I note a 600 per cent increase in the allocation for that agency. Can the Minister indicate why we have such an increase?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Because every year different activities take place, so we have to make a payment into a technical corporate fund and a cash contribution for national participation. So every year the amounts are going to vary.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** So Minister, this is not projected, this is not based on an agreed principle, an agreed period, an agreed quantity, an agreed contribution?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So this falls under what is called a quota contribution, so that is how it is going to be allocated.

**Mr. Tancoo:** So is that Minister why we had a 210,000 Revised Estimate when we had a \$1.1 million estimate year before? Minister, I am trying to gauge why in one year we had a \$1.2 million Estimate, Revised Estimate of 210,000, and we have come back again with a \$1.3 million Estimate which is a significant increase from what was revised to in 2021.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So, I am advised by the PS this is what our quota contribution has been—to us has been assessed by the IAEA.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, Sub-Item 20, what are the criteria for entities of all these organizations for receiving such funding? And how often is this list of entity is revised or reviewed?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Just repeat the second part of the question please?

**Dr. Ragbir:** What are the criteria for these entities receiving funding?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So the criteria are: one, they must be registered as a legal entity; they must produce us with a strategic plan and a work programme that is in alignment with the Ministry of Health's strategic plan for their particular sector; they must also give us their organizational structure; their team support; audited financial statement for the past three years; their proposal for the subvention, what they propose to use it for; then we also check with other Ministries to determine that a similar subvention is not being given by another Ministry; and we must also



have a no objection letter from the prospective or existing NGO that no funding is currently being sourced or given by any other Ministry. So that is the criteria that we use.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you. And supplemented to that—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Ragbir:**—how often are these entities are accessed and reviewed?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Every year. At least once a year minimum.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you.

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

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to Item 01: Medical Treatment of Nationals in Institutions, and maybe you might want to provide this answer in writing. So the question is: for the 61,300,000 expended in fiscal 2021 as indicated by the line Item, can the Minister provide a list for each institution, with the name of the institution, the amount expended, the number of patients treated or investigations performed, and the type of treatment?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you. I remember this identical question last year and the hon. Attorney General had to remind this meeting that some of these arrangements may be the subject of contractual agreements, price negotiations which are sensitive, and which may be confidential. The answer that I gave last year is the same answer I will give this year, and may involve the writing to hundreds of people. The answer is, if the information is allowable under law, not the subject of a confidentiality agreement, or property rights, or intellectual property, and it can be provided, we will endeavour to do so under those conditions. And we also have the FOI to look at it. But these are as you know as a former Chairman of a RHA, you know this. Okay. Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009. Member for Caroni East, you are under 007 or 009?

**Dr. Seecharan:** 009.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, please.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Minister under 01: Regional Health Authority, I see there is a payment for 91 million for the Energy Ambulance Service. Could you give us an idea of the number of visits or trips that this line Item would be paying for?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So, I would not have that here, Member, but we would endeavour to get it from GMRTT.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Minister, as well, are you as the Minister of Health satisfied with the performance of this emergency ambulance service over the last fiscal year? To warrant a payment to 91 million? And may I add that I think when I checked the last book it was 66 million last year, and then we have Other Contractual Services and other payment there as well.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It is passing strange that the Opposition is now questioning GMRTT. Let me remind the country, it was the UNC in 2010, September 2010, a month before a general election that went to GMRTT with sole select, over the objections of the then Minister of Health, Fuad Khan—2015 sorry, who was overridden by a Cabinet Member of the UNC, Anand Ramlogan. And Fuad Khan wrote, it is in the record that he objected that Anand Ramlogan telling him, Fuad Khan, to award this contract on sole select, and you have the temerity now to ask about the performance of this contract?

**Dr. Seecharan:** Yes, I do because there was a lady, a pregnant woman that had to have her baby on the roadside in Otaheite in the last fiscal year, because they rang this ambulance service and could not get service. [*Desk thumping*] So, Minister, I am asking you again, are you satisfied with the service that this—?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Generally, in a pandemic where all health care systems have been stretched, as I said before, no health care system in this pandemic has been perfect, but we have done remarkably well.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Minister, during the mid-year review you indicated that the emergency ambulance service has one station of dispatch from Port of Spain next to the market, are there any provisions in this new fiscal year that another station would be established south of the Caroni Bridge for those that do not live in Port of Spain?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So the contract for GMRTT has expired, and this Government unlike the UNC which went with sole select over the expressed objections of Fuad Khan who was Minister of Health, we have gone back out for open tender, open tender, transparent, and we will look at those matters at that time.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Chair, with respect to Vacant Posts and an allocation of \$23 million, Minister, could you—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Could you indicate the line Item, Sir?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** 01.

**Madam Chairman:** Regional Health Authority, there is a break down in the explanation.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Right.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** With respect to \$23 million, could you provide this meeting with a breakdown of how this \$23 million will be utilized as it relates to Vacant Posts?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So the vacancies in the RHA, those to be filled, 240 at South West, total. The total to be filled two hundred and—sorry, the total to be filled is 240. At South West is 120; ERHA, 82; North Central RHA, 17 and North

West RHA, 29.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And could I ask the Minister in terms of the numbers, could he provide a breakdown of the classification? What it is, nurses, doctors?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay, we will have to get that for you.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And I ask this question again, against the background of the Minister who was very exuberant when he presented his budget presentation, as it relates to addressing the issue of the security of tenure for nurses by the end of December 2021. Minister, could you tell this meeting how many nurses in terms of how many vacant posts are there to be filled as it relates to Registered Nurses across the RHAs?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We will try and get that for you.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, you have been the Minister for six years now and the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association has been sending you letters on an ongoing basis, cajoling you, pleading with you, begging you, embarking on a day of prayer and reflection, and you do not have that information here this morning? It is delinquency of the highest order. [*Desk thumping*] You do not have that after six years of being the Minister of Health?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Madam Chair, as I indicated, we will get the information to the Member.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Chair, I am forced to conclude that we are engaging in a meeting of futility here and wasting our time.

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

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, Sub-Item 03; 04, respectively, I see there is a decrease of 21 million and seven million. My question

to you hon. Minister, with the decrease in the allocation, how would it affect clinical services, especially with North Central, the COVID hospital is in Couva?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So, it will not have a significant effect or any deleterious effective at all. What this will do under 04, this includes provision for the National Cancer Registry, operating cost for Arima Hospital, and operating cost for the Couva Hospital. If we need additional funding as we always do, Member, we come back in the mid-year review for supplementation. So there will be no negative fallout. I assure you.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I want return briefly to line Item 01. And in the Explanatory Notes that same position with regard to Vacant Posts. The Minister is now saying there is on an average 200 vacancies in each of the RHAs. Is that correct, Minister?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No, I never said that Member. You are again deliberately, deliberately—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Minister—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—for public gallery and to grab headlines misinterpreting what I said. I said clearly, SWRHA, 120, nowhere near 200. ERHA, 82, nowhere near 200. NCRHA, 17, 17, and North West, 29. Please do not mislead the population.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Minister. Can the Minister please advise on the normal basis we have recurrence happening where individuals would leave and enter. Are these individuals here on the establishment strictly medical professionals? Are these individuals doctors and nurses? And I am asking that in the context of the same line Items below where you are talking about continuing the operations of new facilities. So we have a shortage of workforce on the one hand, and we have

increased use, we have increased hospitals on the other hand. Why has the Minister not made significant provision before so we do not have vacant posts in existence as this one?

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So, I just want to say to the Member for Oropouche West, the first question has already been asked and an undertaking given to give the breakdown. Right? The first question of what is the post of these 240 people, whether is doctors, nurses, whatever. That has already been asked.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**11.00 a.m.**

**Mr. Tancoo:** May I rephrase the question then, or ask a different question? Given that we have now had the expansion, we are now using the Couva children's hospital and other facilities, has the Minister made any provision for additional resources, additional medical resources to service those facilities, or are we going to still be using existing resources and continue to stretch them thinly?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I am happy to answer. During my budget speech I indicated clearly for those who would have listened that, during the last fiscal, we hired an additional 1,256, I believe, health care workers across the sectors. Included in that hon. Member, and I remember giving the figures that would have included—I cannot remember the exact figure down to the last one, about 400 extra nurses, about 300 extra doctors, to staff these facilities. So the answer is yes, we have made provisions and we have done so.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** With regard to Items 02, 03, 04 and 05 Minister, all the RHAs together, you would have answered the second part of my question with the

number of vacancies, but can you provide in writing the number of established positions in each of these RHAs?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We would endeavour to get that to you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Could that include a sub allocation with regard to Point Fortin which would be under SWRHA—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Bodoë:**—and the Couva hospital and the Arima hospital which will be under NCRHA. Would you be able to provide that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay. We would try and get that for you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. And, Madam Chair, I would like to inform the Minister of Health when my colleagues embark on questioning, it has nothing to do with misleading the public but in the interest of accountability and transparency. Minister, with respect to Legal Settlement of \$2.5 million, could you provide details as it relates to—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What is the line Item?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** We are on 01, Regional Health Authority

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay, sure. As long as it does not breach any privilege or confidentiality we will try to do so.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** This Government is hiding behind confidentiality agreements and so on.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No legal—AG—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** This has been the track record of this Government for the last six years.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It may be sub judice, as the Attorney General is saying.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So the \$2.5 million that is being spent is sub judice at the moment.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What you mean legal fees?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am asking. I am not the Minister of Health.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What are you asking?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am asking for details as it relates to this payment or this allocation of 2.5—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Payment of legal fees or settlement?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Legal settlement.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Ask—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** It is there.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Madam Chair, if I may assist please. The Member's question is well purposed, the Minister's response is equally well purposed. So long as it is not yet triggered, perhaps the matter may very well be in the course of positions. Once it is completed, of course, it will be disclosed.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Exactly.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** So, just to make it clear that there is no attempt to do anything other than answer your question.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am asking— Attorney General, I have heard you—

**Madam Chairman:** Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Is it for a matter that has—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South and the Attorney General, I think the Minister of Health has answered and the answer is he will give the breakdown, subject to these overriding considerations. All right, so that I am not sure it is in



our best interest to interrogate that. The answer is, you have asked for a breakdown, the Minister says you will get a breakdown provided that some of the Items are not caught by certain considerations.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Chair, I am certainly not satisfied.

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

**Dr. Seecharan:** Minister, on page 191, 06—line Item 06 under the Children’s Life Fund Authority—

**Madam Chairman:** Under Other Transfers abroad. Where are you under the Transfers? Your Item is what?

**Dr. Seecharan:** 06: Children’s Life Fund Authority.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, all right sure, thanks.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Minister, with a decrease in the next fiscal year of \$717,000, would you say that this administration has now forsaken the Children’s Life Fund Authority?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Madam, the way the question is phrased, it speaks to an unfamiliarity with what this line Item means. This has nothing to do with the payment for children to go abroad for surgeries. This is just the general operating cost of the CLF and stipends to board members. That is all. Has nothing to do, nothing, absolutely nothing, zilch, nada—

**Dr. Seecharan:** So could you explain to me—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—with the payment—

**Dr. Seecharan:** Okay.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—the payment—

**Dr. Seecharan:** Yeah.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—for children to go abroad. This is for administrative costs and stipends.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Okay, so could you give us some clarity on why there has been a decrease then?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The actual expenditure in 2021 was 2.4 million, and again, if we need additional funding, as we always do, the Minister of Finance will look at it in the mid-year review.

**Dr. Seecharan:** So, you do not know why there has been a decrease?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I cannot give you an exact reason now. We could attempt to get it but I just want to reiterate for the public consumption that this has nothing to do with the payment for children to access life saving surgeries abroad. Okay?

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Madam Chair, Children's Life Fund, the Minister's explanation just now is that this has nothing to do with the amount of money being allocated for children's—treatments for children, but it has to do with the operating and the operation and the stipends to board members of the Children's Life Fund Authority. Can the Minister advise if this reduction in allocation will impact on— Well two questions, whether it will impact on the operations of life fund and specifically what has been the reason—what have been the line Items, the individual expenditure Items which have been removed, which would have now cause this three quarter million dollar drop in allocation.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So again, nothing has been removed. As I indicated, if we need additional funding under this line Item, we come back in the mid-year review. There will be no negative impact on the operations of the Children Life Authority.

**Mr. Tancoo:** So this is a cosmetic reduction, Minister? It was 2.4 million in 2020 actual, estimated at 2.4 million—Revised Estimate 2.4 million in 2022. You have reduced it and unable to indicate why.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** And as I indicated, as all other line Items, and you hear all other Ministers speak about this, if we need additional funding, we will come back in the mid-year review—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Then that means this is an exercise in futility

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—but it will have no negative impact on the operations of the Children’s Life Fund Authority.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I want to link my question to Items—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Bodo:**—21 and 24 which speak to interest payments for Trade Payables, would you be in a position to list the outstanding Trade Payables for the last financial year for those two RHAs?—the SWRHA and ERHA. Can you provide that now or would that be in writing?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, so the expenditure under 21 for South West was \$18,701,169.76. Is that okay, does that answer your question?

**Dr. Bodo:** And that is full payment for—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah.

**Dr. Bodo:**—outstanding Trade Payables?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah.

**Dr. Bodo:** Okay.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No, no, sorry, no, no, no.

**Dr. Bodoë:** I am asking for outstanding—what might be outstanding.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** SWRHA took out a loan for 500 million and this Item refers to the interest rate—

**Dr. Bodoë:** Right

**Hon. Deyalsingh:**—and the expenditure was \$18,701,169.76.

**Dr. Bodoë:** No, understood, but what I am asking is, can you say what would be the outstanding amount—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Outstanding amount? Okay, we will try and get that for you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** For both SWRHA—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Bodoë:**—and the ERHA

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Items 18 and 19, same question these both refer to an interest—sorry. These both refer to interest—line Items 18 and 19—interest payment, which are normally scheduled payments. There was an estimate—a Revised Estimate of 5.5 million and 6 million respectively 6.4. I know that there has been a decrease in the allocation for interest payments in 2022. Is that part of the agreement itself, or do we have another reason—is this another creative editing way of showing a lower budget figure?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What the PS has advised me that this will be based on the payment schedule.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 010. Item—yes, Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Madam Chair, I am seeing a significant drop in this allocation. This is 011/01 National Health Service Company Limited, a very significant decrease of \$1.00 listed. I believe that is a typo. I do not know if the Minister will be inclined to correct it. The same query is also at the fixed rate loan repayment under 08 for UDeCOTT. There is a significant decrease of \$8.00. I suspect both are typos which the Government seems to be very familiar with these days. Can the Minister care to correct both of those now?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So for the National Health Service Company, this company was closed by the Ministry of Finance in 2019. And the payments—any payments made were effect any outstanding fees and the actual expenditure for last year was 2021. So that explains that zero.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Hold on, hold on, hold on.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The actual expenditure for 2021 was zero.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Right. And 02, UDeCOTT. Repayment of Finance and Facility.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Mr. Tancoo:** There is a \$1.00 decrease.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So the Minister of Finance will come in here.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Oh, it is a typo again?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, quite often when the estimates are prepared, some of the numbers are rounded off. And the Budget Division takes the opportunity in succeeding years to put the actual numbers. You have this situation in 02 where they have corrected it from 210 to 209. You have the situation in 06, where they have corrected it by \$702 and they have this situation in 08, where they have corrected it by \$8.00, and also in 09 by \$14,900.

There is nothing unusual about this. It is simply as the budget estimates go along and I would like to educate Members, there is an original provision, there is a revised provision, and there is an actual provision, and these things are in sequence. As we go along year by year as the Budget Division fine-tunes the actual numbers the numbers will change slightly. So this is simply the Budget Division doing some minor correction to some numbers that makes no significant difference to the actual provision itself, because when you look at \$8.00 in 3.3 million, it makes no significant difference for the actual provision.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Minister, with respect and regard, we treat these numbers that you have provided to us as if they have been provided to us after substantial amount of research and estimation et cetera, et cetera. These are—this \$1.00 and \$8.00, and \$702 difference, can the Minister advise then, since these are typos—clearly typos—whether we are now looking—in fact, what figure is now the real figure?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, let me take an actual page. If I take page 191.

**Mr. Tancoo:** This is an actual page, eh.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is for illustrative purposes, in the perhaps futile hope that this type of question will not be asked again. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Tancoo:** Madam Speaker, this is not full Parliament—[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Member. Member for Oropouche West, let us get to the crux of the very important question you have asked. All right, let us get to the substance of what we about here.

**Mr. Imbert:** I did not interrupt him, Madam. They have no manners.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, please give the answer.

**Mr. Imbert:** 191, so that the far left column is the actual for 2020, which has been refined by the Budget Division over a period of approximately two years. That is how you get the actual figure. If you go in last year's book, you will see a Revised Estimate. The next column is the Estimate; that is the initial estimate which is in all these documents. The next one is Revised Estimate, which is the Budget Division's best estimate of what the expenditure will be at the end of the fiscal. They are revising as you go along through the 12 months. So there are three types of estimates inside of here. And for the last 50 years, this is how it has been done. As we go along, the numbers are fine-tuned and corrected and appropriated adjustments made.

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

**11.15 a.m.**

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the Minister is deliberately trying to misguide me. I think he is deliberately proceeding on a course of action, but let me refocus please. This is specifically with regard to the increase and/or decrease with regard to 2022, and a figure was placed on these books of a \$1.00 increase. This has nothing to do with the Actual before and the Estimates before and the Revised Estimates and the Estimates for 2022. This is a figure that was put in the decrease column indicating that there is a \$1.00 decrease between the Estimates of 2021 and the Estimates of 2022, that there is an \$8.00 increase. I am asking, simply, Minister, if this is a typographical error or if it is an actual difference. That is a straightforward question requiring a straightforward answer.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chair, I have made my position clear, and for the record it is not a typographical error. As I said, there are three types of numbers in these

books: Actual, Estimate, Revised Estimate and there is a process to get these numbers. If the Member has never been a Minister determining budget estimates—

**Mr. Tancoo:** And if a Minister with experience cannot understand basic things like this—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I keep quiet when they talk.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, Minister of Finance, please.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** A very experienced Member.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, Member for Couva South. We have limited time and I think the public would really benefit from the questions being asked and the answers being given. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Couva South, there is nothing to answer with that. Member for Oropouche West, please allow the answer, because with the crosstalk I think the benefit of what you want to hear or interrogate will be lost. All right?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chair, for the last time—

**Madam Chairman:** I just want to say to everybody here, I think good manners that every Member here is equipped with will serve us in good stead in this exercise. Okay? The practise of good manners. We all, we are all skilled and schooled in it, because we are all honourable people here. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. For the last time, when the budget documents are prepared, there are three types of numbers in them. There is an Actual number—[*Crosstalk*] Thank you. There is an Actual number—what is this? My turn and you are interrupting me now. [*Laughter*]

**Madam Chairman:** Member, please allow the Minister of Finance. I will recognize you after.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, Ma'am.



**Madam Chairman:** And Member, please maintain your volume.

**Mr. Imbert:** Sure.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you.

**Mr. Imbert:** In the budget Estimates there are three types of numbers. There is an Actual figure. The way the Budget Division arrives at the Actual figure is that they will take the Revised Estimate for that item for the previous year and they will interrogate the expenditure and they will arrive at an Actual figure which is as close as you can get to the most accurate number.

The second column is the Estimate, which is prediction of what the expenditure will be in the current fiscal year. As they get towards the end of the fiscal year, the Budget Division is constantly re-examining expenditure, so they create a column called Revised Estimates. So you have Actual expenditure, estimates going forward and Revised Estimates, Madam Speaker, and, therefore, the three numbers are going to be different. The most accurate of them all is the Actual number.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay? So, I recognize the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and then the Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would just like to note the diligence of the Member for Oropouche West on a dollar and \$8.00 and I wondered why when he was sitting in the corner of Cabinet, he did not recognize \$400 million overspent for the Beetham Wastewater Project.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you so much. So, let us keep to what is relevant for this exercise here. Thank you. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** I probably would have asked for a recusal. Minister of Health, hon. Minister, I return to line Item 08. There is an \$8.00 reduction in the Estimates for

2022. Can the Minister advise what Item would have caused this \$8.00 reduction in the payment to line Item 02, CIBC First Caribbean International Bank?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, Member for Oropouche West—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Yes, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:**—I think that question has been asked and answered. I believe an explanation, whether we accept it or not, an explanation was given under 01, 02, 08 and 09 and I think that explanation was repeated at least three times. So, I will ask you to use your time—may I suggest you use your precious time to interrogate something else if you wish. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** I would like to go to page 193, line Item 011. Minister, I am seeing a decrease here of almost \$35 million of Transfers to State Enterprises Brought Forward. Could the Minister give us some more insight into why there has been such a drastic decrease?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Page what?

**Dr. Seecheran:** Page 193.

**Madam Chairman:** Just now. I think, one, let us just clear up this. The Member for Oropouche West catapulted us to 011. Okay?

**Dr. Seecheran:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Just for the information for all, I had called 010, but the questions asked by the Member for Oropouche West took us to 011. I believe what you are looking at, Member for Caroni East, is a subtotal figure that 34,000 decrease. It is a subtotal figure brought over from the decreases on page 192—

**Dr. Seecheran:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:**—which comes under 011. Okay? So, I think that is where the ambivalence would have occurred in that I did not call 011. All right? So, I do not

know if you would like an opportunity. I will take somebody else if there is another question and I will call you back.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Could I go to line Items 14, 15 and 16?

**Madam Chairman:** Sure.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Under 011.

**Madam Chairman:** We are under 011. We are at page 193.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Minister, given the increases of 8 million, 10 million and 35 million, could you give us an idea of what additional Procurement, Storage and Distribution that this would entail in the next fiscal year?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. Under 14, this was a new Sub-Item that Cabinet approved in June 2021 where we approved the ANSA Merchant Bank to be awarded a mandate to arrange a six-year fixed rate bond to meet the cost of Procurement, Storage, Distribution of Pharmaceuticals/Non-Pharmaceuticals. So that is 14. Madam Chairman, 15, to meet with the cost of Procurement, Storage, Distribution of Pharmaceuticals/Non-Pharmaceuticals again and 16, a new Sub-Item. RBC Royal Bank was awarded a mandate to arrange and fully underwrite an eight-year fixed term loan in the amount of \$284,195,503 to NIPDEC to meet the cost of Procurement, Storage, Distribution of Pharmaceuticals/Non-Pharmaceuticals.

**Dr. Seecharan:** Minister, just for clarity, would this involve any COVID-19 vaccines?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No. I gave a full disclosure on COVID-19 vaccines earlier as you may recall.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, just to clarify, through you, Madam Chair, the sum total of those three new loans will be the amount actually to be spent in this financial year for pharmaceuticals and supplies?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No, these are loan repayments.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Loan repayments?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yeah.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, we go on to Sub-Head 06. The book we are using is *Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies*. We are at page 193. Item 004: Statutory Bodies. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. Item 14: Princess Elizabeth Home for Handicapped Children. Sub-Item 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 179. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Item 007.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme; Consolidated Fund. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. We are at pages 68 and 69. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral & Other Services. We are at page 70. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I note that we are looking at now 002/003. Am I correct?

**Madam Chairman:** We are at Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007.

**Mr. Tancoo:** I will hold until we get to multi-sectoral.

**Madam Chairman:** Sorry. We are on Item 005: Multi-Sectoral & Other Services, which is at page 70.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Yes Ma'am. I am noticing that between 2021—sorry, between the Estimate of 1 million for the Disaster Preparedness Coordinating Unit, we have

only spent, based on the Revised Estimates, if we are believe these figures now, we only spent \$2,625 out of the 1 million allocated to the Disaster Preparedness Coordinating Unit. Can the Minister advise why?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That was the need at that time.

**Mr. Tancoo:** So this is just a fund allocation? It is just an allocation—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Well, as need be. What we will be using some of this funding for is to purchase oximeters and so on to give to our COVID-positive patients at home.

**Mr. Tancoo:** A similar question for 003: Health Information Systems for Arima and same for Point Fortin. You estimated 20 million but spent \$745,000.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. So, with this programme, the expenditure will be ramped up, because we are on the cusp of hiring a subject matter expert or a firm to develop the requirements for the health information systems as we move towards our digitalization of these two hospitals on a pilot project. So that is what we are going to be using this funding for. And also the RFP will be issued in October 2021. Evaluation of bids to be completed by December and we are hoping to have boots on the ground by February 2022. So this is part of the Government's drive to digitalization.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Minister, you would have expected to get to that point to have expended 20 million in 2021, you have not. You are now saying that you are in an advanced stage, but you are only proposing to spend 10 million in 2022. Is that correct?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, for now.

**Mr. Tancoo:** If I may proceed to line Item 250: Health Services Support Programme? Given that we are in the midst of a pandemic, I noticed that you had

budgeted \$60.6 million in 2021, but your Revised Estimate is zero. Is it that none of this money budgeted in 2021 for the Health Services Support Programme was spent? None of this was spent?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No. So in 2021, we spent money on medical equipment for NCRHA specifically for the COVID response. We purchased educational material for patient self-management for NCD risk factors. We did significant training for health workers in the COVID-19 response. We trained 50 District Health Visitors and we have 50 more to train in 2022. We also outfitted the Ministry of Health Command Centre with equipment for the COVID-19 response. So we did use significant funding in 2021. Moving on for 2022, we also spent money—

**11.30 p.m.**

**Mr. Tancoo:** Minister, sorry to interrupt, but if we are to pause just for the 2021, you are saying that you have done several things—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Mr. Tancoo:**—which would have expended funds from this allocation, but I am seeing zero as the Revised Estimate. Is it that this is also a typo or an error?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will let the Minister of Finance maybe look at that one.

*[Confers with PS]*

**Mr. Tancoo:** Mister typo.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It is not a typo. What I can tell you, the PS has informed me, we have spent those funding and our 2022 Estimate is \$74 million moving forward. What we intend to do in 2022 is our healthy schools project; procurement of physical activity equipment for primary schools, secondary schools and special education schools; our Healthy Youth TT phase two programme; again, physical activity—all this is an attempt to bring down the scourge of NCDs in our young

people—national fast-track system for lung cancer; medical equipment; consumables; training. I spoke about this in my budget debate, the gestational diabetes management programme; the NCD surveillance and disease registries; electronic human resource information systems; midwifery training and provision of HIS solutions. So that is what we intend to do with this funding.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Minister, if in fact money was expended under this Head but it is not captured by the figures shown here because this figure shown here as the Revised Estimate is zero for 2021. It means that if there are multiple examples of this throughout this document, that the figure provided by the Minister of Finance as the Estimate expenditure for 2021 by this country would be misinformed because it would not pick up—this is one example of \$60 million which you say was spent but is not shown on these books. It means that the Estimate provided by the Minister would be incorrect.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** What I can inform the Member is that we spent approximately \$58 million of the 2021 Estimate of \$60,600,000 for all the activities I outlined.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Minister. Just to follow up on that, this is funded by the IDB and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago so there is a specific value of the fund as in the explanatory notes. The IDB has funded it up to \$66. million and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as at \$7.8 million, can we expect then—now that figure is only relevant to 2022? There is no figure for 2021, how then has that expenditure that you are just describing that was done but not showing up on the books here, how then has that expenditure been funded? Is it all Government of Trinidad and Tobago? And if it is, where in the national budget is that picked up?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So the majority of that was expended via the IDB loan, the HSSP loan.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Minister, the IDB loan that is described here is specifically—this explanatory note is specifically for 2022 Estimate, not for 2021, which is why when you add both the Government of Trinidad and Tobago funding and the IDB funding, for that year, you come up with your \$74 million for fiscal 2022. There is no funding—there is no expenditure—there is no spend under fiscal 2021. So therefore, there is no way of us knowing exactly how this expenditure, that you just said, was done in 2021.

You listed a series of items which were spent in 2021 under which expenditure was incurred but we see no spending, no—where did that money come from?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** As I indicated, it came from the IDB loan. The expenditure for 2021 was 68.5 million spread across—and I will repeat—medical equipment for NCRHA, procurement of educational material for patients in self-management of NCD risk factors, training for 50 DHVs and 50 more, and outfitting of the Ministry of Health’s Command Centre with equipment for the COVID-19 response.

**Mr. Tancoo:** And why, Sir, is that not in these books that were given to us?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I will have to find out that for you.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Minister.

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

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister of Health, I have several questions for you. Line Item 224: Technical Assistance, I see no money allocated for 2022 and none was printed 2021, does it mean that the Technical Assistance—is this programme still available?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Page 24?

**Dr. Ragbir:** Yeah, just under C., under 005. Page 70, Technical Assistance.



**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Technical Assistance, 224.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Yes. Is this programme no longer available?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No, that is right.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Right. It is no longer available, right?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Right. So let me proceed to 234: Hospital Refurbishment Programme. My question is: what is the status of the Hospital Refurbishment Programme?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So under 2021, under NWRHA and ERHA South-West and North Central, we would have expended \$24.4 million. For North West RHA, we refurbished wards 9, 16 and 37; at St. Ann's Hospital, just over \$1 million. We installed a prefab building for use as workshops in the Port of Spain hospital; relocation of the water supply system at Central Block; ERHA, we installed four generators at four health facilities; roof replacement at various health facilities under ERHA; upgrade of electrical wiring at various health centres; under South-West, upgrade of the neonatal ICU at San Fernando hospital; upgrade of the San Fernando General Hospital, wards 5 and 6; medical gases for ward 5; neurosurgery at San Fernando; and under North Central RHA, upgrade of the electrical infrastructure at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

For 2022, we plan to do electrical upgrade work at St. Ann's; renovation of the first floor, maternity block, to include an operating theater at Port of Spain; construction of external medical records; external medical records at Valencia Health Centre; upgrade of the HVAC system at the Mayaro District Health Facility; construction of an admin building at the Mayaro LRC; replacement of three 125-tonne air cool chillers at San Fernando. We want to refurbish some primary health care facilities in Pleasantville, Freeport, Grandville, Guapo and

Debe, and again, continuing upgrade of the electrical system at Eric Williams. So that is what we intend to do with the money going forward and that is what we have done.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you. And I want to continue at 003.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Yeah. No money has been allocated prior for the Insect Vector Control Division, and I see \$1 million allocated in 2022. Can you tell me, Minister, what sort of project is earmarked for this facility?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** It is going to be primarily for new vehicles.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Sorry?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Primarily for new vehicles.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Okay. Okay. And can I go down straight down to 002?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sure.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division, the \$1.5 million allocated in 2022, Minister, is that not to be testing all pharmaceuticals for Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Not necessarily. Pharmaceuticals are tested both in Trinidad and Tobago and we also do testing at CARPHA in Jamaica, as you may know. CARPHA has several campuses throughout the Caribbean. The Trinidad campus, as you know, is for like infectious disease. The St. Lucia campus is for like water and so on, and Jamaica, they are the central sort of testing area for the Caribbean. So Chemistry, Food and Drugs will be doing some testing for pharmaceuticals. We also rely on the University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards and also CARPHA Jamaica.

**Dr. Ragbir:** And supplemental for that, the reason I mentioned is that we have

quite a lot of counterfeit medication in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is coming from especially suitcase traders.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Ragbir:** So I know you are very aware of the situation so we must test our pharmaceuticals.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Correct.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Thank you.

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

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, could you enlighten us on the preparatory work for the national public health laboratory?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes. Thanks. So we are going to be equipping both the Chemistry Food and Drugs and preparatory work for the national health lab. This would include servicing, certification and calibration of laboratory equipment; micro-b training; purchase of chemicals and biological reagents; air quality testing, and pest control management.

**Dr. Seecheran:** And would this include testing for COVID-19 and its variants?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The public health lab does engage in that, yes.

**Dr. Seecheran:** So—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** No, no, not the variants. The variants are tested by the University of the West Indies and we have said that clearly. Variants are tested, not by the Ministry of Health, nor by the national public health labs, but by the University of the West Indies based at Mount Hope.

**Dr. Seecheran:** So \$1.5 million for both the Chemistry, Food and Drugs lab as well as the national public health laboratory, and do you think this is a sufficient

number given that we may be entering into a Delta surge and we would need increased laboratory capacity?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** So the Member, again, you are conflating two things. I said clearly that variants are not tested at these facilities. We test for variants via the University of the West Indies.

**Dr. Seecheran:** So you would not be testing for the Coronavirus at this lab?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** You are conflating Coronavirus testing and variant testing. If you would let me—

**Dr. Seecheran:** Well, as far as I know we would take a sample, a select sample of a few cases to test for variants, but I am talking about testing for the virus.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, may I speak uninterrupted, please, as I do not interrupt my good friend. COVID-19 testing is done at the national public health lab. The testing for variants, CARPHA collects samples sent by the Member States, including Trinidad and Tobago. Based on certain criteria, those samples are collected by CARPHA from the member states and sent to the University of the West Indies for testing of variants. I want to make that pellucidly clear again. This 1.5 is for capital expenditure to bring these facilities physical up to date. Significant sums, especially for Chemistry, Food and Drugs were expended in the past five to six years because that lab had to be shut down. We hope to have this lab up and running in the first quarter of 2022 and this money, as I said, is to equip the Chemistry, Food and Drugs labs and to prepare work at the national health public laboratory. So I hope that clarifies the issue.

**Dr. Seecheran:** So then, I would come back to my original question, do you think that this allocation is sufficient to do both these things?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, based on what we have expended in the past. And some

expenditures will be coming to an end now. We are finalizing, especially for Chemistry, Food and Drugs. Significant sums were expended of Chemistry, Food and Drugs already.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Madam Chair, I do not know if you will permit me just to go back to page 69 for one question of line Item 018: Establishment of a Renal Dialysis Centre?

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah, we are still under the Sub-Head.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam. To the Minister, line Item: 018, Establishment of a Renal Dialysis Centre, I note that there was an Estimate of \$200,000 in 2021 and no expenditure in 2021 but no allocation in 2022. Can you give us an explanation for that, Minister?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** The very simple explanation is because that matter is before the courts and we are awaiting judgment. So the project is suspended for all intents and purposes.

**Dr. Bodoë:** So that refers to that particular project?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Sorry?

**Dr. Bodoë:** I said, it refers to that particular project then with—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That is correct.

**Dr. Bodoë:** North Central and South-West.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That is correct and it is before the courts.

**Dr. Bodoë:** But in the budget presentation, there is mention of a National Renal Dialysis Centre, is that a separate project?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** We are looking even before COVID-19 to doing a significant dialysis project at Couva, as you may—

**Dr. Bodoë:** But that has not been—no allocation has been made for that?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** But this particular one is before the courts.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Okay?

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Infrastructure Development Fund, Item 004: Social Infrastructure. We are at page 202 of the same book.

**11.45 a.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to line Item 010 under Health Facilities, the operationalization of the Couva Medical and Multi Training Facility and the San Fernando General Hospital, both itemized together, that expenditure, 40 million. Can you give us a breakdown of what that is intended to do?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Go back to what we just spoke about—the dialysis centre at Couva.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yeah, but Minister—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** And also possibly the Cath lab in San Fernando.

**Dr. Bodoë:** I do not like the word “possibly”, Minister, with the greatest of respect, so—

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** As you know, this is a project that is close to my heart, and once we can do it and fund it— and I would not even say why you did not do it for five years when you were there, [*Laughter*] but as you know, we are working together

on it, okay, all right. It is a project that is near and dear to all of us.

**Dr. Bodoë:** All right, so hopefully?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you.

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** You are welcome.

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

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To you, hon Minister, line Item 001, page 202 under (f). I do not know if it is applicable with physical investments with hospitals. I heard nothing in the budget, is there any facility for the new Chaguanas hospital at all with this funding?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** I am not aware there are any plans for a new Chaguanas hospital. I do not know where that has come from, but what this is for is to do upgrades at North West Regional Health Authority, to our Radiology Department at Port of Spain, at ERHA, where you are interested, electrical upgrade; southwest, for the Member for Fyzabad, air-condition and electrical upgrade at the labour ward; refurbishment of Ward 1 at the Psychiatry Unit. I paid a visit there, I think, last year, and when I saw what was happening at Ward 1, we needed to do something there. NCRHA, removal of old roofing and upgrade to the roofing system at Caura. Moving forward in 2022, we want to refurbish our Upper Laventille Health Centre; expansion of the Maracas, St. Joseph Health Centre; electrical upgrade for Port of Spain, St. James Medical Complex; expansion of clinical facilities at Toco Health Centre, and construction of a new mortuary, hopefully at San Fernando General Hospital. Again, I was there last year. We need to do something there, installation of two patients lifts at the San Fernando General Hospital, and refurbishment works at the nursing hostel at San Fernando General

Hospital.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** With regard to line Item 003, Construction of the National Oncology Centre. I see no allocation in 2021 and nothing in 2022. Is that to confirm then that this project is completely off the books?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** Yes, and this will come off the books next year.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Completely off?

**Hon. Deyalsingh:** That is right.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005, Multisectoral and Other Services.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 28 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister, thank you PS, thank you other representatives of the Ministry of Health.

Hon. Members, we will be going on to Head 26, Ministry of Education. Just so that we could do a little table setting, we will be starting at page 163 in the Recurrent Expenditure book, and we will be going on to—when we deal with Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, we will be starting at page 153. Okay? Then when we go on to the Development Programme, we will be starting at page 51. Also, I just wish to remind Members you may recall hon. Members that the schedule for the examination of the various Heads, that Schedule was varied on our last sitting on Saturday. So that what was originally day four became day five, and what was day five became day four. I believe that the revised schedule should have been circulated to Members, so I just want Members to take note of that and, therefore, not be misguided by the original listing.



*Head 26: Ministry of Education, \$5,119,202.*

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

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Education is mandated to deliver modern, relevant, quality education for all. In furtherance of this mandate, the COVID-19 pandemic presents significant challenges. This is therefore a time of transition and transformation for education in Trinidad and Tobago. Transition back to the physical classroom, having been engaged in mainly home-based learning over the past 19 months, and transformation as the education system positions itself to produce the ideal Trinidad and Tobago citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In this way, the mandate of *Vision 2030* with respect to education will be fulfilled. All citizens are assured of a sound, relevant education system, tailored to meet the human resource needs of a modern, progressive and technologically advanced nation.

We thank all teachers, parents, students, school personnel and administration, maintenance and janitorial staff, guards and the staff of the Ministry of Education for their efforts to maintain educational continuity and their transition back to the face to face classroom for all of our children.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

*Question proposed:* That Head 26 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,119,202 for Head 26, the Ministry of Education, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft*

*Estimates of the Development Programme.*

We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, Item 001, General Administration. Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am starting with line Item 14, Remunerations to Members of Cabinet-appointed Committees. There is an increase of 140,000. Could the Minister give us an indication of which committees we are looking at and who stands to benefit from this?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am sorry, could I get the question again?

**Ms. Haynes:** Line Item 14.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Just the question.

**Ms. Haynes:** The question is, could you give us an indication of who stands to benefit? Which committees are we looking at, Cabinet-appointed committees?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This line Item deals with the National Advisory Committee, which has not been re-appointed at this time, and the LMET, which is the committee that deals with the textbooks and so on, learning material, education.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay. So I am moving on to line Item 01, under Secondary Education, Salaries and Cost of Living—

**Madam Chairman:** Just now. No one else has any questions. So, Item 005. Yes, Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, we are looking at an increase of \$10 million. Could the Minister give us an indication of which categories of staff would be employed with this increased allocation?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This is the line Item that deals with the employment of teachers, principals, vice-principals at the secondary schools, both Government and

Government-assisted.

**Ms. Haynes:** Can you give us an indication of how many vacant posts there are currently?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That information is usually given to us by the Teaching Service Commission, and we can certainly request from them that information, as they deal with recruitment of teachers.

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes, but given that, Minister, you are in the public domain as stating—

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Which is why I said, this information—

**Ms. Haynes:** No, no, I am not finished, Madam Chair.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:**—is in the Teaching Service Commission, and if requested we can request that exact figure from them.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, I am in fact requesting the information. That is the purpose of the exercise. So can we assume if a question is asked that the information is being requested, that would make this go easier today. So I am, in fact, requesting the vacancies in secondary schools.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** On the said line Item, and my colleague raised the very important issue, and the Minister committed herself to getting the Teaching Service Commission to provide the number of vacant positions. But in recent times, Minister, there seems to be some policy position as it relates to the application for potential teachers in the teaching service, where I think that—could you clarify whether the acting posts or the vacant posts will be filled by the Teaching Service Commission, or the Ministry has instructed the Teaching Service Commission to cease taking applications from young persons who are seeking employment?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, the Teaching Service Commission is tasked with the recruitment of teachers. When asked from the Teaching Service Commission, the Ministry would have issued the notice that came from the Teaching Service Commission and, therefore, any more information or elucidation of this policy can be sought from the Teaching Service Commission, which is an independent body and is not instructed by the Ministry of Education.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Well, I hope, given what has transpired with the collapse of the Police Service Commission, we will allow the true independence of the Teaching Service Commission to operate.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South, I will not allow that under this exercise. Do you have a question under an Item here?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, fine thank you. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, am I understanding right that you are not in possession of information to justify this increase insofar as we are talking about what Teaching Service Commission may be required to do?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, the question was asked with respect to vacancies, and vacancies would be under the remit of the Teaching Service Commission as they deal with recruitment. With regard to the increase here as this deals with secondary teachers, principals, vice-principals, et cetera, if persons move and adjust in posts then, of course, their salaries would have to be varied. So what you see here as an increase really just is the estimate that deals with if you have variations under these posts that this is allocated for.

**12.00 noon**

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, Member for—Yes, Member, you may continue.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Minister. Minister, in terms of the social workers that are assigned to the respective schools, would this increase also impact on them in any way?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** They are not paid under this line Item.

**Ms. Ameen:** Madam—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am on line Item 32: Remuneration to Substitute Teachers. Could the Minister give us an idea of how many substitute teachers we are looking within the secondary school system at this time?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Are you asking for present number of substitute teachers at this time?

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Based on the fact that schools have been home based for the last 19 months, at the time there are no substitute teachers that we can identify at this point. Schools are now being asked to submit their request for substitute teachers. Those are being received and those appointments will be made as soon as possible.

**Ms. Haynes:** I have a follow-up.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, if you look at the Revised Estimates for 2021 there is a \$97,000 feature there and so if there were no substitute teachers, where is that \$97,000 going?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That was for the last academic year and any teachers that were—any salaries that were outstanding were paid in that time.

**Ms. Haynes:** Well, that is the—so this is for outstanding teachers. But you just

told me that there were no teachers in this same fiscal year that we are talking about.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This is a new academic year that we have just embarked on.

**Ms. Haynes:** Right. Exactly. I agree with you. So therefore, the new academic year we will be looking at \$627,000. Yes? That is for fiscal 2022. When you talk about fiscal 2021 there was an estimated amount of \$626,900 and a Revised Estimate of \$97,000. So I am asking, since you me just now that there were no substitute teachers in 2021, where is that \$97,000 going?

**Madam Chairman:** Minister, I will allow you to answer again. I will ask all Members to pay acute attention in the interest of time because I believe that question has been answered but I will give you what we call as a “bligh”.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, at this time, the 627,000 is estimated for the requests that come in for the academic year 2021/2022. In 20—at this point in time there are no substitute teachers. They will be sent in and we will supply based on request coming from the schools.

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah. But, Minister, as far as the 97,000—

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The 97,000 would have been used to provide the payments for any substitute teachers, any outstanding payments over the last academic year that would have outstanding. Twenty-five schools would have been involved in that.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay? Anything else, Member for Tabaquite? Anything else for this round?

**Ms. Haynes:** On this line Item, no, Madam Chair.

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

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. After 01/20—

**Madam Chairman:** Member, if you could maybe speak in your mike. I know the—yeah. Sure.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Back to line Item 01, given that there may be some impending negotiation settlement in light of the statement by the Minister of Finance that he has given certain instructions to the Chief Personnel Officer, does this line Item cater for those salary negotiations, please?

**Mr. Imbert:** I will answer that. The answer is no.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It could not cater—sorry. It could not.

**Mr. Imbert:** The answer is no. Because negotiations take quite a while and therefore if there are additional provisions to be made, that will be dealt with in the mid-year review. Right now it is impossible to put a figure.

**Mr. Ram:** And the Minister of Finance, please. It is not 0-0-0?

**Mr. Imbert:** I will not answer that—

**Mr. Ram:** I do not expect you to.

**Mr. Imbert:** A question of that nature.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you. If you ask—

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central, do you have another question?

**Mr. Ram:** No, please. I said thank you, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** So okay. I am asking us all to be very efficient in the interest of our time. Okay? Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Ameen:** The question was answered. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South, your question was answered too?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No. No. No.

**Madam Chairman:** Oh.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I would like to find out something, Madam Chair. With respect to the issue of remuneration to substitute teachers, Minister, I heard you indicate that you are now in communication or the Ministry is now in communication probably with your respective education district supervisors and so on to realize from them the issue of how many substitute teachers which may be needed to facilitate teaching based on the fact that classes have resumed physically for 4, 5 and sixth formers. Is there any reason why now and not before in terms of proactive planning so that with the resumption of physical classes, the numbers of teachers you could have answered that today in terms of what is needed within the secondary school system?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** School began online in September for all students. Based on our circumstances, on the health circumstances, it was then advanced that we can look at bringing back out the Forms 4 to 6 who are vaccinated. So at the time and only when schools would have determined what their school reopening plans were, they would have known exactly where the substitute teachers would have been required, and so that would have been advanced at that time. In addition to that, the Teaching Service Commission who deals with teacher appointments would be steadily making their appointments as we go along. They have been doing their online interviews and so on, and so the situation that exists two months ago would not necessarily be the situation existing at this point in time. So this is current data that is being requested to fill current needs.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Ameen:** Thank you. Through the Chair to the Minister of Education. There is



an ongoing issue with teachers who have been promoted, and I want to use the word on paper. They have been promoted, they have been informed of their promotion, confirmed in their position, but their salary has not increased in line with their new position. And they are being told that they will get the money in the future, sort of in a lump sum. Can you indicate if any headway will be made in this financial year to provide some of these teachers with the moneys owed to them based on what they should be getting in their new salary?

**Madam Chairman:** Member, could you identify under 005—

**Ms. Ameen:** That is Personnel.

**Madam Chairman:**—which Item you are addressing? 05?

**Ms. Ameen:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Which Item so that the Minister could—which Item are you directing us to? We are under 005, Secondary Education. Could you tell us which Item?

**Ms. Ameen:** Yes. It is secondary schools teachers.

**Madam Chairman:** Which one?

**Ms. Ameen:** So it is 005, Secondary Education.

**Madam Chairman:** Could you look at your book—

**Ms. Ameen:** Sorry.

**Madam Chairman:**—at page 163 and at which point please.

**Ms. Ameen:** 01, sorry. It is Personnel Expenditure.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**Ms. Ameen:** Under the Secondary Schools, 01. Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Thank you. Yes.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, this is

a situation that exists all throughout the public service with the salaries matching the exact position especially when you have new positions being moved. And that is why, Madam Chairman, we have been working and we will continue to work on the IRIS system which will allow us to digitally manipulate the files of our teachers and allow them to have their correct salary as soon as possible after their position has changed.

**Ms. Ameen:** I wanted to find out if within this allocation if in this year, if in the budget, this financial year, any plans are in place to begin to pay them not only currently but what is owed to them?—because many of them have quite a number of years outstanding. So giving them the current salary today is one, but also paying what is owed to them is another matter.

**Madam Chairman:** So are you asking under 01 if that contains such an allocation. If that is your question, I will allow that.

**Ms. Ameen:** Yes.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, this is a routine matter. As salaries change, as persons are accommodated. And that is why this line Item would contain this allocation to allow for all of that. I cannot speak to specific issues but it is something that is ongoing as every year, every single year, every single month persons' salaries are updated, they are paid their back pay and so on. So all of that is a part of what this is.

**Ms. Ameen:** Madam Chair, I just want to take this opportunity to make a plea to the Minister and the PS because I know teachers who are teacher—who have been confirmed and are very dedicated and they can barely live on the salary that they are receiving. So on their behalf, some of them are constituents who have come forward with this matter. On their behalf I want to ask you to pay attention to this

at this time. Thanks.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 006, Primary Education. Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe the response—I am looking at line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. And when we were just discussing secondary schools the Minister said that there was a provision in the increase of \$10 million to allow for increased salaries but here we are seeing a decrease of \$6 million. So with respect to primary school education and the teachers and what not, are we looking reduction in the staff complement that will allow for this decrease of \$6 million?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No. They are not, Madam Chairman.

**Ms. Haynes:** So then how are we accounting for the decrease of \$6 million?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Once again, Madam Chairman, this is an estimate. If at any point in time there is a need to add further funds to this line Item, it will be done. There is no reduction in the number of primary school teachers that are paid, principals, vice-principals, et cetera, paid under this particular Vote. It is always an estimate because it would depend again of positions, movement of positions, retirements all of these things happening so it is an estimate. And if we need further funding, it will be supplied.

**Mr. Imbert:** Just let me come in here, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Just a minute. Minister of Finance, and then we will take—

**Mr. Imbert:** Sure.

**Madam Chairman:**—Member for Tabaquite and then—

**Mr. Imbert:** On this particular Item on page 164, 006/01, the original estimate for 2021 was 1,040,000,000. So the Revised Estimate, as I said before, is as the

Budget Division goes through the year, they are adjusting the figures. So the original estimate was 1040, the revised is 1046, the 2022 is simply the same as it was for the original 2021. And the Minister has summed it up very, very well. As people move out, they retire, people come up, they may not be paid exactly the same amount as the person that they are replacing and so on. So it is not an exact figure. It is not an exact science. It is actually based on what actually happens during the fiscal year.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Minister of Finance, but then I think you would—what you are saying, you would agree with me then? Because the estimate must be made on data and you made an estimate in 2021 which is the same estimate you are making in 2022. But when you had to revise it, you had to revise it upwards in 2021 so you required six more million dollars. And now in 2022 you are making the same estimates, I am guessing utilizing data, so that the data ought to tell you is that you would need this \$6 million, so then why estimate downward?

**Mr. Imbert:** The estimate—the data would not indicate any such thing. The positions at which primary [*Interruption*] teachers—would you stop it, Couva South? The positions at which primary teachers would be placed is a matter for the Teaching Service Commission. And therefore, it is not for the Government to be able to accurately predict down to the last dollar what the Teaching Service Commission will do with each one of the thousands of teachers. And therefore the estimate is based on the available data. It will not be the same every year. So you go to a base figure, 1040, based on available data.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister of Finance and Minister

of Education, just to make this point and not to belabour it. The data suggests that we had to revise the estimates upward \$6 million in 2021. So what is the data that comes to say that we estimate less? That is all the point, you know, the only point we are making here now.

**Mr. Imbert:** Certainly. Are you finished?

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes, Minister.

**Mr. Imbert:** The data suggest no such thing. As I indicated, it is a dynamic situation. Every year the number of primary school teachers, the positions these teachers are at, whether Teacher I, Teacher II, Teacher III will change whether—where they are in the scale of increments will change and therefore, the 1040 is the best data set available and that is the base figure. The data does not suggest 1046. It might be 1038 when the year is over. You never know.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Item 0—sorry. Minister of Planning and Development.

**12.15 p.m.**

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, I would invite my colleagues on the other side to examine the document carefully. They would notice under the heading of Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, if you go down, almost every single Estimate, Revised Estimate and then the Estimate for 2022, they would notice that the same figures are used from the 2021 Estimate that we started with, right along the column, and then there may have been an increase, there may have been a decrease, but as the Minister of Finance said, you start with a base figure which does not change dramatically each year. You start with a base figure, and then when you do the Revised Estimate for the next year you would see if there needs to be a decrease, an increase, and so on. So if they go down the column under Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance they

would see that 2021, the base figure was, let us say, Item 02, Wages and COLA, it was 1.540. It was decreased to 1.475, and then when you put it again for 2022, you bring it back up to the base figure. So it could increase, it could decrease, but you start with a base figure. Thank you, Ma'am.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chairman, line Item 32, Remuneration to Substitute Teachers. Hon. Minister of Education, we had encountered this, of course, for secondary education, is it that we do not have or we do not see the need for substitute teachers for the primary education?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** At this point in time, Madam Chairman, there is no allocation there. If we do need substitute teachers at the primary level, then we will seek to do that, but the priority at this point, because the persons who are coming out face-to-face would be for secondary schools at this time, we would prioritize them at this point in time.

**Mr. Rambally:** Hon. Minister, this, what we have observed on the line Item is that this is a trend from 2020. Notwithstanding the pandemic, apart from that, there is no need for substitute teachers at all moving forward. So I know you have pointed to the fact that at this time other classes are going out. Apart from that there is no need for substitute teachers even with online learning for primary education?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, we do have Cabinet approval which we sought this year for substitute teachers at both at the primary and secondary level. So if the need arises for substitute teachers at the primary level, you certainly can approach the Ministry of Finance to allow for that.

**Mr. Rambally:** Minister, this is just on this same point, do we have—

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Do we have?

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes, hon. Minister, do we have any requests from the schools or any requests from the education sector for this Head for complementing teachers with substitutes as well?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Not at this time—if we have any requests for substitute teachers at the primary school level this time? We do not have any of those requests at this time.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, the question was asked by my colleague.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. All right, so Item 011. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. To the hon. Minister, line Item 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, which include the provision for vacant post with incumbents. Can the Minister identify how much vacant posts exist at this time?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** At ECIAF?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Sorry?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** How many vacant posts exist at ECIAF? Which one are you dealing with, is it 26/011?

**Mr. Ratiram:** 011.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I do not have that information at this point, I can provide that to you in writing.

**Madam Chairman:** Item— Member for Tabaquite, is your hand up?

**Ms. Haynes:** Oh, no.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 29, Overtime – Daily-Rated Workers, what we see here is the overtime 1.04 million; wages is at 1.4. The overtime seems to be very high, and it is a consistent flow of overtime

from 2020/2021, and then we are budgeting again for it this year. Is it that they are short-staffed and there is a significant amount of vacancies that are not being fulfilled? Can the Minister explain why the overtime bill is so high?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, at this time we would have to speak with ECIAF to provide that in writing, but it is to be noted that the Ministry has put in place stricter measures to deal with the monitoring of the overtime of the workers, these are the daily paid officers. So, we can provide the information with respect to the vacancies and the overtime in writing.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Chair, is this how the Minister is putting agriculture first, because I have asked two questions related to this institute and the Minister seems unprepared to answer. Is this how she is putting agriculture first?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Which line Item exactly are we dealing with on that particular question?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Both line Items.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so we take that as a comment. Member for Tabaquite, do you have any more questions?

**Ms. Haynes:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so can we go on. Item 012. Item 014. Item 016. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001, General Administration. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 08, Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. In the Estimate of 2021, the allocation was 7 million, however the Revised Estimate was 9.07 million. Can the hon. Minister explain why this increase from the Estimates to the Revised Estimates?



**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This line Item deals with the rent for the Ministry buildings and the former buildings of the Ministry of Tertiary Education, and a schedule is attached, which we can provide, a written schedule in terms the rent paid for the year under this particular line Item.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the hon. Minister also provide a list of the landlords associated with the rental here?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Sure.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** No.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, I am looking at line Item No. 28. This goes over to page 167.

**Madam Chairman:** Other Contracted Services, yes.

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes, thank you. Hon. Minister, with respect to this line Item, are you in a position to tell us how many persons would be benefiting from this? We see an increase in the amount of moneys allocated here, and there is an explanation, School Transport, Other Services, but really School Transport I am looking at. Are you in a position to tell us how many persons will benefit from this increased payment?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This payment deals—it is PTSC for school transport, it is also other items under here, Rentokil, Hindi Nidhi, consultants, tent rentals and so on for different schools that we have had under the last financial year. So, it is quite a number of different companies and so on that would have been paid out of this particular Vote.

**Mr. Rambally:** Okay, Madam Chair. Minister, right, so the explanation, and I will

point you to 28 in the explanation column. The majority of 21 million goes to school transport, so I know you have mentioned companies like Rentokil, and I think you said tent rentals, et cetera. Is it that that 21 million increase contemplates paying these persons?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, the 21 million increase contemplates the reintroduction and allocates for the reintroduction of the school transport which was not taking place in the last fiscal, or in any great extent.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at line Item 17, Training. We had a \$6000 Estimate, and then that was revised to over a million dollars. Could the Minister give us an account of what type of training took place that required us to an increase of over \$1 million, over \$900,000? This is line Item 17, looking at the Revised Estimate for 2021.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That increase in the payments in 2021 would have been to pay an outstanding bill to UWI, and so that was paid off. So the 2022 Estimate reflects the fact that a lot of the training is now online, in-house and also in collaboration with some of our other international agencies which would fund the training as well, so that is why the reversion to \$6,000. Teacher training, post-graduate teacher training, that was paid to the UWI in 2021.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you. May I continue? I have line Item 22, Short-Term Employment. We are expending a significant amount of money, 20 million or so. Could you give us an indication of how many persons are on short-term employment contracts under this line Item?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This deals with invigilators for CAPE, CSEC, SEA, it deals with also short-term employees, and we have 118 persons on short-term, and so that Vote deals with that.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, going back to line Item 28, which my colleague from Chaguanas West asked about. In 2021 the Estimate was 23 million, in 2021 the Revised Estimate was 1.9 million. The hon. Minister answered indicating that this is payments to PTSC with respect to the school transport. Can the Minister advise if there are any outstanding bills to be settled for private suppliers of school transport for this service?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The PTSC would forward any outstanding bills to us. I understand that there may be a small amount of persons that have to be paid, and we are in discussion with PTSC to just settle whatever those amounts are.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Minister, on that same line Item, through you, Madam Chair. Many of the private maxi transport providers have been unable to transport school children whilst schools were closed. However, these owners of maxi-taxi cannot ply their trade based on the contractual agreement that they entered into to provide the school transport system, so they were not able to earn any sort of income in the private space based on that contract. Was any consideration put in place for relief during this period of time where these transport providers would not have been earning an income?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, those arrangements are with PTSC, not directly with the Ministry of Education, so I am certain that if advances were made to PTSC on that behalf, they would have been given an ear at that level.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes, Madam Chair. My colleagues have touched on some of the issues, but I just want to get a little bit of further information. Madam Minister, with respect to 16, Contract Employment, and the numbers you provided, are there—what is the duration of the short-term contract?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Which line Item are you on, 22?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** 16.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** 16, well, that is a different question right, because what you referred to was answered on 22. We have 1,565 contract employees.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Are they on month—when you say short-term—

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This is why I say you are conflating two things, because you are asking me about a different line Item.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am coming to the other one.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Which other one?

**Madam Chairman:** Tell us which one you are on.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** 16, Contract Employment.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, that is what I answered, 1,565 contract employees.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am asking or I have asked for the duration, whether it is three months, six months?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Three-month and six-month are short-term contracts, which is why I asked you if you were speaking about 22, because that is what you referenced in the first place. So I am asking again for clarification.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes. Well, in terms of the Short-Term Employment 22, what is the duration?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** There would be varying durations. There are 118 persons on short-term with varying durations of short-term contracts.

**12.30 p.m.**

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And your interpretation or based on what your Ministry—short term is what?—two months, three months, in terms of the varying durations.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** If you are asking for a breakdown of the 118 persons and their contract periods—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yeah.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I offer to provide that in writing.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you. With respect on Other Contract Services, 28, and School Transport. Now, I am asking in the context of children not being placed at the mercy of the bureaucracy because before COVID, there was a total breakdown in terms of liaising between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Works and Transport in terms of the submission of invoices and so on. And in the past, there have been a number of stoppages and so on, where providers of school transportation withheld their provision of this entity or service. And I am asking, could the Ministry of Education be proactive with the Ministry of Works and Transport to ensure that in this particular year and going forward that this issue does not rear its head again?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I do not know if that is a question, Madam Chairman. I took it as a comment and I noted it.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** As a comment, I am asking you as the Minister to liaise with your colleague at the Cabinet level to ensure that this does not rear its head.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I note it. I note your comment.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, returning to line Item 16, it is two questions. Would it not be that—I know you said 1,563 contract workers. Would this category of workers not operate under a fixed term? In other words, everybody is given a standard duration of contract, one year, a year and a half, two years.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Ameen:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to state firstly on 28, earlier the issue of fees for school transportation that the Minister indicated is usually handled by PTSC. I have had to intervene to assist constituents who are school transport providers and they have been directed to the Ministry of Finance to apply for Salary Relief Grants. Some of them—

**Madam Chairman:** Just a minute. Other Contracted Services—

**Ms. Ameen:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** Other Contracted Services does not deal with Salary Relief Grant.

**Ms. Ameen:** Yes, I know.

**Madam Chairman:** So I am not going to allow that. And I just want to say something to guide all of us. Sometimes in a discussion something tangential may be stated. It does not make it relevant for the exercise that we are engaging in. So if we could use that—if we could all use that guidance for what we are about, and therefore, we may make very good use of our time. So having said that, Member for St. Augustine, the point with respect to salary—with 28, I am not allowing a discussion on Salary Relief Grant. That would not be here.

**Ms. Ameen:** No. The question is not Salary Relief Grant, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for your guidance.

**Madam Chairman:** Well, there was no question. I am saying even a comment on it, because as you quite rightly stated from what you are saying, Salary Relief Grant will not be under the Ministry of Education and it certainly would not be under Other Contract—

**Ms. Ameen:** That is correct.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So—

**Ms. Ameen:** That is correct.

**Madam Chairman:** Let us proceed.

**Ms. Ameen:** The drivers, Madam Chair, require some sort of documentation from the Ministry of Education to certify that they do in fact provide this service. And this is where I just want to raise—

**Madam Chairman:** And how does that come under Other Contracted Services?

**Ms. Ameen:** Because that is where they are usually paid. So I just want to raise it and ask the Permanent Secretary—some of them have been having difficulty accessing the documentation to certify them as drivers so that they can then go and apply. But they do usually get paid under this Item. So I am just raising it to the attention of the Minister and the PS—

**Madam Chairman:** Direct everything here to the Minister, please.

**Ms. Ameen:** “Oh” sure.

**Madam Chairman:** Not the Secretary.

**Ms. Ameen:** And the other matter has to do with the Item 16—

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Ms. Ameen:**—the contract employment that includes CAPE invigilators. In the last fiscal—

**Madam Chairman:** Are you asking the Minister whether—

**Ms. Ameen:** Yes. Well, the Minister indicated earlier that it includes CAPE invigilators.

**Madam Chairman:** I do not recall hearing that. So I think maybe you should ask that as a question; ask that as a question.

**Ms. Ameen:** So I am asking if that includes CAPE invigilators?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, Madam Chairman.

**Ms. Ameen:** Can the Minister indicate which Item CAPE invigilators will be treated under?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, that is not the way this is usually conducted. If you have a question—and I am submitting that if you have a question under a line Item, please identify it and I am willing to answer it.

**Ms. Ameen:** But the question is whether CAPE invigilators are treated under Contract Employment. Because there is—

**Madam Chairman:** And I think that question was answered.

**Ms. Ameen:**—an issue with outstanding payments for CAPE invigilators.

**Madam Chairman:** No. Wait, wait. Member, let us do things in a certain kind of way. All right? The question was whether CAPE invigilators were under Item 16? The response was no. I think I heard that. Okay? I heard the response as no. Right. So, do you want to address another Item here?

**Ms. Ameen:** Well, the other question would be—well, I could ask, are they under 22, which is short term? But the question is which Item they are treated—

**Madam Chairman:** I will have you ask that, are they under 22? Is that what you are going to ask?

**Ms. Ameen:** Yes.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes, Madam Chairman.

**Ms. Ameen:** Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Correct.

**Ms. Ameen:** So, Madam Chair, the question is in the last financial year, in the public domain, some persons who served as CAPE invigilators indicated that their



remuneration had not been paid to them and I want to ask if that matter has been settled or if there are plans to settle all the arrears in this allocation?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, the allocation under 22 would have dealt, at the last fiscal year, with the settlement of all the exam invigilators. Unless there were particular queries, all of them would have been settled under the last fiscal. What would be outstanding now would be the payments for this year's current examinations which will be processed as soon as the budget is passed.

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

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you, Madam. Thank you. Through you, Madam Chair, Item No. 23: Fees. Can the Minister indicate which fees are accounted for with this budget?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, that would include ICT fees for Microsoft CASA subscription; Fujitsu agreement payment; our GATE e-service and support; our headquarters; TSTT connectivity; Flow; secondary schools' wireless payments; SoftwareONE, which is a payment we have for one of our offices and that project; laptop warranties, et cetera.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I go to line Item 16: Contract Employment. The actual spend in 2020 was 171 million. It was estimated in 2021 for 150 million. However, we see the Revised Estimate above the actual spend of 2020, it was 188 million. Again, this year we are seeing an Estimate for 150 million indicating a decrease of 38 million. Can the hon. Minister explain why the decrease from actual of 2020 or Revised Estimates of 2021?

**Madam Chairman:** I believe that question was asked and answered. It may not have been asked in the same way but the intent was the same and my recollection is that it was answered. Okay, so maybe you could check *Hansard*. Do you have another question you would like to ask? If not, Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes, yes, Madam.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Let me ask the Member for Chaguanas West and then I would come back to you.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Sure.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My question was asked and answered before. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I go to line Item 61: Insurance. I am seeing the Estimate for 2021 is 283,000. However—which was the actual for 2020, but the Revised Estimates for 2021 was 800,000. That, Madam Chair, is a significant increase from what was budgeted for and what was actually spent. Can the Minister indicate why that significant increase?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The insurance—[*Inaudible*]*—*the workmen's compensation for service staff and teachers and two, our broker as well as the insurance provider, TRINRE Insurance Company Limited. And so, in this particular line Item, if additional funding is required, it will be requested as it was in the last fiscal for this line Item. Any expenditure under this particular line Item, 283 is the base and if we need more, we will ask and receive as we did in this fiscal.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Madam Chair, if I may continue, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 43: Security Services. This line Item was budgeted for 135 million, but the Revised Estimate was 151 million. Normally the security services would have worked with some sort of contract. So is it that new contracts were entered into during the financial year or can the hon.

Minister explain why the disparity of the Estimate and the Revised Estimate.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** In the last fiscal, payment of some arrears would have been made in addition to the current expenditure. So the base figure of 135 million has been maintained and if there is at—during the fiscal, if there are payments to be made that are outstanding, we will make those payments as well and that increase will be accessed from the Ministry of Finance.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, hon. Minister. However, if there are arrears that caused the increase, then why are we budgeting back the same figure to run into arrears again? Why it is we did not revise this year's budgeted allocation for that if there is an outstanding contract in place?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** At this point in time that is the base figure that we are working with. This is Estimates; estimates of expenditure are just that, they are estimates. During the fiscal different things may happen that would allow this to be adjusted, there are virements, there are transfers that can be made to deal with the adjustments, but we must work with a base figure and that is the one that we are working with for this year.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the hon. Minister provide us in the near future with a schedule of, a breakdown of these security service providers and the cost?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The providers are Superior, Sure Security, Innovative Security, IMJIN, Kigel's Security, Advance Security and General Services, S.W.A.T. Estate Police, Amalgamated, and we also have TSTT Blink and MTS.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And the cost?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** We do not have the cost. We would have to provide that in writing.

**Mr. Ratiram:** That would be appreciated. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005, Item—Member for Tabaquite, 005?

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, no, I was looking at Item 02: Goods and Services on page 168. We did not address that yet.

**Madam Chairman:** You are at what? 006?

**Ms. Haynes:** I am at 0—

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So just let me call them and then you will come in.

**Ms. Haynes:** No problem.

**Madam Chairman:** So we are Item 005, which is Secondary Schools.

**Ms. Haynes:** No, but we did not do Goods and Services, 02, on the top of page 168. No, we did not cover that, yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** Go ahead.

**Ms. Haynes:** And I have a question on line Item 99: Employee Assistant Programme. Given the mandate of this programme and the understanding of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that this programme is meant to look at the overall well-being of employees and how it impacts their job performance and given the context that we are in a global pandemic, which I am sure impacts employees very significantly, would it not have been prudent to probably estimate a higher figure given that more employees may need to access this programme looking in the context of the pandemic and the mental health of our employees overall?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, the prudence of budget allocation would be left up to the highly qualified technical staff of the Ministry of Finance. With respect to the allocations that are given, we would have had the same allocation in 2021 and we would have spent just a bit more. And so, we are at the same base allocation in 2022. Certainly, if further funds are required, then the

request will be made whether through virement, transfers, et cetera, and the funding will be made available. So it is not a question of the prudence, it is a question of what is usual, what is put there and if we need more, well then, we make that request to the Ministry of Finance and that is accommodated.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 12: Material and Supplies. Can the hon. Minister indicate what material and supplies this line Item caters for?

**12.45 p.m.**

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am sorry, could you repeat the question please?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Hon. Minister, can you identify the material and supplies that this line Item caters for?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. This caters for items for NCSE: scannable answer sheets, batching of exams scripts, data capture of written exam, data capture or orals and practical forms, et cetera. All items to deal with the NCSE exam.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Chair, through you, to the hon. Minister, this line Item was 384,000, the Revised Estimate was 557,000. However, the new estimate does not cater for that Revised Estimate with that increase that was experienced, can the hon. Minister advise if this new estimate here is going to be sufficient or we are going to see changes in the future?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** At the time of implementation, Madam Chairman, if further funding is required based on the circumstances at that time, then further funding will be sought whether through virement, transfers, et cetera. But that figure that is put there is a figure that is reasonable and should be able to supply, and if we have avenues of boosting.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes, Madam Chair, Line Item 08: Rent/Lease of Accommodation. I see that we are removing a \$39 million sum, can you tell us what changed?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, this was the payment for Bishops/Trinity East, that campus. That arrangement has come to an end in terms of the financial arrangement. It was a loan facility and that has been paid.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 006; Item 007; Item 008. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 05: Telephone.

**Madam Chairman:** 05? Okay. Under 008?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes, Madam Chair, line Item 05: Telephones. The revised estimate was 393, however there is no allocation for telephone expenditure for the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, can the hon. Minister explain?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** At this point the bills that are on hand were able to be paid with that allocation last year, and we would have to, if necessary, transfer into this account to be able to fulfil any other payments to TSTT on this matter.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And how long does TSTT allow the customer to continue with a phone account before the account gets cut?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I am not sure if that is a question that is expected to be answered.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Well, Madam Chair, through you, to the hon Minister: If we are not budgeting any money for telephones mean that the institute will not be able to pay its monthly phone bill and will not be able to service its customer service provider. It is just a matter of time for the telephone service to be cut once again if there is no funding.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, just to indicate that there are telephone line Items under many different areas, and therefore, we would make these arrangements with TSTT as necessary to deal with our current and any outstanding payments to them.

**Ms. Ameen:** Madam Chair, if I could—

**Madam Chairman:** One minute please. Member for Couva North—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:**—still has my ear.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you. So is the hon. Minister advising us in this Committee that an arrangement will be made in TSTT not to cut the telephone of any of these institutes if it is that they incur a telephone bill that they cannot pay because it did not have the funds in the accounts?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, bills to TSTT will be paid. Arrangements will be made in all cases to deal with outstanding payments to TSTT.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I see the Minister of Finance is becoming a bit animated in this meeting. Minister could you tell me or provide this meeting with information as it relates to the future of the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre? Information coming in my mailbox is that the Government has taken a decision to close down this particular—

**Madam Chairman:** I will allow the Minister to answer, but again remember what we are dealing here with. [*Interruption*] No, no. Minister of Finance I will allow the Minister to answer, but I want to hear myself. Remember for guidance we are not dealing with policy here. Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Your information is inaccurate.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Member for St. Augustine. Would you please give the Member for St. Augustine who has been waiting patiently—Minister of Finance and the Member for Couva South, please give the floor to the Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Ameen:** While I appreciate the response of the Minister in regard to the question on the telephone bills at this particular institution, I just want to state that last year they were without telephone services for months because their bill was cut and they was no moneys provided to them to pay. So while that may be the approach and the policy of the Ministry, it is not happening at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre and it has tremendously hampered their ability to deliver and perform. The workers were using their cell phones to do their work.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister, do you wish to respond?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, my information is that there was an issue with the telephone system not the bill and that would have resulted in some disruption of the telephone service at RCLRC.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so can we move on? Any other questions? Item 009. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister: I did not see previously salaries or wages related to the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit, however, I see line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Is that the only budgeted line Item to deal with the staff for Early Childhood Care and Education?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, no it is not.



**Mr. Ratiram:** I see the revised estimate for this line Item 22: Short-term Employment, the revised estimate was nil, whereas it was budgeted for \$2 million, can the hon. Minister indicate what that \$2 million that is being currently budgeted for, what that is to facilitate?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It is to pay the cleaners at the ECCE Centres.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And can the Minister advise us which line Item will facilitate to pay the teachers and the staff?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I will answer this question just to indicate that the usual way is that a question is asked on a line Item and we respond. The ECCE persons are paid under Contracted Services.

**Madam Chairman:** And just note “eh”, we are under Goods and Services. All right? Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes, Madam Chair, continuing here and responding to the hon. Minister to pay for cleaners and janitors at the Centre, Madam Chair, last year when we were going through this exercise, last year during the budget I would have highlighted to the hon. Minister the ECCE Centre that was completed at Waterloo and was never opened. Can the hon. Minister advise me if there is any schedule date for the opening of that Centre at Waterloo, and if it is that any janitors and cleaners will be assigned to have the place useable?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Could you repeat that question again?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Under this line Item: Short-term Employment 22, it is for janitors, cleaners at the ECCE Centre. Right now that Centre which was 100 per cent completed is in a very dilapidated state. It has not been cleaned or maintained for the longest while, can the hon. Minister advise if during this fiscal term we can see some changes where personnel will be assigned to that and if it is that that Centre

will also be opened this year?

**Madam Chairman:** It is a question about if janitors and cleaners will be catered for cleaning that school.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, that is not a Centre that has—if it is not a Centre that has been handed over to the Ministry of Education it would not be. This line Item deals with Centres that are operational, and therefore, require cleaning staff.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes, Madam Chair, and I do appreciate what it is the hon. Minister is advising, however, this Centre is 100 per cent completed. It was completed by Self-Help the information I received and it was handed over to the Ministry of Education. So why it is we are not taking care of our assets if it is that it is totally completed? Even though it was not opened are we leaving it to run down and be vandalized?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, the issue of the Centre being complete and not handed over, or not operationalized just yet, is an issue that is not dealt with under this particular line Item. I will be very happy to answer that question once it is asked under the relevant line Item.

**Mr. Ratiram:** But, Madam Chair, this line Item deals with the cleaning and the maintenance of facilities under the Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Care and Education Unit. Is it that the Minister is just totally abandoning this Unit and not assigning cleaners to it? Because we need to maintain our state assets. We cannot just leave to deteriorate.

**Madam Chairman:** But Member, you know I think I have been following your questions and I am not sure that what you asked and the statement you have made

have that kind of the connection. So if it is you want to ask an additional question you may, but I do not get that your questioning has got you to where you have reached. All right? The Minister has answered your question and said that the line Item only deals with buildings which have been handed over. Right? You said that it was completed and handed over, and the Minister has said that there is a distinction. That is what I get from the general discussion between completed and handed over.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And it has. My information from Self-Help is that it has been handed over to the Ministry of Education. It was just a matter for the Ministry of Education to open the Centre, and all I am asking is if the hon. Minister can consider maintaining the facility up to the point when she decides to official open it to provide early childhood learning for the constituents of Couva North? That is all I am asking for, if the Minister will consider maintaining the facility and consider opening it sometime soon?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So let us go on. Item 011; Item 014; Item 015; Item 016. Sub-Head 03. Item: 001. Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to just draw the Committee's attention to Sub-Item 04: Other Minor Equipment. In 2021 the estimate was \$40 million and as we completed this exercise last year we were told that this \$40 million was to be allocated for the purchase of devices, laptops for e-testing pilot project by the Ministry, and that there would be a provision of laptops for e-testing as CXC moved over to an e-testing method. We are seeing in the revised estimates that only \$2.1 million was spent. So is it that this line Item, the stated purpose, was abandoned at some point during the fiscal 2021?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, if I am interpreting the question, I

will offer that the 2.1 million was spent on ICT equipment repairs, and it was spent on ICT infrastructure upgrades, and that is desktops, servers and so on, and this would be for the Ministry of Education.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**1.00 p.m.**

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you. Madam Chair, I have before me the *Hansard* from the Standing Finance Committee 2020 where I asked the question on this line Item. The response given last year and I am quoting here from the *Hansard* from the hon. Minister that:

“This would be used to purchase devices for the E-Testing initiative of the Ministry.”

And it is directly quoted from the *Hansard* on this same line Item. Is it that that E-Testing programme, an initiative of your Ministry, was that abandoned? Is it that we decided that there would be no E-Testing initiative by the Ministry of Education in fiscal 2021? Yeah, I can also provide the date of the *Hansard*, it is the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, 2020, page 27, under the Standing Finance Committee, Ministry of Education.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, devices that were purchased that would fall under the E-Testing initiative of the Ministry were purchased under a separate line Item and those have been delivered to the students and further will be delivered to schools as they are provided and procured.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you. So then the Minister is stating that the E-Testing initiative took place under a different line Item, however, in this exercise which I believe is to account to the public, the public, you said that the line Item Minor

Equipment Purchases will treat with devices for E-Testing. Is it that it was just arbitrarily changed and we will report on that under another line Item? Is that what you are telling us?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, there is nothing arbitrary. What I am stating is that the equipment that will provide for E-Testing was supplied to the students directly under a different line Item. This particular line Item, the expenditure was used for ICT equipment repairs and infrastructure upgrades at the Ministry of Education.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, I think it would serve the Minister well to look at the *Hansard* that I am talking about here because I am quoting you directly here because you are saying now that this line Item, the \$2 million, was spent to give devices to students and if you look at the *Hansard*, you specifically said that there was no allocation for students, that this was a pilot project for schools. And then we went on to ask you which schools, my colleague from Barataria/San Juan asked the question. So I do not know if you are not aware of the programme that I am talking about but we went through this last year and now I am asking for an account of a programme that you indicated and now you are telling me that it was used and provided under another line Item. So we need to just be very clear because you are looking at an important E-Testing initiative and we are not able to account for it under the line Item that you gave us to account for it under the last year.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, for the third time, I will answer this question. The equipment that is required for the E-Testing was provided under a different line Item directly to the students—

**Ms. Haynes:** Well, which line Item?

**Mr. Hosein:** Which Item?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:**—and the expenditure on this particular line Item was used to provide ICT equipment repairs and ICT infrastructure upgrades at the Ministry of Education.

**Ms. Haynes:** Well, I think it would be instructive, Minister, for you to tell us which line Item dealt with the E-Testing. That would be very helpful in the interest of accountability.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Certainly, when you get to that line Item, I will answer the question.

**Ms. Haynes:** Well, it cannot be “ah secret. How we would know?” How would we know?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I do not know if it is a secret, Madam Chairman, I have answered all of the questions the Member have asked.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So Members, at this stage, this toing and froing is not being very productive. I think, Member, you have interrogated a particular issue, the response seems to be the same. If it is that you have another question that you would like to ask, I will allow it.

**Ms. Haynes:** Well, for the interest of the viewing public, there is no line Item, Madam Chair, that would speak specifically to E-Testing. So it was under Minor Equipment for fiscal 2021, so I am saying that it would be very instructive not to just say when we get to the line Item because as we go through the books, there will be no line Item for E-Testing. So it would be very helpful, not just for us, but for the public, for the Minister to indicate which line Item the E-Testing initiative of the Ministry would fall under and not simply state when we get there, we will

discuss it. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Chairman:** Item 006, Primary Education. Item 007, District Services Division. Item 008. Item 009.

Sub-Head 04. Item 001. Item 002. Item 003. Item 004. Item 006. Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to just direct our attention to line Item 24, Grants to Government Secondary Schools, Education Programme. I am seeing an actual expenditure of 42 million in 2020. We revised the estimates downwards to 15 million in 2021. I would just like for the Minister to account to us for the benefit of the Committee what comes under this grants to secondary school education programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** These grants are to pay the bills and so on for secondary schools. It would be their T&TEC bills, their TSTT bills and so on and—no, T&TEC bills. And so this is the one given to them to do their recurrent expenditure at the schools.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay, and looking on at line Item 26, Special Education Resources Programme. Has that programme been discontinued because there is no allocation and there has been none since 2020?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Sorry, is it the 26 or 27 you are dealing with?

**Ms. Haynes:** 26, Special Education Resources Programme.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Under this programme, we would have given books and so on to the special education which is the special needs schools and so we have no allocation here but we have been providing the devices and so on to those schools and dealing with the brailers and so on that they require. So as requests comes in, if we require additional allocation here, we will request it but we have been dealing

with the needs of the special education students under different line Items.

**Ms. Haynes:** But, Madam Chair, through you, again, to the Minister of Education, if we are saying that you have been dealing with special education schools under this line Item, and we could all appreciate how important the needs of the special education schools are, there is no allocation. We are seeing nil, nil, nil across the board. So can you then help us with what was spent because we have no indication that anything was spent at all in fiscal 2021 and now nothing is budgeted for fiscal 2022.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I draw your attention to the fact that this line Item has not been receiving since 2020 which is not to indicate at all that we have not been catering to the needs of our special education students. What we have done, however, under the fact that this is the inclusive policy, we have been dealing with them as we deal with all of our other schools and so they have been getting all of the different resources provided for schools under the different Votes. Where it deals with their infrastructure, we have a different approach to that. However, they have been getting all the resources that they would have to under those Votes.

**Ms. Haynes:** No, but this refers very specifically to special education resources programme. So are you saying that the reason there is no money here is because it has been disaggregated among other spaces so then you are unable to give us a spend on special education in Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, that is a completely different question. This particular line Item dealt with the books and materials for special education as did the one underneath it, which was textbook management. You would notice there is nothing there either because it is the different approach to



how we deal with those things. So there is no conflation of no money under Special Education Resources Programme which deals specifically with books and so on to carry that out now to mean that there is nothing being spent on special needs. That is a very inaccurate and misleading statement and the Member should be very, very careful about how we say these things because they are not true.

**Ms. Haynes:** I will give you an opportunity then to give us an estimation of much was spent on special education in Trinidad and Tobago for fiscal 2021.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is not before us in this line Item, Madam Chairman.

**Ms. Haynes:** But—[*Laughs*] You have an opportunity to clear the space because if we are going to— So is it that under each line Item, if we want a specific amount that is spent on special education, I have to ask or my colleagues would have to ask specifically, okay, how much under this line Item was allocated specifically to special needs schools.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, this ?Vote dealt with books and resources to special needs schools. I am saying there is no allocation here and there has not been for the last year because we deal with their needs under the other Votes that deal with all of the schools and therefore this particular item, as there is none for the Textbook Management Unit, it is not dealt with that way anymore.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, if you would just give me one more opportunity. As a representative, most of us here, we have dealt with over the past year a number of issues coming to us about the fact that schools that dealt with students with special needs have been left out of this space and so I am asking the Minister, not to be pedantic, but I am asking for the space that you can account to the public, to these people who are looking on, as to what was the spend on special education in fiscal 2021. That is the reason I am asking the question. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I draw your attention to line Item 29 which deals with grants for students at private special schools. That is another way in which we deal and we treat with our students at these special schools. You would see an increase there. The Ministry does not pull out in every area the exact spend on every special school, however, that is one that you can point to which shows you that the Ministry is spending and dealing with students that have special needs.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman?

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Would I ask that we stick with the line Item approach rather than these excursions by the Member?

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to turn the Minister's attention to the same line Item she just made reference to, line Item 29, Grants for Students Enrolled at Private Special Schools and the Minister answered my colleague from Tabaquite and indicated that the reason funding was not in 26 is because line Item 29 takes care of these funds. However, what I am seeing here is this line Item, actual spend of 2020 was 16 million but the revised estimate for 2021, it has reached down to 6 million. Can the Minister indicate why such a significant decrease in funding for this line Item?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, there is not a decrease in funding. As a matter of fact, based on what was expended in 2021, there is an increase in the allocation in this year and it depends on the number of private special schools and the students at these special schools that are enrolled.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, hon. Minister. However, that does not answer the question. What you indicated is what was expended in 2021 and that is what I am asking. Why is it that only 6.8 million was expended when the actual expense in 2020 was 16 million? That is a decrease of 10 million in spending for special education.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, asked and answered. It depends on the enrolment of the students at the private special schools.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Chair, I would like to move—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan. Member, I will take you back in time.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Go ahead.

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

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to draw the Minister's attention to 27 and 30. Line Items 27 and 30 because they are both—

**Madam Chairman:** 27 and 30 you are saying?

**Mr. Hosein:** Yeah. 3-0.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Hosein:** The Textbook Rental Management Unit for both primary schools and secondary schools. I have received several complaints from parents in my constituency especially with the price of textbooks that they have to pay every academic year for the students and I am seeing that not a single dollar was allocated to this particular programme for textbook rentals. Can the Minister indicate why this programme has been shut down?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The Ministry has a different approach in dealing with these as we have with the line Item that the Member for Tabaquite would have

identified. We are at the point now where we are looking at the tenders made for the e-books and that is what would be made available to our students going forward.

**1.15 p.m.**

**Mr. Hosein:** Minister, I do not know if you are aware, through you, Madam Chair, that persons for this academic year have to buy physical books from the bookstore. There are no e-books in the book list from schools, especially in my constituency. So parents still have to buy these textbooks. Can you indicate whether or not any relief will be given to these parents who have to spend thousands of dollars every academic year for students to purchase textbooks or have the programme start back running for the rental of these books until you move into the e-book environment?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, as indicated the tenders are being evaluated now and therefore they cannot be on the booklist that they would have e-books. That is understood.

Madam Chairman, at this point in time, the focus of the Ministry has changed with respect to revision of these books. The Member may not realize the difficulties that were encountered also with this entire system and the difficulty of getting the books back, of ensuring that the books were in proper order. So there were enormous problems with that programme, as it was. A different approach is being taken now, so that the students can be assisted, in terms of their textbook resources.

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Chair, based on the e-book rollout that the Ministry wants to undertake, can you say whether or not this rollout will be completed so that in the next academic year students will be utilizing e-books?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** All efforts are being made to progress this initiative as

quickly as we possibly can.

**Mr. Hosein:** So there is still a possibility that parents will still have to buy books in the next academic year?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Anything is possible, Madam Chairman.

**Mr. Hosein:** Without the rental programme.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to 19, Servol Junior Life Centres, having spent approximately \$6.5 million in 2021, the allocation has been reduced by approximately \$3.56 million dollars for 2022. Is there a plan to close down any of the life centres or disband some of the programmes, and so on, being offered?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, you would note that the 2022 Estimate is the same as it was for 2021 and there were no life centres closed down. As a matter of fact, where more was required that was allocated to this particular line Item, and if it has to be in the next fiscal, that also would take place.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I refer the Minister's attention to line Item 38, Council of Legal Education. Hon. Minister, can you advise if this is the funding provided for the Hugh Wooding Law School?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It is, yes.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Minister, through you, Madam Chair, last year when we dealt with this line Item and the proposed estimate of 20 million, the Minister was asked about the decrease to 20 million. Because in 2020, the Actual spend was 31 and last year a decrease was identified questioning whether this decrease would be sufficient funding for the law school. And the Minister indicated that while we saw

a higher figure in the previous year, it was to clear arrears, and that the lower figure, which was proposed last year, would take care of all expenses to the law school. However, from my understanding, the funding to the law school has decreased causing students at the Hugh Wooding Law School to experience an increase in the tuition fee twice for first year entering into second year. The school fees significantly increased.

Hon. Minister, you gave the undertaking that if there was to be any adjustments that during the financial year you would return and ask for the additional funding but you did not. Would you be able to advise us if it is that you will be making that additional contribution so that the Hugh Wooding Law School students will get the same fees as what they would have paid when they entered the programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I would like to indicate that you are inaccurate in saying that there was not an approach made between the Government and Hugh Wooding Law School and that approach would have yielded certain discussions and the Ministry would have committed to provide some additional funding where necessary. And if that is necessary again, as we move forward into this fiscal, that will be done.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Well, it has become necessary, hon. Minister, because the tuition fees have increased for the students. These students had a proposed fee when they entered into year one, which would have been year one, year two and year three fees. However, when they progress from year one into year two, the fees then increased on them halfway during the programme. Are there any plans in place to assist these students if they cannot meet the financial requirements?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, once again the discussion, it will take

place from the Hugh Wooding Law School to the Ministry and the Government will do what it can to assist our students in the fulfilment of their educational pursuits at this level.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Minister.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 46, National Training Agency, the reduction of approximately \$4.6 million. Does that have anything to do with a decision that has been taken to no longer finance the group health plan for the retirees of the National Training Agency?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, you would notice the allocation in 2021 and 2022 are the same and where in 2021, further funding was required, it was provided, which resulted in the Revised Estimates being just 4.6 million-odd more than the Estimate itself.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, are you aware that a circular or correspondence has been sent out by the CEO of the National Training Agency indicating to retirees of the agency that the entity can no longer fund the group health plan to support expenses incurred by retirees?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, if this relates to line Item 46, then I repeat the answer. The funding allocated is the same as it was in 2021, and if further funding is required, then it will be provided. The internal workings of the organization and the arrangements being made to ensure that the organization is lean and it continues to move forward, these are matters that will be discussed at the appropriate time with the Ministry of Finance and any allocations required would be made available.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** But are you aware of the circular that has gone out signed by the

CEO of the National Training Agency?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I have asked and answered the question.

**Madam Chairman:** The question was asked and an answer was given. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Line Item No. 44, Subsidies Mt. Hope Students, of \$15 million. Could the Minister indicate how many subsidies does this include and what is the range in the values of the subsidies?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Meaning how many students are involved?

**Dr. Seecheran:** Yeah.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I would have to provide that in writing.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Could I go to another question? Line Item 40, Medical Post-Graduate Programme, and I see the allocation here is for \$500,000. Does the Minister think this is sufficient for this line Item?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This amount has been allocated for the past few years and it has been sufficient at that time and we continue to provide that to assist.

**Dr. Seecheran:** So this would include the DM programme in the medical sciences programme, all the DM programmes?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** All the what?

**Dr. Seecheran:** The DM, post-graduate medical training programmes?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It would involve all that UWI would apply it to. This is provided directly to UWI and they apply it as they see fit.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007. Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Current Transfers and Subsidies, Educational Institutions. We did not cover that yet. We did not do 006.



**Madam Chairman:** We are at 007.

**Ms. Haynes:** We did not cover 006. We never called 006. We left NTA and now we are on Item 006. I wanted to just ask a question on Student Nurses Stipend.

**Madam Chairman:** So we are 006, Educational Institutions and you are entitled to ask any Sub-Item under 006.

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes, I just have a question.

**Madam Chairman:** I would not be calling the Sub-Items.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay. So I just had a question on that.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay? So which is the question you want?

**Ms. Haynes:** Student Nurses Stipend. We had an Estimate in 2021 of \$9 million. The Revised Estimate is \$900,000.

**Madam Chairman:** So you are at 63?

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes, line Item 63.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Ms. Haynes:** Line Item 63, Student Nurse Stipend, the Estimate was \$9 million, the Revised Estimate was 900,000. Is it a case of student nurses not being paid a stipend?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This will be used to pay arrears of stipend and this will be for the COSTAATT student nurses.

**Ms. Haynes:** If you are referring to the Estimate for 2022, but I am asking about the change between the Estimate for 2021 and the Revised Estimate is \$900,000. So the question is: Is it in fiscal 2021, the stipends were not paid?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** There are arrears of stipend that are owed to the students and so that arrears has been figured into what will be estimated for 2022 to pay the arrears and to pay going forward.

**Ms. Haynes:** So the student nurses can look forward to their stipends being paid this year.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chair, that is what I just said.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, my question was under 07. But we will move on.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva North, are you under 006, or can I move on? Line Item number?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Line Item 53.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Line Item 53, MIC Pleasantville Technology Centre. Through you, Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, the 2021 Estimate was 7 million, whereas the 2020 Actual was 10 million. The Revised Estimate was 9.5 million, and I see for 2022, we are estimating at 7 million again a decrease of 2.5 million to the Revised Estimate. Is it that there are plans to cut down the programmes at MIC Pleasantville Technology Center, or can the Minister account for why the continuous reduction in this line Item?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I just want to draw the attention of the Member to the fact that the entire budget and the resources of the Government are not the same as they would have been before. And, therefore, you would see a recurring theme that every Ministry is being asked to cut their budgets and to put it in line with what we can afford. And therefore, having estimated 7,000 in 2021, we use that same base figure for 2022. But in cases where the institutions do require some more, then an adjustment can be made as we go through the year. But we are asking all Ministries, all state enterprises, all institutions to lean their operations and their recurrent expenditure as our circumstances require.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. With all due respect, from what I understand this Ministry has received an increase from last year's allocation and the overall budget from last year's budget to this year's budget has also signalled a significant increase of approximately within the vicinity of \$10 billion. So can you explain what it is you just went through, because that does not add up to the overall picture.

**Mr. Hosein:** The "maths not mathsing".

**Mr. Ratiram:** The "maths is just not mathsing". Your Ministry received an increase but you are saying that the institution should get a decrease and a cut and lean.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I have answered the question.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I do not understand.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 007. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 15, what we see is that the Revised Estimates for 2021, there was a decrease. And in light of that decrease, what services does this programme provide to the students? And Minister, just let me let you know what the second question is so you would know how you respond. How does it differ from the Student Support Services Division?

**1.30 p.m.**

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, under this line Item, we deal with career days, career fairs and so on. Certainly, in the last fiscal, we would have had a curtailment of those activities and it also deals with quite a number of training activities. A lot of these have moved online and so the cost to produce them is much less and that will be reflected in the decrease here.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at Item 19: Retraining Programme for Displaced Workers. Now, I understand the idea of the baseline figure, but we are looking at a time when a lot of persons have been displaced, the world of work has significantly changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So looking at the allocation, can the Minister just give us an idea of how many persons benefit from this Retraining Programme for Displaced Workers? Are you seeing uptick in terms of persons subscribing to this programme at this time?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, we would be able to get that figure from YTEPP and we will certainly provide it in writing.

**Ms. Haynes:** Appreciated.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers. This was budgeted for 5 million last year, the Revised Estimate is 15 million. The gratuity to contract workers is something that I believe would be anticipated because we will have an idea when these contract officers are going to retire, when their gratuities are to be paid. So seeing that it was budgeted at 5 million and it was revised at 15 million, that is a significant disparity. Can the Minister advise if similar type of lack of planning or foresight is going to occur this year again? Because I am seeing it at 5 million once more.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The payment of gratuities depends on the terms and conditions, and that is received from the CPO. So it depends on how many we get and how many gratuities are due in that time, then we would pay. In 2021, we would have received a transfer from the Comptroller of Accounts to pay gratuities to contract officers. And so, those would have been paid at that time. So, in 2022,

that is the figure that we have been working with and certainly, if more terms and conditions are received and more gratuities required to be paid, then similar arrangements will be made to do that.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes, I understand that. But what I am asking—what I am asking, Madam Chair, through you, is that payment of gratuities to contract officers is something that can be calculated in advance.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** And I am saying that it cannot, in all cases, be calculated in advance. That is what I am saying. We are awaiting the details from the CPO with respect to terms and conditions and that will allow us to do that.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just looking at—it was actually a continuation of my last question in terms of the retraining programme. I also wanted similar information, possibly to be provided in writing, on the Multi-sector Skills Training Programme, again in terms of number of persons subscribing to the programme. I appreciate that that may need to be provided in writing.

**Madam Chairman:** Line Item 22?

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes, line Item 22.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** We will get that from MIC for you.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009. Item 011. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 07: Metal Industries Company Ltd (National Skills Development Programme). Hon. Minister, I see that is a significant decrease of 13 million, similar to what MIC in Pleasantville and even Servol Junior Life Centre,

all these programmes I am seeing is being met with decrease in budgeted allocation for fiscal term 2022, when the Ministry of Education is getting more money and when the overall budget is an increase from last year. Can you explain why is it we are seeing these increases to programmes that are going to affect youth development in this country?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Once again, Madam Chairman, the allocation from 2021 and '22 are constant at 20 million. If you would notice in 2020, the spend was 26 million; in 2021, it was 33 million. So therefore, the variation can be seen and so, from the base figure where more is required, as was done in 2021, more will be provided for the youth of our nation.

**Mr. Ratiram:** So if it is that we know more is required and more is to be provided, why are we under budgeting these institutions? If we are fully aware, why are we putting 20 million when we know more is required?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Please notice the variation between 26 million, one year; 33 million in another year. Therefore, the prediction of it is fluid throughout the year. Which is why the base is provided and whatever else is needed will be provided during the year.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 06. Member for Tabaquite, are you on the—

**Ms. Haynes:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** —Item 001?

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes, I am. I am.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes. National Schools Dietary Services Limited. Looking at the allocation, could the Minister tell us what was the Ministry's plan for ensuring that students had access to proper nutrition while the online learning was taking place?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Other provisions for families were made under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, as well as the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services during this fiscal.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay. So then we had a \$12 million Revised Estimate under this same line Item? Can we account for that at this point?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Schools were open for Forms 4 to 6 students from February continuing, and that would have been expended at that time to provide for those students who were out.

**Ms. Haynes:** And then we are now estimating \$41 million for fiscal 2022 when the actual figure is somewhere in the ball park of \$180 million? So could we account for why we are using that estimation for 2022?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Because that estimation of 180, you would have seen in 2020, would have catered for all of the students being out to school. In 2022, we already started the school year and we do not have primary schools out. We are now gradually getting our secondary school students out. So that Estimate is given to provide for that and certainly if more is required, as our circumstances improve, in health wise, more will be provided.

**Ms. Haynes:** So at this time that \$41 million is catering for just secondary school students?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, it is not. It is put there as an allocation that should cater for our circumstances during the year and depending on what they are, then if more is required, while less may be spent, it is put there as a baseline to allow us to have allocation to use during this year.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay. So what I am asking for then, specifically, is what were the inputs in this decision making? What were we looking at? We were estimating for

secondary schools and primary schools? I am asking for the inputs into the decision to guide us as to what was the Ministry's thinking for a \$41 million allocation for fiscal 2022?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, the Member is asking for me to predict whether primary schools will open at a particular time—

**Ms. Haynes:** No. I am not. I am not. I am asking—

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:**—and whether depending on that, how much students will be out and to predict whether secondary schools remain open for the entire year. These are not predictions that can be made. They depend on our health circumstances. You would have seen in our last year, we predicted students would come out in February and in April. We were not able to do that because of the health circumstances. So, to predict that and to try to get down to the last dollar would be impossible for anyone including you, Member. So therefore, we have put that allocation there that should be enough to cater for our needs as we go forward. If we need more, we will certainly do so. I draw your attention to the fact that 128,000 was estimated in 2021—only 12 million, sorry—only 12 million would have been expended based on the circumstances, and this would be a similar circumstance.

So no one can predict exactly how many lunches will have to be bought and that will have to depend on our circumstances, health wise, and how our students are brought back to physical school.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, my question was grossly misrepresented there. I am not asking for a prediction. I asked very specifically for what were the inputs into the decision making. [*Desk thumping*] I think that could be answered very easily [*Desk thumping*] because a decision was made to allocate \$42 million. How was



that decision made?

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, through you, to the hon. line Minister, I refer to line Item 09: National Energy Skills Centre. I see the actual from 2020 was 10 million, the Revised Estimate was 7 million for last year, and we are budgeting at the 7 million again. Is it that there is a cut in this programme, that is why the funding is moving from 10 million down to 7 million? Can the Minister explain the reduction?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chair, there is no cut in the programme.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the Minister explain the reduction of \$3 million to this programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, there is no reduction.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Chair, I just pointed out to the hon. Minister that the actual spend of 2020 was 10 million, but the Revised Estimate was 7 million. I do not know if she needs help in doing the maths but there is a reduction; a reduction of \$3 million. And I am kindly asking the Minister to explain—if she can explain this reduction?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I understand that the Member is new to the Parliament. There is no reduction.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 06.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Chair—

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, I was on the Transfers to State Enterprises, please.

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah.

**Mr. Rambally:** 011; line Item 10. Hon. Minister, under line Items 10 and 11—but

I am looking at 10 now for purposes of my question. In respect of EFCL, we are aware that there are judgments against EFCL from contractors. Are you able to tell us how many of those judgements still remain outstanding?

**Madam Chairman:** Member, this item 10 deals with interest on a syndicated loan of \$286.5 million, and Item 11 deals with Principal Payment on \$286.5 million syndicated loan, so I will not allow that question on those two Items. If you have a question on those two Items, you can proceed.

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes, Madam Chair, I will ask it later on, please.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you. Member for Couva North, you are still on 011? Yes?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Chair, line Item 09—[*Inaudible*]

**Madam Chairman:** 09?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Line Item 09: National Energy Skills Centre, the hon. Minister did not explain the difference of the \$3 million.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, I think you asked that question at least twice, about there being a reduction, and the Minister's answer was consistent that there was no reduction.

**Mr. Ratiram:** But the Minister is not providing the answer.

**Madam Chairman:** Member—

**Mr. Ratiram:** If the Minister does not know and needs to get back to me, the Minister can say she does not have the information and she can provide it later. But for the Minister to say there is no reduction when clearly there is in the book.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, the Minister has answered the question that you have put on two occasions. I am not going to put that question—allow you to ask that again. Member for Chaguanas West, are we still on 011?

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes, please.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, please.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, hon. Minister, I had referred to line Items 10 and 11, but let me just for the simplicity line Item 10, can you tell us what is this loan? What is the purpose of this loan? This is line Item 10 I am returning to, please.

**Madam Chairman:** This is the syndicate—the 286.5 syndicated loan.

**Mr. Imbert:** This is an old loan that was taken out to finance the completion of early childhood centres. The loan is coming to an end.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Against that, are there any outstanding moneys, whether by way of judgments or otherwise, owed to contractors involved in the construction of the early childcare centres?

**1.45 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I want to make the point. And if you will allow me, we are dealing with these matters in a line Item basis. This is simply an allocation to make payment on a loan account. So it is the installment that will become due or the installments that will become due during fiscal 2022. This Item is simply about that. If you want to ask those kind of questions, find another line Item.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, I will try to frame it otherwise, but I do not see what is the difficulty in just dealing with it now.

**Mr. Imbert:** I will explain. School construction is paid for under the Development Programme. We are on recurrent. I know you are new, but we on recurrent. What you are asking for is a Development Programme question.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, I disagree with the Minister. This is outstanding moneys I think we could deal with it here but we will deal with it under Development Programme. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, if you will allow me to just correct the record. This Item is under Recurrent Expenditure, it is an allocation to make a payment on a loan instalment. The details of schools construction are contained in the Development Programme either out of the Consolidated Fund or the Infrastructure Development Fund that is where that matter can be raised.

**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 the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. 01: National Institute of Higher Education Research, Science and Technology, Sub-Head 01: Item 001. Member for Tabaquite. We are in a new book, page 153. Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Looking at the subvention to the National Institute for Higher Education Research, Science and Technology and given the emphasis placed by the Minister of Finance on Research and Development on Trinidad Tobago going into the direction of increased funding towards Research, Science and Technology. I noted that the Government's subvention is \$15 million as is a reduced estimate from 2021 and reduced from the Actual in 2022. So, could the Minister of Education just account for the decision on the subvention for fiscal 2020?

**Madam Chairman:** Member, I think you are asking for a global question based on the summary page of 152—

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:**—our consideration is line by line Items so we start at 153—

**Ms. Haynes:** No problem.

**Madam Chairman:**—the summary page is like an index to a book.

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:**—so we are at 01 page 153, if you wish a little time I think Couva North is ready—

**Ms. Haynes:** Uh huh.

**Madam Chairman:** So I would stand you down and take him.

**Ms. Haynes:** No problem.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I see under Remuneration to Board Members, the estimate of \$689,400 was revised to 135,000. Can the hon. Minister advise if it is that the board was lacking members, or what is the reason for the reduction in this?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The full board has been reconstitution now and so the estimate comes back up to what it was. And yes, the board was not in operation and we had reduced numbers on the board in during the period of 2021.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Also, line Items 01: \$6 million was estimated in 2021 however, what the Revised Estimates indicate is \$4 million being spent to there. Can the hon. Minister indicate the significant disparity in these two figures?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, if we look at the expenditure in 2020, it was at 4.7. If we look at the expenditure in 2021, it is at 4 million and the allocation in 2022 is consistent with the expenditure in 2021.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Question was asked and answered, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 02: Item 001. Sub-Head 04: Item 007.

12: Board of Industrial Training; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: Item 009:

13: Trinidad and Tobago National Commission for UNESCO; Sub-Head 01: Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration.

56: College of Science Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Service; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 006; Item 007: Household.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, Item 004: Social Infrastructure.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Speaker, what page are we on, what page?

**Madam Chairman:** We are at page 62. Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair, under Vocational and Technical I am looking at line Item 002: the Sangre Grande HYPE Center. The decision was taken to reactivate the project. Could the Minister just give us an account for where the project was left off and the \$250,000 sufficient to the project?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, the 250,000 that is allocated is planned to be used for the planning of the project work and the preliminary land acquisition activity.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, are we also examining Educational Services at this time?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes—

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:**—because we are under everything under Items 004.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay, excellent. So I am looking at line Item under Educational Services, 004: National and Additional Scholarships based on Advanced Level examination. Could the Minister give us an account of how many scholars we have locally and at foreign universities at this time?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** 14 existing—this is sorry, let me just be clear. Which line Item is it?

**Ms. Haynes:** 004.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** We have 557 local and 429 foreign scholarships.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you and under this line Item, we would have seen an estimate of about 150 million in 2021 and that had to be revised upwards. Given that, under this line Item you are talking about getting money quickly to students who may be abroad. Is it, I think, prudent to estimate below the 210, given that you are looking at students who are already on scholarship and you can estimate that they will be there for three years, five years, the duration of the course?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The fluctuations would have to do with foreign exchange rate, tuition fees, and so on of the students. And so therefore, we have estimated just a bit more to account for that which is 180, as opposed to the 2021 estimate and that should be sufficient. And if there is need to boost that we will certainly do so with the all intentions of ensuring that our foreign scholars are taken care of.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair, if you just allow me just one moment. In terms of scholarship students who are abroad and the payment of not just their school fees, but I am just giving a personal account here, oftentimes you will find students if the fees are not paid by the Government on time, you are unable to register for your classes, you are unable to access your housing and for students who may be in foreign countries, that can literally mean that you are homeless. So I would just like that to be at the forefront of the minds of the policymakers, when we make these estimates.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, I just want to say that that has less to do with the estimate than it has to do the actual workings of the division and extreme attention is being paid to ensure that our scholars are—this perennial problem we have been having over scholars not paying tuition and so on, we are placing firm emphasis on that, and so we do take the Member's view.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 9, this is page 62, the Postgraduate Scholarship. When we look at that line Item we see 2021 and now 2022, no provision is been allocated. What is the status of this programme, please?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Could you repeat the last—what is the what?

**Mr. Rambally:** What is the status of this Postgraduate Scholarship Initiative or Programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** All of the scholarships offered by the Government have now been incorporated into the Scholarships and Bursaries Vote.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, Member for Tabaquite.



**Ms. Haynes:** Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. My question would have been under the Programme of Development Scholarships, but the Minister said that all of this is now encompassed under scholarships so it has been answered.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so the last project group under this is (J) Science, Technology and Applied Arts. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am looking at—this is page 63 line Item 5, and we see the Improvement to Facilities. Madam Chair, when on a perusal of the proposed improvements to these facilities on the Ministry of Finance website, quite a few projects have been stated. I would just like to ask for the update on these different initiatives or activities I should say rather, for example, when are they due to start and when will they be completed, these improvements?

**Madam Chairman:** This is 005: ECIAF Improvement Facilities. That is where you are?

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Just to guide everybody.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, the products that were estimated to be completed in 2021 would have included electrical upgrades, upgrade of student dormitories, upgrade to the agro processing facilities and so on, those are the ones in 2021, of course, affected by the COVID-19 restrictions. And so, these have moved forward into fiscal 2022. And a couple other projects have been added on which they have itemized, refurbishment of the meat processing facilities, fencing, et cetera. So quite a lot of these projects are now under 2022.

**Mr. Rambally:** Hon. Minister, I am grateful for that. Do you have any ending date for the completion of these projects in mind?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** They would vary depending on the scope of the projects. Madam Chairman, I do not have that specific information about the end dates of these projects here.

**2.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** If I would be allowed to make a general comment, one of the things that has affected construction, in particular, and commissioning of facilities, especially where equipment is required, is supply chain disruptions in the countries in which the equipment comes from. So that whereas a contractor, a project manager, a Ministry and agency may have the best will in the world to complete a particular project, if it is affected by a supply chain disruption that throws the whole schedule off and, therefore, it is not possible to give a definite date for the completion of certain sophisticated projects, at this point in time.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to ask the Minister, line Item 25: Establishment of the Aviation Institute—UTT Camden Campus Phase 1 and 2. It was estimated for in 2021 at \$5 million, however, the Revised Estimates was \$512 and now I am seeing the new estimate for 2022 is 2 million. Is it that this programme which was estimated for in 2021 for \$5 million has now been cut down to 2 million, because it was not completed, it was not spent? So, can the Minister explain the difference in the funding there and what this \$2 million is going towards?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** As has been indicated by the UTT, the projects to be embarked upon in this fiscal would be the installation of the hanger enclosure. The tendering is ongoing at this time, and the procurement of ground power units for

the aircraft and the specs for that is being developed, and based on what those projects—those two particular projects that they are focusing on for this year—the allocation should be enough to deal with those particular projects.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And what is the estimated completion duration of this project?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Once again, Madam Chairman, that is not information that I have before me at this point in time.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I would like to turn to line Item 32: Establishment of a Training Facility—Chaguanas. This project was estimated for in 2021 at \$6 million, but only 1.2 million was spent. Can the Minister indicate why the reduction in spending? Is it that the work was not completed because of COVID-19 restrictions?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, this would be a general comment for all infrastructural works which would have been severely impacted by COVID-19 and the restrictions, as well as what the Minister of Finance would have raised in terms of supplies and equipment. So this is, again, another example of that, and so the project would, again, begin in 2021 into the 2022 fiscal.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Minister. However for 2022 the requested amount has increased to 7 million. Can you indicate what additional scope has been added on to this project and what is the anticipated completion date?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Again, Madam Chairman, this would have been the submission coming forward from YTEPP and that would have been the allocation given for it and that is supposed—it is one project that is under this line Item—to kick off in November and that has been allocated for the completion of this project at this time. There have been increases in prices, there have been increases in labour costs and so on as we move forward here, and so that increase should be

able to cater for those things.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the Minister explain to us what the 1.2 million was used to pay for? What part of the project was completed with the 1.2 million?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The designs.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 006, page 63, the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute—Improvement of Facilities. Is it that it is only the north building which requires rewiring works at this time?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This is 006?

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes. John S. Donaldson Technical Institute—Improvement of Facilities.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I have for structural estimates to north and east blocks and that may include—electrical upgrades you are asking about?

**Mr. Rambally:** Yes.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That may include electrical upgrades to both of them, but I have north and east blocks being estimated here.

**Mr. Rambally:** North and east blocks?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes.

**Mr. Rambally:** And is it that we accept that you will not have a certain time for completion, but it is expected to start in this fiscal year—

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Rambally:**—and, hopefully, be completed? Hon. Minister, the follow-up question to this is that when the works are carried out, the rewiring works, is it contemplated that you will have to possibly do an upgrade to the main supply? These electrical works, would it possibly result in the main supply having to be upgraded as well?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I do not have that before me as one of the components of this project.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, 045, Moruga Technology Centre. In 2021, it had an estimate of a million dollars, but in the Revised Estimates there is nil. Could the Minister provide a status, through you, Madam Chair, of the centre?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** There is no planned project at this particular centre in this fiscal.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Madam Chair, through you, if the Minister could just repeat please?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** There is no planed project at the Moruga Technology Centre (MIC) for this fiscal.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Madam Chair, through you, if the Minister could indicate as to why?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chair, the board and the management of these institutions would indicate what projects they want to undergo and they would provide that to the Ministry. At this point in time, there is no planned project there and so there has been no allocation given.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just looking at line Item 005: Annual Scholarship and Technical Assistance Programme. I am seeing that there is a \$4 million allocation that is separate and apart from the national scholarships now. Now, could the Minister give us some indication as to what Annual Scholarship and Technical Assistance Programme this is? How do you benefit? Who can access this programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This is the funding allocated for the Government

scholars under the Cuban Scholarship Programme.

**Ms. Haynes:** The human scholarship programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Cuban, sorry, Cuban.

**Ms. Haynes:** Cuban? Okay. Thank you. And then how do you access this scholarship?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This scholarship is provided or offered by the Government of Cuba. Students would apply based on that advertisement.

**Ms. Haynes:** So then—but the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is allocating \$4 million?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** We provide support to the students.

**Ms. Haynes:** So, once you access the scholarship and you are in Cuba, you can then access this \$4 million for living expenses, that sort of thing?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes. It is not the total amount, but the Government of Cuba provides some and we provide some to assist with the economic cost.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay. Thank you. I have a question on line Item 043: Enhancing of Agriculture through Technology—NIHERST. So, that is on page 64. You had estimated \$500,000, none was spent. Could the Minister give us a reason as to why we no longer thought it necessary to support the Enhancing of Agriculture through Technology in fiscal 2021?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is furthest from the truth. The indication for NIHERST would have been that the difficulty going through with the project, based on the COVID Regulations that would have caused them to have a setback. So they do have an allocation in this fiscal and they will provide those activities which would have been some training activities and so on that they wanted to be able produce for the nationals.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 041: COSTAATT Technology Upgrade. Can the hon. Minister advise what the 2.3 million in the 2021 Revised Estimates, what it was utilized for?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Procurement of laptops, procurement of multimedia projectors and upgrades for the labs.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And the additional—well, the 1 million that was requested for 2022?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It would be used to continue the payment of some of the commitments that were made in the division of services and equipment that I just would have elucidated.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Moving on to line Item 049: COSTAATT Campuses Health and Safety Compliance. Madam Chair, this line Item was budgeted for in 2021 at \$2 million to complete the Health and Safety Compliance, but only \$21,000 was spent. Can the Minister indicate the status with respect to the Health and Safety Compliance at the COSTAATT campuses?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** This project is not been going forward. It will not go forward for 2022, so no allocation has been made for that.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the Minister advise the status with respect to the health and safety compliance that currently exists at these campuses?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The status of this project is that it is not going moving forward for 2022, hence no allocation.

**Mr. Ratiram:** So a project that was necessary that we allocated \$2 million towards doing, which is a health and safety compliance at the COSTAATT campuses is no longer necessary. Is that what the Minister is saying?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am saying that it is not being pursued in 2022.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at line Item 051: Upgrade of the University of Trinidad and Tobago Campuses. We had nothing estimated, and then we were required to spend just upwards of \$4 million. Was that for emergency work at UTT in terms of the upgrade of the UTT Campuses?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It was required to establish a learning commons, upgrade the corporate IT infrastructure and initiate work at NAPA and the Chaguaramas Campus. That work has begun and it will be continued in 2022.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, page 63, line Item 030: Teach Me. How many students Minister, on average, benefit annually from this programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I would have to get that specific information and provide it in writing.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you Minister.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just seeking your guidance. Would I be able to discuss line Item 042: Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets, at this time? That is on page 65.

**Madam Chairman:** Are we under J. Science and Technology? Or, all right. So we are finished with, so—

**Ms. Haynes:** No, I was just asking for your guidance.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Okay. So, hon. Members, Item 005 spans two pages, therefore, I will announce the project groups. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. A. Administrative Services. So, Member for Tabaquite, go ahead.

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes. So then my question on the Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets. Could the Minister give us an account in terms of how many



laptops and tablets were delivered to how many students and then how many students are still without devices at this time?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, 20,000 devices were procured, delivered to the Ministry. Of this 20,000, we have distributed 19,200. That would be to students as well as teachers would have benefitted from that. At this point in time, the data that we have collected from the primary schools, based on the target population of the Standard 5 as well as the Forms 4 to 6 needed just around 23,000 devices required and those have been distributed.

**Ms. Haynes:** So, Madam Chair, is it that at this time, from the Ministry's data, there are no students who are in need of devices to access online school?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, information is coming from principals every day and being collated with respect to further requirements based on the 23,000 applicants from the means test that all applications that was successful were satisfied.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay. Thank you. We are looking at 50 million having been allocated and only \$45 million being spent. Given that you came in under the estimated budget, are we then saying that all of the students who are in need have been catered for? Because we are also seeing no allocation for fiscal 2022, which must mean that the Government has some information that all students have devices to access online school.

**2.15 p.m.**

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, that is not so. The provision for providing devices for the students has been made in this fiscal.

**Ms. Haynes:** Where is that provision?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** 044.

**Ms. Haynes:** Digital Education Programme; so the new project, renamed Digital Education Programme at 044, that is meant to provide laptops and tablets to students who may be in need?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** In addition to other things, yes, Madam Chair.

**Ms. Haynes:** Could you, as we are on the line Item, could you give us the additional things so that we can be clear on what \$35 million would be used for under the Digital Education Programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That will be used to provide funding for the tools of digital education, including laptops, tablets, software, e-books that are required for building out the digital ecosystem.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Chair, the Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets, now, going through the books I saw no space for the Mi-Fi devices, are we to understand that that was also allocated under the Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets or is it under another line Item?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The Mi-Fi devices, 10,000 have already been procured and those are at the stage now of distribution to the students who have indicated the need as well as teachers.

**Ms. Haynes:** So are we to understand, Madam Chair, that no Mi-Fi devices have been distributed as of October 2021?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is not true. Mi-Fi devices are just about 1,000 now being distributed thus far.

**Ms. Haynes:** How many have been distributed, 1,000?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** One thousand.

**Ms. Haynes:** And the other 9,000 that have been procured, there is a distribution schedule that you can share with us?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The students who have been identified from the means test, those students have been identified and in addition to that, schools are also requesting Mi-Fi devices and those requests are coming in as well and they are being dealt with as well. And, yes, it is a distribution schedule based on what is received in hand and the students of the different schools that have been verified by their teachers as requiring these devices.

**Ms. Haynes:** The reason I am asking for a distribution schedule that can be shared with us, you may be aware that my constituency of Tabaquite has a very large rural component. A number of my—the students that reside within my constituency as well as the schools that are in my constituency have made multiple enquiries about these Mi-Fi devices because connectivity is a real problem for us. So whether you have a device in hand you have no access to Internet. So if you are able to provide us with a distribution schedule it will assist us in representing our various communities so that we can give them the information that they need as well.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would indicate to the Member that every single school and the students of the school that have applied based on the means test and that we have data for from the principal, will be dealt with. This Government is providing not just the laptops but providing the connectivity needed and we have begun to do so and will continue to do so according to the internally developed schedule based on the school. So we will continue to do that distribution. So please assure your constituents that they will be assisted as you know.

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

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, you said that you would have distributed devices to various primary and secondary schools, can give

us a breakdown? You may have to do this in writing of a complete breakdown of how many devices each school got both in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The Division of Education in Tobago maybe can provide that, but certainly the Ministry of Education can provide the information for the delivery of devices for each school.

**Mr. Hosein:** So, Minister, will you give an undertaking that this information will be provided in writing?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, that is what I said, yes.

**Mr. Hosein:** And, Minister, I heard you said that, if I heard you correctly, that all Forms 4 to 6 students would have devices in order for school, is that correct?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I said that we requested of the principals, the information about students still requiring devices. That information having been received, those distributions were done.

**Mr. Hosein:** Is that just for Forms 4 to 6 or is it also inclusive of Forms 1 to 3 also?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** We did Forms 4 to 6 as we did earlier this year to ensure that the students who are facing the exams, if there was any loophole that they would have fallen through, that they have their devices. So that information is requested as of September 2021, and just over 2,900 persons were identified and that would have come forward to us and those distributions would have been done.

**Mr. Hosein:** Will the Ministry be moving to give Forms 1 to 3 students devices?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Certainly, we are moving to give all students devices that is why we would have instituted the means test for all students to be able to apply.

**Mr. Hosein:** But as of now, only Forms 4 to 6 students can apply?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is not true. In April of this year all students were

able to apply for devices; failing that, we would have indicated in September 2021, that if there are students who for some reason did not have a device because there are students indicating that they had a device and then they do not have one anymore because something happened to their device. There are also quite a number of students and cases that we have seen where there is deliberate destruction of devices, tablet devices to be able now to get a Government laptop which is why it is critical for us to verify with the principals that requests coming in are really valid requests so that we meet the needs of those who need it the most and we meet those needs first.

So all students have had the chance to apply. If any slip through the cracks, we made an additional call in September focusing on those who have exams facing them, Forms 4 to 6 as well as Standard 5 students. So that was done earlier this year and it has been done once again.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I refer the Minister's attention to line Item 034: Upgrade of the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre Phase 1. Can the Minister indicate if this project is completed because there is no allocation for last year nor this year?

**Madam Chairman:** And I will not allow that question on the exercise—

**Mr. Ratiram:** All right. Okay.

**Madam Chairman:**—based on what you have said. You have another question?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes. Another line Item, line Item 042: Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets. The Minister indicated that persons who would have applied, they would have reviewed and provided the support. Hon. Minister, I recall writing you officially on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2021, which I did not receive an

acknowledgment or a response, but in my correspondence to you I was seeking your intervention to provide assistance to the list of names that I sent you.

I had written to the 18 schools in the constituency of Couva North, the principals, asking for a list of students who were unable to participate in online school because of lack of devices. We were talking about approximately 1,200 students, their names, the parents' name, address, contact number. Can you kindly advise us if it is that you have been able to fulfil the request that was sent to your gracious office?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, in the first instance I recall no such letter. I make a point of replying and many of your colleagues can indicate that they have received replies when they have written to me; that is one. The second thing is that the Government procured laptops; the distribution of these laptops took place through the application for the means test which was given out in April and all of the students that you have identified would have had the chance to apply for the means test.

So, certainly, I am certain that you can determine based on your intimate knowledge how many of them would have gotten the devices through the means test. And if there are persons that have queries or so, they can check with the school or you can write to me and I can see what is the situation with some of those. But they would have had, all of them, the opportunity to apply through the means test for these devices as would every child in Trinidad.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you. And, hon. Minister, Minister, the letter was received by one, J. James, at the Ministry of Education on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, and we have a correspondence where the person who received the letter signed the document. What I will do is make it available to you, along with the request of outstanding

students who have not received devices in the constituency of Couva North and I would kindly appreciate if you can take consideration to assist these underprivileged families.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Please do. I do not know who J. James is but certainly if you send it to my office, you will have a response.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chairman, asked and answered already. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. I have two questions for the hon. Minister. Question number one is I do not think that the Minister has clarified what has happened with this \$4.3 million that you have not spent that is now going to be returned to the Consolidated Fund—

**Madam Chairman:** You are under Item—what, please?

**Mr. Tancoo:** Sorry, my apologies. I am actually under Item 042: Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets; \$50 million was allocated, 45.7 was spent which means that we have \$4.3 million which was not spent and I have in my constituency several persons still awaiting laptops. That is my first question. I would like to get an answer from the Minister as to what was done with this money and why it was not spent on the Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets. The second question I will ask—

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So could I please take one at a time, Madam Chair, if I may?

**Mr. Tancoo:** Sorry, sure.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The remaining funds were spent, expended for the acquisition of the Mi-Fi devices.

**Mr. Tancoo:** So, Minister, you are saying that money was in fact spent—50 million was in fact spent?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is what I am saying.

**Mr. Tancoo:** So this figure represented here is wrong?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chair, I appreciate that the Members are new to the Parliament but in the estimation of the budget, they did not—

**Mr. Tancoo:** No, no, no, no, no, no.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, if I may—

**Madam Chairman:** Just a minute. I asked for us to be courteous. If a question is asked, an opportunity will be given to answer and further questions could be asked. The crosstalk gets us nowhere and I understand we are all eager and very passionate. Minister.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** When the budget documents are prepared there are financial transactions that take place subsequent to that within the financial year. Therefore, the budget gives you a snapshot in time and that is close to the end of the financial year. But you may know that even on the end, the very day that the financial year ends there are transactions taking place, payments being made and so on, that will not be reflected here. So to—I will end it there, Madam Chair.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam. I accept that and move on. Madam Chair, the hon. Minister indicated that 20,000-odd laptops have been sourced and delivered but less than 10,000—I want to make sure I am very clear with this—less than 10,000 Mi-Fi devices have been distributed. Those laptops would have been distributed on the basis of need, Minister, am I correct? They would have been distributed on the basis of perceived need, on declared need having met the means



test. Is it then that those laptops were delivered to individuals who could not access Mi-Fi or Wi-Fi or any other kind of “Fi”? So we would have had students with laptops but no access to the Internet?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chairman, the information that was requested indicated quite a few more students who required devices and had connectivity at their homes, and then there were some who required devices and connectivity. So the procurement was done on the basis of the data that was collected.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Can we proceed? Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Earlier in this discussion we had the question of where the allocation for the E-Testing initiative would take place and I am asking the Minister if the allocation for the E-Testing, is it under this Acquisition and Delivery of Laptops and Tablets?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes, is it a part of that as well.

**Ms. Haynes:** And so how much of this \$45 million that was revised was spent on the E-Testing initiative?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The E-Testing initiative has not been instituted at this time, it is under the Digital Education Programme under line Item 044.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay. So no money in fiscal 2021, and it is now being reprogrammed under fiscal 2022 under Digital Educational Programme, we have that correct?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** To indicate, a large part of the E-Testing infrastructure has to do with devices for students and therefore the first step would have been to provide the devices, which is why I would have indicated that the provision for the E-Testing would have come under that different line Item. So that is a big part of the spend for E-Testing and then there is software that goes along with it and that

is a part of the Digital Educational Programme that has been allocated 35 million in this fiscal.

So, yes, the project, E-Testing, has been advanced in terms of providing the devices and so the software that goes along with that would come under the new allocation for 2023.

**Ms. Haynes:** No problem, Minister. And do we have a list of schools that are taking part in this pilot programme?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The pilot programme is not by school.

**Ms. Haynes:** That is what you indicated last year.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It is a general programme that will be undertaken and software will be provided to assist in all of the areas at the schools.

**Ms. Haynes:** So the scope of the project has changed from last year to this year and so therefore it is no longer that certain schools would be identified for the pilot project, because I am just quoting you again from last year to this year because it is the same programme. So it has changed?

**2.30 p.m.**

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes.

**Ms. Haynes:** So it has changed?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So can we go on?

**Ms. Haynes:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** F. Public Buildings. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to correct the record by advising the Minister that it is not a J. James, but it is an I. James that received the

letter.

**Madam Chairman:** I am sure you could do that with your colleague off the record.

**Mr. Ratiram:** No problem. Moving on to line Item 32, Upgrade of 12Kv Cable and Switchgear - UWI. This project was estimated for in 2021, \$4.192 million. The Revised Estimate was \$599,300, and it is estimated for 2022 at \$400,000. That is a significant reduction in the initial funding that was allocated to this programme in 2021. Can the Minister advise if it is that there are segments of the upgrade works that will still remain outstanding, and if those upgrade works remain outstanding, is there any health and safety threat that will exist to persons operating in and around that switchgear?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chair, UWI has indicated that this project can go forward in phases, and so for 2022, the phase that has been identified will be the upgrade of some cables and switchgear at the main distribution substation at the Faculty of Engineering, and that cost is \$400,000. So they have advised of the progression of this project.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Just for the sake of clarity, my colleague from Oropouche West would have asked about the additional money out of the \$50 million and how much of it was spent on Mi-Fi devices.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, excuse. We are not going back there. We are at Public Buildings.

**Ms. Haynes:** Okay, Madam Chair. Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Infrastructure Development Fund, Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Hon. Members, Item 004 spans three pages. I will therefore also

announce the project group. We are at page 197, A. Pre-primary. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Under 002: Improvement/Refurbishment/Extensions to ECCE Centres. Madam Minister, could you inform this meeting, how many schools will be refurbished or repaired under this particular line Item? And also, does it take into consideration the Sonny Ladoo Early Childhood Care and Education Centre and the Marabella Early Childhood Care and Education Centre on Crooks Avenue, both which have been abandoned for the last six years?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chair, under this line Item, it deals with the emergency work that takes place at ECCE centres, so it would not include the opening or completion of construction for the centres mentioned by the Member.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** But in terms of the emergency work, where are they to take place?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, they are addressed as they arise.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** They are addressed as they are arise? Okay.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** My question follows on, on my colleague and also the Minister's response. Hon. Minister, I know you say that it is as a matter how it arises, when it arises. Other than that, how would you prioritize which list of schools would the Ministry undertake refurbishing and upgrading of the facilities?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It would depend on the particular needs of the school. In terms of emergencies, for example, if you have a weather incident and a roof is damaged or any other infrastructure, that would fall under emergency. With respect to the planned work at schools, it does not fall under this line Item.

**Mr. Rambally:** Hon. Minister, for my benefit, other than the emergencies, this is what I am asking, how would they prioritize or create a list of the schools in order of priority of being upgraded? That is what I am trying to get.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** It would depend on the particular needs of the schools as a context of all the schools that have to be dealt with. Electrical, sewage and plumbing are generally areas—and roofing concerns—are usually areas that are prioritized.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, you have indicated that it is emergency works and so on but, for example, as I said, I continue to get letters, I continue to get visits from constituents of Couva South. There was an early childhood education centre that was completed. All it needed was an electrical supply and outfitting. This school has now been reduced to a shell through vandalism and so on. When will the Sonny Ladoo Early Childhood Care and Education Centre be refurbished and opened for the benefit of preschoolers in the constituency?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is not a refurbishment, that is a completion of construction, and that is not under this particular line Item.

**Madam Chairman:** So we go on to Primary. Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to raise line Item 424, Construction of Flanagin Town R.C. Could the Minister give us an update? Are we no longer pursuing this project?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** At this time, the construction has been terminated and that has to be deferred for completion in another fiscal.

**Ms. Haynes:** Can we get some reason behind this decision?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** When the contract was entered into—

*[Confers with Permanent Secretary]*

Madam Chairman, at this time, I would say to the Member that we have quite a number of requests coming in from different schools for completion of construction, and this is one that would have been identified at one point in time to be pursued. However, that that been relooked, and so, that is not, at this time, on the list of schools going forward in 2022.

**Ms. Haynes:** But I am asking for the reasons?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I do not have the exact reasons for Flanagin Town or for any other school, and let me just say this in general because I know it could be a flooding of specific individual questions. I do not have the particular reasons for Flanagin Town, but what I can say is that the priority has not been placed on this particular school at this point in time.

**Ms. Haynes:** No problem. Well, could I get that answered in writing?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I do not know that I can give you any answer in writing, Member. What I am saying is that the priority has been relooked, so I think I have answered the question.

**Ms. Haynes:** Well, I am the Member of Parliament for Flanagin Town and the R.C. School, so we would really like to know why the Government has chosen to discontinue this project.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The Member can write me in her capacity as MP. I am happy to answer.

**Ms. Haynes:** But I can ask at this juncture as well, and then you can just indicate that the answer will be provided.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** But I have answered the question.

**Ms. Haynes:** So the answer is no, you will not provide it?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, the answer is that we have relooked the priority and Flanagin Town is not on the priority for 2022.

**Ms. Haynes:** Why?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Because there are other schools, based on our estimation, that would require the funding to be applied to them.

**Ms. Haynes:** And then, how do you determine this—the priority schools? What is the input in deciding the list in terms of priority schools? There must be some metric that you use?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes, there are quite a number of metrics, and that is what is discussed internally by the Ministry. We look at all of the schools that require work, because many of them do. We have over 600 plans and we have many of them over 100 years old. So we look at the priority, we look at which schools are most in need of the work. We look at the overall situation and we come up with what can be reasonably done based on the allocations in any one year.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes. Could I just add some clarification here? There were a number of school construction projects that were commenced in 2014 and 2015, without a source of funds. We have just looked at the cost to complete just some of these schools, not all, just some, and you are looking at \$3 billion.

In fact, today we had a meeting where we looked at just 29 out of those schools, and it is going to cost us \$1 billion. So that, to complete the construction projects that were commenced in 2014 and 2015, with respect to schools, is a massive undertaking and, therefore, the Government has to be very careful about how it allocates its scarce resources. We do intend to do whatever is possible and feasible to complete schools that are close to completion, that are in urgent need

and so on, but you have to understand you are talking about billions and billions of dollars of construction costs.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Minister of Finance, but I am looking at the book before me and there was an Estimate in 2021. So while I can appreciate what happened in 2014 and thereabouts—

**Mr. Imbert:** I think the question was asked and answered, but I am not the Speaker.

**Ms. Haynes:** No, but you are saying that you had an—I am referring to an Estimate made in 2021, and then that is a decision you made as Minister of Finance, not a decision made in 2014.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, the Estimate—

**Mr. Imbert:** Asked and answered.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Sorry, if I may—

**Madam Chairman:** I am going on to the Member for Oropouche West. I believe the point that the Member for Tabaquite is making was responded to by the Minister of Education. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I want to give you a snapshot question. There are about 21 schools listed here for which there is a budget of some sort in 2021, and a revised budget, which was either not used at all. There was zero budgeted as a Revised Estimate and nothing budgeted for 2022. I think the question my hon. colleague for Tabaquite was trying to determine is on what basis—what specific basis did the Ministry decide not to spend money in 2021, although in 2021, they determined that there was a need and an allocation was made to complete, at least to address these schools? None of it was spent.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche West, I believe the Member for



Tabaquite was very clear in articulating the question. It has been put three, four times. I am not going to allow that to go forward. So if you wish to ask another question, I will allow you.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Madam Chair—

**Madam Chairman:** While you—

**Mr. Tancoo:**—my colleague was very specific to one school.

**Madam Chairman:** While you—

**Mr. Tancoo:** I am asking about 20 other schools.

**Madam Chairman:** Excuse me, we cannot both speak at the same time, because I am really not hearing. While you recalibrate, I will go on to Member for Couva South. I will come back to you. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I seek the guidance of the Minister here, Madam Chair. With respect, for example, to the Ramai Trace Primary School, I know it is stated in the State Enterprise Investment Programme for 2022.

**Madam Chairman:** Can you refer me to the Item, please?

**Mr. Imbert:** What line Item is that?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am dealing with the question of improvement—

**Mr. Imbert:** Line Item, please.

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—refurbishment and extension.

**Mr. Imbert:** Which one? Which one?

**Madam Chairman:** Are you on 120?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am trying to find out, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is not there.

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. Are you on 120?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Under 120, what is the question?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** If that particular primary school was being left out from this particular listing?

**Mr. Imbert:** That is refurbishment. That is not construction. She answered that already.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am being very serious, I am not being facetious. The Minister made the point that Item is for refurbishment, not for construction. They are two completely different things, and you know that.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And I take the Minister's point but I also, in reading the particular book that was prepared, I could remember recollecting—I could recollect that there was an issue of pointing—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, he is on some other line Item.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** It pointed to the construction of the Ramai Trace Hindu School.

**Mr. Imbert:** We have to stick to the line Item. Madam Chairman, I insist we stick on line Items.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So I am just asking whether it was left out.

**Madam Chairman:** One minute, please. Until the question is asked—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Because this budget has a lot of typographical—

**Madam Chairman:** One minute, please. Until the question is asked, I do not know if the question would be allowed. So you are under line Item 120.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Again, I ask whether the construction of the Ramai Trace Primary School was left out in this particular area. That is all.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So that is not under line Item 120 and I certainly do not

see it under any of the Items listed from 315 onwards. Okay? Member for Couva North.

**2.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer to the Minister's attention to line Item 378, Construction of the Rousillac SDMS Primary School. The actual spend in 2020 was \$10 million but I am not seeing any further spend for last year nor this year. Can the Minister indicate what percentage of completion this school is? And when this is expected to be finished?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chair, I will provide that information in writing to the Member.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Sorry?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Chair, I will provide that information in writing to the Member.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you.

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer you to Item 389, Construction of Monkey Town Government. There is no funding allocated for 2022. Can the Minister specifically indicate what is the reason for that? And I would treat with them one by one, if that is the preference.

**Madam Chairman:** So, all right. So I believe the Minister of Finance is going to deal—

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:**—with an omnibus response with respect of all of those that are listed there.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. In the last several years we

have had to raise significant amounts of money in loan financing to use the MTS to complete a lot of these construction projects. What would appear in the estimates would be the debt service repayments. So that there would be a number of construction projects, school construction projects in particular which would not be identified on a unique basis in these estimates. What would be identified in due course would be the debt service payments. So there are a number of schools here, a number of schools that would not appear in this book. They would be a part of a general construction programme based on a guaranteed loan to a state enterprise and would be off budget until the debt-servicing payments come into the estimates.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And, Madam Chair, if I could through you, if I could ask the Minister of Finance to furnish this meeting with a list of the schools that have been identified to be completed or constructed based on the loan arrangement through the state entity that he has alluded to?

**Mr. Imbert:** Certainly.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** I am sorry that the Member for Couva South just barged in on you but maybe seniority on certain basis. Yes. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, given that a lot of these schools listed here have not been—moneys have not been allocated to for completion or continuous works, can the Minister advise whether there are other facilities, security services, et cetera, that are now being put to these schools to ensure that there is no vandalization of these schools?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** In cases where the schools have been handed over, this is being continuously done. In some cases the schools are not handed over and therefore they would not have been allocated by the Ministry of Education.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Can the Minister then advise whether or not there are ongoing costs associated with the contracts related to these very schools which are no longer being proceeded with? Are there mobilization costs? Demobilization costs? Maintenance or security, cutting of grass, et cetera, Ma'am?

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes. As we restart some of these projects, they would certainly be costs of that nature. It is on a case-by-case basis.

**Mr. Tancoo:** All right. Hon. Minister, can I then ask for a list in writing of each school and the costs associated and the basis for the cost associated?

**Mr. Imbert:** That would be impossible at this time because we are now doing detailed assessment. As I said, it is on a case-by-case basis. So it is impossible to give you the information you request.

**Mr. Tancoo:** So, may I then take it, hon. Minister, that there is no allocation here in this estimate for those services provided? Because that is what I am asking. You would have come up with an estimate of a cost at some point in time for fees, dues, et cetera, that are now currently available.

**Mr. Imbert:** As we remobilize, the construction, as I said, it is going to cost us billions as a country. All of those costs will be taken into account with the loan financing.

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

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am just trying to make the connection between the State Enterprises Investment and Programme under the MTS. Now, it is not a book. But it is under these Items, please—Madam Chair, I am trying to make the connection, the connection with the information given there and the information that is finding its way in the budget.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So what I want to say is, what we do here according to the Standing Orders is a line by line.

**Mr. Ram:** Right.

**Madam Chairman:** So you have to identify an Item and ask a question—

**Mr. Ram:** Under—

**Madam Chairman:**—on that Item only.

**Mr. Ram:** Under line Item 120, Improvement, Refurbishment, Extensions to Primary Schools, has a list been given in terms of the primary schools which will be refurbished under this line Item?

**Madam Chairman:** I believe that question was asked and answered.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Let me clarify it. It is the same principle of the question, where these are emergency works, works that come up as arise and that is allocated to deal with those things.

**Mr. Ram:** Madam Chairman, if I may again through you. When we are given our packages for these budgets there are a number of accompanying books outside of these yellow books that are provided. I am just trying to make the link and if there is a link between what is written here and it is finding its way as a budgeted Item, please?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, can I get a ruling please? Are we dealing with the estimates and line Items in the estimates? Or are we dealing with everything under the sun?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So—

**Mr. Ram:** Madam Chairman—

**Madam Chairman:** Member, Member, just one minute. I may appreciate your difficulty but this is a very specific exercise as set out in your Standing Orders.

Okay? When there is the debate we do a different type of engagement. All right? So that what I want to assure you is that, if the question that is exercising your mind is not one that is allowable in this process, there are many other avenues which would be opened to you. Okay?

**Mr. Ram:** Right. Madam Chairman—

**Madam Chairman:** I guess that is the best way I can assist you.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you for that ruling, Madam Chairman. And you are saying, hon. Minister, that a list would be provided to us? No?

**Madam Chairman:** What I understood the Minister to say with respect to 120 and the Minister may have answered before you came in but she answered again is that this, there is no list. This is an allocation to cater—they expect that there will be improvements and refurbishing works to be done that may arise from time to time and this will be treated under here for primary schools. And there is some sort of basis by which they decide which is emergency, which has greater priority. I think the Minister said electrical, et cetera, have greater priority than certain things. That is what my recollection is. Okay? So can we go onto secondary schools? Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Madam Chair, I would like to turn to line Item 440, Construction of the Montrose Vedic.

**Madam Chairman:** I am at secondary schools. Item E, Special Education. Member for Tabaquite. Item J, Science, Technology and Applied Arts. Item 0—sorry. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, in terms of line Item 41, this is page 199. Hon. Minister, could you give us an estimation of how advanced the works are at the Tamana Campus?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The works are approximately 85 per cent complete at this time.

**Mr. Rambally:** And along those lines are you able to tell us what works are required that are remaining 15 per cent?

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The signature building needs to be complete. There are roads and service drains that have to be completed. Street and parameter lighting, security systems for the parameter, the vista centre, bus shelter, charging station and storm water drainage and the outfitting.

**Mr. Rambally:** Hon. Minister, I am not asking for a date certain for completion but, you know, when it is expected in your contemplation that this can be completed.

**Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** If all goes well and there are no further restrictions, then this should be significantly progressed within the next fiscal.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 26 ordered to stand part of Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, PS. Thank you to all the representatives from the Ministry and also the Minister in the Ministry. We move onto Head 23, the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs. One minute, AG. We have some little domestic matters to take place. One minute. And therefore, in setting the table, Members, I wish to refer you all in the Recurrent Expenditure book we start at page 149. In the Development Programme we start at page 58.

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman—



**Mr. Chairman:** Head 23: Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs.

*Head 23:* Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, \$336,735,760.

**Mr. Chairman:** Before I invite the hon. AG, I would like to welcome the technocrats from the Attorney General, Madam PS and all the other members. I will now invite the Attorney General to make brief opening statements not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs is in its sixth year of operation having been comprised from three separate Ministries prior to its creation. The three separate Ministries were the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Ministry of the Attorney General. Over the years we have managed to significantly reduce expenditure. In fact, by public documents laid in this Parliament we have saved somewhere close to \$2.65 billion in expenditure as a result of the reorganization and expenditure of management reforms.

**3.00 p.m.**

Mr. Chairman, we have a very exciting year, a large part of which comes about in our Development Programme, so I will save it for questions under that point, particularly as we complete the digitization efforts that the Ministry is at the cusp—and in fact has already launched in go-live testing, and I mean specifically in relation to the property business registration system, as we are looking to the unique parcel identification numbering protocols and the upgrade of the Civil Registry including bedside registration, online system regulation as we look to the development of a national population registry and our land and ICT refreshing

combined with our upgrade of IT and other positions. At the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, we are pleased to present ourselves for questions, and I therefore thank you for the opportunity for that very brief opening statement.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, hon. AG.

*Question proposed:* That Head 23 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$336,735,760 for Head 23, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

Right, so we are in the Recurrent Expenditure booklet. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, and we are on page 149. Item 001, General Administration; Item 002, Law Reform Commission, page 150; Item 003, Equal Opportunity Commission; Item 005, Law Revision Commission; Item 007, Intellectual Property Office, page 151; Item 009, Criminal Law Department, page 152; Item 010, Sentencing Commission, page 152; Sub-Head 02, Good and Services, page 153; Item 001, General Administration, pages 153 to 154. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am on Line Item 23, Fees, and based on our mid-year review we know that this would encapsulate legal fees paid to external counsel both in Trinidad and Tobago and foreign. Now, we saw in the document that \$75 million has been spent according to the Revised Estimates for financial year 2021, and a further \$44.5 million is allocated for 2022 in relation to legal fees. Can the Attorney General—I do not know if he is conflicted in his

matter—advise this honourable House whether or not any of this fees in the amount of \$44.5 million is to be paid to any British Queen’s Counsel the name Mr. Vincent Nelson?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** May I ask what on God’s earth the Member means by whether he is conflicted in this question?

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. AG, you want us to go into those details?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Well, it was a ridiculous question premised on that statement. I would like, in case I am going on an angle that I ought not to, what does the Member mean?

**Mr. Chairman:** Member.

**Mr. Hosein:** I do not know, Mr. Chairman, in terms of whether or not the Attorney General had any agreement with this particular individual, that is, we are seeing in the public domain.

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** What does the Member mean?

**Mr. Chairman:** So Member, ask your question, and then we will put it to the AG and give him the opportunity to answer.

**Mr. Hosein:** I ask the question again, whether or not any of this \$44.5 million is to be paid to Queen’s Counsel Vincent Nelson in this fiscal year? It is a simple question, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** He has been specific. AG.

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman, I thank the Member for not knowing what he asked himself and for putting that on the record, and I will say quite squarely. There is an obsession by the Member for Barataria/San Juan and Members of the Opposition to point out to certain persons, including the name just mentioned, Vincent Nelson, Queen’s Counsel, and I want to put it on the record. The Member has on many

occasions asked about this particular gentleman, and I can say the gentleman is in fact a witness in criminal proceedings against the former Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan. That is a matter properly before the courts. This estimate of expenditure for the year is a projected estimate of expenditure. I will not encourage any fantasy or improper allegations by the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and he stands on his own in relation to his plight to try to raise matters in the public domain which in my view are intended to prejudice the fair trial proceedings and to cause Mr. Ramlogan to walk free, and I say no more.

**Mr. Hosein:** Mr. Chairman, that is imputing improper motives on my behalf. There is no way that I am in any way prejudicing the case. It is a simple question, whether any of this \$44.5 million will be paid to Mr. Nelson? Is either yes or no. I do not know why the Attorney General is running around this entire question. It is a simple straightforward question, yes or no?

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you Member. Anything to add, AG?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman, I have spoken in the English language on this microphone in a clear and precise and measured and slow fashion. If the Member for Barataria/San Juan is incapable of understanding the English language, he is on his own.

**Mr. Hosein:** Yes or no, Mr. Chairman?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chair, asked and answered.

**Mr. Chairman:** Again, asked and answered, as the AG just mentioned. Item 002, Law Reform Commission, page 154. Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** On the same line Item, Fees. Can the Attorney General please indicate whether this will also encompass fees under the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority please?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman, I understand that my friend is new to the Parliament. I will just direct him to the book in front of him where there is a disaggregation between various entities.

**Mr. Ram:** And again, is it belong or no?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Well, clearly you have not read the material before you.

**Mr. Ram:** But clearly you do not understand your—is it belong?

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, Members, it is through the Chair.

**Mr. Ram:** It is yes or no?

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes or no, it is another Item.

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Chairman, there is a disaggregation of every single body before us. The Legal Aid and Advisory Authority is under a different Head.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you.

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** It is in black and white, paid for by the taxpayers of this country, provided to my learned friend on October the 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. I cannot help him if he cannot read the documents in the time he has had.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thanks AG. Item—

**Mr. Ram:** I have been reading documents. I want to advise the Attorney General, I have been reading a lot of documents.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 003, Equal Opportunity Commission, page 155; Item 005, Law Revision Commission, page 156; Item 007, Intellectual Property Office, pages 156 to 157; Item 009, Criminal Law Department, pages 157 to 158; Item 001, Sentencing Commission, page 158; Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001, General Administration, page 159; Item 002, Law Reform Commission; Item 003, Equal Opportunity Commission; Item 005, Law Revision Commission,

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page 160; Item 007, Intellectual Property Office; Item 009, Criminal Law Department; Item 010, Sentencing Commission; Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 161; Item 005, Non-Profit Institutions, page 161; Item 007, Households; Item 009, Other Transfers; Item 010, Other Transfers Abroad.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, and we are going to Sub-Head 09, Development Programme Consolidated Fund on page 58. Page 5, 8. Item 004, Social Infrastructure; Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 159.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 23 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, hon. AG, and also your Senator, and Madam PS and your team. Thanks for coming, do have a safe afternoon.

[Pause]

Hon. Members, at this time the Committee is suspended until 3.30 p.m. Thank you.

**3.13 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*

**3.30 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee resumed.*

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Chairman:** This Standing Finance Committee is resumed. Welcome to the new Minister of Youth Development and National Service. Welcome to Permanent Secretary and also the technocrats from your Ministry.

*Head 81:* Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, \$467,100,210.

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Youth Development and National Service to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** Thank you, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to attend this Standing Finance Committee of the Parliament to discuss the budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, MYDNS. Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service is dedicated to the development of youth and infusing in them the values and attributes of national service and entrepreneurship.

As a primary agency responsible for the development of the nation's approximately 500,000 youths, the Ministry is committed to the delivery of the nation's young people. The Ministry is also committed to the delivery of quality services, youth skills and development programmes and training to enable young people of Trinidad and Tobago to achieve their full potential and become productive members of society. In the discharge of its mandate the Ministry is guided by *Vision 2030 National Development Strategy* and the Road Map to Recovery Report which provides the overarching framework for the Ministry's interventions.

At the sector level the Ministry is guided by the National Youth Policy 2020 to 2025 which defines youth as persons aged 10 to 35 years and reaffirms the value of empowering and strategically engaging the nation's diverse youth as co-creators of sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman, in April of this year when I joined the Ministry I embraced the vision that the Ministry is responsible for setting the foundation for the next generation of leaders and advancing the youth development agenda by increasing access to positive transformation opportunities for our youth population which represents 40 per cent of our national population. Today I am pleased to announce that the Ministry has engaged in collaborative discussions with key stakeholders

and the fiscal 2020 Development Programmes form the basis of a comprehensive medium-term development agenda for our young people.

Through these programmes and interventions the Ministry will provide the avenues that will facilitate the seamless transition of youth from their current situations. It is through our residential and non-residential training and support programmes that our young people will become beacons to enjoy the sustainable employment and livelihoods and become successful entrepreneurs. It is indeed my pleasure to address the Committee this afternoon and to answer any relevant questions coming from the other side. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

*Question proposed:* That Head 81 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$467,100,210 for Head 81: Ministry of Youth Development and National Service is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. So we are in the Recurrent Expenditure booklet, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 403; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, thank you, Chair. I would like to refer the Minister to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance which was estimated for 9.3 million, it was revised at 8.872; a difference of approximately \$428,000 which includes provision for vacant position with incumbents. Can the Minister advise how many vacant positions exist at this time in this Ministry?



**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** The number of vacant positions currently would be 230 on the establishment and 45 in terms of contract positions.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And these positions are expected to be filled during this financial year?

**Hon. Cummings:** In terms of the contract positions we will be moving towards doing that and that is where the focus would be at this point in time.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Minister.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, and probably the Finance Minister may want to pronounce on this, because I just heard you indicate that in terms of the filling of vacancies it may be in the direction of contract positions. Minister, in your last year's budget presentation you had indicated that there will be a freeze on hiring in the public service. In this particular presentation I did not hear any pronouncement, but in terms of this particular line Item in this Ministry and other Ministries, has the Government extended this freeze on hiring in the public service?

**Mr. Chairman:** The Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** We have put an allocation in this year's budget—well, allocations, plural, to cater for some partial resumption of the filling of vacancies.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And I am forced to ask the question to seek further clarification. Minister, when you say “partial filling”, could you elaborate on that because from where I stand and my experience, and I am sure that you have similar experience from the point of view of being a trade unionist, in a previous incarnation—

**Mr. Imbert:** You know, many people do not know that. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Indarsingh:** What does this mean in terms of those who may be seeking employment in the public service?

**Mr. Imbert:** In my discussion now, remember this is vacancies without bodies, eh. This is a post totally vacant, there is nobody in them acting or anything like that. My instructions and my discussions with Budget Division is that we will put about 50 per cent of the usual amount for the filling of vacancies in this fiscal year and we will monitor the situation and see whether that needs to be adjusted upwards or downwards.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And that is Ministries—

**Mr. Imbert:** Right across the board.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Across the board.

**Mr. Imbert:** This is my understanding. Just let me get clarification.

*[Confers with Permanent Secretary]*

I am getting clarification here, we put in the Ministries that requested that allocation, not across the board.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So the Government from a policy position at the level of the Cabinet, are you saying that it has lifted this freeze on hiring?

**Mr. Imbert:** No, I am not saying that. I am saying we made a provision and we will monitor that and adjust it appropriately.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay, thank you. I am not totally satisfied—

**Mr. Imbert:** I am not saying that we lifted any freeze. I am just saying we made a provision and we will monitor the financial situation and make appropriate adjustments.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So the freeze in the hiring of persons in the public service would have been guided by what, the overall financial situation of the country?

**Mr. Imbert:** You see, what Ministries used to do is that they would not utilize this line Item for one reason or another. Quite often it is an external cause. The Service Commission did not fill the vacancy so you come towards the end of the financial year and you see that this money is still there, they would take it and use it for another purpose. So that is one of the reasons and the other reason of course is to reduce expenditure as far as possible.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** But is there a continued focus as it relates to an expansion of contract labour in the public service?

**Mr. Imbert:** Contract labour will be used as and when required.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Chair, thank you.

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

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the same line Item, please, 01, can the Minister indicate how many permanent positions are there currently?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** How many permanent positions where?

**Mr. Ram:** That are employed currently in the Ministry.

**Hon. Cummings:** 365.

**Mr. Ram:** 365. And these are all persons who would have started when this new Ministry was formed?

**Hon. Cummings:** These would be positions on the establishment.

**Mr. Ram:** No, but the establishment would have been formed last year when this Ministry was formed, correct?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yeah. Those persons who came across from different Ministries when this Ministry was created.

**Mr. Ram:** Okay, I understand, thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Supplemental question again?

**Mr. Ram:** No, another line Item, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on, hold on, let me get to it first. Item 002: Co-operatives.

**Mr. Ram:** No, I mean in the same—

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you. I see line Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. Can the Minister give what sub-committees this will be catered for?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** That would be the Advisory Committee on the YDAC which is the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres and Non-Residential Youth Development Centres.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Couva North, you have a question here also before I move on?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Chair, on this same line Item, Item 14: Remuneration for Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. There has been an increase from the Estimate to the Revised Estimate. Is that more Members were added on in terms of—when we were planning for 2021 and what we actually executed in financial 2021? Because it was not in the initial Estimate.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** Which Item are you referring to?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Item 14: Remuneration—

**Mr. Chairman:** Line Item 14—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees, what was estimated for was 33,000 there, which would have been the calculated, the

anticipated remuneration for the Cabinet-Appointed Committees. However, more than that was spent and what I am asking is, if it is that the Committee was expanded, how much was initially conceptualized?

**Hon. Cummings:** Well, this Committee, because of the revamping of the YDACs we had to expand the Committee and that would account for that.

**Mr. Ratiram:** What is the size of that Committee now?

**Hon. Cummings:** I do not have that information readily available, but I can give it to you later.

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

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 002: Co-operatives. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, Includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents. Can the Minister identify the number of vacant positions for that line Item?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** We will provide that to you in writing.

**Mr. Ratiram:** No problem. Can the Minister also indicate the number of persons currently employed in the establishment?

**Mr. Chairman:** That was answered already?

**Hon. Cummings:** We will also provide that information to you.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, will be provided. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Just very quickly, Minister. In years gone by you know we have had a lot of problems with the operations of credit unions and their financial books and so on. You have a full complement of staff within your Co-operative Division, monitoring the operations of credit unions and so on.

**Hon. Cummings:** The Government has taken action to strengthen the Co-operative Development Division and certainly the division has been able to benefit from significant training opportunities that the Government has put in place.

**3.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And you have a substantive Commissioner for Co-operatives, and so on, existing, in credit union?

**Hon. Cummings:** There is an Acting Commissioner in office.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Acting?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 003: Friendly Societies, page 404. Member for Couva North, proceed.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Chair, and I make reference to line Item: 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. The Revised Estimate was approximately 166,000 above, what was estimated in 2011. Can the hon. Minister advise what the additional spending was for?

**Hon. Cummings:** This was for payment of Salaries and COLA, and increments and acting allowances to monthly paid officers of the Friendly Societies Division.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the Minister advise how much additional warm bodies were recruited?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister?

**Hon. Cummings:** We would provide that information to you in writing.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, hon. Minister. However, in 2022, what I see is a decrease from what the actual spend was of 724,000. It has decreased now to 557,000. So if it is that we did recruit warm bodies and we paid additional Salaries

and COLA, is this proper budget planning to have a reduced figure or should it be what the Revised Estimate is?

**Hon. Cummings:** Well, we will not jump to any conclusions because I have not been able to—we will provide the information so we cannot assume about the warm bodies as yet. So let us provide the information and at that point in time, I will be able to answer that.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chair?

**Mr. Chairman:** Go ahead. Proceed, Member.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yeah. The Remuneration to Board Members. It was initially estimated at 200,000, Revised Estimate of 369,000, an increase there of \$169,000 for Remuneration to Board Members. Can the hon. Minister advise how much additional board members, from what was initially anticipated, were actually placed on the board?

**Hon. Cummings:** What I can tell you is that the board is now at its full complement. So if you see an increase there, it will very well be attached to that situation.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And is it that before the board was short of members? How long did that exist for?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister?

**Hon. Cummings:** Okay. I do not have that information readily available with me but I can provide it to you.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, hon. Minister. However, in 2022 if it is that the board is at its full complement and that is what the 369,000 is for, then why are we

budgeting only 200,000 for this financial year?

**Hon. Cummings:** As I said, I do not have that information readily available. I will submit it to you in writing and at that time, the answer to that question will be taken care of.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Chairman:** Moving on, Member? Item 005: Youth Affairs. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Through you, Mr. Deputy Chair, hon. Minister, Item 01. This is Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, Youth Affairs. Can the hon. Minister say how many persons are currently employed in this division?

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Minister?

**Hon. Cummings:** Okay. I do not have that information available in terms of the numbers but I can provide that to you.

**Dr. Ragbir:** And can you also, hon. Minister, through the Chair, how many number of existing vacant positions are there in this division?

**Hon. Cummings:** We will provide the information at the same time.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 006: National Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres, page 405. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes, please, Mr. Deputy Chairman. I was at 06/01 when I had my hand up. Would you allow me to go back to it?

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on. On what page?

**Mr. Ram:** 405.

**Mr. Chairman:** And what line Item?



**Mr. Ram:** 02, please. 006/02: Wages and C.O.L.A.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. So we are on page 405? Right. Proceed.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes, please. Through you, Mr. Deputy Chair, can the Minister indicate what was the result of the decrease in Wages and C.O.L.A. for the Estimates for 2021 and the Revised Estimates, and how has he arrived at the Estimate of \$6.8 million?

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, first of all, just position the mike properly because as you are looking down—yeah, right so that we could hear clearly. Minister, you—

**Hon. Cummings:** That represents payments for daily-rated workers for the youth development and apprenticeship centres and at the head office and youth facilities.

**Mr. Ram:** Also please, hon. Minister, can you indicate what is the metric deployed to calculate this cost of living allowance? Metrics.

**Mr. Chairman:** The metrics to calculate—let me hear again.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes, metrics.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance?

**Mr. Ram:** There is a formula that is used, please, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance?

**Mr. Imbert:** Yeah. This would be—I am being told these workers are daily-paid workers or daily-rated workers, and this will be part of a collective agreement.

**Mr. Ram:** Part of an agreement collective, please?

**Mr. Imbert:** I beg your pardon.

**Mr. Ram:** It is part of a collective agreement you are saying?

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mr. Ram:** Can you indicate which unions are represented here?

**Mr. Imbert:** I am being told that I must not tell you in a bad way, that it must be

the National Union of Government and Federated Workers. You should know that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Ram:** Same line Item: 006, we are moving to 29.

**Mr. Chairman:** Overtime - Daily-Rated Workers.

**Mr. Ram:** Overtime - Daily-Rated Workers.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Proceed.

**Mr. Ram:** Given that in fiscal 2021 many of the operations, due to COVID-19, would have slowed the Ministry's operations, how was the Estimate arrived at for 2022, please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** Because the Government's thrust has been to reignite the work of the youth development and apprenticeship centres, we are comfortable that the operations will be similar to what exists in prior to what you speak about in terms of interruptions from the COVID pandemic.

**Mr. Ram:** And therefore—okay. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. The Estimate for 2021 was 6.3 and it includes the provision of vacant posts with the incumbent. Wages and C.O.L.A., line Item 02, the Estimate was 6.8, the Revised Estimate was 5.9, a difference of 900,000. This would have indicated that it was budgeted to pay salaries and wages and COLA to have persons employed. In the environment where several young persons have become unemployed and are looking for jobs, can the Minister advise that why it is that the

Revised Estimate is 1.7 million when you add the two line Items together less than what was budgeted for and why it is these young persons who are looking for jobs were not recruited during the fiscal term?

**Hon. Cummings:** This does not have anything to do with recruitment. We are currently in the process of revitalizing these centres and putting plans in place for the resuscitation of these apprenticeship centres. So this really has nothing at the point in time to deal with recruitment of the persons you speak about.

**Mr. Ratiram:** However, in the explanation it says:

“Includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents”

So during the fiscal term, we are looking at filling the vacant positions here with an increase of 800 for line Item 01. Can the hon Minister—well, can the Minister explain—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, allow me to answer that.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I give way for the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Chairman:** You are finished? Okay. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, I realize some of the Members are new. The terminology “vacant posts with incumbents” means there is somebody there. They are simply not confirmed in the position. So you are not recruiting anybody.

**Hon. Cummings:** You are acting.

**Mr. Imbert:** You will be regularizing somebody or appointing somebody, but you are not recruiting anybody.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I take note of the Minister’s explanation. However, if it is that someone is in the position we are dealing with Estimates of 6.3 million and Revised Estimates of 5.5. The actual Revised Estimates is less than what the Estimates were, and if it is that persons were there then people would have been

paid a salary. What it implies is that the salaries were not being paid which is why the Revised Estimates came in at 800,000 less than and 900,000 less than for wages and COLA. So all I am asking is during this environment where several young persons have been out of work, why these positions were not filled for the last year? That is simply what I am asking.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, the question arises from a false premise. The posts have people in them. It is simply that the people are not confirmed in the position.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. So Member, we will need to move on. Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Same line Item, please, based on the response of the Minister of Finance. I get the point that the Minister of Finance is saying that there are persons in the position existing now. Is he saying that they are to be confirmed and there is no process for confirmation? They are just going to be confirmed. There will be no interviews held?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, I know these Members are new but they need to do some research. The Government does not make appointments to these positions. The appointments are made by the Service Commissions. We cannot control the Service Commissions. They are independent. We ask them every year to try and speed up the process, but we do not know during the year which of the persons who are acting, they are going to confirm. That is entirely up to them. We can only urge them, we can only plead with them, we can only ask them, but we do not control the actually appointment of persons to positions. It is not the Government that does that.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chair, would the hon. Minister be willing to provide in writing the request that was made to have these position filled?

**Mr. Imbert:** No.

**Mr. Ratiram:** But the Minister just said that they asked and the position was not filled. The persons are in the position. The initial position that I was speaking of had nothing to do with what the Minister is speaking about. What I was speaking about, Chair, is that the moneys were allocated but it was not paid out. So you cannot tell me that it have positions, acting in the positions, or the persons in the positions and they are not receiving a salary. Because 800,000 was not utilized from what was assigned to this line Item 01, and 900,000 was not utilized from what was assigned to this line Item in 02. So it cannot be the persons were there—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, this Member—

**Mr. Ratiram:**—receiving as salary—

**Mr. Imbert:**—has asked the same questions seven times now—

**Mr. Ratiram:** And if it is the Minister—

**Mr. Imbert:**—and got an answer a long time ago. He is wasting time.

**Mr. Ratiram:** No, I have five minutes to make my contribution. I have five minutes to make my contribution.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on. Hold on. So Member for Couva North, you still need to get clarity on this particular line Item. Right? They said that it will be provided the writing. You still have a further question on this line Item?

**Mr. Ratiram:** When I asked for it in writing, the hon. Minister of Finance said no.

**Mr. Imbert:** I did not.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I want to place on the record—

**Mr. Imbert:** I said I would not provide you with the letters. That is personal and private information about individuals. That is what you asked for.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I am not asking about individuals. I am asking about the positions,

Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Imbert:** You did not. You asked for the letters.

**Mr. Ratiram:** No, I am not asking. The positions to be filled—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, this is a waste of time.

**Mr. Ratiram:**—and I am asking for the request—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** He is wasting time.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. No, hon. Minister. One second.

**4.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Ratiram:** The Minister said that request was made to Service Commission for these positions to be filled.

**Mr. Imbert:** This is going on and on. Mr. Chairman, we have four more Heads to do.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I am asking if it can be provided in writing that the request for the positions to be filled, if it can be made available.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, we have four more Heads to do. He is wasting time.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, Minister. Thank you.

**Mr. Ratiram:** The purpose of this Committee is for the Minister to answer and provide the information.

**Mr. Chairman:** So, Member for Couva North, right, so what I want from you now state clearly what you would like to receive and we will find out from the Minister if it can be provided.

**Mr. Ratiram:** The Minister of Finance indicated that request was made to Service Commission for these persons— There were persons in the positions and request was made to Service Commission to have the positions filled. I am asking from the honourable line Minister if he can provide us in writing a copy of the request that

was made to Service Commission for these positions to be filled.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, he is asking for personal and private information and he will not get it.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I am not asking for the individuals, I am asking for the positions.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Mr. Minister, can that information be provided on the positions? Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, it is personal and private information. He is asking for copies of the letters.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right, it cannot be provided so we move on at this time. Member for Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** On the same point. The names can be redacted please. We are asking for the positions.

**Mr. Imbert:** The answer is no.

**Mr. Chairman:** I am not entertaining any more questions on those two Items.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Well then no request was made.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Planning, you care to shed some light on this information please?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We have had opinions given to us on these issues. That is personal information and we cannot and will not provide that information and this is a general statement that I am making in relation to any question of that nature.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, thank you. We now move on to line Item— What aspect, Member for Couva South?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I just wanted to get some clarification from the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning because I have been listening very intently.

**Mr. Chairman:** But also you are a seasoned campaigner and I think you should be able to understand what they are saying.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Well, I am asking it in the context of my previous incarnation and so on.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Last question on this.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Because while both Ministers indicate that it is personal information, I think that what is being asked is not personal information but the request that was made if indeed a request was made by the line Minister to have or through the Permanent Secretary to have to the respective Commission to have whether it is 10 vacancies filled, 20 vacancies, not about the person's personal information and that is what I seek clarification and guidance on. Because I know for a fact it is not in keeping with good industrial relations practices and so on to divulge personal information but this is a general request.

**Mr. Hosein:** Correct.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, so hon. Ministers, provide what can be provided. I am moving on.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Okay.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Chair, when you say provide what can be provided, you are leaving that to the interpretation of the Minister of Finance and so on and I mean based on the Minister of Finance's track record, we may not be able to because last year, commitment—

**Mr. Imbert:** Chairman, this is “ah” waste of time. They are going down “ah” road over and over regurgitating the same question in a different form over and over and over again. Asked and answered.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. And listen, Member for Couva South—



**Mr. Indarsingh:** Last year, for example, commitments were given to provide information in writing—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, I am asking for a ruling.

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—and when the meetings were completed, we did not get the desired information.

**Mr. Imbert:** Can the Opposition continue in this way? I would like a ruling please.

**Mr. Chairman:** Both individuals cannot speak at the same time.

**Mr. Imbert:** I would like a ruling please.

**Mr. Chairman:** So, Minister of Finance, hold on. Member for Couva South, I hold you and again, Mr. Minister, through the line Minister, provide the information that can be provided based on what is requested please. Right? Minister of Planning.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Chairman, just to make one point please. The Parliament staff is very careful with regard to undertakings that are made here and elsewhere and for the Member for Couva South to say that we gave undertakings that were not fulfilled, that is not accurate. That is not accurate.

**Mr. Chairman:** Line Item 002, Co-operatives, pages 406 to 407.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Mr. Chairman, I cast—

**Mr. Chairman:** I am not recognizing you now, Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—no aspersions on the character of the employees of the Parliament.

**Mr. Chairman:** Couva South, I am moving on.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No problem.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 002, Co-operatives, pages 406 and 407 and I recognize the

Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Mr. Chairman, my hand was up to ask on 001, General Administration.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, I am now on Item 002, Co-operatives, 406 to 407. You have a question there, hon. Member?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes, Sir, I have a question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, pages 406 to 407, Co-operatives. I am recognizing you, Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Line Item 22, Short-Term Employment. Can the Minister advise the number of persons recruited in that Ministry under this line Item?

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** I do not have the number or names of those persons but we can provide the information to you through the Chair.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I do not want the names, can I get the number of persons? Not the names, just the number.

**Hon. Cummings:** We will provide the information.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Also, there has been a decrease of 524,000 for Short-term Employment.

**Hon. Cummings:** Short-term Employment is conducted as and when required.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Is the Minister satisfied with this funding considering that decrease of 524,000?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yes.

**Mr. Ratiram:** In an environment and a time where a lot of young persons are looking for work and employment?

**Hon. Cummings:** Asked and answered.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Line Item—

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance. One second, Couva North.

**Mr. Imbert:** Could I make a general statement? Again, I understand Members are new. The term “Short-term Employment” means employment of persons on very temporary contracts between three to six months. This type of employment is not the preferred model of employment and therefore if there is a reduction in the allocation for short-term employment, then that is to be commended, not disparaged. It is not what the Member thinks it is. Those are temporary, critical, short-term three-month or six-month contracts that are required as and when the exigencies of the service require. It is not a permanent thing.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Minister of Finance. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the hon. Minister advise us that the \$2.8 million that was spent for 2021 in the Revised Estimate for Short-term Employment, what was the position utilized for recruiting those persons? Were those positions advertised on their website if they have a website?

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** The Minister of Finance just spent some time explaining what short-term employment is.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yeah. What was the process to recruit?

**Hon. Cummings:** It is very short term, three to six months and the very process within all the Ministries that would be managed by the human resources department is the same process utilized throughout.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the hon. Minister kindly advise what that process is?

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Is it a public advertisement?

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, this is becoming ridiculous. If somebody is to be hired for three months, then to go through the whole process of public advertisement and interview, by the time—

**Mr. Ratiram:** But 2.8 million was spent, 2.8 million spent.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, I did not interrupt them when they were speaking.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, Couva North, you are getting an answer, I will give you the opportunity to make a comment after. Proceed.

**Mr. Imbert:** That hon. Member does that all the time. “Yuh rude.”

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no. Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Ratiram:** No, he is rude because he is saying my comment is ridiculous.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on, one second. Mr. Minister, please. Right, so answer.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, would I be allowed to go on without interruption from the other side?

**Mr. Chairman:** Answer, please.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you very much. If one were to go through the whole process of interview, advertisement, evaluation for a three-month contract, by the time that exercise is over, the three months would have expired. It is not practical nor uses established public service procedures on these things. The person must fit the purpose, they must meet the academic and experience requirements, they must be able to perform the function. It is “ah three month, sometimes is ah one month, sometimes is ah two month”.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can I have an answer from the hon. line Minister related to this \$2.8 million in spending please?

**Mr. Imbert:** No, I have answered.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Minister of Finance has given an answer. Do you care to make a comment?

**Mr. Ratiram:** The purpose of this Committee is for us to review the spending of the previous financial year and I am still on line Item 22, Short-term Employment. Mr. Chairman, the purpose of this Committee is for us to review the moneys that have been spent for the previous financial year and for us to look at what is being proposed in this upcoming financial term. It is expected that the line Minister, when asked, will provide answers to ensure transparency in the spending of taxpayers' money.

We are asking questions here, the Minister is indicating that he does not have the answer, he is willing to provide us with it in writing, we are happy to receive that in the near future but when I ask for how \$2.8 million has been spent for 2021 to recruit persons under this line Item, the Minister of Finance has not provided an answer with the process. I am asking what is the process and if the hon. line Minister can provide us with it in writing. If he does not have the answer now, if he can provide us in writing how this money has been spent and what is the process used for spending this money.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, can you provide—

**Hon. Cummings:** Mr. Chairman, the Minister of Finance did answer the question and I do not know what else I can add to that except to say that the established procedures of the public service is utilized in the recruitment of these very short-term persons and that is the answer to the question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan, you had—

**Mr. Ratiram:** He did not answer and say if it was advertised.

**Mr. Chairman:** I am now recognizing, you had your hand up, Barataria/San Juan?

**Mr. Hosein:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed.

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Deputy Chair. Can the Minister of Youth Development and National Service advise this honourable meeting how persons are made aware of when short-term employment are required in the Ministry so that persons can apply for these specific jobs?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** Mr. Chairman, it is the same question but I will endeavour to add that the established procedures of the public service is utilized in the recruitment of these very short-term positions and therefore the human resource departments at the various Ministries would utilize the database of information available to them in the recruitment of these very short-term positions and that is my final answer to that question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item—on the same?

**Mr. Hosein:** Yes. Can the Minister then advise this House what is this established public service practice in order to make persons aware of the vacancies with respect to short-term employment?

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, they are dragging this simple item out. I am begging you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Hosein:** It is \$2.8 million.

**Mr. Imbert:** Dragging on and on with the same thing.

**Mr. Hosein:** 2.8 million.

**Mr. Ratiram:** People out of work, people looking for jobs.

**Mr. Hosein:** How are they made aware?

**Mr. Chairman:** Members, listen, we have been going Government, Opposition on

both instances, left and right, so again, Mr. Minister, provide what information can be provided in writing and we are moving on. Member for Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes, please. Line Item 08 under Goods and Services, Rent and Lease, can the Minister provide in writing for us the amount, the buildings leased and who are the landlords please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, what page are you on?

**Mr. Ram:** So we were on page previously 406, 02, Goods and Services, General Administration, it was brought forward so I am just taking you back within the same block 08.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, Item 002, Co-operatives, page 406 to 407. No, your colleague Couva North went back to that particular line Item. We are now Item 002, Co-operatives.

**Mr. Ram:** Right, so we are still within the same block. We were discussing line Item 22, I am just discussing line Item 08 within the same block before you moved on. So Goods and Services, General Administration straddles two pages 405 and 406, we were now discussing within that line Item 22.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right, I am going to allow one more question there, proceed and then we are moving on back to Co-operatives. Proceed.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you very much. Which is the buildings, the amount we pay and the landlords please in writing. Can the Minister provide that information?

**4.15 p.m.**

**Hon. Cummings:** We can provide the information.

**Mr. Chairman:** Line Item 002: Cooperatives, pages 406 to 407.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chairman, before you move. My hand—Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Couva North, I am moving on.

**Mr. Ratiram:** There is another line Item.

**Mr. Chairman:** No. Couva North, I am moving on to this particular line Item. I allowed you all to go back. We are going forward.

**Mr. Ratiram:** I am not asking to go back, Chair, but I am on the same block before we move on another line Item on the same block.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, but we had already moved on, Member.

**Mr. Ratiram:** No Chair, the Minister now finish answer and you are aware my hand was up.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed, proceed.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Moving on with line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, may I ask for a ruling?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the Minister of Finance not interrupt please? Line Item 66.

**Mr. Imbert:** May I ask for a ruling? Is it the intention of the Chair to allow Members to go back to Heads already dealt with?

**Mr. Chairman:** Not necessarily, Mr. Minister, but I am giving him the opportunity on this occasion. Proceed, Member for Couva.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We have not asked any Item on 002. We are dealing with 001.

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed, Member.

**Mr. Ratiram:** 02: Goods and Services; line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and Other Functions. Under this line Item the estimated budget for 2021 was 250,000. However, the Ministry spent four times that amount. The Ministry revised estimate was 1 million. Can the hon. Minister advise why such a significant



overspending in this line Item?

**Hon. Cummings:** Mr. Chairman, this sum will include all of the various training and seminars and conferences held by the Ministry during this period, including the annual youth awards.

**Mr. Ratiram:**—million dollars. Can the hon. Minister provide us with a breakdown of how this million dollars was spent, in writing?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yes.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 003: Friendly Societies, page 407. Item 004: Youth Centers, page 408. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, hon. Chair. To the Minister, Item 43: Security Services. In 2021, the Estimate for security service for this line Item was 1,430,000. The Revised Estimate was 2,390,000, a significant overspending of 960,000. Can the Minister advise if there is any new contracts or why this additional spending?

**Hon. Cummings:** This would cover additional facilities that would have been commissioned during the period.

**Mr. Ratiram:** And for this financial year, are we still providing security for those new facilities?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** Some of the facilities have moved into a state of refurbishment, so that they will come back on the following fiscal.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the hon. Minister provide a detail of this \$2.39 million spent behind security services in writing?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 005: Youth Affairs, pages 408, 409. Proceed, Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I will refer the Minister's attention to line Item 17 for Training in Youth Affairs. The estimate figure of 100,000 in training was there. No moneys were utilized. Can the Minister kindly explain why?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** Mr. Chairman, this is an allocation to cover external training and because of COVID restrictions, no such training took place.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 006: National Youth Development and Apprenticeship. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration, page 410. I recognize the Member for Couva North again.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chairman, you moved from 005: Youth Affairs into the following and you left out 06: National Youth Development and Apprentice Centres, 006.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, I did not. I identified it.

**Mr. Ratiram:** So you were dealing with two Items at once? Because you did not call 006.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, Member, I got no acknowledgement from none of the Members, so I moved on.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Well, I did not hear you call it, Sir, with all due respect. If I may—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, how long will this time wasting be allowed to continue?

**Mr. Chairman:** Member, I called it.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Okay, I am guided by you, Chair. If you said you did, I am guided by you but I did not hear you.

**Mr. Hosein:** Mr. Chair, I keep hearing the Minister say that this is a time-wasting exercise. I take umbrage to that statement because this where the Government has

to account for the expenditure of the taxpayers' dollars.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are free to take umbrage.

**Mr. Hosein:** The Minister cannot say this is a—

**Mr. Imbert:** I am seeking a ruling from the Chair.

**Mr. Hosein:**—time-wasting exercise.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am seeking a ruling from the Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, Members, please. Okay, Member for Couva North. So you are saying on Item 06: National Youth Development Apprenticeship.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes. Thank you, Chair. I would like to ask the Minister also under National Youth Development and Apprentice Center, line Item 17: Training, 100,000 was allocated for training for those centers and none was utilized. Can the hon. Minister identify why?

**Hon. Cummings:** Mr. Chairman, this is to cover stipend for the trainees, and for this period there was no intake to pay any stipends to.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you. Also under Short-Term Employment, 100,000 was budgeted for Short-Term Employment during 2021, however the Revised Estimate, again no moneys were utilized. Can the hon. Minister advise why?

**Mr. Chairman:** 22, right?

**Hon. Cummings:** 22. The same answer applies for line Items 22, 23, 28, 40, 43, 57, 58 and 66.

**Mr. Chairman:** I recognize the Member for Moruga/Tableland.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Thank you, Chair. The Minister would have answered the question when he addressed with regard to 43. But could we ask, through you, Chair, with regard to the status of the centres and when they would be on board?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, but which line Item, Member?

**Ms. Benjamin:** I was going to ask a question with regard to security and I guess he addressed it when he addressed all the rest of line Items with regard to it being utilized within that fiscal period and he would explain with regard to the estimates.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, but Member, you still have to give me a line Item so I can be specific when I refer your question or your comment to the Minister.

**Ms. Benjamin:** All right. So my question is with regard to the fiscal period 2021, most of the finances were not utilized. So I am just asking with regard to the status of the centres.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, could I get a ruling? It must be a line Item, as far as I know. There must be a specific line Item, not a catch-all, all the Items. Could I get a ruling on that please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Fair enough. Member, you must identify the particular page and line Item. Even though you can make a general statement, once you are asking a question, to get an answer, you must identify the particular line Item.

**Ms. Benjamin:** I am so guided, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** What you can do is choose one of the line Items and specify your question with regard to that.

**Ms. Benjamin:** I am so guided, Chair. With regard to the security services, in 2021, it had an allocation. Then we see when it was revised nothing was spent. Then we have an estimate of 513,000. So with regard to the facility I am asking: Why nothing was utilized with regard to—with regard to the security services. So, if I could get a status of the centres.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** Mr. Deputy Chair, I did answer that question before but I will cooperate. The centers, as I said, did not have an intake for that period and

therefore that is why those Items you do not see any expenditure reflected. The Government, as a policy position, has taken a decision to resuscitate all of these centres and we expect that our new—during this fiscal we will have an intake of students at these facilities.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, I need to recognize Caroni Central first.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you. Same line Item, hon. Minister, 43. No amount of money was spent in the 2021 Revised Estimates. Is it that these centres were left unmanned for the entire year? That is my question.

**Hon. Cummings:** No.

**Mr. Ram:** So, how much was spent on security service if they were manned security services?

**Hon. Cummings:** There are daily-paid watchmen attached to all of these facilities and it would not be reflected here because they are daily-paid and that was accounted for earlier on already.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Couva North, still have a question?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Yes. Following up from the Minister's response to my colleague from Moruga, if the hon. Minister can advise us in terms of the policy decision that he spoke about, why no moneys were spent and it is the new policy now to reactivate this programme for the line Items 15 to 66, that he called out indicating that no moneys were utilized because it was a policy decision. Can the hon. Minister provide us with a copy of the policy decision, when that policy decision was implemented and when it was revised?

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** I am a bit lost by the question but I did indicate that we did not have an intake in the last period and that is the reason for the no expenditure for

that period and that the Government has decided to resuscitate these centres and facilitate an intake during this fiscal. That is the policy position.

**Mr. Ratiram:** So what I am asking the hon. Minister for is the policy position for no intake. Because the Government came to this House, presented a budget last year. We debated that budget and we agreed on a certain spending. However, this spending was not utilized.

**Hon. Cummings:** Chairman.

**Mr. Ratiram:** The Government—

**Hon. Cummings:** Chairman.

**Mr. Ratiram:** If I may finish please.

**Mr. Chairman:** One second, one sec.

**Mr. Ratiram:** The Government took a policy position for no intake during the fiscal term and did not utilize the funds. The Minister is now saying that they have revised that policy position and intend to utilize funds for the upcoming financial term. All I am asking is for a copy of the policy decision that took place for it to not have any intake during the last financial year and the amendment to that policy position in writing when those decisions were taken.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, can that be provided?

**Hon. Cummings:** No, Deputy Chair. The position of no intake, these programmes are residential in nature. As a result of a worldwide pandemic associated with COVID-19, there was no intake for that period. We anticipate that as long as the Government vaccination programme improves, we will be able to facilitate an intake to these residential programmes and therefore have an intake in this fiscal.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chair, if I may at this—

**Mr. Chairman:** Is it on the same line Item, Member?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chair, well we are dealing with multiple line Items here but what we are dealing with is the policy position by the administration and what I am asking—

**Mr. Chairman:** The Minister has made it clear—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on, Minister of Finance. The Minister has made it clear it cannot be provided. You have an alternate to that answer?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Well, if the policy position is that there is not document relating to the policy position—

**Mr. Imbert:** Chairman, I would like a ruling please.

**Mr. Ratiram:**—that cannot be provided—

**Mr. Imbert:** May I have a ruling please?

**Mr. Chairman:** One second, Mr. Minister, one second.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can I get from the Minister just the date when the decision was taken, whether it was by Cabinet or the Minister to suspend the programme? The date that decision had taken place to suspend the programme, who took that decision and the date the position was taken to reactivate the programme and who took that decision; whether it was the Minister that took the decision or Cabinet took the decision.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Ratiram:** But there must be some procedure and some sanity in how we go about doing things. We cannot just do things in a wishy-washy manner without any specific guidelines.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Before I go to the Minister, Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, I have been participating in Finance Committees now for 30 years. It is established procedure that delving into matters of policy is not allowed in the Standing Finance Committee. We are dealing with the Estimates. Allocations, that is it. Going on deeply into policy, as the Member wants, is completely ultra vires and out of order. I would like a ruling on that please.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chair, it was the Minister who said it is a policy position.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, I have asked. Why does he keep interrupting? I have asked you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. And again, I will uphold the question that you are asking and we are going to no move. All right? We are going to move on. The Minister said it cannot be provided. The Minister of Finance made clarity with regard to the policy statement and we are going to move on at this time.

**4.30 p.m.**

**Mr. Ratiram:** I am not asking for the policy, I am asking for the date and I am asking who made the decision? Simple as that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Those are not matters for this Committee.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Planning and Development.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, just to remind and just to follow up on what the Minister of Finance said, when the Chairman set the table for us to start the Standing Finance Committee, that was one of the things that was said, that policy is not part and parcel of the—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chair, what is the line Item—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Excuse me—

**Mr. Ratiram:**—the Minister of Planning and Development is referring to?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** May I be allowed to speak?



**Mr. Chairman:** Member for—Member for Couva North, Minister of Planning is on the floor at this time.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Exactly.

**Mr. Ratiram:** On what line Item? I would like to follow what she is—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** I am not on a line Item. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Listen, Member. Minister of Planning—Minister of Planning and Development, address the Chair. Member for Couva North, the Minister of Planning and Development has my eye at this time.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, as I said, when we sat here on Saturday and set the table for this Standing Finance Committee—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Chair, I want to object.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** You cannot object.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Why do we need line Items in the Opposition but the Members of the Government do not need line Items? Can we have a ruling on this? If there are line Items to be referred it should go across the board. It cannot be one rule for the Opposition and another rule for the Government. [*Desk thumping*] This is wrong.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Couva North. Member for Couva North, I still do not recognize you. Proceed, Minister of Planning and Development.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Mr. Deputy Chairman, if the Members opposite would even read their Standing Orders [*Desk thumping*] they would understand what is taking place here. As I was saying, Mr. Deputy Chairman—[*Interruption*] you “doh” know any so “yuh cyah” refer to them. First of all, read Standing Order 8.

**Mr. Chairman:** Address the Chair please.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Mr. Deputy Chair—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much. May I be allowed to finish?  
[*Crosstalk*] May I be allowed to finish? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Couva South, hold on. Minister of Planning and Development, complete.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** I will repeat. Mr. Deputy Chairman, when the Chairman set the table for this Standing Finance Committee, one of the rules was very clear, that issues of policy are not part and parcel of this Committee's remit. Mr. Chairman, therefore, if the Member wants information on policy, it cannot be done through this Committee. And, Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask that we move on from this because the Member obviously is asking a question on policy, and this is not the remit of the Committee. If he could go to a line Item and ask a question that does not refer to policy, then the Committee can hear him.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. Hon. Members.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Mr. Chair, Mr. Chair—

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, Couva North, hold on. Hon. Members, thank you, Minister of Planning and Development for that input. And I now go to Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 410. Item 001: General Administration. Caroni Central, you have a question there?

**Mr. Ram:** Yes, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sure.

**Mr. Ram:** Can the Minister indicate what other Minor Equipment is due to be aboard this financial year which will result in an increase in \$76,100 please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, you with us?

**Hon. Cummings:** Mr. Deputy Chair, the replacement of outdated equipment such

as power washers, brush cutters, and vacuum cleaners.

**Mr. Chairman:** Caroni Central, you have a supplemental?

**Mr. Ram:** Not supplemental, but I am trying to follow you here. We are still on 001: General Administration. I want to move to 004, which is Youth Centres.

**Mr. Chairman:** Just now, no. Hold on. We are on page 410, we are on Item 001: General Administration. That is where we are at this time. Until I call the other line Item then we will be able to move on. So, Member for Couva North, are you on this line Item? Right. So we now go to Item 002: Co-operatives, page 410. Item 003: Friendly Societies; Item 004: Youth Centres. Member for Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes, please. 01: Vehicles for Youth Centres. Can the Minister provide a breakdown in vehicles earmarked to be purchased and/or leased with respect to this line Item: 01?

**Hon. Cummings:** Mr. Chair, that is an allocation to purchase two mini-buses for two of our youth development centres at Los Bajos and St. James.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, under your Furniture and Furnishings, you intend to spend any of this allocation on the California Youth Facility?

**Mr. Chairman:** Line Item, Member?

**Hon. Cummings:** This would be on an as required basis and would cover for the six development centres operated by the Ministry, of which California is one.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 005: Youth Affairs; Item 006: National Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies. You are all right there? Okay. Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Item 0—where are you, Chaguanas East?

**Ms. Mohit:** Item 005.

**Mr. Chairman:** 005: Non-Profit Institutions.

**Ms. Mohit:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** And we are on page 412.

**Ms. Mohit:** Yes. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Proceed.

**Ms. Mohit:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. 005, 03, the RAPP programme. Can the Minister indicate how many youths and retirees are involved in this programme at present? Or during the last fiscal year?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** This is one programme that continued during the fiscal. I will be most willing to provide the details requested by the Member which is not available right now.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Hosein:** Yes. Thank you very much, Deputy Chair. I am on Item 01: Contribution to Non-Profit Institutions Youth Organisations. I saw that there has been a spend of about \$191,000 there for the fiscal year. Can the Minister please provide us with the names of these organizations, inclusive of the amount of money that was allocated to them for that fiscal year?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Will be provided.

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Couva North. Okay, no. Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes please, at this same line Item 05: Transition Homes. Can the Minister give a breakdown of the various purposes of these transitional homes?

**Hon. Cummings:** Transitional homes have a sole purpose of transitioning young persons who would come from community residences, and what we would previously call orphan homes, and that is the purpose of the transition home, to train them and equip them for entry into normal or regular life.

**Mr. Ram:** And just for my edification please, how will the Ministry go about choosing these individuals to stay at these homes?

**Hon. Cummings:** The Ministry has little to do in terms of choosing. As you attain the age of 18 years, if you are a resident at a community home and you get to 18 before you no longer can stay at the community home, so the next position to graduate to will be the transition home.

**Mr. Chairman:** I recognize the Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Following the same line Item 05, would the Minister be able to provide a list of these homes and the individual allocation to each home?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister?

**Hon. Cummings:** There is the transition home at St. Madeleine and the Government intends to have another transition home during this fiscal.

**Mr. Tancoo:** So is it then, Minister, that there is only one transition home at this point?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 007: Households, page 412. I will recognize Member for Oropouche West first.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Chairman. I note under Item 07: Civilian Conservation Corps, that we have a \$2 million increase in the allocation. Can the Minister indicate whether this reflects an increased intake of members?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yes. The intention is to increase the intake in the programme.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I refer the Minister's attention to line 04: National Mentorship Programme. This was budgeted at \$3.34 million for 2021, however none was utilized. Can the Minister advise why? Is it a policy position to shut down the programme? If that is so, what date?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** There is no intention to shut down the programme. This programme would have suffered the same fate as the YDAC which because of the situation with COVID, we did not implement during this fiscal.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 009: Other Transfers, page 413. Couva North, you have my attention.

**Mr. Ratiram:** No, it was on the previous block but you have moved on Chair, so I will wait.

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

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. To the hon. Minister, this is regarding line Item 02: the GAPP Programme. How many persons are currently enrolled in this programme, Sir?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** I do not have the number with me readily available but will certainly provide it to you.

**Dr. Ragbir:** And the supplemental is that, are there any changes expected in 2022 during this programme, the GAPP programme?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Cummings:** There would be no significant changes to the programme during

this fiscal.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Chaguanas East.

**Ms. Mohit:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. To the Minister, Minister, can you give some clarity as per if there are any major differences between the GAPP and RAPP programmes?

**Hon. Cummings:** The RAPP programme is a programme designed for retirees to mentor young students in terms of homework centres and assistance with programmes such as that. While the GAPP is a programme that attaches young persons to senior citizens to assist them with care and those kinds of issues, so that we can bridge that gap and strengthen the relationship between our young population and elderly persons.

**Mr. Chairman:** I recognize the Member for Couva South, and then I will go to Oropouche West. Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you. Minister, with respect to the GAPP programme, I do not know if you are in a position to tell this meeting at this point how many persons are on the waiting list as it relates to seeking this particular service?

**Hon. Cummings:** I do not have the information available now, but I will provide it.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And I know that the issue of the waiting time for the processing of the applications sometimes takes two, three, four, five months and so on. I will endeavor or ask of you to see if that could be reduced. And in addition to that, I have had some issues in the constituency where persons over 90 years and so on, who really need this from an elderly support point of view, it has been pulled back from the respective families. And if you could look at that in terms of reviewing

the focus of the programme.

**Hon. Cummings:** Our digitization efforts are to strengthen across the Government, services and delivery. It will be of course given significant attention with the introduction of the new Ministry of digitization, and I expect some of the issues you raised there will be addressed.

**4.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** I now recognize Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Line Item 01: National Entrepreneurship Development Company. I note that 100 per cent increase between the Estimate of 2021 and the Estimate of 2022. Can the Minister indicate what would have caused this drastic increase in the allocation under this Head?

**Hon. Cummings:** The increase in the loan portfolio to assist entrepreneurs and all of this is tied to a Road Map to Recovery Report as we seek to assist budding and—businesses in their recovery efforts.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Oropouche West, supplemental or—

**Mr. Tancoo:** No, different Head.

**Mr. Chairman:** You okay?

**Mr. Tancoo:** No, one more question, Sir.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, proceed.

**Mr. Tancoo:** But it is not a supplemental. It is with regard to line Item 03: Community Recovery Programme. In 2021, we estimated \$7.7 million to be spent under this very important Head. Only 690,000 was actually spent. But this year, even though we recognize the importance in 2021 and allocated 7.7. This year, we are only allocating \$1 million. Can the Minister indicate why is it that this Community Recovery Programme no longer is as attractive as it was in 2021?



**Hon. Cummings:** Chair, many of the recommendations of the Community Recovery Programme have been taken up by several other Ministries, including the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. And therefore, the work of the recovery committee is well covered.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Chairman:** Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much. Minister, with respect to the National Entrepreneurship Development Company, could you or are you in a position to inform the meeting about the current liabilities of this particular entity from a loan portfolio point of view?

**Hon. Cummings:** Are you speaking about outstanding loans? We do not have that information available now. And insofar as it relates to individuals, we will not be able to provide that. If you are asking for other information—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No, I am not asking for the names of persons and so on, in terms of how many are in, what you would call a bad situation and negative point of view, and what are you doing to try to recover the liabilities and so on?

**Hon. Cummings:** The efforts of debt collection are very robust and the NEDCO continues to work along with all their clients to make sure that there are limited issues in relation to delinquency.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So, based on the aggressive debt collection policy or initiative, you will provide the information on the number of bad debtors and so on?

**Hon. Cummings:** We will provide the information that we can.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme—different book—Consolidated Fund, page 172.

[MRS. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

**Madam Chairman:** Item 003. Item 004. Item—yes, Member for Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Yes, please. 004. I am looking at they are all taken together on projects numbers 011 to 025. Can the Minister provide to us in writing the locations, if they have been identified, where these new projects will take place?

**Hon. Cummings:** Yes.

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 002: Implementation of the National Youth Policy and allocation of \$1 million dollars was made towards that in 2021 for the implementation of the National Youth Policy. However, no money was expended. Can the hon. Minister advise why?

**Hon. Cummings:** Can the Member indicate what Item he is on, and what page?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Line Item 002.

**Madam Chairman:** Page 173.

**Hon. Cummings:** 173.

**Madam Chairman:** There is D. Youth Development and the Item right beneath that.

**Hon. Cummings:** Could you repeat the question, please?

**Mr. Ratiram:** Can the hon. Minister advise why the Revised Estimate is nil for this \$1 million that was allocated for this line Item?

**Hon. Cummings:** “Um-hum”. The youth policy has been completed and it is just for printing and dissemination.

**Mr. Ratiram:** So nothing took place for the entire fiscal term of 2021 with respect to this, and this project has been shelved for 2022?

**Hon. Cummings:** The youth policy was approved very early in the fiscal and it is now just to package and disseminate.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Okay. Moving on to line Item 008: Establishment of a Farm School – Moruga, 1 million was allocated for this project in 2021. However, the Revised Estimate is nil. Can the Minister advise why no moneys were utilized here?

**Hon. Cummings:** We are currently at the stage of consultations with the community for this project and that is where we are with the Moruga Farm School.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Can you also consider including my colleague, the MP for Moruga, in the hosting of those consultations?

**Hon. Cummings:** I remember seeing—I remember seeing the MP for—

**Madam Chairman:** Member—

**Hon. Cummings:** Sorry.

**Madam Chairman:**—that is not a question for here. Member for Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Thank you again, Madam Chair. Line Item 004: Refurbishment of the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Center, I see it is a cost of \$60 million. Can the Minister indicate which centers will be upgraded or refurbished? Whether this amount of spend will complete these projects and whether those projects are earmarked to be completed in this financial year? So, there are three things. If you want, I can go one at a time.

**Hon. Cummings:** The centers located at Chatham, Persto Praesto and El Dorado will be refurbished during this fiscal and this amount represents the estimated expenditure to be incurred during this fiscal.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Moruga.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 005: Youth Social Programmes, an Estimate of 1 million in 2021, Revised is \$2,730. I see that

the Minister has estimated \$2 million. Could the Minister provide us with a listing of what these social programmes entail?

**Hon. Cummings:** These programmes entail mental health programme, adolescent intervention programme, World AIDS Day, among other similar programmes organized by the Ministry.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, Member for Moruga/Tableland.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Madam Chair, Item 007: Construction of Youth Development Apprenticeship Centers. Could the Minister indicate the location of the centers; these new centers that are to be constructed?

**Hon. Cummings:** The locations would be Wallerfield and Chaguaramas.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, Member for Moruga/Tableland.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I know my colleague will have answered with regard to line Item 008 but I see in fiscal 2022, we have 15 million allocated. Could the Minister provide in writing a breakdown as to how this would be disposed of—how it would be spent in the community?

**Hon. Cummings:** That sum is the sum allocated towards the design and start of construction for the Moruga Farm School.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Is the allocation in my—[*Inaudible*]—at the moment?

**Hon. Cummings:** That is specifically for the Moruga Farm School which will be in Moruga.

**Ms. Benjamin:** I know it will be in Moruga but what part of the community? Is there a specific street that has been allocated.

**Hon. Cummings:** Well, the consultation is still ongoing. As you know, you would have been part of the first consultation and as soon as the consultation is completed, we will decide and determine the exact location.

**Ms. Benjamin:** Thank you, Minister, so guided.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 003, there is an allocation of \$891,000, this is a new project. But I note in the name of the project Institutional Strengthening of Societies Registered under the Friendly Societies Act 2021 – 2022 and Liquidation and Distribution of Assets for Closed Societies. This does not appear to be an expenditure item. Certainly, liquidation distribution of assets should not be considered as a cost item, it seems to be more of a revenue generating item. Can the Minister provide some clarity with regards to that?

**Hon. Cummings:** The Item speaks to any expense that would be incurred in the institutional strengthening of existing societies and the disposal of assets. The disposal of assets will involve a procedure and, therefore, whatever costs associated with that procedure would fall under this Item,

**Mr. Tancoo:** Can the Minister—just as a follow up, Madam. Can the Minister then indicate what would happen to funds generated out of the sale of these assets? Would they go to the Consolidated Fund or would it go to a Sub-Head somewhere?

**Hon. Cummings:** By law, all funds from the disposal of these assets are distributed to the existing members of the society.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 81 ordered to stand part of the Schedule*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Permanent Secretary and the representatives of your Ministry.

**Hon. Cummings:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** We now go on to Head 06: Service Commissions and for ease of reference Members, we are now going to—we will start at Recurrent Expenditure and that is on page 29 of the relevant book. And we will also look at the Development Programme which will be on page 9 of the relevant book.

*Head 06: Service Commissions \$7,488,900.*

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

**Hon. West:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Service Commissions Department, as the Secretariat for the four independent Commissions, is a key part named this country's transformation agenda as articulated in *Vision 2030* National Development Strategy and the Road Map for Trinidad and Tobago post-COVID-19 recovery. These two national documents establish the context and framework for the functions and operations of public administration in the country. These documents, coupled with the SCD's vision, mission and core values and the findings from the institutional strengthening exercise, have established a pathway for the SCD to embark on a comprehensive transformational strategy. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensifies the need to improve service delivery throughout the public service, through the enhanced use of information and communication technology. The restricted budgetary constraints have mandated SCD to adopt various and lean means to ensure business transformation and to execute core business functions.

**5.00 p.m.**

Therefore the SCD's transformational strategy, inclusive of a digital transformation, will allow for the management of document records with appropriate security policies, data-driven decision making and transparency, cost-efficiency, standardization of processes across all four commissions and a more client-centric environment focusing on ease of services to the public via technology, reduced time frames for output, improved communication channels and enhanced stakeholder relationships.

There is a need for improved performance at public institutions, through not only the process, but human capital. Inherent in this is also the imperative to build trust and confidence in stakeholders and to achieve meaningful results in the shortest possible time.

The SCD's transformation agenda which is aligned to the strategic vision of the four service commissions is essential to the development of a suitably structured and well-staffed competent public service, which is able to support the necessities of national development. Madam Chair, me and my team are happy to address any questions that may arise.

*Question proposed:* That Head 06 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$70,488,900 for Head 06: Service Commissions 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 Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister,

taking into consideration that you have an allocation of \$11,881,500 as it relates to salaries and cost of living for 2022, and your Minister of Finance has indicated that salary negotiations are to begin or to commence in 2022 for the backlog of public sector wage negotiations, could you inform this meeting whether the Personnel Department or the Office of the Chief Personnel Officer has the capacity and manpower as it relates to dealing with the backlog?

**Madam Chairman:** So before I invite the Minister to answer, Member for Couva South, maybe you could assist us in letting us know exactly what Item you are referring to.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Sorry, sorry. I jumped it a bit.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. All right. So do you need an opportunity to recalibrate? I will take somebody else.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yeah, yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** So, I guess we can go on, because your question is not under General Administration, 01. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Tobago services; Item 003: Public Service Commission; Item 004: Teaching Service Commission; Item 005: Judicial and Legal Service Commission; Item 006: Police Service Commission. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And, Madam Chair, we all know with respect to the issues relating to the commissioner, the appointment of a Commissioner of Police—

**Madam Chairman:** What line Item are you under? We are on page 32.

**Mr. Hosein:** I am on 28: Other Contracted Services, and I am wondering whether or not this allocation will be enough for the Police Service Commission to do its



work in terms of the recruitment exercise for creating the Merit List in order for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. It is a very small allocation of \$419,000.

**Madam Chairman:** It is an allocation of how much, 200?

**Mr. Hosein:** 419,000.

**Madam Chairman:** Oh, yes.

**Hon. West:** Madam Chair, can I proceed?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Hon. West:** My understanding of your question is, do we think that this allocation is adequate? Yes, we do.

**Mr. Hosein:** In terms of the hiring of external firms for the purposes of evaluating the candidates in order to create the merit list for the appointment of the Commissioner, because in the past we know that this can be a very expensive exercise.

**Hon. West:** The legislation has been amended to make it no longer compulsory for the commission to engage external contractors to treat with this. So, based on that and the commission's proposed approach, it is of the belief that this allocation is adequate.

**Mr. Hosein:** Minister, through you, of course Chair, the fact that we do not have a Police Service Commission currently, if additional moneys are requested, if the new commission so determines or so decides to hire an external firm, can you give a commitment that they will be receiving the funding for that exercise?

**Madam Chairman:** I am not sure you understood the response that the Minister gave regarding external firms.

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Chair, if I may?

**Madam Chairman:** I am not sure you understood the response, so if you would

like to ask another question, I will allow that.

**Mr. Hosein:** Yes please. Because what I am asking is that the Minister said it is no longer compulsory.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, I heard what was said. I ask you if you wish to ask another question.

**Mr. Hosein:** I am asking whether or not if it is not compulsory, and if the new commission do determine whether or not a firm should be hired, if they would be given the additional allocation.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, I think the first question you asked the Minister was whether this would be sufficient for the purpose and that was answered. You have another question?

**Mr. Hosein:** No please, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09—this is in a different book—Consolidated Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Could the Minister, under 06: General Public Services and we go further down, Administrative Services, 034. In relation to the conduct of a job evaluation classification exercise in respect of the Prison Services of Trinidad and Tobago. The allocation is 3.—

**Hon. West:** Madam Chair, the Member is looking at the Personnel Department's details rather than the Service Commissions' details.

**Madam Chairman:** And I think I assisted by giving you the page number.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 06 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you Minister, thank you PS and your other members of your staff.

We now go on to Head 17: Personnel Department, and we are starting at page 78 of the book that deals with recurrent expenditure, and we will also look at the *Draft Estimates for Development Programme*. We will be starting there at page 45. Couva South?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** We are on the same page?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Good, thank you.

*Head 17: Personnel Department, \$55,947,000.*

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

**Hon. West:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Personnel Department is responsible for determining and advising on pay and terms and conditions of employment for employees of the public service, estimated to be around 90,000 workers. The department determines through consultation and negotiations with the appropriate recognized majority unions and associations, the terms and conditions of service for persons in the Civil Service, statutory authorities, subject to the Statutory Authorities Act, the Teaching Service, the Police Service, the Fire Service and the Prisons Service.

The Department is also responsible for the determination of terms and conditions of employment for members of the defence force, daily-rated workers,

contract employees and the provision of secretariat services and advising the Salaries Review Commission on the terms and conditions of employment of officeholders within its purview, as well as providing secretariat services to the Human Resource Advisory Committee, a sub-committee of Cabinet for which the Department provides recommendations and advice to treat with organizations in the state sector. The Department is also required to advise on a wide range of HR issues in the public service, including, matters relating to industrial relations. These include matters before the Industrial Court, grievances and disputes.

Currently, the Department is engaged in two job evaluation exercises; one is for officeholders within the purview of the Salaries Review Commission and one for officers within the Civil Service Tobago House of Assembly and Statutory Authorities subject to the Statutory Authorities Act. The leadership of the Department through the implementation of its strategic plan 2018 to 2020 continues to strengthen the organization to improve the timeliness and quality of service delivery to all its stakeholders. I thank you, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister.

*Question proposed:* That Head 17 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$55,947,000 for Head 17: Personnel Department is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Princes Town. Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 16: Contract

Employment. To the hon. Minister. On the last—

**Madam Chairman:** We are at page 78.

**Mr. Padarath:** 78?

**Madam Chairman:** 78.

**Mr. Padarath:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** And you are?

**Mr. Padarath:** On page 78, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, welcome and I know it might be a bit late in the day for all of us. We are at Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001.

**Mr. Padarath:** Or I skipped ahead. Sorry, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. I will give you an opportunity to find your way with us. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, in relation to an earlier issue I had raised, I will return to it. With respect to your allocation of \$11.9 million, approximately, in relation to salaries and cost of living, I ask the question in the context of, do you have an adequate complement of staff taking into consideration the commitment given by the Minister of Finance as it relates to commence negotiations for outstanding collective agreements in the public sector for 2022?

**Hon. West:** As with all Ministries within the Government, we do have some vacancies and we would like to get them filled, but we are committed to getting the work done. We have been waiting on the instructions from the Minister of Finance with respect to this matter. So the CPO is ready to proceed.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** So the CPO has its full complement of?

**Hon. West:** I just indicated there are vacancies—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** There are vacancies—

**Hon. West:**—but the CPO will put in the necessary effort that is required to get the work done.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** All right. And could you tell us—would you be in a position to tell us how many negotiations are there outstanding for the office of the Chief Personnel Officer to address in 2022?

**5.15 p.m.**

**Hon. West:** I am unable to say that at this time.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Would you commit to collaborating with the Minister of Finance as it relates to ensuring that this meeting gets that list and for what periods that are outstanding? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I have already told the Member for Couva South that the Minister of Public Administration was not here, that I will present a comprehensive list of all outstanding collective agreements in the public sector. So he is being mischievous.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am not being mischievous; I just want you to put—

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So let us go on, please. Member for Couva North.

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—Minister—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva North. Member for Couva South, I would like to invite you and the Minister of Finance to have a little discussion at the back of the dais. Yes.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister: Line Item 05: Government Contribution to NIS, the actual spend for this line Item in 2020 was 2.5 million however the Estimate and the Revised Estimate was in the vicinity of 800,000—856,000. As in terms of the Revised Estimate, can the hon. Minister

advise the significant difference in the actual spend of 2020 and the Revised Estimates of 2021?

**Hon. West:** With respect to this matter there were persons who were acting in higher positions and therefore their NIS contributions were higher than they otherwise would be.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, and I think I could now invite Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a similar question that the Member for Couva South raised under 001. With respect to line Item 16: Contract Employment, Minister, the question in terms of the announcements made by the hon. Minister of Finance in his budget statement regarding outstanding wage negotiations, under line Item 16: Contract Employment, there does not seem to be any shift, is there a full complement of staff at the Personnel Department at this point in time?

**Hon. West:** Madam Chair, I think I already answered that question and the answer is, no. There is not a full complement. There are vacancies within the division.

**Mr. Padarath:** Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to identify these vacancies?

**Hon. West:** Madam Chair, can I give that—their total number of contract staff, 70; total number of establishment staff, 186. There is a ratio of 70 over 186; 38 per cent of the positions are vacant.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are at page 45. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund; Item 005:

Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you. Minister, under 034: Conduct of a Job Evaluation/Classification Exercise in respect of the Prison Services of Trinidad and Tobago, has this had the sign-off and agreement of the Prison Officers' Association?

**Hon. West:** The job evaluation is currently in process and we are working with the unions as we go through the process in respect of all the stages. So there is no requirement at this point for a sign-off because it is not completed.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** All right. Well, I mean, I do not want to get into the nitty-gritty of it but sometimes in terms of comparators and the parameters and so on you have to sign a memorandum of understanding as you go forward, has this been done?

**Hon. West:** Well, as I said, we are working closely with the trade unions, the relevant trade unions. I have seen a draft memorandum of understanding. I cannot let you know whether that has been executed.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** All right. And that applies to also the Civil Service too, the public service?

**Hon. West:** Correct.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And with respect to—okay. All right. Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 17 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, PS, and other technocrats. Head 01: President. And for the guidance of Members, in the Recurrent Expenditure, Draft Estimates, we will be at page 1.

*Head 01: President, \$16,679,970.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief



opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you. The President of the Republic—the Office of the President of the Republic provides administrative support to Her Excellency the President. The various Items of expenditure provide allocations for Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and other Items of expenditure, all designed to support the projects and programmes and responsibilities of the Office of the President.

Her Excellency has the responsibility for the appointment of a number of independent commissions and also for the management, the overall supervision and management, of 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 \$16,679,970 for Head 01: 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. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, on line Item 23 which is found on page 2, Fees, can the Minister indicate whether or not this Fees here that we are seeing, this figure, \$113,108 spent in the fiscal year 2021, whether that would have encapsulated fees relating to external counsel—advice from external counsel to the Office of the President?

**Mr. Imbert:** Correct me if I am not mistaken, you said 108 but it is 113. Are you

on the correct line Item?

**Mr. Hosein:** I am looking at fiscal year 2021, Minister, the Revised Estimate.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, 113,108.

**Mr. Hosein:** Yeah, 113,108.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. That is for fees for membership in various websites and for legal fees if required.

**Mr. Hosein:** Minister, can you indicate or advise this meeting whether or not Her Excellency's office would have sought legal advice for the last fiscal year? And if so, how much of this 113,000 was spent on legal fees?

**Mr. Imbert:** I do not have that information at hand but that can be got for you.

**Mr. Hosein:** That can?

**Madam Chairman:** Be obtained for you.

**Mr. Hosein:** I appreciate it. Line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions, I see there is a sum of \$1.2 million being allocated for fiscal 2022, is this line Item also inclusive of Her Excellency hosting the hon. Prime Minister for meetings to keep Her Excellency up-to-date with regard to the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. Imbert:** Absolutely not and that should be obvious.

**Mr. Hosein:** It does not include?

**Hon. Imbert:** It does not. It says Conferences, Seminars—

**Mr. Hosein:** It does not include meetings on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August?

**Hon. Imbert:**—and other Functions.

**Mr. Hosein:** Okay. No meetings on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August?

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

**Hon. Imbert:** Conferences, Seminars and other Functions.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, under 16: Contract Employment, there is an allocation of 2.—well, approximately \$2.8 million, could we get a breakdown of how many contract officers and their representative classification, job descriptions at the Office of the President?

**Hon. Imbert:** They have 10 contract officers; one short-term person. One person on a short-term contract and one consultant.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I did not hear clearly. I did not hear you clearly, Sir.

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay. You wish me to shout? We have the President, not me, the Office of the President has 10 contract officers, one person on a short-term contract and one consultant. Okay?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Could we get the job classification of these 10 or the designation of these 10 contract officers?

**Hon. Imbert:** That will be provided in writing in due course.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002: Tobago Services. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item—where are you? Are you going on Minor Equipment or you want me to go back to Tobago?

**Mr. Padarath:** Minor Equipment.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Item 001: General Administration, Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 01: Vehicles, there is an allocation of \$1 million, can the hon. Minister indicate whether or not the vehicle that usually transports Her Excellency, whether or not the Office of the President envisages purchasing a new vehicle for Her Excellency in this financial

year?

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

**Mr. Padarath:** The question is, with respect to this allocation, whether or not the Office of the President envisages changing the vehicle for the exclusive use of Her Excellency in this financial year?—\$1 million has been allocated here.

**Hon. Imbert:** It is not for Her Excellency's use, it is for administrative use for vehicles for the Office of the President for the work that they have to do administratively.

**Mr. Padarath:** Okay. In light of that answer, Minister, it says here, Minor Equipment Purchases, so therefore there will be the purchase of vehicles with this Vote, can the Minister indicate how many vehicles are envisaged to be purchased with this allocation?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will provide the information. I am told that the existing fleet is quite old and is in need of replacement. These are administration vehicles, not for Her Excellency herself.

**Madam Chairman:** 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 to the Minister, the accounting officer and the other representatives from the Office of the President.

**5.30 p.m.**

*Head 03: Judiciary, \$419,192,100.*

**Madam Chairman:** For the guidance of Members, the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, we are going to page 10, and on the *Draft Estimates of*

*Development Programme*, we are starting at page 2.

I will now invite the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Al-Rawi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Judiciary is at the cusp of some major steps, which have been long in purchase with a great amount of work, and it gives me great pleasure to publicly salute the leadership of the hon. Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, and the entire administrative staff of the Judiciary.

Madam Chair, it is no secret that the Judiciary has in the last few years lead the charge on digitization. Whilst many thought that virtual courts were a thing to be found only on television and in cinema, it is now an experience which all of us can expound upon and celebrate, as the Judiciary was caught without a step missing when the pandemic descended.

This came about as a result of a significant amount of legislative, administrative and process reform, including the technological improvements at the Judiciary for all of its platforms: TTJIM; TTJEMS; court pay; virtual courts; the Criminal Procedure Rules; the Civil Proceedings Rules; the Family Proceedings Rules; the Children Court Rules; the amendments done to the Probate Division; the filing and facilitation that is now online and 24 hours a day, have taken the Judiciary into a different sphere. This has been brought to life in particular by the Family and Children Division and by the Criminal Division, as there has been a retrofitting equally of the Civil Division, without legislative structure necessarily.

The two former divisions created have allowed for the Judiciary, effectively, to increase its rate of disposition and, Madam Chair, it is not lost upon the country that the improvement in the number of Masters, the inclusion of Registrars into the

Magistracy, the simplification of districts, the simplification of divisions have resulted in an identification of caseload that is now managed in a very aggressive and leading edge way. Our Judiciary stands as a shining example of progress built upon the maxim, plant and machinery, people, processes and law.

Madam Chair, the summary of expenditure before us now is one which will be the subject of further discussion when we get to the mid-year review, because there is before us the intended proclamation of the abolition of preliminary enquiries, earmarked for the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, 2022. The courts are being aggressively outfitted in a number of places, at Waterfront Tower D, and importantly, in the east where the jury courts are being structured as well, to meet with the life of the Judiciary in the time of pandemic with a very careful eye on the disposition of criminal matters.

It is for that reason that we will at the mid-year be asking the Ministry of Finance to consider, in particular, matters concerning contract employment and other positions, which we recognize at this point were not capable of being calculated in full form just yet.

Madam Chair, I make myself available, with the assistance of Mr. Jerome Mark to my left, to answer the questions that this Committee may have.

*Question proposed:* That Head 03 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$419,192,100, for Head 03 Judiciary, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: Judiciary Trinidad;

Item 002: Judiciary Tobago. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: Judiciary Trinidad; Item 002: Judiciary Tobago. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: Judiciary Trinidad. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 005: Multi-sectoral and Other Services.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 03 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Attorney General, thank you Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, thank you the representatives of the Judiciary.

Hon. Members, we have completed the eight items as set out for today. I want to thank you all for your cooperation and for your very prudent use of the time. Hopefully we will be able to maintain this for the other four days left, and hopefully some of our misdirected energies would now be curbed in going forward.

I want to thank you all. Wish you all a pleasant evening and a safe journey home. See you tomorrow. This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Tuesday, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2021, at 10.00 a.m.

**5.39 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*