


HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, October 13, 2021***APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2021) BILL, 2020**

[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 resume. Head 22: Ministry of National Security.

Head 22: Ministry of National Security, \$2,202,016,400.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of National Security to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very warmly, Madam Chair, and a very good morning to you and all else in this honourable House and to all of our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who I know participate very eagerly in these important proceedings.

Madam Chair, it is well recognized that the Ministry of National Security is among the largest and most complex organization in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry has primary responsibility for ensuring and maintaining security of the nation, our people, the territory and all of the national interests. It is primarily responsible for the maintenance of law, order, public safety and defence against aggression, management of disaster preparedness and relief, monitoring and control of the flow of persons into and out of Trinidad and Tobago.

In order to fulfil this very diverse group of responsibilities that fall under the remit of the Ministry, there are established divisions: General Administration; the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service; the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service; the

Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service; the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, which consists of the four formations: the Coast Guard, the Air Guard, Regiment or army and the Volunteer Defence Force; the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force; Immigration Division; the Office of the Disaster Preparedness and Management; Strategic Services Agency; the Life Guard Service Division; the Probation Services and the Forensic Services Division.

I take this opportunity to thank sincerely and profusely all the men and women in and out of uniform who work in these divisions for their diligence to duty and for their efforts in making Trinidad and Tobago a safer and more secure place. It is important to note, Madam Chair, that this Government, for us, there is no greater role than the security, protection and safety of our citizens. It is the foundation of our prosperity and the best assurance of future generations.

Madam Chair, the Ministry of National Security has been allocated 5.7 billion between the Ministry generally and the Police in this year's fiscal package. I wish to assure Members of this Standing Finance Committee and the public at large that this allocation will be prudently allocated, monitored with astute financial management for the benefit of our people. We must take into consideration that like other Ministries, ours is also managing its resources during the challenging times of the global health pandemic. We now recognize how important it is to account to our country's taxpayers for every cent and all of our activities in these divisions that consist of the Ministry. Despite the country's decline in revenue and reality that things are more challenging financially, we will continue to work with the Ministry of Finance and other stakeholders to fulfil our mandate to public safety and security. I thank you, Madam Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 22 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,202,016,400 for Head 22,

Ministry of National Security is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under six Sub-Heads to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 123. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Good morning, Madam Chair, thank you very much for recognizing me. Madam Chair, I am on 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances. Minister, in the 2021 Estimate, there would have been an Estimate of \$19.4 million under this line Item and based on the Revised Estimate, that has been decreased to \$17.3 million. Can you account for this decrease in expenditure for salaries and cost of living allowances? Is it that there is a lower number of employees at the Ministry or? Any alternative explanation?

Hon. Hinds: I did not follow you. You said that the—could you repeat that?

Mr. Hosein: So if you watch, Minister, if you are with me at the 2021 Estimates—

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: You will see 19.4 million. 01.

Hon. Hinds: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein: And then the Revised Estimate for that fiscal would have been 17.3 million which means that there is a decrease of about \$2 million.

Hon. Hinds: Well, I am not following you from the figures you are quoting based on the record in front of me. However, there are a number of vacant posts and they are not yet filled so that might account for the discrepancy that you are alluding to, the difference that you are alluding to.

Mr. Hosein: So basically, you would have anticipated to fill those vacancies in fiscal 2021 hence the high estimates.

Hon. Hinds: Some of them. We have, for example, 237 posts. We have 92 filled.

We have 145 vacant posts. But the number of vacant posts with bodies is 143 and without bodies, two, so we are indeed endeavouring to sort some of that out in this fiscal.

Mr. Hosein: Well, Minister, I would anticipate that you would have had some challenges to fill those vacancies for the last fiscal because the spend is actually lower than what was allocated.

Hon. Hinds: Well, there are always challenges but it is a work in progress as you know.

Mr. Hosein: So as you said before, there are 145 vacant posts. Can you just in writing, I know you may not be able to provide it now, can you provide this meeting with that subsequently?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, indeed.

Madam Chairman: Are you through, Member for Barataria/San Juan?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, on this line Item.

Madam Chairman: Yeah, sure. Member for Naparima. No? Item 002 Fire Services. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Again, Minister, I am 01 Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, I see that, again, for the estimates of 2021, there is \$232 million allocated but the actual spend was 296, that is about \$64 million more than that was allocated. Can you give an explanation for that increase in expenditure?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, I am advised that that was as a result of a shortfall in the original estimate so it is now being adjusted here.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Good morning, Madam Chair and morning, Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Good morning.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, on line Item 01, in the last presentation of the fiscal package and Standing Finance Committee, for this Item, we were told that there were 239 vacant posts. Are you in a position to tell us how many vacant posts exist now?

Hon. Hinds: Insofar as Fire is concerned, there are, to answer your question, 2,723 posts. The number filled is 2,415. Vacant posts 308. Vacant with bodies 232, without bodies, 76 and the number of officers recruited in the difficult period of the pandemic, zero. So we are aiming to ramp up our recruitment across the Ministry of National Security's platform in the immediate or the foreseeable future.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you for that information. Would you be in a position to tell us how many persons are holding acting positions?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, well where you see there are vacant positions with bodies, those are persons who are acting in those positions. So the position is vacant and persons are acting up in them. In this case, 232.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, if your policy for this upcoming fiscal is to increase or to fill those vacancies that currently exist, do you think that this allocation would be sufficient because it is almost the same allocation as last year in order to carry out or execute this policy in terms of the filling of the vacancies?

Hon. Hinds: There are two general issues that would surround the question that you have asked and this applies to all similar questions. One, given the state of the nation's economic circumstance, the Budget Division generally was very mean and lean in its allocations for obvious reasons. Do not want to displease you by ramping up expenditure when the revenue does not sufficiently match it. And

secondly, the other issue is the question of if, for example, it is absolutely necessary and you recruit more persons, then we have the mid-year review or in some cases, you can vire money in order to deal with those situations. So this is of general applicability.

Madam Chairman: Member for the Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, in terms of line Item 10: Remuneration to Auxiliary Fire Unit, on the last occasion, we were told that this group of officers, they were seeking to get on the permanent establishment and discussions were ongoing. Is there any update in terms of those discussions with the CPO?

Hon. Hinds: Well, I came here to discuss the accounts and discussions for the advancement of all the platforms in national security are always ongoing.

Mr. Rambally: And Minister, any update in terms of is it that they are closer to getting onto the establishment since last year until now? I know we are in the pandemic but—

Hon. Hinds: As I said, and I think you know that, discussions are always ongoing to advance the work of the Ministry of National Security.

Mr. Rambally: And in terms of this line Item, Minister, how many officers are we looking at to date?

Hon. Hinds: Insofar as auxiliary posts are concerned, there are 828 of them. The number of posts filled, 586. The number of vacant posts, 242. The number of vacant posts with bodies, nil and the number of vacant posts without bodies, 242.

Madam Chairman: Item 004. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Looking at Item 03 which speaks to Overtime for Monthly-Paid Officers and there is a decrease of \$9.5 million. Now, could the Minister state in the context of COVID and I understand that there are a number of officers on quarantine and whatnot, one would have anticipated that the

overtime bill would have at least held or increased to cater for that. So the first question is how many prison officers are in quarantine arrangements at the moment? First question. Could you tell us how many?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. Of course, I cannot immediately tell you how many are in quarantine but certainly there are officers in quarantine.

Mr. Charles: And has this affected the overtime allocation in the existing year?

Hon. Hinds: I suspect that once men, as I have seen in other divisions, once men are unable to work by virtue of being in quarantine, those who are at work will be called upon to do more.

Mr. Charles: Right.

10.15 a.m.

Hon. Hinds: And consequently it would affect their overtime arrangements.

Mr. Charles: I thank you for that answer. So in that context, why would you decrease the overtime allocation by close to \$10 million?

Hon. Hinds: Because I am, one, we are trying, generally speaking, to make adjustments to our consumption of money even through overtime across national security, and secondly, we know that where it becomes necessary, as I have just said to Baratara/San Juan, your colleague, where it becomes necessary we must be able to access that by way of the mid-term review or by way of some other virement.

Mr. Charles: So essentially you are saying that the budget does not take into consideration existing circumstances because you have the option later on of viring money from one allocation to another? That is what you are saying?

Hon. Hinds: I could not and I would not say that. I am saying to you as a last stop, where we consume moneys by virtue of overtime in the circumstances as you have described them, we can resolve the issue in the way I have described.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning to you and your Minister. Now Minister, line Item under Prison Service, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Hon. Hinds: Which one?

Mr. Lee: 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. The budgeted amount in 2021 was \$305 million. The Revised Estimate, to use my colleague's words, the actual spent was \$413 million, an increase of \$110 million. Could you state what was the reason for this drastic increase of \$110 million?

Hon. Hinds: We did receive what we consider to be a shortfall in our expected allocation in the last fiscal.

Mr. Lee: That is \$110 million shortfall, approximately.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, we would have wanted to have it but circumstances in the Ministry of Finance did not allow it.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, I could offer some clarification here? Members may remember in the mid-year review exercise we supplemented the appropriation for this particular Ministry and a substantial sum of money, several hundred billion dollars, and quite often when the Estimates are prepared not every supplementary appropriation is brought to book.

In the closing of the accounts which will take place in a couple of months, the final expenditure for 2021 fiscal will be reflected in those documents. But at this point in time I can say if you go back to the mid-year review, you will see we supplemented this Ministry significantly around June of this year.

Mr. Lee: Madam Chair, I have a follow-up question.

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

Mr. Lee: To the Minister of Finance. Minister, based on this line Item that you did

during the mid-year review, increase it to \$110 million, when you originally budgeted back in 2020, you would have based your budget on a certain complement of physical prison officers at the time. So that that number of 305 million should have been closer to what the reality is of 413 million. So I do not understand that drastic under-budgeting.

Mr. Imbert: I explained that during the mid-year. I will explain it again, that it was an estimate at the time and we saw the need to supplement in the mid-year. We supplemented it.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am on 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, can you tell you us how many posts there are on the establishment, those that are acting and those that are filled and those that are vacant?

Hon. Hinds: The number of officers altogether is 4,219. The posts filled, 3,661; vacant posts, 558. The number of posts with bodies, 86, and without bodies, 472.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, also, in light of the high number of posts that are actually vacant, the ones without bodies, that 472, would the Ministry be taking steps in order to fill these vacancies in terms of trying to get persons in these positions, especially in light of the state of the prisons?

Hon. Hinds: That is always the ambition and the work that is in progress, yes.

Mr. Hosein: Because we heard this last year that there were attempts that will be taken to fill those vacancies, and it is about the same, roughly the same amount of vacancies from last year to this year. So what different will take place from last year to this year, in terms of the filling of the vacancies?

Hon. Hinds: Just to remind you that, as I said in my opening remarks, COVID-19, the onslaught of COVID-19 had massive implications on all of us in the world,

including on the prison service.

Mr. Hosein: Yep. You see, Minister, the problem with this is that a lot of the officers who contract the virus go into quarantine. So in addition to the existing vacancies of 472 officers, you then have a lower number of manpower in terms of those who are in quarantine. Therefore, steps should have been taken in order to fill these vacancies to increase the manpower at the prisons.

Hon. Hinds: Well, in the real world while some go into quarantine, some are coming out. So it is not as acute as you might think.

Mr. Hosein: At every point in time there must be a shortage of manpower—

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes.

Mr. Hosein:—at the prisons.

Hon. Hinds: We acknowledge that. We acknowledge that and we make up for it by virtue of their extra work, some of them, and they are paid for that work.

Mr. Hosein: You see, it is difficult to understand that because there is a cut in the overtime budget also, that the Member for Naparima raised, that if you are going to use the existing officers to increase their hours, there is now a cut in terms of the overtime, according to line Item 03.

Hon. Hinds: Well, as the Minister of Finance just explained, last year you would recall there was a supplementation of the moneys allocated to the Ministry, and that kind of thing happens routinely, from time to time in the mid-year review and otherwise. So it is not as acute as you might think. And it is not that they would not be paid if they work. It will be. Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Regiment. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 23: Salaries - Direct Charges. In 2020, 384 million was spent. It dropped by approximately \$20 million last year, the Revised Estimate for 2021, and I am seeing a further decrease of 20.3 million.

Is it that you expect to reduce the numbers in the regiment, or you are not filling vacancies, or you are paying less to existing staff? Could you kindly explain the 20.3 million decrease?

Hon. Hinds: Actually, there is no plan to reduce the numbers. As a matter of fact, the regiment would have trained personnel in the last fiscal and there are personnel in training as we speak.

Mr. Charles: So you are saying that you intend to increase the numbers.

Hon. Hinds: Sorry, one second. Yes. So, in terms of the numbers, just to answer you, the—in terms of auxiliary—you are talking of commissioned officers. In terms of officers, the number of posts filled is 107. The officer posts vacant is 90. The number of officers recruited in 2021 would be eight. The number of other ranks of the regiment, 3,671. The number of other ranked posts filled, 3,237; and therefore the number of other ranked posts vacant is 434. The number of other ranked officers, not commissioned, other ranks, recruited in 2021, is 396 of them, and to be recruited in anticipation in 2022, 200 of them.

Mr. Charles: All right. If you anticipate that you are going to recruit 200 additional officers, how do you explain a decreased allocation?

Hon. Hinds: What—the figure you see allocated is what was allocated by the Budgets Division. We would have indicated, as all Ministries do, what we would desire to have. But the budget allocation that we had is as we would have read it. And we know, as I explained before, when necessary we will have those funds supplemented. So we proceed in the confidence—

Mr. Charles: Am I hearing correctly that you make allocations and you justify it—

Hon. Hinds: No, not—

Mr. Charles:—and somebody somewhere in the Budgets Division, they cut it

without coming back to you and saying—

Hon. Hinds: No, no.

Mr. Charles:—if you cut this you cannot recruit 200 officers.

Hon. Hinds: As you know, you make requests and you take that which is allocated, all things considered.

If, as you anticipate, you do recruit and get engaged in the training, you make a requirement for an adjustment in that, at the midterm review, to accommodate that. That is how the process works.

Mr. Charles: Madam Chair, I know that is how the process works but we have figures in front of us and every year we are told, “doh take on these figures because in the mid-year review we will change as what not”. And what we are seeing as in the case of the overtime, where there is clearly a manifest—a situation that has to be budgeted for, it is not because you could rely easily on the excuse that you are going to change it in the mid-year review. I think that is unacceptable.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Coast Guard. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, there are two related line Items, that would be 01: Salaries and then 23: Salaries - Direct Charges. Minister, I know that there is, with respect to the coast guard legislation governing certain officers, based on the separate line Items 01 and 23, can you just give us the total number of positions in each of the line Items and again those that are filled and those that are vacant?

Hon. Hinds: Insofar as the public servants at the coast guard is concerned—you are talking about public servants right?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Hon. Hinds: There are eight posts, three are filled and there are five vacant positions.

Mr. Hosein: And for the officers that will be 23, line Item 23.

Hon. Hinds: Yeah. One moment. Yes, there are 182 officer posts of which 116 are filled; vacant posts therefore, 66; new recruits or persons/officers brought on in 2021, six; and projected for 2022, so far, nil.

Insofar as other ranks are concerned, posts 1,749; posts filled, 1,437; vacant posts therefore, 23. Eighty-five recruits were taken on in 2021 and we do not project any recruitment for 2022.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good morning to all. Minister, I am at line 23: Salaries - Direct Charges. From what is before us, there is a decrease of \$25.6 million. We have an Actual of 222 million for 2020, revised slightly downwards for 2021. We do not have a final figure yet. But this is a further decline of 25 million. I just wanted two things, one, an explanation of this, and secondly, given the fact that there have been public concerns about the manpower, coast guard manpower to use the assets that are available, and indeed there are new assets now, could you also give us an inventory as to whether or not the coast guard has suitable manpower to properly utilize the assets and vessels that are in their possession at this time?

10.30 a.m.

Hon. Hinds: From the information, through reports available to me, that is not an issue or a problem that I am discerned as Minister. But I am confident, given the very proficient and professional posture of the defence force, if that emerges as an issue, the Ministry will be very quickly advised, and as usual, we will respond very promptly to resolving that.

Dr. Moonilal: So Minister, as of now you can state categorically that you are not

aware of any manpower shortage to properly man and patrol and utilize the assets available to the coast guard?

Hon. Hinds: There are vacant positions, so I have conceded that and that is quite clear. But insofar as that being directly related to unable to utilize assets and resources of the coast guard, I am not aware that that is an issue.

Dr. Moonilal: And the first part of my question, would you want to respond?

Hon. Hinds: What was it, if you might—

Dr. Moonilal: Oh, let me remind you. I will remind you. The 25 million decrease in Salaries - Direct Charges?

Hon. Hinds: Again, that is what was allocated to the Ministry and we content ourselves with that, knowing that once the circumstance warrants it, we will make that available to the Ministry of Finance. And as has happened routinely in many years past, since 1962, adjustments will be made in the mid-term review or otherwise. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Now, back on line Item 23—

Hon. Hinds: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Hosein: Yeah. And Oropouche East did indicate that there is a shortfall in the Estimate by about \$25.6 million. Now, Minister, in 2021, just looking back at the records from 2021 and answers given by the previous Minister, is in fact that in 2021, there were more vacant positions. So that means vacant positions were filled within the year and there are less vacant positions now. So when there were less officers, you allocated \$215 million. But now when you have more officers for this fiscal year, you now allocate less in the sum of \$190 million. There were about 82 positions that were filled and there is a \$25.6 million reduction in the allocation. Should it not have been an increase in the allocation seeing that the vacancies were

filled?

Hon. Hinds: I think you are asking the same question a little differently to the way the Member raised it. So the answer is still applicable.

Mr. Hosein: You see, Minister, the accounting is not making sense because you cannot have less officers and allocating—sorry, more officers and allocating less money. Because this exercise we are doing here means that the books are not reflecting exactly what was mentioned in the budget and it is not taking into account this exercise in a proper manner, because the figures should have been in line with the policy and what currently exists. And even if you look at line Item 31, there is also a reduction in the NIS contributions for about \$9.7 million.

Hon. Hinds: Which line Item?

Mr. Hosein: 31. There is now a reduction in the NIS from 30.2 million to 20.4 million, so that is a total reduction of \$9.7 million which means that more officers and less NIS contributions.

Mr. Lee: Were they “bad paid”?

Hon. Hinds: What would have happened in 2021, there would have been some outstanding moneys owed to the NIS, and you might have seen provision for that. At the moment, I can tell you that we are allegedly indebted to the NIS in certain sums and for reasons I am familiar with, and those figures are being audited, as we speak, in order to ensure that we arrive at the correct figure and the payment will continue to be made to the NIS.

Mr. Hosein: Can you provide that figure to this meeting in writing at a later date?

Hon. Hinds: Which figure?

Mr. Hosein: The audited figure that is owed to the NIB from the Ministry.

Hon. Hinds: “Oh”, that is not a problem. That is well in keeping with the spirit of accountability. We are happy to do that.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much.

Hon. Hinds: Indeed.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much. Minister, with respect to the said line Item 31: Government's Contribution—

Hon. Hinds: Which line Item are you speaking about?

Mr. Indarsingh: 23 and 31: Government's Contribution to NIS. You just raised it in response to San Juan/Barataria and you indicate that the Government is in the process of auditing—or your Ministry, sorry. Is it in relation—

Hon. Hinds: No, I did not say that.

Mr. Indarsingh: What you said?

Hon. Hinds: I said that we are auditing the records to ensure that what is owed to the NIS, balances with the history and the facts, and we will make good that payment to them. We are doing that.

Mr. Indarsingh: “We” is your Ministry?

Hon. Hinds: The defence force is doing that. They have been asked to ensure that the figures are accurate.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. And you are asking that from the defence force—from an administrative point of view, in terms of the Government's contribution and the officers' contribution?

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: So, is it that deductions have been made from officers' contributions and they were not remitted to the NIS?

Hon. Hinds: No, it is not that. It is not that. It is that with the defence force from 1962, there are some special NIS arrangements.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Uh-huh”.

Hon. Hinds: They pay—the officers pay a little less than ordinarily would be the case because they benefit less from the NIS programme, in the sense that inside of the defence force, they get certain benefit like dental and medical and so on. And in that circumstance, they do not make a claim on the NIS and as a result, Cabinet agreed way back to 1962, and it has continued through the years, that they pay a little less. So we are making sure that that is the case. We are making sure.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay.

Hon. Hinds: When the NIS rates changed, we wanted to make sure that that change—the last change in the NIS rates would be reflected in what is owed to the NIS.

Mr. Indarsingh: And this exercise—I know you indicated in relation to the coast guard, is it taking place in relation to all arms of the—

Hon. Hinds: All the formations of the defence force, yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. We would—I am sure that we on this side would like to get the final or what you would call the audited figures in terms of the sums owed.

Hon. Hinds: And as well—

Mr. Indarsingh: Because I know your Minister of Finance—

Hon. Hinds: And as well—

Mr. Indarsingh:—is paying very close attention to the financial state of the National Insurance Fund.

Hon. Hinds: And as well, you will also get a good example in terms of good governance.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I hope that you all have not deducted and not paid on behalf of the officers—

Hon. Hinds: I assure you—

Mr. Indarsingh:—the law enforcement officers of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk*

thumping]

Hon. Hinds: I assure you that that was not the case. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: We await the audited findings.

Hon. Hinds: You are more than welcome.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Immigration. Item 008: Probation Service. Item 009: Forensic Science Centre. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I see an increase of \$344,000. I want to know if this figure represents the optimum level of forensic pathology? So the question is how many—what is the optimal level of forensic pathologists in the Forensic Science Centre? And how many are there now? And how does this figure fit into that?

Hon. Hinds: To answer your question, the positions are four. At the moment, we have two. We have taken a decision that we would like to bring it to its optimum level. As such, I have, as Minister on the direction of the Cabinet, mandated and the process is now ongoing, to invite young, bright, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are so inclined to make application which will be advertised promptly or shortly for scholarships in this regard. This is not new. This has been done before. And persons were recruited as pathologist to the Forensic Science Centre in the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago on that basis in the past. But then, you have attrition, people leave, they go to greener pastures, they have other options in life and so it is an ongoing situation.

But that is our immediate response, and I can tell you that we have recently engaged the UNDP to assist in identifying suitably qualified persons internationally. And out of that, we identified a doctor of Indian nationality who is a man of high record. And we are happy to inform you that he should be taking post in a couple—well, probably about—immediately. He should be very promptly

at the service of the Forensic Science Center. That will take us to three for the time being.

Mr. Charles: That is good news, Minister. Good news.

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Charles: But this figure of 344 does not reflect that known anticipated expenditure.

Hon. Hinds: Well, again, as I indicated to you earlier, all that I have said in terms of what we request, what we are allocated, and the fact that we are able to make adjustments along the way to accommodate any anticipated arrangement—because I will tell you what happens, you know. I just want to say, you might tell the Budget Division, the Ministry of Finance, you want to do so and so, and for some other reasons, not for want to money, it did not happen, COVID and other things. So, once you do that, then you are able to revert and get the matter adjusted as we have said.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, in terms of the same line Item and what my colleague, Member for Naparima had asked, what we had heard last year was what we have heard today which is that the UNDP was engaged in terms of getting that number two up to four potentially, in terms of the pathologists. Is it that there are other issues, other than COVID, which is at play thereby restricting the Ministry somehow from employing two other pathologists? And the follow on question to that is: What is the impact you know, in your assessment, what it is impact of only having two pathologists at this time?

Hon. Hinds: Well, I have no reports of any massive pile up of autopsies outstanding in the current circumstances. I do know that those who are at the wicket, the two of them, they are called upon to perform and to perform perhaps

more than they ordinarily would had there been four. But certainly, I have no reports of any problems as a result of it. But we are aiming, of course, to increase the number of persons at station in that regard. And the question that you asked about what other factors might be at work? That is really speculative, I could not venture there. All I know is that we have made efforts through the UNDP to deal with this matter and we will continue.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, the question was—

Hon. Hinds: And we are making our own efforts with inviting citizens of Trinidad and Tobago suitably inclined and skilled—to go on scholarship, sorry, to become skilled in order to fill those positions.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, thank you for that. The question was really posed when I said if there are other factors at play because, as I said, the response we got today, no disrespect meant, is something that we heard last year in standing finance. So hence the reason why I asked—the engagement of the UNDP was something that we heard. So that is why I asked the question if there was something else because, you know, I know we have been hearing that we are trying to move from the two to four. So that is why we had asked that question.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

10.45 a.m.

Hon. Hinds: I am just being reminded that the UNDP actually started the recruitment process.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, I just want to focus on the ballistics department. That will also be 01.

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Salaries and Cost of Living. Minister, are there any vacancies currently at that ballistic department, because we know that there is a backlog of

firearms for testing in terms of ballistic reports for certificates of analysis from the court. Can you indicate whether or not there is a shortfall of manpower in that department?

Hon. Hinds: Generally speaking, so I can give you the general position with the forensics, I am unable to tell you specifically today about the ballistics, in particular. But generally speaking, there are 77 posts, 40 posts filled, 37 vacant posts, 11 vacant posts without bodies, 26 vacant posts with bodies and of course you have in addition to that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, thank you Madam.

Hon. Hinds: And I am reminded and quite properly so that in order to deal with the backlog that you correctly identified, a decision was taken before I went to the Ministry of National Security and I am now seeing the fruits of that where 25 persons have been specifically trained in dealing with the ballistic analysis and reporting, and they are at work at the Forensic Science Centre. I, however, as Minister took note of all of the issues, including the backlog that you have identified, and I am assuring you that action is being taken internally, to ensure that we get optimum efforts from the Forensic Science Centre with a view to eliminating the backlog that you correctly identified.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I go back to 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances and the comment by the Minister that we have two forensic pathologists, and from time to time, they may be required to do additional work. I wish to find out or ask the Minister, if he is aware that accrediting agencies indicate that there are limits placed on forensic pathologists, in terms of the number of autopsies per year. And

it may be that we are reaching a critical point where they may not be able to deliver, as expected. And this will be shortchanging our efforts.

Hon. Hinds: I am aware of the accreditation requirement as you described it, hence the reason for the very busy activity and the happy news that the UNDP has begun the recruitment process and the other actions I described, we are taking, mindful of all of that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: On this issue of the staffing for the functions under the 009, I just wanted the Minister to indicate whether or not this includes staffing for the Special Evidence Recovery Unit at Cumuto, whether this is also part of the Ministry's operation and the status of that particular unit going forward.

Hon. Hinds: Contemplation and the purview of the Ministry, but the SERU is different from the Forensic Science Centre. That is a police unit that does particular police analysis.

Madam Chairman: Item 012: Lifeguard Service. Item 015: Cadet Force. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: 01—

Madam Chairman: 015 you at?

Mr. Indarsingh: No, 012.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so I looked up I did not see anybody so could I ask that you be a little quicker on the draw. Okay, are you hearing me?

Mr. Indarsingh: So you are allowing me to—

Madam Chairman: I am allowing you—

Mr. Indarsingh:—yeah—

Madam Chairman:—but I am just trying to advise—

Mr. Indarsingh: Oh yes.

Madam Chairman:—that it is not a course that we will adopt. Thank you.

Mr. Indarsingh: I always take your advice, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, with respect to vacant salaries and cost of living allowance, could you inform this meeting if you have the adequate or sufficient complement of lifeguards under this particular Head.

Hon. Hinds: I can tell you that there are six posts insofar as public officers are concerned and all six are filled. And in terms of lifeguards, there are 126 posts on the establishment of which 101 are filled. There are 25 vacant posts therefore, 15 with bodies and 10 without bodies. The number of regular workers are 19 and casual workers are eight insofar as that division is concerned. And again, I have had no report of any difficulties in the circumstances.

Mr. Indarsingh: Beaches are closed currently and so on—

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh:—but prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we always had instances especially around Easter time and the—what we would term to be the August holidays—

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh:—that there is a shortage of lifeguards and so on. So I am hoping, going forward and so on there is not—this does not become an issue, in terms of shortage of lifeguards when beaches are reopened.

Hon. Hinds: I should tell you that when I assumed this office a few months ago, I had the honour to hand over very critical lifesaving assets to the lifeguard division of the Ministry of National Security. And I am not only hoping, I am taking action to ensure that they are optimally effective, and that they can serve the public of Trinidad and Tobago to your satisfaction.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chair. With regard to this Item, Mr. Minister, I know you would have been aware of newspaper articles and so on where lifeguards, were indicating that they were not being paid their salaries or not been paid on time. Have those arrears been addressed and are they up to date with the payment thus far?

Hon. Hinds: Fortunately, for me, I have the benefit of the advice in his presence, the Permanent Secretary who handles the financing for the Ministry as you would know, and other officials of the Ministry, and it appears that you are the only person who is aware of that problem.

Ms. Ameen: It was widely reported in the newspaper—

Hon. Hinds: It was so wide—

Ms. Ameen: I just want to ask if all the arrears have been addressed at this time.

Hon. Hinds: I can only repeat that it appears as though you are the only person who is aware of that problem. As I am advised by those who know and those who are responsible, there is no such issue that we can now identify.

Madam Chairman: Is there another question under 012?

Ms. Ameen: I just want to ask the Minister if he could check into it and he could send it in writing.

Hon. Hinds: Well, I have checked—

Ms. Ameen: It was not this week or last week, it was during the last financial year.

Hon. Hinds: I have checked with the Permanent Secretary—

Ms. Ameen: Those matters, a matter of public record— [*Interruption*]

Hon. Hinds: And I have checked with the Permanent Sectary.

Ms. Ameen: Those matters were raised in the last financial year.

Madam Chairman: Only one person can speak at a time.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hon. Hinds: I do not know what I should put in writing, I have checked the Permanent Secretary, and I have checked with our—

Ms. Ameen: If I may, it is a matter of public record.

Hon. Hinds:—Director of Finance.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. It is a matter of public record, Madam Chair, that during the last financial year these issues came forward in the public domain it was widely reported in media as well. We are not in a position to know therefore, I am asking if those arrears have been addressed. If that situation has been addressed.

Hon. Hinds: Suffice it to say, that I am advised by our Director of Finance, who is present in the Chamber here with me and our PS that as we speak, no such issue is present or arises. I will also tell you—

Ms. Ameen: Thank you very much.

Hon. Hinds: —I am just being reminded that there was a period in time when lifeguards without authority did not appear for work at their stations and they were not paid for that period. In the context of good governance.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine, you are finished. Can we move on?

Ms. Ameen: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: 015: Cadet Force, 016: Air Guard. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Minister, under line Item 23: Salaries, Direct Charges. There has been a decrease in the allocation for salaries for the Air Guard in the sum of \$13.7 million. Minister, can you provide an explanation to this meeting for this reduction?

Hon. Hinds: Member?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Hon. Hinds: Could you just rehash please? Sorry.

Mr. Hosein: Yes. So, if you look at line Item 23, there is a reduction in the allocation for salaries for members of the Air Guard. It went from 53.5 million to 39.87 million, which is a shortfall of \$13.7 million decrease. Can you explain why this decrease in terms of salaries?

Hon. Hinds: I told you earlier that when you see that kind of thing, it is the allocation that we have had. I told you as well that there will be no issue insofar as payment to them. The one thing I can tell you in response to you is that every single public officer in the Ministry of National Security would have received their salaries on time, every month, notwithstanding the financial constraints that we have had as a nation to resolve through the pandemic. And even prior to that, every single officer can tell you that they would have received their salary. And it is on that basis, given that to whom much is given, much is expected those of us who know that we must protect the citizens of this country expect that they would just perform as they do in the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, you are saying all of that, but what we have in front of us in terms of the books, the black and white in the yellow books here—

Hon. Hinds: I am not disputing that.

Mr. Hosein:—is that it does not reflect what you are saying.

Hon. Hinds: And I am saying to you, no, I am saying to you, not one has not been paid. And I am saying to you, every one would be paid for the foreseeable future. Any adjustments in salaries and wages and on the direct charges, allowances and so on, will be dealt with in the ways I have explained ad nauseam through this morning, thus far. So I understand your concern, but I trust you will understand ours and be assured that when these men and women, professional, contributory

and hard-working as they are do their business, they will and have been in the past paid.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under Air Guard line Item 31: Government's Contribution to NIS. In 2020, the actual was \$5 million, 2021, the budgeted amount was \$4.3 million, 2021 Revised Estimate \$9.9 million, more than 100 per cent in the Revised Estimate. Is it fair to say that, that 9.9 million was due to a major arrears owed to the NIS from previous years?

11.00 a.m.

Hon. Hinds: I had explained earlier, in response to the question from my friend from Couva South, that all of the four formations of the defence force benefit from reduced NIS contributions, because within the defence force they have a system to deal with some aspects of their well-being, their medical attention—dental, optical and what have you. As a result, we are now looking at the figures that are allegedly owed to the NIS to ensure that they are in accord with that policy, that position, especially since NIS would have increased their rates some time ago. We have to make sure that the figures match, and that is what we are dealing with at the moment, all the four formation.

Mr. Lee: Follow-up question, Madam Chair. And based on your response, Minister, I understand what you just said, but let me just put this question then, based on the NIS. if under Air Guard, the officers did not pay the correct amount of NIS—the employee part of it, because of whatever reasons that you just gave—is it then that the Government will be picking up that responsibility of whatever shortfall or underpayment that was charged by the—

Hon. Hinds: I have not said that there was any underpayment. So let me make it

pellucidly clear. I have not said that. I said that the figures are being reviewed to ensure that they are in accord with the demand of the NIS.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, same line Item 31. What my colleague was focused on was, in fact, Estimates 2021, \$4.4 million, Revised Estimate 2021, \$9.9 million. This is in terms of contribution to NIS direct charges. Can the Minister indicate why—given that in every other year the average was close to \$4 million—in this year there was a doubling of the figure? Is this because of payment of arrears that was owed to NIS?

Hon. Hinds: One moment please, Member.

Mr. Tancoo: Sure.

Hon. Hinds: Since then, I am being advised, we actually paid in fiscal 2021, \$4.72 million and that would have brought it up to the expectation that you shared.

Mr. Tancoo: Just a follow-up. So, I want to confirm then that this payment, this additional payment, is doubling of the figure in 2021 Revised Estimate was, in fact, payment of arrears outstanding?

Hon. Hinds: Yeah. And that was indeed for arrears, to settle arrears.

Mr. Tancoo: A follow-up subsequent question with regards to Item 24: Allowances—Direct charges. We have a similar situation with the Estimate for 2021 being 14.7, but the Revised Estimate being 18.6. Is that the same situation that arose that we had arrears of allowances to representatives and employees of the Air Guard of upward of \$4 million which would have been paid in 2021 having not been budgeted for previously?

Hon. Hinds: As you would have heard the Minister of Finance remind us that in the mid-term review there was a supplementation. It included some of the shortfall that we had received, and we were able to pay that and settle those arrears as well.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, hon. Minister. Can you then tell us and confirm that there are currently no arrears under any of these Heads, either the allowances or NIS contributions for this Sub-Head, Air Guard?

Hon. Hinds: It would be unthinking of me to confirm that. All I can assure you is that we are constantly dealing with the NIS, settling any arrears that might accumulate, and as I have indicated, looking closely at the figures to ensure in the spirit of good governance that we pay what is owed.

Mr. Tancoo: And you are saying that, hon. Sir, in respect to the fact that we had on this one page \$8 million in arrears that was settled in 2021, arrears that would have accumulated over a period of time. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I have heard the explanations given by you on a couple occasions when we have been dealing with salaries and COLA and salaries direct charges, but I want to return to line Item 23. This is page 128, line Item 23 under Air Guard. Minister, when we look at this, right, the figures, the actual amount of expenditure for 2019 was 55,465—sorry, 55,465,110. That is 2019. Now, I did check that figure while we were having some discussions earlier. The 2020 Actual is 54 million, 2021, 49. The Revised Estimate for 2021, it goes up to 53. So, in response to Barataria/San Juan, Minister, I understood when you said, well, there may be the need—if there is a need to return to the mid-year review and seek to supplement any shortfalls. But this is not a case of where we are dealing with potential adjustments. This is where we know for sure that 2019 it was 55 million; 2020, 54 and 2021 it is almost 54 million as well. So, how is it when we know the Actual estimates is going to be 50 million in excess that we go with a reduction of over \$12 million. And the point I want to make is, how is it at the beginning, if we know what the sum is going to be for expenditure, that we deliberately undervalue the amount that we are going to put

on these figures?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, Member for Chaguanas West that question has engaged this meeting in the last hour in different configurations, and a consistent answer has been given with respect to that question. So, if maybe you could use the time to move on to another aspect of whatever you might like to highlight. Thank you.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, with your permission, the question I am asking is that with the reason given before, was that if there is a need for adjustments that it will be sorted out in the mid-year review. I am saying that with respect to line Item 23, this is not a case of where we are dealing with potential adjustments. This is where we actually know what the expenditure will be and we come and we budget at a lesser sum.

Madam Chairman: And I think I understood exactly what you asked. What you have repeated has showed that I understand what you asked. The question has been asked, and it has been answered on several occasions.

Mr. Rambally: I am guided, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 06: Water and Sewerage Rates, and I see in 2020 10 million and in the Revised Estimates last year it was 11 million. So it seems that the annual WASA rates are in the vicinity of 10 to 11 million, and we see it increased to 30,000, 300 times per cent more. And I am asking the question, given that the Minister is loath to increase salaries and given where he says that they could always vire amounts, why would he increase it by 300 per cent? Is this indicative that the water rates are going to increase by 300 per cent to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? Or what is the reason?

Hon. Hinds: I want to suggest that the Member looks more closely at the figure and see whether he is getting it right.

Mr. Charles: I am looking, 10,687 and 11,040, and now the Estimates is 30,000. That is clear. Yeah.

Hon. Hinds: If that is the case, it can only explain an attempt to allocate to sort out any arrears that might be owed to that state enterprises. [*Crosstalk*] I think it can only be an anticipation of settling the arrears that might be outstanding to them, to that state enterprise.

Mr. Charles: And you are guaranteeing that it does not reflect an anticipated 300 per cent increase in the water rates?

Hon. Hinds: I can guarantee nothing. I can only tell you, if that be so, it is only likely that it would be settled arrears owed to that enterprise.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Public Utilities.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for recognizing me. I do not know if the Member across from Naparima, representing Naparima, is trying to make statements to grab headlines. But with respect to any review of the Water and Sewerage Authority rates, Madam Chair, that is a matter for the Regulated Industries Commission. There is a process. The Government is not responsible, in law, to setting rates for electricity and water. The RIC will do its work. A recommendation will be made to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government will decide what subsidy structure would be in place to protect the weak and the vulnerable people in the society. So, I reject any attempt to create any narrative in national community that there is an attempt to increase water rates by 300 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Hinds: Yes, that is why, Madam Chair, I asked the Member to look closely at what he was reading, because we had an allocation of \$30,000 for 2022 and our

expenditure as at September 30, 2021, was \$38,708. [*Crosstalk*] This is our records. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Charles: That is 06, Madam Chair.

Hon. Hinds: 06?

Mr. Charles: You cannot make up figures. That is in the book, 10.6. It is either this is valid or it is not. And, if not, well then let me throw away the book, “um” pretend. Then I could throw away the book. The book is of no use.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam Chairman. If we are on page 128, Item 02: Goods and Services; Sub-Item 06: Water and Sewerage Rates for the Ministry of National Security, under General Administration, then a provision of \$30,000, which is approximately \$2,500 per month for the Ministry of National Security is not unreasonable and there is no indication whatsoever that there will be an increase in water rates.

Mr. Charles: Is the Minister in answering saying that you underpaid in the previous years?

Mr. Imbert: It is quite possible that there are arrears. The Minister of National—just one more clarification, Madam, if you do not mind to deal with that supplementary question. The Minister of Public Utilities, in his presentation previously, did give some details of amounts owed to the Water and Sewerage Authority by various Ministries and agencies. So, it is not unknown and it is not unusual for Ministries and agencies to be in arrears to the Water and Sewerage. In fact, the Minister said there is a billion dollars outstanding there from the public and private sector. And, therefore, there is nothing unusual about a provision of \$2,500—I want to repeat—\$2,500 per month for water rates for the Ministry of National Security. That is not an exorbitant amount, and it cannot lead to a conclusion that water rates are going to go astronomically.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. On this very matter, I do not want to mix up the matter, and I would like the Minister to clarify. We are dealing with the water and sewerage rates for the Air Guard, not the Ministry of National Security in total. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: General Administration.

Hon. Hinds: General Administration.

Dr. Moonilal: What page are we on?

Madam Chairman: 128.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, under General Administration?

Madam Chairman: General Administration.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, in this matter, the answer appears to be owing money to WASA. There is a debt to WASA of some kind, because it is not foreseeable that you would have 10,600 in actual 2020 and then 30,000 in 2022. So, could you confirm that? And, secondly, a related question. Could you confirm the Ministry, how much money the Ministry is owing to utility providers?

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to confirm that, at this time, but that can be made available beyond today. Insofar as General Administration is concerned, the figures are in front of you and there is nothing else I can usefully add.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just want to make it crystal clear, this is not a provision for water rates for the Air Guard. The Air Guard is not under this sub Item. This is General Administration which is the entire administration of the Ministry of National Security. Yes, there are arrears, and I repeat that a provision of \$2,500 per month for the administrative offices of the Ministry of National Security is not an unreasonable amount and cannot lead to the conclusions made by the Members opposite.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Same line Item 06. I do not think that

there is clarity with regard to the figures. Minister, I repeat, it is 10.6. On average, this cost per year has been \$11 million. You have now proposed an increase, sorry—\$11,000—[*Crosstalk*] Yeah, yeah. You pay attention a lil bit please. You have now increased it by over 100 per cent to \$30,000. All that is being requested is an explanation as to why, because you would have projected a reason for the increase. Is it that there are arrears? If you do not know if there are arrears then say so. If you have specifics that can be brought forward later, then provide it later in writing Minister.

11.15 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I already said there were arrears so stop that.

Mr. Tancoo: What were the arrears being considered that would have increased this figure by 100 per cent and for what period?

Hon. Hinds: In finality, let me repeat, Madam Chair, that the Actual expenditure for '21 was \$38,708, Actual expenditure.

Mr. Tancoo: That is frightening because what the Minister is saying is for 2021 when he had an Estimate of 12,000 and a Revised Estimate of lower, which is 11,000, he is now saying the Actual spend is three times that; it is 30-something thousand dollars. And that is your way of explaining, Sir. All we want to know is why.

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, the question has been asked pretty clearly and answered—

Mr. Tancoo: Very poorly.

Hon. Hinds:—equally clearly.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, you are saying—you are quoting figures that are not in this book before the Parliament.

Hon. Hinds: Madam Speaker, I need your protection.

Madam Chairman: Are you going on to another question because the Minister's response is that it has been asked and answered. So are you going on to another—

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, the Minister has not responded. He has not provided any explanation. In fact, his explanation, what he attempted to make made it even worse because those figures he is citing are not in the books and are higher than the Revised Estimate in the books.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, on line Item 16: Contract Employment, Minister, I see that there is an increase in the allocation for Contract Employment in the sum of \$8.4 million, can you give an explanation for this increase?

Hon. Hinds: A moment please. Madam Chair, let me outline what the circumstances are insofar as Contract Employment is concerned. The number of posts, 596; the number of those posts filled, 267; the number of persons recruited in 2021, 15; the number of contracts renewed in 2021, 59; and the number of contracts not renewed was one. However, it is the intention of the Ministry to fill in 2022, 53 positions. That includes the Director of the Legal Department, CCTV Manager, the IT System Manager, Procurement Specialist, Senior IT Infrastructure Specialist; to fill the position of Director, International Affairs and the Manager of the National Drug Council. And those are some of the positions we intend to treat with in the pursuit of optimum efficiency in 2022.

Mr. Hosein: So, Minister, when you anticipate to hire more people you allocated more money, which makes sense, but when you had before Items relating to persons who are already on the establishment and who are working you allocate less. So that is why we are saying that your explanation is not making much sense when you come to various line Items.

The other line Item I would like to move on to is 23, which is Fees. Now, based on our previous discussions this would also encapsulate software subscriptions and other related fields relating to ICT. The Minister of Finance in the budget did announce Government's strategy for digitization. Is it that the Ministry of National Security is not moving in that direction because I see that there is a very small allocation for Fees of \$320,000 whereas other Ministries were in the vicinity of millions of dollars for the digitization exercise?

Hon. Hinds: The Ministry of National Security as all other Ministries across the governance platform in Trinidad and Tobago is in accordance with Government's policy headed off in digitization and digitalization of all of the platforms.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Perhaps I can assist my colleague, the Minister of National Security. The Ministry of digitization has lead on this project and Members are reminded that there are significant digital assets inside the Ministry of National Security already. They are the ones that have the greatest amount of hardware and software already installed. What is missing is the process management.

The process management includes, Madam Chairman, digitization of hard copy records, the use of existing software and other positions and a lot of these structures are delivered into reality by the use of electronic payments which are really a matter of financial instructions from the Ministry of Finance pursuant to the precedent that the Attorney General's office has led on.

It is important to note, Madam Chairman, that under the Development Programme and under the IDB and other functions, which we are not dealing with right at this point, that that is where you will find some of the materials to go but that the Ministry of Planning and Development has certain other aspects there. So it is not that you just need to see a dollar figure for digitization, there are multiple

ways in which the Government is treating with this and the lead comes from the Ministry of Digital Transformation.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Hon. Hinds: In addition to that, if I may just say, the response that I provided to the Member was in terms of line Item 23 which is an Item of digitization, if I may call it that, in respect of the legal department and there we allocate to deal with like the search engine, LexisNexis; that kind of thing, to pay for those. But we have a much more significant allocation under 04: Other Transfers where we deal more frontally with the general ICTU issue. I was responding to line Item 23 which is only in relation to the legal department.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima. No? Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think it is important to note that this is the first time during the Standing Finance Committee that we are seeing the Actual 2020, Revised Estimate 2021 and Estimate for 2022. In that vein I am looking at line Item 09 and I note a \$201 million Actual spend for Vehicles and Equipment - Rent/Lease in 2020. I am seeing an allocation this year, for 2022 fiscal, of \$1.689 million. Can the Minister indicate why there is this huge gap between Actual spend in 2020 and proposed 2022? Maybe he might be able to give us a breakdown as well as to what vehicles and equipment are being rented, from whom and at what cost.

Hon. Hinds: That is pretty straightforward. This was the Vote that was previously used to deal with the CCTV camera operation and payments. That has since been transferred to another division, the SSA, of the Ministry of National Security.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Hinds: My pleasure.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South—Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am on Item 36: Extraordinary Expenditure, found at page 129. Minister, I saw that there is a very high increase in terms of what was estimated in 2021 of 50 million and there was a spend of 80 million for 2021. Minister, can you explain what Items of expenditure fall under this line Item and why this massive increase of \$30 million in expenditure for 2021? It is page 129, line Item 36. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, in this regard we consider that the allocation that we had had for '21 initially was not adequate and we went in the midterm review and we got some of that adjusted. This Item treats with some of the covert operations of the Ministry of National Security.

Mr. Tancoo: So you are under-budgeted?

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Minister, could you confirm whether or not this Item would also deal with payment to international organizations for technology and payment of professional and legal fees?

Hon. Hinds: No.

Dr. Moonilal: Could you also confirm whether or not this expenditure provides for contract settlements?

Hon. Hinds: Say again?

Dr. Moonilal: Contract settlements in the event that the Ministry has to settle matters of breach of contract?

Hon. Hinds: No. This is not taken care of here.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, can I just clarify we are dealing with page 129, 02/001/36.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Extraordinary Expenditure.

Mr. Imbert: Well, I am advised that during 2021, without saying any more because this is a security matter, that there was expenditure on the—what do you have your hand up for?—there was expenditure on the coastal radar system which would not have been incurred in 2020 which is one of the reasons why the expenditure in 2021 was revised from 50 to 80 under this.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Minister, just to seek further clarification, you indicated that Extraordinary Expenditure involved covert operations. Could I ask the Minister to explain, by way of policy, certainly not example, whether the Ministry of National Security undertakes covert operations?

Madam Chairman: Member, the way you start from the question, you said you are talking about policy. And we are not asking—

Dr. Moonilal: As a matter of policy.

Madam Chairman: We are not asking policy here.

Dr. Moonilal: Well, could I ask the Minister—

Madam Chairman: I am so sorry.

Dr. Moonilal:—then on expenditure, whether the expenditure that is identified here is for covert operations of the Ministry of National Security?

Hon. Hinds: All of the Ministry of National Security, its agencies; its—

Dr. Moonilal: But this is for the administration of the Ministry of National Security. This is not for an arm, or is this for an arm, like the SSA or something like that?

Hon. Hinds: This is for covert and operations overseen by or financed by the Ministry of National Security.

Dr. Moonilal: So this would include the budget of the SSA?

Hon. Hinds: No.

Dr. Moonilal: The SSA will have a separate budget?

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Dr. Moonilal: I think I—

Mr. Tancoo: I think my colleague for Oropouche East has asked the question although it was not answered properly by the Minister himself.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Fire Service. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 13: Maintenance of Vehicles, and I see—Item 13, 1-3, Maintenance of Vehicles, I see it was 7 million in Actual in 2020 and there has been a consistent decline by 50 per cent over the years and there is a 124,000, 125,000 decline this year. Now, I am asking the Minister, in view of the fact that two years ago, according to the *Express*, March 26th, the Acting Chief Fire Officer—I think his name is Mr. Kenny Gopaul—indicated at least half of the fire trucks in Trinidad and Tobago are broken down and off the road, and I am asking the Minister if that situation has been improved—because I have friends in the fire service who tell me that most of the appliances are not working—and is this 124,000 increase likely to deal with that issue?

11.30 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Member, is it Item 13 you are referring to?

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Madam Chairman: It is just, you know, that I am trying to follow with the figures.

Mr. Charles: Yes, the figures—it was 6.9, there is a 3,000, and so it is cut in half then.

Madam Chairman: No, that is 3 million.

Mr. Charles: 3 million.

Madam Chairman: You see, sometimes we just look at the figures to try and identify—

Mr. Charles: No, I am sure I know what I am saying. It was cut to 3 million, and this year there has been a decrease of \$125,000.

Madam Chairman: Okay. You said increase just now, so that is what I am saying.

Mr. Charles: “Oh”, yes, I apologize. I apologize, a decrease.

Madam Chairman: Sometimes you are not sure where you are.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I just want to make a general point—

Mr. Charles: But the core issue is, are these sums and the decrease adequate to meet—to treat with the fundamental problem of broken down fire trucks in Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, Madam Chairman, if one looks at the original Estimate in 2021 for this Item, it was 3 million and, therefore, the Estimate for 2022—the starting Estimate is 3 million. There is nothing unusual about that. They spent an additional 124,000 in 2021; that is just under 5 per cent over the original Estimate. Therefore these figures are within any statistical range of probability. It is nothing to quibble about, and I also doubt that he has any friends in the fire service. They would have retired over 10 years ago. [*Laughter*] So I do not believe you.

Mr. Charles: A follow-up question. Could the Minister indicate how many fire trucks in Trinidad and Tobago and what percentage are operational at this moment?

Hon. Hinds: Just for the benefit of the viewing and listening public, as Minister of National Security, and I have regular briefings with the heads of all of the divisions, including the Fire Service, there is no condition or circumstance of half

of the trucks down, as has been suggested by my friend opposite.

From time to time, as everything else, vehicles will malfunction, they will need maintenance. As the Minister of Finance said, these figures here are within the reasonable and anticipated range, and there is no such issue as we speak. When there is need for maintenance, it is routinely done and, therefore, the scaremongering that I am sensing here is not helpful.

Mr. Charles: I was just asking a question about a comment made by a senior officer of the fire service some years ago.

Hon. Hinds: And I have just reported—

Mr. Charles: I asked, has the situation improved? And is this Vote adequate to deal with it? So the “gallerying” is unnecessary.

Hon. Hinds: I said that we think—

Mr. Charles: The “gallerying” is unnecessary.

Hon. Hinds: I said that we think yes and I also said to you that I am now listening to the current Chief of the Fire Service who gives me the other view that I have shared.

Mr. Charles: I will talk to the representative body.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, so you have undertaken to give us the number of fire vehicles that are operational at the moment at a later date? Because we are asking for specific numbers here. I appreciate that you may have had conversations—

Hon. Hinds: You are more than welcome, you would have that.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to provide it immediately, obviously.

Ms. Haynes: No problem. We will take it in writing. Thank you.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much. Could fit in your thimble?

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, page 129, line Item 17. In terms of training, there were no allocations or releases for 2021. Whilst we are in a pandemic, training continues to be of critical importance to fire officers and related staff. Any reason why no allocations for that fiscal year?

Hon. Hinds: As far as I am aware, there is an allocation of \$1 million in this fiscal to facilitate training. Have you noticed that?

Mr. Rambally: Minister, yes, I did notice that.

Hon. Hinds: Yes?

Mr. Rambally: Yes, now and I will get to that. The question I am asking: Is there a particular reason for no releases in 2021?

Hon. Hinds: Because of the COVID situation, other countries where they would frequent—for the kind of training that is required in modern firefighting, they had border issues as well, and as a consequence, the training programme in that regard was shut down.

Mr. Rambally: Yes, thank you, Minister. In light of that, would one million be sufficient for bringing the officers up-to-date in terms of training in this fiscal year 2022?

Hon. Hinds: We consider that it is, and if it is not, as I have indicated ad nauseam earlier, we can make adjustments to accommodate that as necessary.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, I am at line Item 21, to be found at page 130. We are still under Fire Service: Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings. Minister, I do not know if you are aware of the condition of the fire station in San Juan. It is really in need of some work. I wonder whether or not this

particular line Item and this allocation, whether or not some attention can be given to that particular fire station, because you will know how populated the area is and how closely located the buildings are next to each other, especially in a commercial zone. So I want to know whether or not some attention would be paid to the San Juan Fire Station.

Hon. Hinds: This allocation is to deal with the maintenance of buildings across the fire service. Insofar as the prioritization is concerned, that will largely be led by the Chief Fire Officer, an administrator, the leader, but this allocation is to deal with maintenance generally, and we consider that it is useful in this regard.

Mr. Hosein: The question I am asking is whether or not any attention would be paid to the San Juan Fire Station for this particular fiscal year from this allocation.

Hon. Hinds: Well, from my perspective, as Minister of National Security, attention should be paid to all buildings.

Mr. Hosein: Well, I am making a special plea for the San Juan station.

Hon. Hinds: You are more than welcome.

Mr. Hosein: And I invite you to visit—

Hon. Hinds: And it is noted.

Mr. Hosein:—so that you can see the condition of the station.

Hon. Hinds: And it is noted.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I notice that the Minister, in his attempt to deliver a good line and length this morning, is bowling a lot of no-balls. But more importantly, Minister, in your regular briefings with the Chief Fire Officer, I want to give you the MP's view as it relates to maintenance of vehicles, and in your briefings and interactions with him, probably to pay some attention to the Savonetta Fire Station and the Couva Fire Station, in the context of

both stations and their proximity to the Point Lisas Industrial Estate as it relates to the maintenance of their respective fleets.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am looking at line Item 96: Fuel and Lubricants. Your actual for 2020 was \$2.5 million. Your Revised Estimate for 2021 is 1.3, and you have an Estimate for 2022 of 1.2. This is about half of what was spent actually in 2020. Can the Minister advise why that is so, given that by his own admission, there are increased number of fire appliances, et cetera, currently in use?

Hon. Hinds: As I said before, this is the allocation that we have had, and we are assured that by way of virements or through the mid-term review, any other need would be addressed and I can tell you, from the finance department right here, we have a commitment of \$60,000 to be paid from this allocation. This allocation is really to deal with fuel and oil and grease and, et cetera, those things for fire service vehicles.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, every time you give a statistic, you seem to create more queries than before. What is this \$60,000 for, given that I am speaking specifically about \$2.5 million being cut down to \$1.2 million? What is this \$60,000 commitment that you refer to now?

Hon. Hinds: That will probably be invoices that have been presented to be paid. Just give you that with the detail.

Mr. Tancoo: So this \$1.2 million includes arrears—\$60,000 at least at this point that you could refer to; \$60,000 worth of arrears is catered for in \$1.2 million, which is already half of what you actually spent two years before?

Hon. Hinds: The allocation that we have of \$1.2 million will deal with moneys owed, and debts to be incurred in the future, and it is an ongoing process. If we

need more money to do those things, by way of the midterm review or virements, we can treat with them. But we give you the assurance these Items for those vehicles will always, as they have been, provided for the fire service.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, your Estimate for the year going forward must be based on previous experience, and appliances that have been added to the fleet, which is why I am asking, your previous experience would have told you actual expenditure 2020 is \$2.5 million. If you have now budgeted \$1.2 million for 2021, which includes arrears, it suggests that you have under budgeted by 50 per cent what you expect to spend in 2022. That means that the budgeted—the budget figure from Ministry of National Security is actually under estimated and understated, and that pervades throughout these estimates of expenditure.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, in terms of line Item 15, when we look at the decrease—

Hon. Hinds: 002?

Mr. Rambally: Yes. When we look at that sum that is the estimated sum for 2022, \$250,000, a decrease in over \$1 million from the 2021 Revised Estimate. When we allocate these small sums—I know it seems as though the trend is, well, we can go to the mid-year review if we need more. But when we allocate these small sums and you have vehicles that are in need of repair, would there not be a slowdown in the process, or a continuing stalemate in the process in terms of getting the vehicles up and running, and any other equipment—actually any equipment to be functional within a short space of time? So what would happen is if we wait for the mid-year review, then you would have to get that release, then to take control of some of the repairs that we want to effect. So I am asking: Is this not really a sort of gross underestimation of what is required to make sure that all equipment is up-to-date?

Hon. Hinds: It is also available to us, Member, as has been happening from the

beginning of the existence of this nation State, that there can be virements. If you have a need, the Permanent Secretary makes a request of the Ministry of Finance to vire money from one place, where it is not immediately needed, to another. So the problem that you have highlighted does not necessarily exist.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, the point I am making is that if we even have to go that route of viring the moneys from elsewhere, do those things not slow down the process? This is the fire service. It is not one of those things that we can shelf and wait for the release of funds, whereas if you budget up front, you can see a more holistic approach in terms of treating with repairs. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Hinds: I disagree with you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to refer the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Minister, this was estimated at 2.6 in 2021, but the Revised Estimate shows nil. Can you advise why this was not utilized?

Hon. Hinds: Most fire guardians were recruited in 2021, due to—the experts felt that the rainfall this year, as anticipated and actually occurred, did not warrant the recruitment of fire guardians in fiscal 2021, hence the reason for the circumstance you have described.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

11.45 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, if I am to be very clear with what the Minister's explanation was, that basically we had enough rain to not have the need for fire guardians. So we had enough rain so we did not need additional fire protection. Is that what the Minister is saying?

Hon. Hinds: The manpower in the fire service and the re-afforestation programmes that are operational across Trinidad and Tobago were considered and, in fact, were sufficient to deal with that threat. That is what the Minister has explained.

Mr. Tancoo: That is not what the Minister said just now.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, on line Item 99: The Employee Assistance Programme. I saw, hon. Minister, there was no allocation 2020/2021 and in 2022 a paltry sum of \$10,000. Minister, could you explain the rationale? Or is the programme defunct? Or employees are sent elsewhere?

Hon. Hinds: Well, in my communications with the heads of the divisions of national security, I think they all understand the importance of the welfare of the men and women in their respective divisions and the need for the EAP arrangements, some of which are very effective, some not as effective, some needing to be ramped up, from the information I have. And, again, in terms of funding it, once the programmes are ramped up and activities taking place, money will be vired and adjusted to treat with it. So to a large extent, this is for the individual divisions to get on with it, recognizing the importance of the welfare of their personnel and the need for these programmes. Funding will not be an issue for the reasons I have stated all along.

Mr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 17, I am returning to it but not to rehash what we had discussed before. But I just wanted to make the point that, recently there was situation where a fire officer was attempting to save, rescue someone from drowning. And he himself unfortunately,

you know, would have drowned, and it raised the question as to whether or not the fire officers needed, you know, specific training and in this case swimming. Why I raise it and this is borne out in articles in April of this year. Why I raise it is that, is it that in arriving at the sum proposed \$1 million that there would have been input from the Chief Fire Officers to the specific training that they require moving forward in this fiscal year?

Hon. Hinds: I cannot say specifically but consideration would be taken across the board in the respect of the allocations that we sought.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. Minister, for 2021 the Estimate for this line Item was nil however, your Ministry went about spending \$1.5 million. Can you indicate what this Other Contracted Services were? Line Item 28.

Hon. Hinds: I am advised that that expenditure was to treat with some outstanding bills, cable bills owing to providers, service providers. Yes. So that is what you see reflected there across the system.

Mr. Ratiram: And how long these outstanding bills were for? For what time period we are talking about?

Hon. Hinds: I am being told that they would have been accumulated over about, just over a year—

Mr. Ratiram: Over a year.

Hon. Hinds:—and a half.

Mr. Ratiram: So then if it was accumulated over a year, in working out our 2021 Estimate, why did we not cater for it? Was it a matter of under-budgeting last year again? Like what we are seeing happening this year?

Hon. Hinds: As I indicated earlier, the Ministry like all other Ministries would make a request or make requests and the allocations that we have, we work with. Where necessary we will make adjustments as I have described it.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. However, for us or the fire service to work with nil allocation for this line Item and ask them to work with it, it is really unreasonable. However, for this line Item can the hon. Minister provide us in writing a list of all the contracts that were paid with this \$1.5 million? And the sum for those contracts?

Hon. Hinds: Certainly. Certainly.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I think my colleague asked the question already and it was answered. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So Item 004: Prison Service. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am at line Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment. Minister, based on the budget statement for that fiscal year, 2021, there is an indication given in the debate that there will be upgrades to the prisons in terms of the alarm system because there are several prison officers who raised this matter in the public domain that the alarms are not working in the prison system. Can you indicate whether or not any work has been done? Because I saw that there was a spend of just a little shy of \$1 million for fiscal 2021?

Hon. Hinds: You are talking the alarm system?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Hon. Hinds: Yes. I can assure you that at the MSP, the contractor has been put to work, as we speak, maybe about a week or two ago on work job reworking the

alarm system at that institution.

Mr. Hosein: And what about Port of Spain?

Hon. Hinds: I do not know specifically where that is but I can provide to you at the shortest possible time recognizing the importance of these systems for the security of the environment.

Mr. Hosein: And the security of the prison officers. Yes. I thank you. I want to move on to line Item 96 with your leave, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Is that within that Sub-Head?

Mr. Hosein: Yes. Fuel and Lubricants. Minister, I saw—

Hon. Hinds: Which line?

Mr. Hosein: 96: Fuel and Lubricants.

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: There was an Estimate of \$486,000 and I would have anticipated that that Estimate would have been low simply because of the prisoners would not be required to be taken to courts because of the establishment of the virtual courts. But then I see that there was a spent of \$1.3 million for that fiscal year. Can you account for that increase of \$1 million or so from the original Estimate?

Hon. Hinds: This Estimate, it appears, is roughly for the first part of the year and we, as necessary, will make requests or virements to treat with any other requests in this regard.

Mr. Hosein: No. Minister. I asked why there was an increase of \$1 million for fuel for that, the fiscal 2021 in light of the fact that there would have been a decrease in prison transportation because of the establishment of the virtual courts through the COVID Regulations.

Hon. Hinds: The prison still, notwithstanding the fact that they have courts now at the facility and there have been courts online. The prison still has transportation

things to do, to take people to the various posts, to take people to the hospitals and various things, so it is their requirement and we have reflected it in the allocation.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, in terms of, again, I am looking at training which is line Item 17, now at prison service. This is page 130. The sum that is estimated here—

Madam Chairman: Seventeen.

Mr. Rambally:—17 for 2022 is \$200,000. Would you not—would these prison officers not be required to engage in additional training now that we are moving more in the, you know, into virtual courtrooms and they may need special training to treat with these situations? And therefore, \$200,000, again, is a very low figure to put for training.

Hon. Hinds: Well, all the prison officers do is present the prisoners to the court, you know, and they have been doing that for eons. So insofar as the other elements are concerned, that is really largely conducted by the Judiciary. The prison officers simply present the prisoners, and the IT systems are in place to conduct the courts quite satisfactorily.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, from the perspective to the Office of the Attorney General, the Judicial Education Institute conducts certain aspects of training. The Office of the Attorney General also conducts certain aspects of training with the coordination of international assistance. The Government of Canada, the United Kingdom and the National Center for State Courts in the United States have all

been lending assistance in training. There are a number of programmes afoot and a number of them are, in fact, paid for by way of the contribution of international assistance.

The aspect of prison officers in relation to their duties to the court are confined really to ensuring that there are security positions maintained including, for instance, belly chains and other factors when you are in the virtual courts. And just to add, Madam Chair, in relation to a matter just discussed within this Head a moment ago, the transportation of prisoners is something that is conducted outside in some instances by the prisons. The figures that we see are in relation to the maintenance of vehicles and cost that the prison service itself owns, because they have equipment of their own. Thank you for that opportunity, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. It appears that the Minister does not know what is going on in the Ministry. I am glad his colleagues would assist him. Line Item 43.

Hon. Hinds: Just out of order.

Mr. Tancoo: Sure. Sure. Line Item 43: Security Services. At a point in time when our nation's prison officers are under continuous attack and when we have riots in prisons, et cetera, I see a movement from \$22.7 million actually spent in 2020 to a Revised Estimate of \$2 million in 2021, upping to \$7 million which is still substantially less than the actual spend in 2020. Can the Minister advise what has caused this significant and dramatic decrease in expenditure on security services for the prison service of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Hinds: This sum, the increase of \$4.5 million is for payment for prison transport which is quite different and separate from prison vehicles as was explained a moment ago. The last contract expired in July 2020 and a new contract

is pending. Further, if an increase in the allocation is required, as I have said for umpteenth times for the morning already, those adjustments would quite easily be made, as I have explained. And the line Item is to process payments for prisoners' transport.

Mr. Tancoo: Line Item 43 is to provide for prisoner transport?

Hon. Hinds: No. I am talking—

Mr. Tancoo: Make up your mind, Minister.

12.00 noon

Hon. Hinds: Just stand down. As I said, the contract expired in July of 2020 and a new contract is pending and that sum that you see was to pay for that outstanding money in terms of prison transport.

Mr. Tancoo: So then the decrease between the Estimate of 2021 of \$10 million to \$2 million revised for 2021—

Hon. Hinds: That is in consideration of the virtual courts now. That is prison transport. We do not expect too much of that again, because we have gone into a regime of virtual courts and that is what explains it.

Mr. Tancoo: So then why are we increasing to 7 million now?

Hon. Hinds: Those are to deal—

Mr. Tancoo: I am speaking. Just for clarification, I am speaking, Minister, to deal with security services, eh.

Hon. Hinds:—with further arrears.

Mr. Tancoo: Oh, further arrears. So what are the current arrears then, Minister?

Hon. Hinds: I could not tell you exactly an off-hand figure like that.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I request hon. Minister that you provide it in writing?

Hon. Hinds: You are more than welcome. Yes, you are more than welcome.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 03, Uniforms. This was estimated in the 2021 budget at 3.3 million, but the Revised Estimate was 600,000. Is it that prison officers, the prison service, was not provided with the anticipated amount of uniforms for the financial term? Minister, line Item 03, Uniforms, the Estimate for 2021 was 3.3 million, however the Revised Estimate was only 634,000, when the actual spend for 2020 was 4.4 million. Can the Minister indicate the reason for this significant disparity? Is it an issue that the uniforms were not provided?

Hon. Hinds: The expenditure obviously will vary from year to year. Uniforms provided a year, a year and a half ago, two years ago, would be required to be replaced, to be renewed. So the increase is for new recruits. Remember, I told you there are 3,464 officers in the prison service, and they are all given several uniforms and pairs of shoes for each one of them. So the amount would vary from time to time.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister advise us what is the arrangement in the— collective bargaining arrangement in the provision of uniform for prison service?

Hon. Hinds: I could not tell you off my head, but if you would like to have that in writing, most certainly.

Mr. Ratiram: And does the Minister have any idea of if this agreement in the collective bargaining has been fulfilled for the last financial term?

Hon. Hinds: What I do know is that prison officers wear uniforms, and they have been, and they will continue to be provided for prison officers.

Mr. Ratiram: We understand that, hon. Minister, however the actual spent for 2020 was 4.4 million, whereas the actual spent—when it was budgeted at 3.3 million, only 600,000 was spent. So I am asking, if it is that a disservice—

Hon. Hinds: It may be that they needed—

Mr. Ratiram: If I may finish, I was asking if a disservice was provided to the prison service during the last financial term.

Hon. Hinds: No, no, if they got uniforms last year it does not mean that they will need a replacement of them in this particular year. They may need them two years hence.

Mr. Ratiram: But you cannot say if the collective agreement is being fulfilled or not?

Hon. Hinds: I just told you I do not have that particular detail off my head, but can provide that in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 005, Regiment; Item 006, Coast Guard. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister again, one of the things that we see here, and I would ask this question in relation to Coast Guard, is line Item 17, and my question again is, would you deem this to be, you know, a sufficient allocation for training in this fiscal year, \$250,000?

Hon. Hinds: I have noticed that all the divisions of the Ministry of National Security, and I imagine across the platform, are constantly engaged in training and upgrading their skills in order to serve the public, as well as they must. And therefore, dynamic as that is, there will always be a need for more, and you make request, and you get allocations, and you work with that, and as the need arises you make further requests. But training is a very critical component of the work in national security, and this is happening across the board.

Mr. Charles: Thank you very much. Item 96, Fuel and Lubricants, there has been a \$6.3 million decrease. And I refer the Minister to the *Express*, September 30, 2021, and I quote:

“Fishermen posted a video of what they believed was...body on the beach, saying they had reported it to Coast Guard officers who said they had no vessels available because there was ‘insufficient gas.’”

And four months ago when a fisherman was attacked at gun point by pirates and thrown overboard the coast guard was contacted for immediate assistance, but they did not have a vessel available, relatives had to find a boat to assist in the search. And the question I ask, given reports that vessels are not available because of fuel and/or lubricants, and last year the expenditure was 14 million, and yet our citizens were saying that when they called on the coast guard they were not available. And now in spite of that you have decreased the fuel and lubricants allocation by 6.4 million. It does not makes sense, but then explain?

Hon. Hinds: Let me say that you want me, like you, to rely on what somebody say that somebody in a newspaper. [*Interruption*] That is not the way a sober Government behaves. What I rely on, and the reports that I would receive, officially, from the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, and all the formations, I will tell you this, I also pay attention, as a Member of Parliament and as a citizen, to reports in the newspaper. But I can tell you, we have been working closely with the fishermen and your colleague from Couva North behind you, will testify to that fact. He complimented me recently. We have—[*Interruption*] Yes, we have been working closely—

Mr. Ratiram: That is misleading. That is misleading this Committee, Minister.

Hon. Hinds:—with the fishermen, and I want—

Mr. Ratiram: That is misleading this Committee.

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, I am being distracted, drowned out by “un-sober” noises.

Mr. Ratiram: Do not mislead the Committee.

Madam Chairman: Member, you will get an opportunity to discharge something. Please!

Hon. Hinds: And as I was indicating, Madam Chair, we work very closely with them, we provided training, we provided technical advice, we put an advanced base in San Fernando in order to assist them, we use the riverine patrol, and we are working very closely with the fishermen in that area. And I will also let you know, in respect of our border security arrangement, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard and the Coastal and Riverine Patrol Unit of the Police Service are very actively at work, along with other formations out there. So this suggestion about fuel and all of that, it is all exaggerative, and it is all scandal-mongering. And I am not going to do what you have done, rely on what somebody say that somebody say reported in a newspaper.

Mr. Charles: Follow up question. Somebody did not say, but 14 dead bodies arrived in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and nobody knows, and there was no coast guard vessel at the time, and it was said for fuel and lubricants. You are telling the population today that you have enough fuel and lubricants to ensure that we have a 24/7 patrol of our borders, Trinidad and Tobago. You are making that commitment today to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Hinds: That suggestion that the coast guard did not respond when reports of a boat with bodies flowed into Trinidad and Tobago, and of course it was seen by fishermen who happened to be in the zone where that happened outside of Tobago, and they would have made contact with the coast guard. And what is not known to a lot of people, part of the maritime safety regulations for all vessels, all shippers, is to lend assistance to another vessel in distress as you can. It has happened many times.

So when the coast guard, and I am in possession of an official report on this.

It had absolutely nothing to do with any lack of fuel. That is misleading, and the Member should withdraw that. The official report is, the fishermen brought it to the attention of the coast guard, they were on their way, and the coast guard quite naturally, in accordance with maritime rules, asked them to lend any assistance that they could while the arrival of the coast guard was impending. By the time the bodies and the vessel got to the shore the coast guard was present along with the police, and the police took control of the investigation since. The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has been brought up to speed with the outcome, and efforts have been made to contact the Government of Mauritania from where it was discerned that these bodies had emanated, and the matter is now in that course. So, it is wrong, absolutely wrong and misleading to suggest that it had anything to do with a shortage of fuel, as the scandal-mongering suggests.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you confirm for the last fiscal year that there were no reports of fuel shortage by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard?

Hon. Hinds: I cannot confirm that. What I can confirm is that allocations have been made, and the Ministry of National Security provides resources to all of the divisions of national security, and their work is ongoing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. After this very enterprising commentary ad nauseam by the Minister of National Security I want to return to line Item 96, Fuel and Lubricants. The figures are here and they are very clear. In Actual 2020 actual expenditure \$13.4 million, Revised Estimate 2021, 14.4 million. Despite that, the Minister is now proposing an expenditure of \$8 million. So Actual 13.5, Revised Estimate 14.5, that is past, that is 2020 and 2021, and for some reason the Minister believes now an allocation of \$8 million, which is \$6 million less than he said he spent last, an allocation of \$8 million will suffice for the year given the track record which was substantially higher than that. Can the Minister account for

why we have a substantial decrease in the allocations of fuel and lubricants?

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, just to suggest, fortunately we have with us in the Chamber here a very senior commander of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, who is responsible for their financial and other circumstances, who has just given me, and I give the public the assurance that there has been absolutely no report of any lack of fuel for any vehicle [*Desk thumping*] or vessel belonging to the coast guard. Absolutely none. Okay! So you all can continue to follow who say and she say and “dem say in dey drunkness”. Absolutely none. Madam Chairman, I would future say, in respect to the question about the 8 million, I cannot understand it, my friends on the other side behave with us as though there are no constraints on the Exchequer in terms of revenues, and in terms of management of the budget. We could want what we like, and we are entitled, but the Minister of Finance in budgeting has to take into account the revenues for Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and he will budget accordingly. We on this side understand that. They pretend as though that does not exist. They pretend as though COVID-19 did not exist, by a reckless—

Mr. Hosein: Is this Standing Finance Committee?

Dr. Moonilal: This is an answer or a question?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, it is.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, Madam Chair, if I may please. I have asked—

Hon. Hinds: Because, Madam Chair, I have had, Madam Chair, to repeat ad nauseam, every Ministry including the Ministry of National Security will make request based on proposals coming from all of the divisions. Having so done, you go before the Budget Division, you try to persuade them of your needs, but they have budgeting priorities, they have constraints. Trinidad and Tobago is not making revenues, making money as she used to. [*Interruption*] Good, thank you.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, the Minister has still not explained the decrease. However, Madam Chair, if I may pursue, then this allocation in this book here— [*Holds up book*]—provided by the Minister of Finance—

Madam Chairman: One please. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes.

Madam Chairman: We do not allow displays. All of us know the books we are looking at. Secondly, I think, and I want to suggest, that Sub-Item 96, that line Item, has been dealt with exhaustively on the same—

Mr. Rambally: We have no response, Madam Chair, we have no response from the Minister in relation to the—

12.15 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, I just want to place it on the record, is the Minister suggesting that the news reports and all of the social media videos are false?

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West, we are here on a certain exercise. Either you are going to comply with the exercise or I will go on to somebody else.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, in relation—

Madam Chairman: Let us be productive.

Mr. Rambally: Sorry. Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: We are not talking about newspaper reports, it was asked in a particular context. That has been going backward and forward. Do you want to ask another question?

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, I just wanted the Minister to state on the record in relation to line Item 96, he made a statement on the record that he had information which suggested that what Member for Naparima was saying is false and we are

going with the mainstream media as well as social media showing pictures of bodies, dead bodies. And I want to know if the Minister is saying that those are false.

Madam Chairman: Well, I do not think we were talking about pictures of dead bodies. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 96: Fuel and Lubricants, and the Minister went about at length to explain the constraints of revenue—

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North—

Mr. Ratiram:—and the management—

Madam Chairman: I ruled that we are no longer dealing with line Item 96.

Mr. Ratiram: Just one—

Madam Chairman: Is there another line Item you would like to deal with?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Please.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. So I should not point out the question that I had—

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 17, just to show that this budget does not make sense.

Madam Chairman: 70?

Mr. Charles: 17, 1-7, training—

Madam Chairman: Right.

Mr. Charles:—does not make sense. In the Revised Estimate, \$236,970 was spent for training; that is 2021. The Estimate for 2022, \$250,000 in spite of the fact that we have two new cape vessels. So it seems to me that we are acquiring equipment, buying new stuff and not getting the human resources up to skill, and probably

some of the problems we are having relate to your inadequate training budget for the Coast Guard of Trinidad and Tobago. Could you kindly explain the limited 250,000, which is one scholarship?

Hon. Hinds: I cannot understand how my friend found himself down that very dusty road. I cannot understand it. The arrangement for the two cape-class vessels which we ordered and delivered to the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard to assist in protecting our borders and our people and providing safety and security, carried with it a training component, similar to the three OPVs that were purchased and were scuttled sometime after. It carried a training component. Some of our officers went there, to the ship yards, and oversaw the construction phase of the vessels. Once they were delivered our personnel were supposed to have gone—personnel from Australia were supposed to have come to Trinidad and Tobago, they did and they have carried out successfully the training for the operation of those vessels. And in fact, I received correspondence two days ago from the Chief of Defence Staff. Now that the vessels are here and now that the training programme has been completed, they are ready to commission the vessels and that will be done in a few days from now.

Mr. Charles: Minister, there has been a history of poor maintenance of first class vessels—

Hon. Hinds: You are raising a separate issue.

Mr. Charles:—on the 12 Damen—it is related, the 12 Damen vessels—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, what line Item is this?

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, is this the correct line Item?

Mr. Charles: Are redound to training.

Hon. Hinds: I dealt with training.

Mr. Charles: They are down, Madam Chairman, they are down because of—they are tied up in Staubles Bay. You know it.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, what line Item are we dealing with, please?

Madam Chairman: Item 17.

Mr. Imbert: Is this a correct discussion for that Item?

Hon. Hinds: So now he moves from the ridiculous specific to the ridiculous speculative.

Mr. Charles: Madam Chairman, we are on 13 and 17 and the allocations are inadequate to the manifest problems [*Desk thumping*] that the whole of Trinidad and Tobago is aware of.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, there is a line Item 24: Refunds and Rebates. Minister, can you explain what refunds this line Item refers to.

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, this has to do with persons who would have been dismissed from these formations and there is an agreement in terms of their terms and conditions that their pension contributions would be returned to them and those are the—that is the allocation to treat with that particular issue.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Madam, you ruled that we could no longer ask any questions on that line Item.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am on page 132, Coast Guard. Could I speak to Item 40?

Madam Chairman: Sure you may.

Dr. Moonilal: Minister, of course we have heard the default answer that when you

budget and there is a decrease you can always come midterm and get some moneys and so on. At the Food at Institutions there has been an increase of \$359,630. Now, it struck us as interesting that there would be a decrease in fuel but an increase food. Are there some functions that we expect this year that the cost of food will increase this way, because I am sure you will support that your Minister of Finance reduced the cost of pigtail and Crix and so on, so the food prices may be cheaper.

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair—

Dr. Moonilal: But is there some function, is there some catering, is there something that is happening? If you do not know, it is fine.

Hon. Hinds: I just indicated, I earlier indicated that recruitment has taken place. They have recruited more persons into the formation and that is a small increase that might account for that. There is no particular function or so, it is just the ongoing business of that important formation of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to point the Minister's attention to line Item 08: Rent/Lease-Office Accommodation and Storage and line Item 05: Telephones.

Madam Chairman: You are taking them together or one at a time?

Mr. Ratiram: I can, I can take it one at a time.

Madam Chairman: One at a time, please.

Mr. Ratiram: I will take it one at a time. Minister, when we met earlier in the financial term you gave an undertaking of setting up a coast guard base in central Trinidad. From then to now that has not taken place and none of the issues and the commitment that you gave in that meeting concerning the coast guard, the telephone we will deal with after, but none of the undertaking you gave concerning

the coast guard was adhered to. Under this line Item here, do you think there is sufficient or is there another line Item that is going to adjust the establishment of the commitment that you gave for the setting up of a coast guard base in central Trinidad.

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, I did not give any such commitment. That is an operational issue about which this Minister will give no such commitment unless I am so advised by the head of Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard or the Chief of Defence Staff. I gave no such commitment. However, I was able to report, truthfully, that the coast guard set up an advanced base in San Fernando to be able to respond more quickly to the calls and the cries of the fishermen. I also gave the assurance that we will provide the training and the working with them in order that they can better protect themselves. I am fully aware that that ensued. I got a report recently from the Riverine Patrol Unit head that they had met with the fishermen after some difficulty and they continue to work with them. So to suggest that nothing we agreed at that meeting is just disingenuous and typically UNC.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, we will deal with the Riverine Unit on another line Item. We were dealing with the coast guard and you are now saying now to us and to the public that is looking on, [*Desk thumping*] we are dealing with the coast guard and you are now saying to the public that you as the Minister do not see the necessity in guiding the way forward with the establishment of a coast guard presence in central Trinidad taking into consideration the plights that the central fishermen have been facing for years. [*Desk thumping*] You do not see that as a necessity?

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, the question that is now being posed by my friend is quite different from the one he asserted a while ago. What he said a while ago is that I gave a commitment that that will happen. I gave no such commitment. He is now asking me about whether I see the need and whether it is a good thing. That is

quite a different story. If you want me to recommend and suggest that to the coast guard after deep consideration as to its commonsense and viability I might. But, for the most part those operational issues, this Government, this Minister leaves to the experts.

Madam Chairman: All right. Member—

Mr. Ratiram: Just on the telephone.

Madam Chairman: Member, we are at Item, according to you, 08, which is Rent/Lease-Office Accommodation and Storage. Let us deal with that please as identified by you.

Mr. Ratiram: I will move on to another line Item, Madam Chair. Line Item 05: Telephones. Minister, at that said meeting we exchanged telephone numbers and phone numbers were given to the Presidents of the various Fishing Associations that were at that said meeting. Minister, you held a public—

Madam Chairman: Member, we are talking about Telephones under Coast Guard.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: We are not talking about telephone numbers. Please ask your question under 05.

Mr. Ratiram: 05: Telephones.

Madam Chairman: Coast Guard.

Mr. Ratiram: 05: Telephones.

Madam Chairman: Coast Guard, no.

Mr. Ratiram: The Coast Guard, Telephones, yes.

Madam Chairman: 05, okay. So please—

Mr. Ratiram: And this is related to what I am saying. Right. I am just trying to bring the Minister's attention to the issue at hand, right. Because the last statement

we saw in the public space is he was sleeping when the incident took place with Marley—

Madam Chairman: So—

Mr. Ratiram:—and he did not present himself with this debate.

Madam Chairman: Member, Member, while I could understand that we will throw barbs at each other—

Mr. Ratiram: Okay.

Madam Chairman: I would like all of us to be mindful, right, of the fact that it is two and half hours and we have really gotten nowhere with this exercise.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect—

Madam Chairman: I would like us to be prudent in our management of our time. According to you, we are on 05 under Coast Guard. Please proceed.

Mr. Ratiram: I am guided accordingly, Madam Chair and thank you for such guidance. Line Item 05: Telephones. The Actual spend was 2.5 million in 2020. It was budgeted for 1.5 million in 2021, but the Revised Estimate again was more than what it was estimated for. And we are seeing under-budgeting here at 1.5 million again for 2022. Minister, with respect to the telephones at the coast guard base, the number that you gave the fishermen to call, I was present when calls were actually made to that phone number and the calls go to an answering machine.

Members: “Oooh.”

Mr. Ratiram: There is no direct line, fishermen had to wait an extended—

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North, could you deal with the financial issue that is before you?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, Madam—

Madam Chairman: And I am suggesting that so far you have not. You may have another issue, there may be other avenues for you to raise your other issue. It is not

allowable here about the exchange of numbers and so on. Could you ask your question in light of the financials that are before us?

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I was guided by your gracious self that—

Madam Chairman: And please continue taking into account the guidance.
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ratiram: Okay. It is to make my contribution. I thought I had five minutes at the start of this Committee—

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer to line Item 04: Electricity. In 2020 we had an Actual spend of \$1.95 million. The Minister of National Security then estimated an \$800,000 spend, but the Revised Estimate was \$1.3 million. He is again estimating an \$800,000 spend. Madam Speaker, I want to know whether or not this heading 2022 Estimate should actually be 2022 half-year estimates. Because it is clear that the Minister has under-budgeted for his statement here. This is a 2022 estimate expenditure for a financial year. That is what these books are for. The Estimates for the financial year 2022, not the estimates for half of 2022. Can the Minister explain given the fact that they have spent 1.95 million in 2020, Estimate at 1.3 million in 2021, why is it that he is now estimating a significantly less figure for 2022?

12.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, I am getting weary to repeat the same position again. So the explanation I gave earlier in terms of what we request, and what we get, and how we will treat with any shortfall is repeated.

Mr. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]— —for financial year 2022. This figure clearly, as projected by the Minister himself—

Hon. Hinds: And that is—

Mr. Tancoo:—is for half of the year 2022. Therefore, these books, Minister—

Hon. Hinds: And that is in addition—

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, these books then are wrong—

Mr. Hinds: No, it—

Mr. Tancoo:—because they do not contain an Estimate for the year. By your own admission—

Mr. Hinds: No—

Mr. Tancoo:—this Estimate is inadequate. By your own statement, Minister, on a multiplicity of occasions, ad nauseam according to you, you have said that they will come, you will have to go back to the Minister in the mid-year review for additional funding. So you know that in advance that the numbers are wrong. They are understated. This is not for the financial year, but for part of it, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Madam Chairman, Item 13: Maintenance of Vehicles, and Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment. In that context, I wish to ask the Minister if he could indicate how many marine assets exist in the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard? How many are operational? And how many are down?

Hon. Hinds: I do not have those details with us but we can make them available at the earliest opportunity in accordance with the Standing Orders.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Line Item 05: Telephones. Can the hon. Minister advise if a direct telephone line will be installed for the upcoming financial year, taking into consideration that phone calls to the coast guard goes through an answering machine and fishermen who are in distress have to wait long extended hours before

they can get an answer?

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chairman, it is also very possible that he must have called one of his Venezuelan business friends accidentally too. [*Crosstalk*] So, Madam Chair, we do not have any further clarification on this.

Madam Chairman: Item—

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item—Madam Chairman—

Madam Chairman: Yes, please. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Moving on to another line Item because clearly the Minister does not want to address the situation. Uniforms. Line Item 3: Uniforms. There is a significant decrease in this line Item, can the Minister advise us what is the collective bargaining agreement and arrangement with the Ministry and the coast guard with respect to the provision of uniforms?

Hon. Hinds: I would like to help my friend for Couva North to suggest that when it comes to the essential service of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, there is no collective bargaining or collective bargaining arrangement. [*Desk thumping*] Please be guided according. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise the significant difference in the Revised Estimate of 1.4 million to 500,000? As the Minister would have indicated, additional persons were recruited but we are seeing a significant decrease here. Can the Minister explain this?

Hon. Hinds: I can only suggest that maybe previously they required certain—having done their stocktaking and so on, certain items of kit and uniform, those having been procured, it may not be so necessary in the upcoming fiscal period. The other details, I can attempt to find out. But it is as honest as that and sober as that.

Mr. Ratiram: So, Minister, are you saying also based on the previous answer you

gave, that with respect to the provision of uniform for coast guard officers, that there is no arrangement in place with respect to their terms of reference for engagement with the provision of uniforms?

Hon. Hinds: Terms of reference for engagement?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes—

Hon. Hinds: What I can assure you—

Mr. Ratiram:—with respect to the provision of uniforms.

Hon. Hinds: What I can assure you, notwithstanding the meanderings of your mind, every coast guard officer is outfitted with the kit and the uniforms that he or she should have to carry out their work. And where that is not so—

Mr. Ratiram: And how often is that provided?

Hon. Hinds: How often? As often as—I do not know what the regulations inside of the coast guard are but I suspect as often as necessary.

Mr. Ratiram: Can you find out and provide us with that information in writing, please?

Hon. Hinds: I think as often as necessary should suffice.

Mr. Ratiram: No, but you said you think—you said you do not know. So can you find out specifically and provide us with the arrangement?

Hon. Hinds: I should try. I should try.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you. “Oh”, I am just being told by the very worthy Commander in our presence, and fortunately, and for which I thank him, kit is provided to the personnel every two years—

Mr. Ratiram: If that be the case, Mr. Minister—

Hon. Hinds:—generally.

Mr. Ratiram:—what we are seeing in 2020, a spend of 3.2 million in the actual

spend; 1.4 in 2021, but only 500,000 in 2022. Is this another piece of under budgeting that is happening within the Ministry? Because—

Hon. Hinds: Kit is provided every two years and they are given kit as necessary. Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 007. Item 008. Member, I am just asking everybody to pay extreme attention. All right? Okay? And this is the last such indulgence because I looked up.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you for your indulgence, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am at line Item 12: Materials and Supplies. Over the last fiscal year, Minister, I am sure you would be aware that many of the immigration officers would have been complaining about the lack of supplies in order to keep with respect to the COVID Regulations. We reopened the border this year, the immigration officers that are housed at the airport, the Piarco International Airport, were complaining that sanitizers, face masks, even hazmat suits were not being provided to them and they are actually the first in line for persons who travel, especially from foreign jurisdictions. Can you indicate whether or not this allocation is enough because there is a decrease of \$2.7 million for materials and supplies for immigration? So now they have moved from \$2.9 million to just \$187,000 for materials and supplies for this financial year.

Hon. Hinds: I cannot speak about—I can tell you now that I work very closely with the Chief Immigration Officer who is present in this Chamber as head of that Division today, and obviously, I work on a daily basis and very closely with the Permanent Secretary and I have no reports of any issues around shortages of these items for sanitization and so on. No reports that makes it a problem that stops the Immigration Division from functioning and performing its duty to the people of

Trinidad and Tobago and our visitors.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, before you were appointed as Minister of National Security, the former Minister did in fact indicate that he had to provide them with sanitizers and face masks.

Hon. Hinds: And I just want to share with you, many, many corporate citizens, including elements of the Chinese business community, recently would have made donations to national security. I have taken, since I am there— at least on three occasions, corporate citizens provided stuff and I aware that the Government has provided, as best as it must, equipment for sanitization and for cleansing and so on in the context of COVID, quite apart from the vaccines and everything available for every single citizens in this country. But the expenditure you see there, I am told that was for the purchase of passports, not necessarily for sanitization material as you are alluding to.

Mr. Hosein: So is there another line Item where that money will come out from for sanitization.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, line Item 10.

Mr. Hosein: Office, stationery and supplies?

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: There is a cut there, Minister. I mean, we still have to adhere to all of the COVID protocols.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, there might be a cut, but I am saying to you I have no reports as Minister of any shortage which adversely affects or affected the proper functioning of the Immigration Division of the Ministry of National Security.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 43: Security Services. In light of the actual figures for 2020 and the Estimates for 2021 having

to be revised upwards, I am looking at the decrease now in the 2022 Estimates. Is there any particular reason for decreasing that allocation?

Hon. Hinds: Same considerations, as I have explained all morning, apply, that we are not in a position, we are not in a phase, Trinidad and Tobago, where madly everything you want “yuh does get”. Trinidad and Tobago’s circumstances are very different today than those heady days between 2010 and 2015.

Madam Chairman: Item 008. Item 009. Member for Chaguanas West, 009?

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, in terms of the Forensic Science Centre, there is an overall decrease when you look at the cumulative figures. Would that not impact adversely or negatively on the Forensic Science Centre being part of the whole trend of detection rate? I know last budget we were talking about increasing the capacity of the Forensic Science Centre so that we can have better detection rate, it can fulfil its demand, and here it is we are saying now—coming into 2022, we are seeing an overall decrease in funding. Would that not adversely affect the functioning of the—

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West, in the exercise that you are engaged, I cannot allow that question, and I am sure you could maybe use that question against one of the line Items here. So that, I would give you an opportunity to re-ask but I cannot allow that global question in this exercise.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I will hone in to probably line Item 12: Materials and Supplies. Minister, my question holds even when taking one Item, a decrease in something like materials and supplies to the Forensic Science Centre, would it not have some negative impact in terms of the functioning of the institution?

Hon. Hinds: I have indicated earlier that we understand full well the critical contribution of the Forensic Science Centre in terms of the criminal justice process

and its impact on the sociology of Trinidad and Tobago. An action is being taken internally. That essential service, we have brought out all of the staff; we have had the DNA equipment recalibrated recently and case work is now taking place; we have brought 25 new persons. Under the previous Minister, that was arranged. They have now completed their training, they are at work. And all other actions are being taken to ensure that the Forensic Science Centre makes its due and proper consideration to the efficacy and the efficiency of the criminal justice system insofar as its contribution is concerned, and I am not convinced, I am not of the belief that the allocation here would adversely affect that laudable and necessary objective.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, thank you for that and I mean, again, we on this side, I will say that the figures do not bear out what you are saying. [*Desk thumping*] So I will just put that on the record, Minister. I did not wish to, to and fro, but—

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very kindly.

Madam Chairman: Item 010; Item 011; Item 012; Item 013; Item 014. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was looking, Minister, at line Item 36 as to what may be included or encapsulated under this extraordinary expenditure.

Hon. Hinds: This includes issues such as response— [*Pause*]

12.45 p.m.

Yes. This will include things like payment of court orders, assistance to other Caricom—our brothers and sisters in Caricom with disaster issues and of course military funerals and that sort of thing. Remember we had some operations assisting other elements of the Caribbean, this is the kind of thing that is taken in this extraordinary expense. Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 015. Item 016. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am on line Item 13. Minister, there is a large allocation of \$50 million on this line Item. Can you kindly provide us with the total number of air assets that we currently have, the number of assets that are operational and those that are not operational, please?

Hon. Hinds: Question of, my friend?

Mr. Hosein: The total number of air assets that we have, those that are operational and those that are not operational.

Hon. Hinds: I am advised, since I do not have personal knowledge of this, I am advised that we have two C-26 fixed-wing aircraft. Yes, I continue. Six rotary-wing aircraft and that includes four AW139s and two light twin engine aircraft. I am aware that the C-26 aircraft are operational. The six rotary-wing, they are in preservation mode, they are being preserved. I understand that they are in different stages of preservation, so that is insofar as aircraft are concerned. That is as far as I can go.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, when you say preservation mode.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, you have aircraft and they may not be operational but they have to be preserved and they have to be managed even though they are on the ground.

Mr. Hosein: So in the event that they are required—

Hon. Hinds: In accordance with the aviation rules and regs and law.

Mr. Hosein: In the event that they are required for use, they will be operational?

Hon. Hinds: They can become operational.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much as well.

Madam Chairman: Item 017. Item 018.

Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001. Item 002. Item 004.

Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. With respect to 004/04 Other Minor Equipment, Minister, I believe that this line Item would have covered the promise by the Government to provide the prison officers with stab vests and also firearms for the use and protection of themselves at the nation's prisons. Minister, can you indicate how many of these vests and firearms were provided for the prison officers for the last fiscal year and how much you intend to purchase for this upcoming fiscal?

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to say that but unwilling to say that publicly but if the Member insists, I can provide that in writing.

Mr. Hosein: I definitely will appreciate that information in writing.

Hon. Hinds: And I hope that the Member would not allow it to fall into, accidentally, someone else's mailbox?

Mr. Hosein: No, I will ensure that I hold the Government to account for all of the officers.

Hon. Hinds: These are matters of the safety and the security of our personnel.

Mr. Hosein: That all of the officers get the necessary equipment as promised by the Government.

Hon. Hinds: As a matter of fact, I will go a little further, Madam Chair, I will take advice as to whether I can make that available.

Mr. Hosein: That information was already answered in the public domain eh know.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West, you have a question?

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, just as a follow up on that line Item, it is a matter of accounting to just ensure that all officers have the vests, I do not know that you know giving the information as to the amount in any way threatens any national

security. They should all have one. [*Interruption*] Minister, I do not know what advice you need on it, that is my point. They all require one.

Madam Chairman: Item 005. Item 006. Item 007. Item 008. Item 009. Item 010. Item 012. Item 014. Item 015. Item 016. Item 017. Item 018.

Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies. We are at page 146. Item 001. Item 004. Item 005. Item 007. Item 009. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am on line Item 02, the SSA. Minister, we have seen that the SSA was allocated \$215 million for 2021 and the Actual spend was—well the Revised Estimate reflects an expenditure of \$350 million which is a significant increase from what was originally estimated. Minister, can you give an explanation as to the reason for this massive increase in expenditure by the SSA?

Hon. Hinds: I did indicate that along the way, the entire CCTV management operation was transferred to the SSA. So you will see a reflection of that.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you indicate to us because we know the CCTV cameras have been quite contentious in Trinidad and Tobago. Can you indicate to this Committee or this meeting the percentage of cameras that are currently working because there were issues with respect to the renewal of the contracts with TSTT? Are we at a better place in terms of the functionality of those CCTV cameras? Because we have heard numbers before where it was very unacceptable, the number of cameras that were actually working.

Hon. Hinds: I am advised and verily believe it to be true that 84 per cent of those cameras are now in the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I am also aware that the Government is in full flight making further arrangements to improve this substantially for the benefit and the safety and security of the people of our country and visitors.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you just confirm because last year for this Committee, we were told that Johnson Controls would have been the new management company with respect to these CCTV cameras.

Hon. Hinds: No, no, not the management company. I do not know what you were told but Johnson and Johnson is not the management company.

Mr. Hosein: The provider, sorry.

Hon. Hinds: They were contracted to do some things.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, so they are the providers now for the cameras?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, some of them at any rate.

Mr. Hosein: Some, okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Hon. Hinds: And they are on the job and doing that.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, if you would just allow me. Minister, based on—

Madam Chairman: I think what you should do is ask your friend, the Member for Couva North, if he would allow you because I recognized him.

Mr. Ratiram: Yeah, I will come back after, Madam Chair.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, are there any arrears being owed by the SSA or the Ministry of National Security to TSTT for the existing cameras that were in place?

Hon. Hinds: Well, I am aware that there are claims and those are being resolved.

Mr. Hosein: Is it possible that you could provide that information in writing?

Hon. Hinds: I do not think so. Those are business transactions which might defy the need for that kind of exposure.

Mr. Hosein: The arrears?

Hon. Hinds: TSTT is a commercial operation and I will have to seek advice on that before I could give any commitment in that regard.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 24, National Crime Prevention Programme, 3 million was allocated in the 2021 Estimate, however, only 474,000 was utilized. Can the hon. Minister advise why such a significant decrease?

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, I am advised that this programme did serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago but it is under review as we speak since this business of soft management of crime and anti-social behaviour is constantly under review and it is being reviewed as we speak in that context.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am at line Item 27, the Migrant Registration Framework Venezuela. Minister, based on the Budget Statement given by the Minister of Finance where it was said that the re-registration process for Venezuela nationals residing in T&T had been completed with 13,800 persons re-submitting their forms. The Minister said that the exercise has been extended to the end of October 2021 to allow for legal regularization and the protection of registered Venezuelans. Minister, I notice that there is no allocation being made under this line Item for that particular exercise. So that is one. The second question is really, what is the legal regularization that the Minister of Finance had alluded to in his Budget Statement?

Hon. Hinds: I am not going to speak in those terms for the Minister of Finance who is present so you may direct that otherwise. But insofar as the re-registration process—

Mr. Imbert: Could you repeat the question please? Because I was not listening.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, in your Budget Statement, you said that the registration exercise for the Venezuelans would be extended to the end of October and that is to allow for legal regularization of these Venezuelan nationals. Can you explain

what that legal regularization is?

Madam Chairman: That is not really a question for this exercise.

Mr. Hosein: Well, Ma'am, if I may rephrase—

Mr. Imbert: Irrelevant.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, if I may rephrase, it is falling under the Migrant Registration Framework, line Item 27. So is it the same exercise of the re-registration under this line Item that you were speaking of so it will now be a re-reregistration?

Madam Chairman: So are you asking what this allocation is for?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Hosein: And if it means the legal regularization that the Minister alluded to.

Mr. Imbert: The allocation is to register Venezuelans.

Mr. Hosein: Under the same exact framework that we currently have?

Mr. Imbert: It is to register Venezuelans.

Mr. Hosein: So legal regularization is not in terms of citizenship or residence?

Mr. Imbert: The allocation is to register Venezuelans.

Mr. Hosein: All right, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 001. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 18, just a curious note, I was wondering if this Unit has been disbanded or this line Item has been assigned elsewhere. Line Item 18.

Madam Chairman: One minute please, Member. Where are you? You are at 009?

Dr. Ragbir: Page 147.

Madam Chairman: I am at 011. Where are you? You at 009?

Dr. Ragbir: No, I am at 18. That was on 009, yes, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Yes, so you are under Other Transfers?

Dr. Ragbir: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes, okay, so I will allow you because you are at the lower end of the Chamber and you may have lost track of what is going on.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay, good. Yes, please.

Dr. Ragbir: Yeah, so hon. Minister, I was just wondering line Item 18, if this Unit has been disbanded or assigned elsewhere.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much for a very sensible question. It has been assigned elsewhere.

Dr. Ragbir: I thought as much.

Hon. Hinds: Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 011.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Head 09, Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 004, Social Infrastructure. Hon. Members, this Item 004, spans four pages.

Therefore, I will announce the project groups. A: Coast Guard; B: Regiment; C: Air Guard; D: Defence Force Headquarters; E: Defence Force Reserves; C: Prison Service. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

1.00 p.m.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Minister, you could probably deal with a couple of these Items because they are related. Item 31: Acquisition of CCTV cameras for the prison service, 36: Installation of CCTV cameras at YTC and 37: CCTV cameras at Port of Spain Prison. Now, allocations were made for fiscal 2021 for all three centres. Minister, can you indicate the reason why there was no

expenditure in the last fiscal year although an allocation was made?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. I am advised that the COVID pandemic affected—this is at No. 31—the ability of the foreign service provider who was contracted coming to get the project going and we continue to be in communication with such provider who is expected to return to the project in January of 2022. And, of course, I must also add that the system is about 95 per cent completed.

Mr. Hosein: 95 per cent.

Hon. Hinds: Yes. Much work has already been done.

Mr. Hosein: At 008, Minister, Improvement Works to Prison—

Hon. Hinds: Prisons as well?

Mr. Hosein: 008: Improvement Works to Prison Buildings. Are you on that line Item?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, I know in the PSIP it was indicated that works were done with respect to the prison cells, installation of toilet facilities at the prison. What percentage so far has been completed?

Hon. Hinds: I had the benefit of visiting myself a couple months ago and I am told—

Mr. Hosein: Is this Remand Yard you are referring to, Minister?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes, yes, Remand. I am reminded that that project is about 50 per cent completed now, that is the improvement of the Remand block, as you have indicated, and that work is ongoing.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. Expect it to complete in this fiscal?

Hon. Hinds: And that is under the IDF, eh.

Mr. Hosein: It is the IDF, okay.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes.

Mr. Hosein: Well, when we get to there.

Hon. Hinds: Uh?

Mr. Hosein: We would get to there after.

Hon. Hinds: Right, right.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you very much, thanks. Item 031: Acquisition of closed-circuit television system for the prison service.

Hon. Hinds: Yeah.

Mr. Charles: I have a note here. In this budget speech we were told, and I quote:

“...installation of security perimeter fencing...”—and the installation of—
“...alarm systems and a CCTV system.”—at our prisons.

And in March it was reported that no alarm system. There is no alarm system at Golden Grove. The Ministry assured, after a year and six months, that the prison would be equipped, but nothing has happened so far.

In May this year, the President of the Prison Officers Association, Ceron Richards said the prison is a death trap. The question I am asking is: What is the delay? I think you had given a reason. But what is the ideal, in terms of close-circuit television? Is this the ideal in terms of modern prison technology? And I would just quote:

In the Federal Correctional Complex in the United States there are surveillance cameras that are a 360 degrees view. There are motion detector sensors located all over the prison and have face detection technology to help identify the inmates.

When could we look forward to the completion of this project and the incorporation of these new technologies?

Hon. Hinds: That is what?—the Golden Grove Alarm system. I am happy to

advise that that is completed and operational. And insofar as the MSP is concerned the contract was settled, awarded and the contractor is already on the job, and he is actually on the job. The contractor, sorry, is already on the job. When I came to this platform, the prison service made a request as a high priority of that and I gave them that assurance and the project is on.

Madam Chairman: E: Immigration, F: Fire Service. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, we sort of touched on fire services in previous line Items. Under this is—

Hon. Hinds: Which page?

Mr. Rambally: This is page 54.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Rambally: We had spoken about some of the problems. Minister, would it be possible to have, or for your Ministry to provide a listing of what the Ministry deems to be priority, in terms of repairs to fire equipment, purchase of vehicles and fire equipment to be rolled out in this fiscal year? Because my colleague from Barataria/San Juan spoke to some issues in his constituency. We are aware of, in Mayaro, that they have had one fire tender as well out of operation for some time. And we are hearing different reports. Now that you are seeing here a certain sum of money is to be expended in this fiscal year, can we see how it will be spent and the priority areas, please?

Madam Chairman: So, is it that you are addressing 156 and 174?

Mr. Rambally: Yes 156, 174.

Hon. Hinds: Actually, this allocation is earmarked for a water tanker for the Mayaro Fire Station, the acquisition of a water tanker for the Penal Fire Station, acquisition of two ambulances, acquisition of two double cab pick-ups for use as

general purpose utility vehicles. And, as we speak, the fire service is preparing vehicles specifications. I will obviously have to approach the Cabinet for its approval and this allocation is geared towards all of that. Does that meet your taste and satisfaction my friend?

Mr. Rambally: Minister, as I said, yes. We have spoken about it under other Items but I was raising it in the context of this article.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rambally: But you have indicated what this is for.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Can I do General Public Services? Madam Chair, page 55.

Madam Chairman: Excuse me?

Mr. Lee: Can I ask a line Item under page 55, under General Public Services?

Madam Chairman: On page 55? Once it is under 005: Multi-Sector and Other Services.

Mr. Lee: Yes, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Lee: Minister, line Item 46: Upgrade of Machine Readable Passports to e-passports. In 2021, we had allocated \$15 million for this project. Nothing was spent. So now you are allocating \$11 million. I think it is a very critical project. Now, could you give us what is the status of that for the last—

Hon. Hinds: This is geared towards the extension of the current passport issuing system for upgrade of the machine readable passports. It is an upgrade to e-passport travel document. The Immigration Division is, as we speak, in discussion with the provider of the current border management system on the

upgrade required. And the technical specifications and RFP are now actually being prepared.

Mr. Lee: Okay.

Hon. Hinds: I agree with you. It is a very important project and we are pursuing it in those terms.

Mr. Lee: Another line Item now. Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 45, Minister. The same sort of questions I would pose to that I posed with line Item 46.

Hon. Hinds: Well, I am happy to report to you, on behalf of your constituents and all of the listeners across Trinidad and Tobago that the extension of the border management system to incorporate a new component of fingerprinting at all ports of entry into Trinidad and Tobago, this is what this is all about, the Immigration Division is again in discussion with the provider of the current border management system on the upgrade required and the specifications and RFP are also actively under development.

Mr. Lee: And once it is instituted, it would not only be at the airports but also at the—

Hon. Hinds: All ports of entry.

Mr. Lee: At all ports of entry.

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Hon. Hinds: So all anti-slopers would be found out, both coming in and those going.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Yes. There are many anti-slopers around.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. On page 56 at Item 062: The Construction of a Media and Conference Center at the Ministry of National Security Head Office. Minister, can you explain to this Committee why this project is costing \$1 million for a media conference center at the Ministry's head office?

Hon. Hinds: This is a new project. At present, there is no fit for purpose media and conference centre at the entire Ministry of National Security to host the media and confidential conferences sometimes. At present these events are hosted in an open space that is far from suitable. The construction of a purpose-built modern media and conference centre is an absolute requirement in these very modern times and this is what we are in pursuit of.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am looking at 006: Establishment of an Electronic Monitoring Programme for Trinidad and Tobago. As the Minister is aware, this matter has been before us for some time, and I just wanted to get an update in the context of the 2021 estimate of 5 million being revised downwards, significantly downward, and a much smaller estimate at this time. What would be the status of this project that some of us have been monitoring for some time?

Hon. Hinds: You have not been monitoring sufficiently apparently. Just about two months ago this Minister came to the public with the electronic monitoring team, and thankfully, if not boastfully, suggested that it was up, operational and running in the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, at least three or four persons, as ordered by the courts, have been wired-up, fitted with bracelets in accordance with the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. So you need to improve your monitoring in this regard my friend.

1.15 p.m.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I just follow up to ask the Minister, but the project itself involves as you could recall, much more than three persons. It was a rather expansive project.

Hon. Hinds: I am talking—I am talking about those ordered by the courts—

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah.

Hon. Hinds:—to be so wired-up.

Dr. Moonilal: So that you are saying that the equipment is in place, technology is in place and so on—

Hon. Hinds: Everything is in place on the entire operation.

Dr. Moonilal:—for the Judiciary then to follow up by using—

Hon. Hinds: An entire system is in place, up and functional.

Dr. Moonilal: Fine. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Hinds: And it cost this country just about \$10 million with no suggestion of any untoward behaviour or corruption.

Dr. Moonilal: Could you indicate the 800,000 provided, it is for the recurrent—

Hon. Hinds: I imagine so. Yes.

Dr. Moonilal:—supervising or so of the equipment and so on?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes. Indeed.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, hon. Minister, just a point on line Item 065: Cumuto Airbase Upgrade of ICT, which falls within my constituency. I know hon. Minister, when we talk about ICT we talk about communication, intelligence, upgrade of software. My point of observation is the 2022 Estimate was \$1 billion, I thought it would have cost actually quite much more looking at the strategic location of Cumuto Airbase. Any comments?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. This of course is a new project as well. And the Air Guard

recently gained an additional air station at Cumuto Barracks. Previously, it was with the SSA. As a consequence, there is a need to expand the Air Guard's ICT infrastructure to incorporate this new site, and I have to approach the Cabinet for its approval in this regard.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Hon. Hinds: I thank you as well.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, in terms of the line Item 006, I know you had said that it is fully operational, this is the Electronic Monitoring Programme, would you be in a position to tell us how many devices have been acquired to date?

Hon. Hinds: Not off my head but that can quite easily be made available to you. But I can give you the assurance that the number we have is adequate as at today. As the system expands we would obviously need more. But so far, so very, very good. And I am proud of the people at the Electric Monitoring Unit, they have done the business.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund. We are at page 193. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Hon. Members, this Item 004 spans three pages, therefore I will also announce the project groups. A: Coast Guard. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Through you, Madam Chair, to the Minister, Item 044: Construction of an Integrated Logistics Support Facility at Heliport Base. This was a project that was announced by the Minister of Finance in the last budget at a cost of \$1.4 million, no money was spent in the last fiscal. And then, I see the same allocation is made again for this fiscal. Minister, can you indicate why they did not

do any construction for this logistic support facility at the heliport base? And I know you will say COVID, but throughout the time, the COVID Regulations allowed for construction for government purposes.

Hon. Hinds: In respect of this project it is a facility to carry out dry docking and maintenance of vessels, and to allow for training of engineering and seamen, you know. Development of the designs have been approved by the Cabinet. The contractual agreement was signed between the Ministry of National Security and NIPDEC, that was signed in July.

Mr. Hosein: July of this year?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. July of '21. And the contract sum is very clear, \$1.4-plus million and the project kick-off meeting was held on August 11, 2021. And the project is ongoing.

Mr. Hosein: So we expect it to be completed in this fiscal?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes. We are getting on with it.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Chair. [*Inaudible*] On page 194.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East, please. Your mike. Yes. Okay.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes. Minister, could you indicate the—

Hon. Hinds: Which one?

Dr. Moonilal: There is an allocation for the construction of the Penal Fire Station, as you would be aware that fire station was constructed and completed.

Hon. Hinds: Which number?

Madam Chairman: A: Coast Guard. All right. So, if nobody else is at A, can we go on to B: Regiment. C: Air guard. D: Defence Force Reserves. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, I was just looking to ask a question on C.

Madam Chairman: At C? Yes.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, in terms of this particular project, line Item 002, under Air Guard. What works—I know it is a new project but what works are anticipated to take place in this coming fiscal year?

Hon. Hinds: I have to approach the Cabinet for its approval because this is a new project. And I will be doing so very promptly because the storage situation is not as desirable—is undesirable and we intend to improve on that. So I am going to be approaching the Cabinet very shortly for its approval and get on with this project.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, when we reach Prison Service.

Madam Chairman: Okay, sure. E: Defence Force Reserves. C: Prison Service. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, 007: Construction of a Correctional Facility at Hope, Tobago. Has that project been abandoned by the Government?

Hon. Hinds: No. That project has not been abandoned. We do not behave so fleetingly. There are some issues in terms of the site and that matter has generated some satisfaction for some, some angst for others, and we are trying to resolve that to get on with this project. So to answer your question, no, it has not been abandoned.

Mr. Indarsingh: The issues with respect to the site, has it to do with ownership and any friends allegedly, and their relationship to the Prime Minister?

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to provide any such specificity. Suffice it to say that it is an important project for us and we are resolving land issues in order to get on promptly with it.

Mr. Indarsingh: I hope that there will be full disclosure as it relates to the land acquisition for the construction of this particular facility. Minister of Finance, who owns the land?

Madam Chairman: Member for San Juan/Barataria.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. I am at line Item 012: Construction of Safe House for Officers. Minister, can you give us an indication of how many houses you intend to build as safe houses for the officers?

Hon. Hinds: Actually—this is a new project for us and it is really a repurposing of an existing building. Unfortunately, we live in a world, we live in a country, where men and women who decide to stand up for what is lawful and proper and right find themselves under attack.

Mr. Hosein: Correct.

Hon. Hinds: And that is an effort to take into account that and it is the repurposing of a building in order to accommodate some elements of this, as this state pushes back against those who threaten those who stand in the service and the defence of the State.

Mr. Hosein: You see, Minister, I am very disappointed with an allocation of just \$500,000 for this project because to construct a press conference room at your Ministry it is costing \$1 million. Whereas the importance of the safety of these officers, you only spend \$500,000. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Hinds: I am not surprised at the applause of your friends because all of you are as illogical as does not surprise me.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chairman, are you allowing that?

Hon. Hinds: But the refurbishment, [*Crosstalk*] the refurbishment and the repurposing of a building is quite different from the construction of and the establishment of a modern conference multimedia centre. So I do not see the

comparison. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: What is illogical is spending—

Hon. Hinds: But your logic does not surprise me.

Mr. Hosein: What is illogical is spending \$1 million on a press conference room—

Hon. Hinds: You may think so.

Mr. Hosein:—and \$500,000 for the safety of prison officers in this country. [*Desk thumping*] That is illogical.

Hon. Hinds: Of course. Of course.

Mr. Hosein: That is unpatriotic.

Hon. Hinds: Of course, Madam Chair, the Member is not taking sight of the fact that this is only one of a number of measures that are geared towards the safety and security of the prison officers.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at line Item 008: Construction of the Point Fortin Fire Station. We are—

Madam Chairman: No, no, we are not there. We are still in Prison.

Ms. Haynes: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Haynes: Okay, I will hold.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. Hinds: That is the “thimble” philosophy.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Chaguanas West.

Ms. Haynes: Pardon, you have something to account for?

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West. Please, Minister, let us get on with this.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, earlier I am afraid that I must confess the logic escapes me when you said we will be holding confidential press conferences at that media centre—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, may I ask what line Item is this? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Hinds: Just for clarity. I did not say confidential press conferences. I said confidential conferences. [*Crosstalk*] And if I said confidential press conferences that was an error that I am now big enough, sensible enough to withdraw.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, let us go on please.

Hon. Hinds: But I meant confidential conferences.

Madam Chairman: Minister of National Security. F, Member for Oropouche East and then we will take Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just some clarification Minister. At Fire Service: 009, to our knowledge that Penal Fire Station was completed. In fact regrettably, I think the Member for Port of Spain North had a bad experience there. But you are now budgeting \$10 million for the Penal Fire Station that was completed, would you care to explain?

Hon. Hinds: Yeah. That I understand as some outstanding payments to be made good in this fiscal.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I also ask for the Point Fortin Fire Station, whether that is outstanding as well, \$18 million?

Hon. Hinds: Point Fortin? Yes. This one is under construction. That began on the 1st of August of 2019, and it is now about from the report in front of me, about 25 per cent completed. And we are—

Dr. Moonilal: So that moneys would be for ongoing work?

Hon. Hinds: Ongoing works, yes. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. And while we note the significant expenditure for the construction of fire stations and the completion, finishing to pay the bills, how can the Minister then justify the allocation in terms of equipment purchased in—do we have sufficient equipment to furnish all of these fire stations?

Madam Chairman: What Item are we under please?

Ms. Haynes: Well, I would look specifically at the Point Fortin and Penal Fire Stations, if they have equipment to furnish these fire stations upon completion?

Madam Chairman: Member, this Item is really about Construction.

Hon. Hinds: Correct.

Madam Chairman: And therefore, I would suggest that your question could be asked in another forum.

Ms. Haynes: Okay, no problem.

Madam Chairman: All right. So, Item—Member for Oropouche West, I am sorry.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I return to Item 009: Construction of Penal Fire Station. Minister, you just advised my colleague the Member for Oropouche East, that this Fire Station was in fact completed, and this is moneys that were in arrears. Can the Minister indicate just for the clarification for the Committee, when this fire station was completed? And why is it we have several years afterwards this outstanding arrears, and whether there are other arrears still due for the completion of this Penal Fire Station?

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chairman, the answer I gave about the sum that you see it is for the settlement of outstanding payments and that is where we are.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister then advise why we had such an extended delay between completion and settlement of arrears?

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to say. All I know is that there are some outstanding

payments and they will be made in this allocation.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under Public Buildings, 002: Construction of a new Facility for the Forensic Laboratory and Pathology Services. Is this the same building of the new forensic that was talked about under your last Minister of National Security that was some consortium with China?

Hon. Hinds: I suspect it is. And I want to take the opportunity to congratulate my predecessor in this Chair for advancing as best as he did, and that is the project and we are continuing.

Mr. Lee: And where is the location of that new building?

Hon. Hinds: In the Mount Hope area and the Cabinet approved a particular location and that project is ongoing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much for some clarity, Minister. Through you, Madam, 003: Acquisition and outfitting of a building for administrative purpose. Would you be able to tell us which building you acquired and outfitted? There was nothing in 2021, and nothing in—nothing in 2020, nothing in 2022. So was this \$5 million spent?

1.30 p.m.

Hon. Hinds: Okay. I am told that we had made an attempt to acquire a particular building, that attempt was not successful. And so, the project that was designed around it—when I say designed, intended for it, has now been deferred.

Dr. Moonilal: So therefore, the money that was allocated to it, was it vired? Was it used elsewhere?

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to say at this time, but that can quite easily be identified.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members—

Hon. Hinds: “Oh”, no, Madam Chairman, I have just been advised by the man who knows, the Permanent Secretary, we did not use those funds for any other—

Dr. Moonilal: The funds were unused.

Hon. Hinds: Unutilized, yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 22 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, PS. Thank you to the representatives from the different agencies.

Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police.

Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, \$2,471,000,164

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of National Security to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is the institution in our twin-island Republic tasked with the responsibility to effectively preserve law and order in this country. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, through its Strategic Plan 2019—2021 and the Operational Plan 2021, has embraced this responsibility in our service. These plans are the underpinning of the actions and the directions of the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, whose—or which mission statement includes, and I quote

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

“In partnership with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we provide for safe and secure communities and other places through professional policing, focused leadership and consistent high quality service.”

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service's vision and mission are supported by alignment to four broad areas: public safety, community partnerships, operational excellence and professional development. These areas encompass the strategic focus of the organization, utilizing modern policing strategies such as: intelligence-led policing, community-oriented policing, and evidence-based policing, and is supported by utilizing the Compstat model which platform is based on utilizing modern technology to support and manage crime and to exert crime control.

There were challenges to the police service and its operation given the impact of COVID-19 like everywhere else, but the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has demonstrated its resilience in serving the public and I could bear personal testimony to that as Minister. Although the organization has a sanctioned strength of 7,884 positions, 6,685 are currently filled. There is a high attrition rate with several officers reaching consistently retirement age and as a consequence and response on an ongoing basis, new recruits are brought on, of which 94 expected to pass out in a few weeks' time in this fiscal.

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service continues to forge forward to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago, pursuing its vision to make every place in Trinidad and Tobago safe. Mr. Deputy Chair, with those opening remarks, I am now in your capable hands.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Chairman, before you continue, I just want to ask a question. I notice the Acting Commissioner Police is to the left of the Minister which—he is the Accounting Officer. I do not know the individual to his right is. Because normally, it is just one—one individual is allowed.

Hon. Hinds: This lady is here in support of the Police Commissioner in terms of providing you, this Committee, with the information that you want. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Lee: No, no, no, I know that.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Let us move on.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman.

Question proposed: That Head 64 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,471,000,164 for Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police 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*, and we are at page 300. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: Police Service. I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I just want to reflect on the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance matter. There is a significant increase here. And I wanted the Minister to be advised and, of course, relay to us the issues that are underpinning. And on the issue of Vacant Posts, 08—

Mr. Chairman: No, one second. Let us deal with one at a time.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So we are at 01.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes. I will come to 08 just now.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: This allocation is intended to pay police officers, including SRPs and public servants associated with the police service; arrears of \$8 million to be paid to SRP officers, and they are about 1,004 SRP officers to be paid in this context. The increase is to pay arrears of increment and acting allowances.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: On 08, if the Minister cannot—

Mr. Chairman: 08.

Dr. Moonilal:—if the Minister cannot provide all information now, there could be an undertaking to provide it later in writing, the quantum of persons that are declared to be as vacant. And Minister, could you clarify whether or not yesterday, at the Ministry of National Security, you indicated that it is not the wish of the Government to have Mr. Gary Griffith return as Commissioner of Police?
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Member—

Dr. Moonilal: Is the Office of the Commissioner vacant?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Member—

Dr. Moonilal: Is the Office of the Commissioner vacant?

Mr. Imbert: Can you rule the Member out of order, please?

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche East, could you just retract the last statement, please?

Mr. Imbert: Can you rule him out of order?

Mr. Chairman: I will take the question, but you can retract the statement.

Dr. Moonilal: I will retract the last statement, whether the position is vacant.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, thank you.

Hon. Hinds: Mauvais langue and slander.

Mr. Chairman: No. So the question, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: There is no question, except why does he bring rotten mauvais langue and slander to—

Hon. Hinds: Okay. Okay, Mr. Minister.

Dr. Moonilal: But you told the Ministry yesterday you do not want him.

Mr. Chairman: Couva North.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North,

Mr. Imbert:—would you rule that point out of order, please?

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chair. Chair, I would like to refer the line Minister's attention to 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Mr. Chairman: Again, Members, in order to hear Couva North—and I am sure all of us would like to hear him so that we can get the necessary answer. Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Chair, under line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Can the hon. Minister advise if it is under this line Item that SRPs are paid their salaries?

Mr. Chairman: I think Oropouche East asked the question similarly, and an answer was given with regard to the SRPs and so on.

Mr. Ratiram: In addition to that, the praedial larceny officers, are they also under this line Item?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister?

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister advise us the number of praedial larceny officers and where they are located across the country?

Hon. Hinds: No, the praedial larceny police unit, they are now associated with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Ratiram: They are, hon. Minister. However, under the Ministry of Agriculture's Estimates, there is not a line Item that addresses the funding for the praedial larceny officers.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Ratiram: So are you saying that they are not funded under this line Item?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, may I get a ruling on this, please? I would like a ruling. If the Minister of National Security said that the praedial larceny officers are catered under another Head, why is he asking about it again?

Mr. Ratiram: The Minister said yes and then the Minister said—

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Member. Right. So, Mr. Minister

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: So, Mr. Minister. Right. The praedial larceny division is now under the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, but the officers are funded. Can the Minister confirm whether it is funded under the TTPS or under the Ministry of Agriculture?

Hon. Hinds: This allocation here does not take that group of officers into account.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, fine.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: Police Service (Trinidad), pages 300 to 301. I recognize Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am on line Item 16: Contract Employment where there is a total Estimate for 2022 of \$88 million.

Mr. Chairman: "Uh-hum". Yes, Sir.

Mr. Hosein: Yeah. You with me, right?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy, I want to ask, if the SRPs are being paid out of the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance line Item, who are these persons who are being paid under this Contract Employment line item—

Hon. Hinds: Which Item? Which line?

Mr. Hosein: 16, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: 16, page 301. Item 16: Contract Employment.

Hon. Hinds: One moment, please, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Would you like the question again or you—

Hon. Hinds: Yes, I would like the question again. I think that—yes. What is the question?

Mr. Hosein: Who are the persons who are being paid under this line Item if the SRPs are coming out of the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance on 01 in the previous Head?

1.45 p.m.

Hon. Hinds: Mr. Chairman, 561 persons are on contract throughout the police service, including at the Academy. Duration range from six months to two years. Some vacancies will not be filled and it has to do with the homicide, that division, and some of them at the Police Academy and some contracts will not be renewed. This is what this allocation is for.

Mr. Hosein: Is this in relation to administrative support for the TTPS, these contract employment positions?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes, some of them, yes.

Mr. Hosein: And Minister, I want to take you the line Item 23: Fees.

Hon. Hinds: 01, 23?

Mr. Chairman: No, 23: Fees.

Mr. Hosein: On page 301.

Hon. Hinds: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Hosein: Yes. So, there is an increase in Fees by \$16 million. So, the total anticipated Estimate for 2022 is \$46 million. What accounts for this extra \$16 million in expenditure for Fees under this line Item?

Hon. Hinds: Some of it involves like annual membership fees and fees for licences in respect of some of the computer and the technology platforms that we used.

Mr. Hosein: Yeah, but there is an anticipated increase of 16 million from last year, because I would imagine those subscriptions would roll over to this year. There is anticipated spend—

Hon. Hinds: Some for the AFIS system, the Automated Fingerprint System, the criminal database, investigative tools that the police use, software applications and IT equipment and records management and some technical support that we have had—annual renewal, wrecking and language translation, forensic accounting and accounting services and legal services. The allocation in the previous year was not sufficient, and this allocation is intended to catch up.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, the fingerprint system that you mentioned, is that for the processing of Certificate of Characters? Because I remember earlier on you talked about the Immigration Department managing the fingerprints at the ports.

Hon. Hinds: No, that is a different system. This one is—

Mr. Hosein: For the Certificate of Characters?

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Are persons now able to have their Certificate of Characters processed?

Hon. Hinds: I have had no recent noisy complaints.

Mr. Hosein: So the system is back up?

Hon. Hinds: I rather suspect that it is. In fact, it is. I am being told it is.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Hon. Hinds: Mr. Chair, could you take a quick break?

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

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, page 301, line Item 58: Medical Expenses. We see an increase of almost \$5 million. What I would like to find out from the Minister is what type of medical expenses is contemplated here? [*Pause*]

Mr. Chairman: Just hold on a couple minutes, hon. Members. [*Pause*]

Hon. Hinds: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. In respect of—oh sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Right. I am sorry for that delay, hon. Members, and Minister over to you.

Hon. Hinds: In respect of this allocation, it involves medical expenses, surgery expenses, dental, optical issues for police officers in accordance with—

Mr. Rambally: Would all of the officers be eligible for coverage?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, all. I am told all officers, yes, are entitled.

Mr. Charles: Thank you very much. Two questions: Item 30: Maintenance of Vehicles.

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister indicate the total number of motor vehicles in active use by police officers and those vehicles that are operational and how many are down for repairs?

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very kindly. Insofar as vehicles are concerned, and this allocation is about their maintenance, the TTPS has a fleet of 1,905 vehicles, 1,905 vehicles of which, at the moment, 1,181 are operational and 724 are not operational as we speak. Approximately 500 of these vehicles are considered to be sufficiently unserviceable to require disposal.

Mr. Charles: Item 96: Fuel and Lubricants. I would like to know how much is outstanding to state-owned MPMC and, of that amount, how much is outstanding over 90 days?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. Just for information sake, payments are made through what is called the fleet card system and, therefore, debited. But if you want exact figures, I can certainly provide that at a time later than now.

Mr. Charles: All right. Could you give a commitment to do so?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes, yes.

Mr. Chairman: No, I need to recognize Couva North first Barataria/San Juan. Couva North? Okay. All right. Barataria/San Juan, your turn.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I am on line Item 58: Medical Expenses. Minister, I know you earlier indicated that all officers will be “illegible” for dental, medical and optical coverage.

Hon. Hinds: Eligible.

Mr. Hosein: Eligible.

Hon. Hinds: I said eligible. Yes.

Mr. Hosein: And then I am asking whether or not—what is the total? What is the cap in which an officer can claim under this particular line Item?

Hon. Hinds: I can provide that in writing. I cannot say what are those caps are, if they exist.

Mr. Hosein: Can you indicate whether or not the coverage was, in fact, reduced—the total coverage was reduced?

Hon. Hinds: That too I can produce in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Police Service (Tobago), page 302. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: Police Service (Trinidad). Member for

Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, in terms of the vehicles, how many vehicles is it that we contemplate acquiring and the types of vehicles, if you are able to give us some details of that?

Mr. Chairman: That line Item will be which one?

Hon. Hinds: Yeah, yeah. We are not there as yet.

Mr. Rambally: 01.

Hon. Hinds: Yeah. We are not there as yet. Are we?

Mr. Rambally: Yes.

Hon. Hinds: All right. Okay. The plan is to purchase about, well, 100 vehicles: marked SUVs, unmarked SUVs; marked sedans, unmarked sedans. And insofar as Tobago is concerned, the plan is to purchase 12 vehicles, including marked SUVs, unmarked SUVs, small bus and semi long wheel base.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, do you by chance have the average prices for the breakdown of those models?

Hon. Hinds: No, I do not have those. I do not have those, but I can assure you proper procurement processes are always to be undertaken.

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

Hon. Hinds: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Imbert: If you look at the amount of money provided, 2.5 million, and if you take 12 vehicles, it is about \$200,000 more or less, which is the normal price for one of these vehicles without taxes. Okay? So you vary depending on whether it is a sedan or an SUV.

Mr. Rambally: I take your word, Minister. I only asked it because I know there were different models called. So you have SUVs, you have sedans, you have—

Mr. Imbert: It varies as to whether it is a sedan or an SUV. SUVs obviously as

you know are a little more expensive than a sedan. The average price may be about 200,000.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head—you are with Minister of Finance or me?

Mr. Hosein: No, 001.

Mr. Imbert: I am bantering with the Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan?

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. 04: Other Minor Equipment. Minister, does this include the drones that were promised by the TTPS?

Mr. Imbert: Is this Tobago?

Mr. Hosein: No, no, no. We are still on—

Mr. Imbert: We are on 002/04.

Mr. Chairman: We are under Other Minor Equipment.

Mr. Hosein: We are at 001 Minister of Finance. You are studying to banter and you are not following the proceedings.

Mr. Imbert: No, we are on 002. Mr. Chairman, we had reached 002.

Mr. Hosein: No, no, no.

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Chairman, we are on 001.

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister of Finance—

Mr. Hosein: You are not following me.

Mr. Chairman: One second, one second. Hold on. We just dealt with 002: Police Service (Tobago); 01: Vehicles, where the question was last raised. Right? And now the hon. Member is talking about using 004, which is supposed to be what? Other Minor Equipment. Barataria/San Juan, under Tobago. Right. That is where we are.

Mr. Hosein: Yeah. We are under Minor Equipment Purchases.

Mr. Imbert: Tobago?

Mr. Hosein: No. Mr. Chair, we are under Minor Equipment—

Mr. Chairman: Listen, Members, we are on 002: Police Service (Tobago). Right? We just dealt with 01: Vehicles and now we are 04: Other Minor Equipment as Barataria/San Juan just drew to your attention. So question?

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Chair, if you look at 01: Vehicles is under Minor Equipment Purchases.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, which is the same 2.5 million that the hon. Minister just spoke about.

Mr. Hosein: 25 million, yes. So, I am asking on the line Item now 04: Other Minor Equipment.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, are we not on 002: Police Service (Tobago) 04?

Mr. Chairman: Page 303.

Mr. Imbert: Right. He just want to go back. You are wasting time.

Mr. Chairman: Listen. Members, listen. Barataria/San Juan, do you have a question there or shall I move on?

Mr. Hosein: Yes Sir, I have a question on 04: Minor Equipment.

Mr. Chairman: Right? Page 303.

Mr. Hosein: Is this allocation for drones that were promised to the TTPS?

Hon. Hinds: That is not—

Mr. Imbert: In Tobago?

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, he asked the question, we will get the answer.

Hon. Hinds: That is not the advice that I have.

Mr. Hosein: So, this Other Minor Equipment, line Item—

Hon. Hinds: It is for like non-lethal equipment that the police would use and so

on, replacement of those.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies. Item 004: International Bodies. Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Who do I have first? Naparima. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: 01: Police Youth Clubs. Could the Minister indicate why of an allocation of Estimate 2.7 million, only 200,000 was spent, and although an allocation of 2 million has been estimated? Could we anticipate that this will be spent? And the reason why I say so, Mr. Deputy Chair, is the fact that when you do the math and you look at youth programmes across Ministries, the total is 466 million. Right? Which 0.8 per cent of the total budget. I am talking about CCC, MiLAT, MYPART, Servol, Cadets, et cetera.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, are we talking about 01, Police Youth Club?

Mr. Charles: So the question in this context—Sir, I am making a point.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, you go ahead.

Mr. Charles: In this context, is this sufficient to deal with the kind of problems and challenges that young males are faced in Trinidad and Tobago at this time?

Hon. Hinds: That is a very good question, unusually, good question. The Government has taken to this matter a whole-of-Government approach. You would notice that the Government has established a Ministry, stand alone, of Youth Development and National Service which I had the honour to lead and to shape. And you will find youth programmes all across the platform of Government activity, a lot geared towards youth. [*Crosstalk*] Just a moment. And you seem to have continually ignored the fact that in the existing or coming to an end fiscal '21, we, the country, all elements of the country were adversely affected by the COVID-19 challenge and these youth programmes suffered as a consequence of

that.

The Government is now, having provided vaccinations for all the citizens and actively involved in promoting the use of these vaccines and taking the—I would say, generally, a safe zone application or approach, the Government is confident that we will be able in those circumstances, particularly since the Pfizer vaccine is available to those as young as 12 years; we are confident that we will be able in these new circumstances to ramp up some of these youth programmes as important and necessary as we see them to be.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Sir, it is good that the Minister spoke about a whole-of-Government approach. I have done the math of the entire budget and it is—

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, we are dealing with 01, how does the whole budget come into play here?

Mr. Charles: Yes. I am contextualizing.

Mr. Imbert: He is continuously going, doing that.

Mr. Charles: I have five minutes to continue.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I am asking you—

Mr. Charles: I object.

Mr. Imbert:—let us deal with 01.

Mr. Charles: I object. I have five minutes—

Mr. Imbert: It is not the whole budget.

Mr. Chairman: And, Minister of Finance, the hon. Member has a couple of minutes in order to come to his question.

Mr. Imbert: Well, this is the second time he is taking a couple of minutes.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed Member.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Thank you. The rude reply from the Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed Member.

Mr. Charles: Yes. The Minister spoke about a whole-of-Government and that is commendable but I did the math and the “all-of-Government”, it is only 1 per cent of the allocations are to young people.

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, I am asking for us to deal with 01—

Mr. Charles: I am asking if this—

Mr. Imbert:—not the “whole-of-Government”, not all the youths—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Imbert:—01.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Mr. Minister. Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Charles: Yes. I am asking if your comments on the “all-of-Government” are not reflected in the allocations as reflected here today, 1.8 million? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Hinds: Well, you do not expect an allocation in the police service to reflect the whole of Government; do you?

Mr. Charles: I said it is 466 million “all-of-Government”—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, could we deal with 01, please?

Mr. Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. To the hon. Minister, just to add to my colleague for Naparima, 01, I am wondering if the Ministry has some formula for the allocation of funds to the different youth clubs across the country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, this is not a Ministry, this is the police service. It is not a Ministry matter.

Mr. Chairman: Member, kindly rephrase—just rephrase your question, please.

Dr. Ragbir: Well, I was wondering if there was a formula for distribution of funds

from the Ministry for the police service—

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, this is not a Ministry.

Dr. Ragbir:—from the police service.

Mr. Chairman: For the police service. Right.

Hon. Hinds: In addition, he said he would add to the Member for Naparima. He said he would add to the Member for Naparima. I too did the math, zero plus zero equals zero. This allocation is for the police youth clubs and insofar as an allocation for specific youth clubs would be concerned, this is a global allocation and the police service will shape the direction of the funds in accordance with the demands of the particular youth groups and the activities they will undertake.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, to the hon. Minister, Minister, I have been working closely with several police youth clubs across the country and within recent time with the police youth club in the constituency of Couva North, the Waterloo Police Youth Club, where I have provided them with the support, are they getting a home? The empowerment centre in Bank Village is a scheduled for some upcoming activities with the police youth club in Bank Village there.

So, Minister, what I am seeing here under this line Item, it was allocated \$2.7 million for 2021 but we are talking about police youth clubs nationally with approximately 15,000 members across the country, only 200,000 were disbursed or was utilized in the Revised Estimate. Minister, can you give us a commitment that the activities for the police youth clubs that is being budgeted here for this \$2 million will actually be made available for these youth clubs to carry out their prospectus of programmes for the next financial year? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: He wants me to give a commitment that the allocations will be actually made available to them; I would not venture such a commitment.

Mr. Ratiram: Well, if I may, what was—

Hon. Hinds: What I can say—

Mr. Chairman: Just now.

Hon. Hinds: What I can say is that the fact of this allocation here and the planned activity of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, I am confident that the young people would be made to benefit from this allocation directed to them.

Mr. Ratiram: Why I asked the question—thank you very much, Chairman—why I do ask the question, hon. Minister, it is simply because 2.7 million was allocated to this line Item in the last fiscal term but only 200,000 was utilized for the Revised Estimate. And I know for a fact that the police youth clubs have been holding fundraisers, barbeque, et cetera, [*Desk thumping*] for the entire year because many of them have advised me that they have not been getting the releases that they have been requesting and they had to do fundraising initiatives themselves. And we have to compliment, you know, the parent councils associated with these police youth clubs [*Desk thumping*] and the communities that step up to assist where the line Item has not been able to provide the funding.

So all I am simply asking, on behalf of the 15,000 members out there and the parents of these families and the communities, is that this 2 million that has been provided for the police youth club that it will be disbursed. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Hinds: Given your—

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister—

Hon. Hinds: Given your penchant for exaggeration and hyperbole, I am not inclined to accept that many of them have been having fundraisers, cake sales and so on.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Members.

Hon. Hinds: The question has been asked and I have already answered.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Item—thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Couva North. Item 007: Households, page 304. I recognize Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Deputy Chair, on 01 or it could also fall under 02, Minister, a lot of serving police officers have lost their lives due to the COVID-19 virus and they leave back behind them children and also mothers who are unemployed and therefore it is difficult for those families to pull through with the death of their loved ones. [*Desk thumping*] Can you indicate whether or not it is a policy of the Government, the TTPS, whether some level of relief can be given to the families of those police officers [*Desk thumping*] who have lost their lives due to the COVID-19 virus?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Well, the amount paid under this Head in 2021 was \$738,000 and 11 officers received awards under this. I think that suggests that there is a commitment on the part of the police service to do exactly that which you are asking for. And of course there are two matters that will affect awards that are before the court and when these matters are resolved then they too will be granted awards as the outcome of the court might dictate. So there is that commitment.

Mr. Hosein: Are you saying that under 01 they can be paid through the ex gratia payments that those officers who lost their lives due to the COVID-19 virus can be paid under there?

Hon. Hinds: No. No. No. This does not take into account COVID, death as a result of COVID. This has to do with members of the protective services who would have been injured or died in the context of their active duty.

Mr. Hosein: That is 02; 02 is for Compensation to the Estates of Members of the

Protective Services; the Minister said those who died.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, 01 is that kind of compensation and 02 is for persons who die in the active context of their duty.

Mr. Hosein: Can that now we widened to also include those persons who have lost their lives due to COVID-19?

Hon. Hinds: You are making a recommendation?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, I am.

Hon. Hinds: That it be widened to accommodate persons who die as a consequence of COVID?

Mr. Hosein: Police officers, yes.

Hon. Hinds: It is not a very—well, you know, it is a matter that we would consider.

Mr. Charles: Consider?

Mr. Hosein: I really do hope that the recommendation is accepted. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Thanks, Members. Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*; different book. And we are on page 130 of the Development Programme booklet. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 130 to 131. I will recognize Chaguanas West and then I will go to Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, again, line Item 46, if you could advise us as to the type and number of vehicles being suggested here to be acquired?

Hon. Hinds: Yeah. Generally sedans and SUVs—[*Crosstalk*]—yeah, talking, yes, the Cabinet—well, we approved and we are focused here on 80 SUVs—70 SUVs

and 10 sedans. Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Item 001: Improvement Works to Police Stations and Buildings and also the Upgrade of Police Administration Buildings, this question is in the context of a piece of law that we would have passed recently which is the amendment to the Firearms Act in terms of for the use of persons to use pepper spray, whether or not there would be facilities there for persons to come in to apply for the permits in order to be granted those pepper spray permits?

Hon. Hinds: You are proposing that a special room be developed in all police stations?

Mr. Hosein: No. I am not saying a special room, whether the facility will be available whether through if it is an online application, whether it is through someone to assist them there to fill out the application for pepper spray?

Hon. Hinds: This deals with Improvement Works to Police Stations, physical works.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, and I am asking also if it will also include any computer access or devices for persons to come into the station to fill out these forms in order to apply for the necessary permits. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: This cannot apply to that.

Hon. Hinds: This deals with improvement works, police stations, the Member is raising—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hosein: You all passed the pepper spray law and—

Hon. Hinds:—something extraneous to this.

Mr. Hosein:—nobody has a pepper spray in this country, nobody.

Mr. Imbert: This is like preparing the roof, painting the wall, that is what this is for.

Mr. Hosein: Nobody has a pepper stray in this country.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Members—

Mr. Imbert: Nobody but you, Sir. That would be under—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima, I will recognize you now.

Mr. Charles: Yes. Thank you, Sir. Item 047: Purchase of Equipment for the Police Service, and the question I ask, does this include body cameras?

Hon. Hinds: They do. It does.

Mr. Charles: Thanks, and that is very good. Could you given an indication of how many officers of the 7,000-plus sanctioned strength, how many of them right now have body cameras?

Hon. Hinds: I can make that available to you at another time.

Mr. Charles: I am told it is less than 5 per cent eh.

Hon. Hinds: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Item 00—Okay, Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, an allocation of \$20 million was estimated for fiscal 2021 for Purchase of Equipment for the Police Service, Item 047, but under the Revised Estimate \$5.6 million was spent. Naparima indicated that there is a deficit with the number of body cameras, why the police service did not utilize the allocation to them in order to purchase more equipment?

2.15 p.m.

Hon. Hinds: I am told that there are orders made, and we are expecting some body cameras to come within a short time again, as a consequence of that. But I am advised that generally speaking there were issues even with the providers abroad that were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and doing business.

Mr. Hosein: What about the drones, was there any purchase of any of the drones also?

Hon. Hinds: This includes, and this deals with body cameras, the cameras inside of police vehicles, GPS upgrade, tablets for the police vehicles, and that kind of modernization that we see in police services around the developed world. This is where we are heading with this.

Mr. Hosein: How many of these police vehicles have the tablets?

Hon. Hinds: We just have a few, and this allocation is designed—this Head is designed to facilitate more of that.

Mr. Hosein: Can you give us the number in writing? Can you give us the total number in writing?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, of course.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche West, on this same line Item? No, when I say Item 004, that is where we are.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, please.

Mr. Chairman: Sure, proceed.

Mr. Tancoo: Sub-Item 051: Supplemental Works - Phase 1 Police Stations. I note, Mr. Minister, that in 2021 we had an allocation of \$15 million, but none of that was spent and there is no allocation for 2022.

Mr. Chairman: 051, you are with us, Mr. Minister, 051?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes, I am with you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: So go ahead, Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: My question, Minister, is it was deemed very important to undertake these works in 2021, but there was no spend in 2021, and no subsequent Estimate for 2022. Can the Minister advise what specifically this allocation was initially designed for, and why it is we no longer have requirement for it?

Hon. Hinds: This was transferred to the IDF, in any event, but this has to do with a significant problem with air-conditioning at many of our police stations. This

began, for those of us who have been around here a long time ago, in the '90s, where we went for an HVAC system, even for the schools. They turned out to be very, very problematic. Back between 2010 and 2015, with a new government, they revisited the same HVAC system and put them in the police stations. There is no end to the problems that that system of air-conditioning is generating, and I am told that it is affecting the police operations because condensation taking place over station, gypsum mashing up. It is just totally unworkable, inappropriate, and now we find that we have to spend money in order to revamp this system to make it wholesome, so that the police could get on with their work. I do not want to go into the origins of these contracts, and how and why and who, but these stations are affected by this.

As I speak to you, Mr. Chairman, Arima station is affected by this, Maloney, Piarco, Cumuto, Brasso, Moruga, La Brea and Oropouche. It has cost the police service and, by extension, the Government and the people of this country, millions of dollars, and hundreds, thousands of hours in lost productive police time, because of a bad decision repeated in 2010 to 2015, in the context of police stations.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, if I may, just as a follow-up question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chairman. As a follow-up, Minister, this is a 2021 Estimate, this is not 2015, this is not '16, this is not 2010. [*Desk thumping*] Your Ministry, your Ministry, made this Estimate for the police service. This figure was provided by you; this figure was not spent in 2015. So if it was so important and of so much concern to you in 2015, why was it not done in 2015, so that you could come now and speak ad nauseam about your failure to implement whatever plans you had here now? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Hinds: We are living with the sins of those who were sinful in times recent

past.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Tancoo: This is a straightforward question.

Mr. Charles: Are you finished?

Mr. Tancoo: I give up.

Mr. Charles: 062: Establishment of a Coastal and Riverine Patrol Unit. I see only 29,000 allocated in 2022. My understanding is that the problem is significant. I mean, we have endless reports, international reports about human trafficking, drugs, illegal immigrants, et cetera. The question I will ask you: How many vessels are there in this Coastal and Riverine Patrol Unit? What are the optimal numbers of vehicles, and is this figure in any way adequate to the challenge that we face?

Hon. Hinds: Just for the record—just for the record, to answer my friend, just for the public record, permit me Mr. Chairman. Just to say in respect of the HVAC system, major works have been done. Complete replacement is required. Designs and approvals have already been had, all ready for execution. Thank you very much.

In respect of line Item 62—is it 62?

Mr. Chairman: 62, yes.

Hon. Hinds: There are two riverine patrol vessels and two coastal patrol vessels in this brand new, recently put in place unit, to assist in the border security for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Charles: That has to be a joke. Two vessels and two others for all of Trinidad and Tobago, with all the—

Hon. Hinds: I am talking about the coastal—

Mr. Chairman: Wait, one at a time—one at a time.

Mr. Charles: With all the access points, where the coast guard is saying that they

are responsible for all those? There are 67 access points.

Mr. Chairman: So, question now?

Mr. Charles: Does he think four vessels can deal with the kind of problem we faced with human trafficking, et cetera, especially in the southwestern peninsula?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Apparently the Member did not know the answer to that before the public chased them out of office. Before the public chased them out—

Mr. Charles: “What kind of chupidness is dat?”

Mr. Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. Hinds:—there was no coastal and riverine patrol, we have now implemented it and stocked it with four vessels.

Mr. Charles: Bring back Minister Stuart Young and Gary Griffith!

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Members. I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West. Chaguanas West first.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 71 on page 131. Are you aware of the scope of works for this particular project? Line Item 71.

Hon. Hinds: I am not personally aware of the scope of works. I am aware, however, that action has been planned to improve the dormitory facilities at the police academy to create more dormitory space, so that more recruits can be injected into the police service at any one time. That is alongside some other development plans that are now being reviewed before we contemplate further action.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: I am at line Item 63: Establishment of Virtual Courts.

Hon. Hinds: Which line?

Mr. Hosein: 63: Establishment of Virtual Courts. I want to ask if the Barataria Police Station is earmarked for a virtual court.

Hon. Hinds: I am told that the answer to your question is yes.

Mr. Hosein: And since the repurposing of that particular police station, Minister, through you I am pleading on behalf of the constituents, because they have asked me that that station, notwithstanding that it is going to be used as a virtual court, but persons are allowed to make reports at that station. We have complaints that the police officers are not allowing citizens to take reports. They have to go all the way up to San Juan Hill in order to file reports. You know, it is right off the highway, the Barataria station, so if there are accidents on the highway, it is easier access into that police station. So I am pleading, through you, Mr. Chairman, to both the Acting Commissioner and the Minister, if some consideration can be given for the reopening of the Barataria Police Station for members of the public.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Hosein: Well, yours is a very worthwhile suggestion and I might tell you, it comes alongside many complaints and similar concerns I have had from citizens in areas that have been affected by this particular policy approach, including in Tobago.

Mr. Hosein: I know your constituency is also affected by the Barataria station.

Hon. Hinds: So I have engaged the leadership of the police service, and we are engaged in discussions touching and concerning this matter, bearing firmly in mind the very legitimate concerns that you have expressed on behalf of your constituents, and those legitimate concerns that I have had from others, including Tobago, in this regard.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much.

Hon. Hinds: My pleasure.

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

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I am returning to Item 062: Establishment of a Coastal and Riverine Patrol Unit. Can the Minister advise the complement of officers that constitute this unit?

Hon. Hinds: Yes, as I indicated, Mr. Chair, this is a brand new attempt to deal with the space between the coastline and two miles out, because we have another system to deal with the two miles out of 12—

Mr. Tancoo: Complement of staff.

Hon. Hinds:—and then we have another system to deal with beyond 12 in the exclusive zone. So, this is a brand new very powerful effort on the part of the police service, to assist in the management and control of the affairs of our borders for obvious reasons. We are now starting out, as I said, started out from zero, notwithstanding the wild accusations from my friends opposite. We started out from zero, we now have a unit with 50 personnel, men drawn from the previous Police Marine Unit, with some experience, men drawn from different operational elements of the police service, and certainly from the coast guard.

In fact, it is led by a retired mid-rank senior official of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Hinds: So 50 personnel, four vessels, for a very good start, and that will be developed as the need arises.

Mr. Chairman: Couva North. Item?

Hon. Hinds: Paying particular attention to human trafficking and human traffickers.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 132. I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, I realize there is a line Item: Transformation—
[*Interruption*] May I have the Minister's attention?

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Hosein: Minister of Finance is disturbing the Minister of National Security. I am seeing the line Item: Transformation of the Police Service, and there is no allocation for 2022, and no spend for 2021. Can the Minister indicate why?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister. We are on page 132, 003: Transformation of the Police Service.

Hon. Hinds: 00—?

Mr. Chairman: 008—

Mr. Hosein: 3.

Mr. Chairman: 3, sorry. Transformation of the Police Service, no allocations, reason why.

Hon. Hinds: 003? One moment please. Thank you, let me get some advice. Well, let me say suffice it to say that the police service must of necessity be a very dynamic organization. The police service's main function is to treat with crime and antisocial behaviour and, therefore, transformation of those behaviours and the mores of the society, and the affairs of the world affect what the police service in Trinidad and Tobago must constantly be doing. So transformation of the police service is an ongoing and necessary element in modern policing in accordance with some of the things I described in my opening comments.

Mr. Hosein: But there is no spend. There is no money spent in the last fiscal and none allocated for this fiscal.

Hon. Hinds: Well, it is not always about money, you see.

Mr. Hosein: Well, you see, the thing is—

Hon. Hinds: It is not always about money.

Mr. Hosein: This transformation is about money, because it is in the budget book. If it is not to be about money—

Mr. Chairman: Members, wait—Hold on.

Hon. Hinds: Transformation comes in different ways and different forms.

Mr. Hosein: Well, then it would not have been in the budget book if it is not about money.

Hon. Hinds: Well, no, no money may have been allocated then for the particular issue, but that does not mean that transformation is not foremost in the mind of the police service as the need arises.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund, page 234. Page 234 and it is Item 004: Social Infrastructure, page 234. I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 029: Supplemental Works - New Phase I Police Station. Can the Minister advise what this \$20 million allocation for 2022 is for?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Which line Item, Mister—

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 029: Supplemental Works—

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Chairman:—New Phase I Police Station.

Hon. Hinds: Okay. Yes. This is exactly what we were talking about earlier, I am advised, in respect of the necessary work in terms of improving those eight police stations which I named.

Mr. Ratiram: So, hon. Minister, this line Item existed last year, even though there is no funding here under the IDF, under the Development Programme. This line Item was funded \$15 million on line Item 051 under the Development Programme, Social Infrastructure but none of that \$15 million was utilized. Can you advise why for the last financial year nothing was allocated to this programme under the IDF? And why none of the—what was allocated under the Development Programme was not utilized?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. Yes. Yes. Actually—

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds:—I am advised that what had happened is that the period under review by my friend was utilized for assessing the work to be done, working out new designs, getting approvals and getting ready for implementation. This allocation is to take us to that stage.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Item—

Mr. Chairman: Pardon? I did not hear.

Mr. Hosein: Item 26: Establishment of New Police Headquarters. Minister, I saw that there was an allocation of \$15 million, none spent in 2021, and an allocation of \$1 million for the next fiscal. Can you advise us where this new police headquarters will be established?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Right. Yes, there were some thoughts about a new police headquarters to be developed just outside of the city and that matter is under review.

Mr. Hosein: Do you have a location?

Hon. Hinds: No. But it is now under review.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. So you are not sure whether you are continuing? Because I see that there is an allocation for \$1 million.

Hon. Hinds: Yes. But the matter is under review and once a settlement is arrived at in that regard, then this allocation is to deal with preliminary works, quantity surveyor, getting surveys done, and the planning process and that sort of thing.

Mr. Hosein: So by next year you will be able to advise us of the location?

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche West. Member.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Line Item 008: Construction of the Oropouche Police Station. I see you have an Estimate and a Revised Estimate of \$1.5 million. Can the Minister indicate the current state of the Oropouche Police Station's construction?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. I understand that what is happening now—or is it complete? Work was done to reinforce the—the station is completed, I am being told but some work had to be done in terms of a retaining wall to shore up the structure of the station and that work is complete as well?

[Confers with Permanent Secretary]

Ongoing. Ongoing. Thank you very much.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister then advise when police officers at the Oropouche—in the Oropouche area would be able to access and enjoy facilities at the new station?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. The station is under occupation, I am being told.

Mr. Tancoo: Partially, hon. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Partially.

Hon. Hinds: Yes. And the work, as I told you, the retaining wall and that sort of

thing, that is ongoing. But the police are involved—they are already involved in police duties at that location.

Mr. Tancoo: Partially, Minister.

Hon. Hinds: So you are negotiating for what you already have.

Mr. Tancoo: Partially, Minister, partially involved.

Hon. Hinds: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may move on to line Item 027: Establishment—

Mr. Chairman: Line Item?

Mr. Tancoo: 027—

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo:—Establishment of a Marine Division at the Carenage Police Station. Minister, I see an allocation in 2021 for \$10.5 million. So this was determined to be very important in 2021, but there was no spend. And now, in 2022, you have come for half of that. Is there a reason why, firstly, there was no spend in 2021? And now, secondly, why the Estimate is only half of what you initially expected to spend?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: The new Carenage Police Station was only recently completed and commissioned and this facility to create a jetty and to create a base for the developing Coastal and Riverine Unit of the police service is to be done. So that is now in its planning stages and it will be executed as promptly as practicable.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Hinds: My pleasure.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 64 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Acting Commissioner of Police and to your senior technocrats at the police service. Thanks for coming.

Just bear with us as we make the change over to the next Ministry, Head 18: Ministry of Finance.

[MRS. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

Madam Chairman: Head 18: Ministry of Finance.

Head 18: Ministry of Finance, \$6,596,526,574.

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, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Finance has the responsibility for developing and implementing fiscal policy for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and also collecting revenue and raising revenue where it is not generated by taxes, disbursing revenue, preparing these Estimates that are before us, managing 53 state enterprises and their subsidiaries, liaising with the Central Bank with respect to monetary policy. It also has responsibility for some state enterprises such as Caribbean Airlines, the National Investment Fund. It is also responsible for all of those state enterprises that are in liquidation or in the process of being wound up.

There are a number of divisions. Some of the more important ones would be the Debt Management Unit, the Economic Management Division, the Strategic Management Office. The Ministry is also responsible for the Board of Inland Revenue and also the Customs and Excise Division and the Valuation Division, among others.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

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

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$6,596,562,574 for Head 18

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

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, we are at page 81. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Allow me to welcome the technical team. Mr. Minister, I have noticed under Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, that is Sub-Item 01, that there is a \$2 million increase in the expected spend for 2022, over the spend, the Revised Estimate for 2021. Can the Minister advise what caused this increase? On what basis do we have a \$2 million increase?

Hon. Imbert: It is a provision for acting allowances.

Mr. Tancoo: Item 08: Vacant Posts - Salaries & C.O.L.A (without incumbents). I see that the Minister has now budgeted a figure of \$750,000 for fiscal 2022. Is that an indication, Minister, that you are going to hire persons in those current vacant positions without incumbents?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I dealt with this matter already in a previous Head in the Standing Finance Committee. I do not propose to go over it again. It has already been reported in the newspapers as well.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, if you may place the other mike on so that we can hear your responses clearly.

Mr. Indarsingh: I was just going to ask, Chair, I did not hear the Minister on the filling of vacancies. If he could just reiterate it, if he would be so kind.

Hon. Imbert: I will respond to any requests made of me by the Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, apparently your response was not heard—

Hon. Imbert: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman:—so please. Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: I have already dealt with this matter in this Finance Committee and my response was reported widely in the newspapers, as was the question posed to me by the Member for Couva South on this matter. I do not propose to belabour the point again.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Line Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. Minister, you had an Estimate of 20—sorry, of \$60,000 in 2021 but no spend in 2021, yet you have returned to the House to ask for in additional spend of \$60,000. Is it this Cabinet-appointed committee did not function in 2021?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister advise what is this Cabinet-appointed? Who it comprises of and what their function is?

Hon. Imbert: There was not any.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, you are asking this Committee for \$60,000 in fiscal 2022, I am asking for what purposes? Listed here as a Cabinet-appointed committee, is it that there no Cabinet-appointed committee, because there is an allocation? I am asking for what purpose.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the Member is changing his question every couple seconds.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, to repeat my question—

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, may I respond? I did not interrupt him. The

question was, why was there a zero expenditure in 2021? I answered that. There was no committee. So I answered that question, this question is a new question, and it is in anticipation that there may be a Cabinet appointed the committee under this particular Item, which is General Administration. I would advise Members, look at the top and see what the Item is. This is 001, General Administration. There was no Cabinet appointed committee in fiscal 2021 under General Administration. We expect that there may be one in 2022; that is why a provision has been made.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, line Item 08, Vacant Post to Salaries and COLA. This is budgeted at \$750,000 for financial year 2022. Can the hon. Minister advise the number of vacant posts this \$750,000 is going to fill?

Madam Chairman: Okay, I think that question was asked in a different way. It was answered, and if the Minister will not remind you all, I believe at the beginning of this Committee the Minister gave an undertaking to supply across the board, it will help with efficiency, that the information with respect to all of these Items in the various Heads, he would supply the information. So that was the intent of the response the Minister gave to your colleague from Oropouche West a short while ago. Okay? So, there is an undertaking for all of that information to be supplied for every Ministry.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay, you are welcome. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 23, Salaries, Direct Charges. We have an actual spend in 2020 of 586,000, and you now an Estimate for 2021, sorry for 2022 of \$1.7 million, \$1.8 million. So, we are moving from 586,000 to \$1.8 million in 2022. Can the Minister advise what has caused this significant increase?

Hon. Imbert: We will provide that to you in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 002, Budget Division; Item 003, Customs and Exercise Division. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair, again. Madam Chair, we have now a \$29 million increase in the allocation under Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances for the Customs and Excise Division. Can the Minister advise what accounts for this substantial increase? This is a 50 per cent increase in the allocation.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I would just ask my colleagues, there is no need to be so long-winded, just ask what is the reason for the increase. The reason in this particular case is promotions and recruitment of customs officers.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister, same line Item, identify the number of persons to be recruited?

Hon. Imbert: Okay, I will provide the information in writing in a short while, or during the course of this process, this budget process. But we did bring on some new customs officers recently, and there were a number of promotions, but it is quite a voluminous document, so I will summarize and provide it to the Member in due course.

Mr. Tancoo: Moving on to line Item 003, Overtime. Minister I note that while we have—based on your comment just now, you have increased staffing, that the overtime cost still remains upwards of \$44 million. Is it not more feasible Minister to add more warm bodies so that we could reduce the cost of overtime?

Hon. Imbert: In a perfect world, yes, but there are always complaints about the amount of time it takes for the Customs Division to process imports and deal with matters, so that overtime will still be required. In many instances, containers are sent to bonded warehouses and other places, and customs officers have to attend to

inspect these containers after hours. So, of course, we will continue to strive to reduce the overtime payments, but we also want to strive to increase the efficiency and speed at which the customs services its customers.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister, same line Item. I note that there has been a \$10 increase in the allocation under this Head between the Revised Estimate and the Estimate—the Revised Estimate for 2021 and the current Estimate for 2022, a \$10 increase. Can the Minister account for what has caused this \$10 increase to this \$44 million Estimate?

Hon. Imbert: Again, I will beseech my colleagues. There is no need to be so long-winded, just say what is the reason for the \$10 increase. And I have said this before, where we had quite a little argument over a \$1 difference. It is simply a rounding off exercise. It was 690 they have rounded it off to 700. That is all. And the other point I wish to make, Members opposite, especially the new ones, do not seem to appreciate these are Estimates, they are not exact figures. So all the Budget Division has done is round it off, 690 to 700. At the end of the day, the Actual, as you can see, if you look at that same line, the Actual for 2020 was 44,133,222. So that is the Actual amount which could be \$2, \$3, \$5, whatever it is. But the Estimate is a rounded off number.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I note that on that same line Item as you are referring to that the Estimate for 2021 was 44,245,690 and the Revised Estimate is the same figure. So there was no rounding off at that point in time.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I was asked about the 2022 Estimate. I would ask the Member, stick to your question. You asked about 2022—

Mr. Tancoo: I would ask the hon. Minister to please answer your question.

Hon. Imbert:—and I answered you on '22. And, Madam Chairman, I wait for them to finish, even though I think what they are asking makes no sense, I wait.

And I would ask them to wait until I finish.

Mr. Tancoo: Hon. Minister, if you have a difficulty in answering questions, I assure you that accounting to the population for moneys expended is serious business. It is not wasting time. Maybe it might be wasting time to you.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I really do not want to get into a debate over a \$10.

Mr. Tancoo: I am entitled to my few minutes.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I am asking for a ruling, are we still on this line Item?

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: We are still fussing over \$10?

Madam Chairman: All right, so can we move on? I think—

Hon. Imbert: “Ten dollars you getting on for?”

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West, I think the answer with respect to the difference between the \$10 for the Revised Estimate 2021 and the Estimates for 2022 has been explained. Not just with \$10, with \$1, \$8, a couple of—

Hon. Imbert: Yes, thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so do you have another question you would like to ask? Yes? No?

Hon. Imbert: Thank you very much. [*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, is there a question you would like to ask?

Hon. Imbert: He keeps grumbling.

Madam Chairman: Is there a question you would like to ask?

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]—the Minister of Finance—

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, he keeps—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute.

Hon. Imbert: He keeps grumbling.

Madam Chairman: One minute please! This sort of volley between friends can go on outside of the Chamber.

Hon. Imbert: I would love that.

Madam Chairman: And inside of here we are about serious business, as your colleague would have pointed out. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer to line Item 05, Government's Contribution to the NIS. I note a \$1.4 million increase in the allocation between the Estimate for 2022 and the Revised Estimate for 2021, Can the Minister advise whether this constitutes arrears, or on the basis of the increased proposed hiring?

Hon. Imbert: The latter.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 21, Government Contribution to Group Pension. This was budgeted at 20,000 for 2021, however no contributions were made in the Revised Estimates. Can the Minister explain why?

Hon. Imbert: Because it was not finalized.

Mr. Ratiram: Sorry, I did not hear the answer?

Hon. Imbert: I answered.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I did not hear the Minister's answer, can he kindly repeat.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, if it is going to continue for the whole afternoon, I gave a perfectly solid answer and they say they "cah hear", I will have to shout.

Madam Chairman: No. no.

Hon. Imbert: They will—

Madam Chairman: Minister, one minute.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, Madam.

Madam Chairman: I think in all fairness to all of us, right, there are times that we do sound a bit muted even though the mikes are on. And we do know that you have a capacity when you are ready to speak at a higher level, and we also realize you could speak at lower tones. So the fact that a Member has not heard, I think we should give them the benefit of the doubt.

Hon. Imbert: I do not.

Madam Chairman: Okay?

Hon. Imbert: I am sorry, Ma'am—

Madam Chairman: Yes. Okay, so you could kindly

Hon. Imbert:—I am not giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Madam Chairman: Minister, please! Okay? Can you kindly repeat your answer?

Hon. Imbert: Ma'am, I would most certainly repeat.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much.

Hon. Imbert: I think they are playing games. There is no pension plan finalized yet.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. Minister, well, this was budgeted at the beginning of 2021 for the entire year—

Madam Chairman: Are you on the same Item?

Mr. Ratiram: On the same line Item.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Because for 2022 it is being budgeted again for 20,000. Can the Minister indicate when this will be finalized? When this will be completed?

Hon. Imbert: That is in the Budget Statement.

Madam Chairman: Okay, can we go on? Item 004, Inland Revenue Division.

Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Member—Madam Chair, sorry. Again Item 01, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances, I see that there is a \$2 million increase in the allocation for staffing for the Inland Revenue Division. Can the Minister advise whether there are going to be new members of staff? What rank they are coming at? What is his proposal for additional staffing given that he is proposing to migrate to the Revenue Authority?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I see my pleas are falling on deaf ears. Just ask what it is for. It is for acting allowances.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, if I may be allowed to ask the questions in my way—

Madam Chairman: Member, just one minute? One minute. Member! Minister of Finance, a Member has five minutes.

Hon. Imbert: That is unfortunate, we need to change that Standing Order.

Madam Chairman: And Minister of Finance—

Mr. Tancoo: And he is still answering.

Madam Chairman:—you yourself have referred before to the Standing Orders.

Hon. Imbert: We need to change it.

Madam Chairman: And until we do that is what we operate by.

Hon. Imbert: I will suffer.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so could you just kindly answer the question.

Hon. Imbert: I did.

Madam Chairman: You can take less than five minutes if you wish.

Hon. Imbert: I answered it, Madam. I said it is for acting allowances.

Madam Chairman: Yes. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I understand that the Minister has grave difficulty accounting to the country—

Hon. Imbert: Here we go again, wasting time.

Madam Chairman: Okay, one minute. This is not only a question of wasting time. Okay! I sometimes used to say that Mr. Ghandi said “an eye for an eye will make everybody blind”. Okay? So let us stop all of this crosstalk and let us get to the meat of the matter. All right? I guess we are all tired after three days, but we have two more days to go.

Mr. Tancoo: Duly guided, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Yes, let us go. What Item you are on?

Mr. Tancoo: Item 08, Vacant Post Salaries and COLA (without incumbents). There was no allocation in 2020, no Estimate in 2021, no Revised Estimate in 2021. There is an allocation proposed now of \$13.9 million for Vacant Post Salaries and COLA (without incumbents). Can the Minister advise what exactly he intends to spend this money on specifically? Numbers of positions? Numbers of warm bodies?

3.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so Member for Oropouche West—

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: I am going to say this for the last time. I think the undertaking—this is 08, was given to both you—was given twice to both you and the Member for Couva South on Monday, all right. So maybe what you could say is, Minister I expect the undertaking applies to this and we move on, okay. Do you have another question?

Mr. Tancoo: Not under this Head, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, go ahead.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, just to confirm, because there are multiple Heads and Sub-Heads under Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances. Is the Minister

committed to provide in writing an indication of all these increases why, what, when and how. Because these directly also relate—

Hon. Imbert: What line Item we are on?

Mr. Tancoo:—to the Vacant Post/Salaries and COLA.

Hon. Imbert: Because if he would tell me what line Item we are on I will answer him. Madam Chair?

Madam Chairman: As far as 01 and 08, an undertaking was given—

Hon. Imbert: That is my understanding.

Madam Chairman:—at the commencement. I think after you asked it on three various Sub-Heads it was given in the interest of time.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: In respect to all to come, all right?

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair, moving on.

Madam Chairman: So I give you an opportunity—Member for Couva South to ask a question and we could come back to you. Member for Couva North, do you have a question, yes? Member for Couva South, do you have a question?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, certainly.

Madam Chairman: So, Member for Couva South and then we would do the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: You are welcome.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, with respect to 08: Vacant Post and that allocation of \$13.8 million, in your statement you indicated that the—I think the Board of Inland Revenue you would move to recruit 100 tax officers. Will that recruitment be under this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: And I will simply repeat what Madam Chairman has said, that I

gave an undertaking, and this is to clarify a question asked by one of your colleagues, that with respect to vacant posts I would provide the necessary information. Vacant posts in all Ministries I will provide the necessary information. And I would expect somebody with the seniority of the Member for Couva South to know that this line Item is for establishment positions and could not possibly refer to contract positions. I am a little disappointed in the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, this is where I was seeking clarification, whether those tax officers will form part of the establishment or will they be recruited—

Hon. Imbert: That is not what you asked.

Mr. Indarsingh:—under contract employment.

Hon. Imbert: That is not what you asked. You asked me whether—

Mr. Indarsingh: That is all, that is all—

Hon. Imbert: I will wait for you to finish.

Mr. Indarsingh:—Minister of Finance, all right.

Hon. Imbert: I will wait for you to finish. Are you finished?

Mr. Indarsingh: That is all.

Hon. Imbert: You asked me whether the 100 contract positions— [*Crosstalk*]
Madam Chairman—

Madam Chairman: All right, so let us move on.

Mr. Indarsingh:—in the budget statement, whether it will be—

Hon. Imbert: I waited for him to finish, Madam Chairman, he keeps talking.

Madam Chairman: Member, Minister of Finance and Member, hold on.

Mr. Indarsingh:—whether it will be under contract—

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance and Member for Couva South, thank you very much. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I refer the Minister's attention to line Item 05: Government Contribution to NIS. The 2021 Estimate was 9 million. However the Revised Estimate is 7 million and the 2022 Estimate of 10.1 million. Can the Minister indicate if this 2022 Estimate will facilitate arrears in the contribution to NIS?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise what the increase of 3.19 million is for?

Hon. Imbert: Increase in salaries due to acting allowances and promotions.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Treasury Division; Item 008: Investments Division. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair, line Item 14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet Appointed Committees. In 2020 we had an Actual spend of 44,200 and a Revised Estimate of 50,000 in 2021, but in 2022 there has now been a 78,000 increase. Can the Minister advise, firstly, what is this Cabinet appointed committee assigned to do, what is there term of reference? Who are the members of that committee? And why is it that we now have such a significant increase, a \$78,000 increase in the allocation for that committee?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman—

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert:—can I first, before I answer, can I get a ruling? Since the Member has jumped all the way to 008, will anybody be allowed to go back to 007?

Madam Chairman: I do not see 007 here.

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister is not paying attention.

Hon. Imbert: Or 005.

Madam Chairman: We are at 008—

Hon. Imbert: Yes, I know.

Madam Chairman:—Investment Division.

Hon. Imbert: Would anybody be allowed to go back to 005?

Madam Chairman: No.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you so much. This is for all the Cabinet appointed committees within the Investments Division which is in charge of the 53 state enterprises. These Cabinet committees are ad hoc and they occur from time to time and it is anticipated that in the coming year there may be the need for additional ad hoc Cabinet appointed committee to deal with one matter or another that is associated with the 53 state enterprises.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, I initially had no intention of going back to 05—

Hon. Imbert: “Aaah.”

Mr. Tancoo: But it is in the same block—

Madam Chairman: No, no, no.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chair—

Mr. Tancoo: It is in the exact same block—

Madam Chairman: Wait, wait, please. We cannot go back to 005 which is Treasury Division.

Mr. Tancoo: No, no, I am not going back to 005, Madam Chair, I am going back to line Item 05. On the same block, under the Investments Division 008: Governments Contribution to NIS. I am asking the same question that was asked before whether this includes allowances for arrears to the National Insurance Board.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the discussion we just had was about 005—two zeroes—and it is the same answer to this as I gave to a previous Sub-Item. It is for increased salaries and naturally when people go into a different pay scale their NIS

contribution may go up. So that is why there is an increase.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 009. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer the Minister to line Item 06: Remuneration to Board Members. In 2020 you had an Actual of \$25,733. In 2021 you had budgeted Minister 565,200 which is a substantial jump. But there is zero revised. There is nothing that was spent according to you Minister. You return now for the same allocation in 2022 as you had initially allocated for 2021. Can the Minister advise whether there was no board at the Central Tenders Board functioning which is why there is no allocation for them as a Revised Estimate for 2021.

Hon. Imbert: There is a board.

Mr. Tancoo: So why is there no allocation Minister?

Hon. Imbert: We will get back to you in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister is committed to get back in writing. Minister at the last Standing Finance Committee which would have been the mid-year review you did commit to provide in writing—

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman—

Mr. Tancoo:—can I get the commitment in writing before the end of the Standing Finance Committee.

Hon. Imbert:—really it is the—[*Inaudible*] Shorten the question. The Member for Oropouche West is just rambling. Could you summarize what you just asked?

Madam Chairman: The Member has asked if—

Mr. Tancoo: I have asked the question. You should pay attention and then speak.

Madam Chairman: The Member has asked if the information could be available before Friday.

Hon. Imbert: You could get it now. I just simply undertook to give it in writing, but he could get now.

Madam Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Imbert: This is a—

Madam Chairman: Member for—you giving it now?

Hon. Imbert: Yeah, right now.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: This is for provision for non-public officers. There was none for last year, there may be some next year.

Mr. Tancoo: This is a provision for non-public officers. Minister, the question is strictly with regard to remuneration for these board members. Were there no board members functioning? This is for board members. Were there no board members functioning in 2021?

Madam Chairman: Member, that question was answered.

Hon. Imbert: Asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Because you asked if there was no board. The Minister had answered, there is a board.

Mr. Tancoo: And I asked, Madam Chair, why there was no allocation. [*Crosstalk*] The Minister indicated that he would put that in writing. He then said that he would provide it now.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, in a hope that I will put an end to this unusual line of questioning, I said this is an allocation for non-public officers on the Central Tenders Board. In fiscal 2021 there were no non-public officers on Central Tenders Board, but there were public officers who are not paid because they are paid through their public service remuneration. There may be non-public officers on the Board in fiscal 2022. That is why there is a provision. I said that already and I

really do not want to—

Mr. Tancoo: This is such a simple explanation. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Imbert:—continue on this point, Madam Chairman. This is a waste of time.

Mr. Tancoo: Accounting is not a waste of time.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Valuation Division. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. The 2021 Estimate was 9.5 million. Can the Minister account for the increase of 3.26 million in the Revised Estimate.

Hon. Imbert: Some posts were filled.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister provide us; can the Minister advise how many posts were filled with the 3.26 million?

Hon. Imbert: We will get back to you in writing on that.

Madam Chairman: Item 011; Item 014; Item 017. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, we at page 87, Item 001. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair, I refer to Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence. I note that there has been close to 100 per cent increase in the allocation between the Revised Estimate of 2021 and the proposed for 2022. Can the Minister indicate why?

Hon. Imbert: COVID.

Mr. Tancoo: That is it?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 05: Telephones. This was estimated at \$4.5 million. The Revised Estimate is 2.5, \$2 million was not utilized. Can the Minister advise if there are outstanding arrears in this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. Item 002; Item 003; Item 004, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, I think you passed a whole of lot of these things very quickly. You are at Item 004.

Hon. Imbert: What he is all about? What he carrying on about?

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, can you direct me to what page you are on now please?

Hon. Imbert: The one with 004.

Madam Chairman: We are on page 92, Item 004. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 04: Electricity. There is a disparity with the 2021 Estimate and Revised Estimate. Can the Minister advise if there is outstanding arrears in that line Item also?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Does the same apply for line Item 05 with the Estimate of 2021 and 2022?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise how much is the arrears?

Hon. Imbert: We will get back to you in writing on that.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 16: Contract Employment. Can the Minister advise the number of persons under contract employment for the last financial year?

3.15 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: I am advised we have it enumerated by Division. We do not have a total. So we can get back to you on that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I refer to line Item 15: Repairs and

Maintenance - Equipment. I note that we have a \$10 million increase in the allocation. Can the Minister provide a listing of what items—what type of repairs this specifically deals with outside of simply equipment?

Hon. Imbert: Yes, I can. This provision has been made for GenTax maintenance, for GenTax Version 9 and e-Services module, production support, Inland Revenue Tower, data centre annual maintenance, Snyder solution checkpoint, firewall software maintenance annual support, annual recurrent expenditure for the wide area network and the Internet.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 43: Security Services. There is an increase of \$2.3 million in security services. Can the Minister advise why this significant increase?

Hon. Imbert: If you look at the Ministry you would see that we have moved into a new Tower at the Government Campus and we have several satellite offices in various areas, and this provision is for armed and unarmed security services at the Inland Revenue Tower; unarmed services at Trinidad House. We had recently vacated Trinidad House, but we still have to provide some level of security; armed and unarmed security services at the various District Revenue offices; armed security services for out of hours work planned and unplanned at District Revenue offices; the monitoring and response at the Bim Bim Trace Warehouse; armed security services for the VAT office in San Fernando; and the armed monitoring and response for all district offices. So it is an estimate based on the requirements of the Ministry.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. Minister, line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Can the Minister advise the number of persons that had been recruited during the last financial year under this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: We will get back you on that.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise if the recruitment of these persons, the position was established prior to them being recruited?

Hon. Imbert: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Ratiram: These positions under Short-term Employment, were these positions advertised?

Hon. Imbert: Short-term Employment was indicated in response to several similar type questions going to several different Ministers under several different Heads. It is of its nature short-term, in some cases it is a direct employment, sometimes you advertise, but if you advertise for a three-month position, by the time you finish the advertisement evaluation recruitment the three months is up. So a number of different approaches are used within the rules of the public service.

Mr. Ratiram: So, hon. Minister, there are hundreds and thousands of young people out there unemployed looking for employment. This is 8.7 million that was spent in the last financial year for recruiting persons. How can the unemployed persons out there know of these opportunities that are going to be filled?

Hon. Imbert: Short-term employment comes up quite often at short notice. It is not feasible to engage in any sort of long-term advertisement programme for short-term employment. That is more applicable to contract employment and also employment with a significant duration.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam. Just to expand on the request by my colleague. He had requested the number of persons employed. I would appreciate if under the same line Item 22: Short-term Employment, if the Minister can advise the jobs that were assigned to these number of persons. I would like to get their names—sorry not their names, but the numbers of persons employed and the classification/job

that they were employed to do.

Hon. Imbert: That is no problem, and I might point out that quite often short-term employment is used when there is a break between contracts. While a new contract is being negotiated, quite often contract officers are kept on a short-term basis until their new contract is finalized. But the information will be provided.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Item 005. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Under Electricity, that is 04, I note that there has been an increase of \$350,000 allocated to the expenditure for 2022. Can the Minister advise whether this is arrears or part of regular course of doing business?

Hon. Imbert: No, I cannot at this point in time. I will get that information for you, but if you look at the original Estimate for 2021, it was identical, 1,850,000.

Mr. Tancoo: I have so looked, hon. Minister, and I noticed that you have revised that figure downwards which is why my request is whether or not this is arrears.

Hon. Imbert: But I answered you. I said I will get the information for you.

Mr. Tancoo: And I responded to you, Sir.

Hon. Imbert: Are you trying have two bites at the same pie?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 05: Telephones. There is a 500 increase there in Telephones. Minister, can you advise if this is also to pay arrears in this Division?

Hon. Imbert: Again, if you look at the Estimate for 2021 it was 1.95 million. It is now 2 million. There is no substantial difference. If there are arrears that information will be provided.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, the Actual spend for 2020 is 1.1 million, the Revised Estimate for 2021 was 1.5 million, that is now being increased to \$2 million. There

must be some sort of reasoning in providing an additional allocation for this line Item. Can you advise what is the reasoning in providing the additional 500 million?

Hon. Imbert: I thought I answered that. I will provide the details.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 12: Materials and Supplies. This line Item was estimated in 2021 for 2.6 million, however only 1 million was utilized. Can the Minister advise on the significant difference of 1.6 million that was not utilized in materials and supplies for the Treasury Division?

Hon. Imbert: This includes the purchase of cleaning supplies as a result of regular sanitization due to COVID-19 protocols. It is not something that you can estimate exactly.

Mr. Ratiram: So 1.6 million was not utilized. Are you saying that less cleaning supplies that was anticipated to be purchased was purchased?

Hon. Imbert: That should be obvious.

Mr. Ratiram: So are you saying that the Treasury Division did not receive the expected amount of cleaning materials for the year in which the employees were exposed to COVID-19, hon. Minister?

Hon. Imbert: I am saying no such thing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may move, Madam Chair, to Item 28: Other Contracted Services. We have migrated from 2020 Actual of 518,000 to a proposed 1.96 million in 2022. Can the Minister advise what type of Contracted Services are being considered under this Head for this substantial increase; how they are going to be procured?

Hon. Imbert: Well, it is not substantial, but the information will be provided.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may continue, line Item 29: Losses on Foreign Currency

Conversion. You had a budgeted figure of 500,000 in 2021 of which none was spent, and I see another 500,000 being allocated in 2022. Can the Minister advise what exactly caused this allocation? What is he envisaging with regard to this Losses on Foreign Currency Conversion?

Hon. Imbert: It all depends on the exchange rate used for the particular transaction.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I also note line Item 32: Losses of Public Money. There is a \$500 allocation. Can you kindly advise what exactly you are looking at under that Sub-Head, Loss of Public Money?

Hon. Imbert: I will get back to you on that.

Mr. Tancoo: I further go down to line Item 56: Loss of Public Monies on payment of Pensioners through Banks. There was a \$1 million Actual spend in 2020, you have an Estimate of 500,000, a Revised Estimate of 500,000 and now an Estimate for 2022 of the same 500,000. Can the Minister advise what measures have been put in place to ensure that we do not experience this Loss of public Monies on payments of Pensioners through Banks?

Hon. Imbert: Well, I think you would have to bring back the dead because this is when a cheque has been issued to somebody and they die before they get the cheque. So if you want me to raise the dead, no problem.

Mr. Tancoo: And the Minister thinks that is funny.

Hon. Imbert: I am dead serious, this is what this is for. It is when a pension cheque is issued to someone and the person passes away before they could collect or cash the cheque. Sometimes it is impossible to retrieve the cheque because the person is deceased. So listen to what I am saying. There is a logical explanation here.

Mr. Tancoo: As a result, Minister—

Hon. Imbert: If you do not want to learn, no problem.

Mr. Tancoo: As a result, Minister, you are saying that this cheque is to be cancelled. Then why is there a \$1.1 million Actual spend if the cheques are simply cancelled because the person is deceased and cannot cash it? That is a book entry.

Hon. Imbert: That is what you think but in some cases these—

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Imbert:—things cannot be cancelled.

Mr. Tancoo: So if they cannot be cancelled and they cannot be encashed because the person has died, how then is there a loss of public moneys incurred?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I have answered this question. If he does not want to learn, I cannot help him.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, Item 22: Short-term Employment. Can the Minister provide the same undertaking for this line Item that he gave under the last Head?

Madam Chairman: Yes. Short-term Employment, it applies to all.

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, line Item 85: Outstanding Insurance Claims - Government Vehicles. I noticed that in 2021 we had an increase of \$700,000 between the Estimate and the Revised Estimate. Can the Minister advise what would have caused this increase in insurance claims on Government vehicles?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, even though you have admonished me I will plead again to say what is it for and I will answer. This is for outstanding claims from fiscal 2020 that were paid in 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: So Minister, these are claims on the basis of vehicular accidents or

deterioration of vehicles?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Line Item 92: Claims for Payment in respect of Void Cheques. There is a \$10 million allocation for Claims for Payment in respect of Void Cheques. Can Minister advise whether any measures have been put in place to ensure that some other process is taken rather than us having to pay \$10 million in 2022 for void cheques?

Hon. Imbert: These would be cheques that have been issued in a previous financial year and had expired and it is a valid payment, and the person has asked for a new cheque and it has been determined to be a genuine claim. This is what this Item is for.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 008: Investments Division. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. 28 relates to provision for divestment of State Enterprises and Special Audits, and you have allocated \$15 million this year. Could you indicate to this meeting what state enterprises are anticipated to be divested this year?

3.30 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: Divestment? Where you seeing that?

Mr. Lee: In line Item 28: Other Contracted Services; 28 means according to the book—

Hon. Imbert: It also refers to special audits, eh.

Mr. Lee: Right.

Hon. Imbert: So that the only divestment that we are doing this year, as I indicated in the budget, was the sale of approximately 10 million shares. Well, putting onto the market, offering for sale, 10 million shares in FCB. There are no

other divestments planned at this point in time. So this allocation is essentially for special audits; special audits of state enterprises which are very, very important, as you will appreciate.

Mr. Lee: All right. And do you have a list of that, that you could provide in writing?

Hon. Imbert: We can give you the planned work programme for the year but it is subject to change.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 009. Item 010. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, again, Madam Chair. I refer to line Item 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. I note that we have a \$3 million increase in the allocation to the Valuation Division, rent and lease arrangements. Can the Minister advise what has caused this \$3 million increase?

Hon. Imbert: You are asking why there is an increase?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: To rent more offices, obviously.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, you had an allocation before. Is it that there are new offices? This is like pulling teeth, Minister.

Hon. Imbert: I do not know what you are talking about.

Mr. Tancoo: Clearly.

Hon. Imbert: Ask the question.

Mr. Tancoo: There is an increased allocation. Can the Minister advise what caused the increased allocation now, above what your Revised for 2021 is?

Hon. Imbert: I answered you. I said to rent more offices. If you want to know what these more offices are, ask that and we will provide the information.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much for the opportunity, Minister. Thank you very

much. Can the Minister provide a listing—

Hon. Imbert: The information will be provided.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence. There is an increase in Travelling and Subsistence under the Valuation Division from 2 million Revised Estimate to 6 million in 2022. Can the Minister advise what this increase is for?

Hon. Imbert: In the same way that in 2022, we are going to be renting additional office space for the Valuation Division in several parts of the country, we also expect more travelling in 2022.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 16: Contract Employment. Minister, this actual spend in 2020 was 44 million. It was estimated at 62 million in 2021 but only 35 million was utilized in the Revised Estimate. Can the Minister indicate why the decrease from 62 to 35 million?

Hon. Imbert: COVID.

Mr. Ratiram: So, is it that persons who were to be employed under contract were not or is it that the establishment reduced the number of persons employed under contract?

Hon. Imbert: I think I answered the question but if you want to know what COVID is, it is a virus that creates social distancing and lockdowns and reduces activity. So COVID caused a reduction in activity, causing a reduction in expenditure.

Mr. Ratiram: In terms of the number of persons employed under this line Item, can the Minister provide us in writing—

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Can the Minister provide a list of the number of persons and the positions in which they are employed under Sub-Item 22: Short-term Employment?

Hon. Imbert: Sure. But again, as I indicated previously, this Sub-Item is often used for persons who are between contracts. So it would be quite logical to assume that most of the expenditure is for persons moving from one contract to another, but we will provide the information.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 011. Item 014. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister given an undertaking to do similarly for Contract Employment, line Item 16, under the Financial Intelligence Unit to provide a listing of the positions and the number of persons under whom are now considered this contract employment?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Similarly, Madam, for Item 22: Short-term Employment.

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chairman, if I may proceed to Item 23: Fees. Can the Minister advise what exactly constitutes the fees being identified here, given that in 2020, we had an actual spend of 428,000, but in 2022, there is an Estimate of \$1 million which is double the amount that we had before?

Hon. Imbert: It is not doubled. In 2021, the original Estimate was 1.8. We have put 1 million for 2022 and it is simply an Estimate.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister confirm that the actual spend in 2020 was \$428,911 and that the Estimate for 2022 is 1 million? What I said is a double between 2020 and 2022.

Madam Chairman: But, Member, why are we asking for confirmation when that

is there in the book?

Hon. Imbert: It is in black and white.

Mr. Tancoo: Because, Madam Chair, I indicated that it had doubled between 2020 and 2022, and the Minister insisted that it had not.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chair, the Members opposite keep mixing up 2021, '20, '22.

Madam Chairman: Minister. Okay—

Hon. Imbert: “They jumble up everything.”

Mr. Tancoo: I am very clear, Minister. I am very, very clear.

Madam Chairman: Member for—

Hon. Imbert: “He is ah jumble.”

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West and the Minister of Finance, I think the substance in what we are trying to do is being lost with all of this ancillary talk. Okay? Let us try to curb it. It is almost becoming a pandemic inside of here.

Hon. Imbert: I am fully vaccinated.

Madam Chairman: I do not know vaccines help this—

Mr. Tancoo: Unfortunately, it is very infectious.

Hon. Imbert: I do not know about them.

Madam Chairman: All right. So let us get serious. Member—

Hon. Imbert: Otherwise we would all be under different circumstances here.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, Ma'am?

Madam Chairman: Item 017. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister provide a listing of the constituent parts of Other Contracted Services, line Item 28, for which there is a current \$3.5 million

Estimate?

Hon. Imbert: I can tell you right now. It is adversary services for insolvency reform. The cost is US 497,000, which when converted at an exchange rate of 6.74, gives 3,454,776. This is subject to change if a different exchange rate is actually used at the end of the day.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister advise who is the provider of that service?

Hon. Imbert: The World Bank.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Imbert: You want the names of the World Bank people too?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001. Item 002. Item 003. Item 004. Item 005. Item 008. Item 009. Item 010. We are now at page 101. Item 014. Item 017.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. We are at page 102. Item 001. Item 002. Item 004. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at Item 03 under the Treasury Division under 004 and I note that there has been under expenses in connection with international financial institutions. There is an Estimate for 362 million which is significantly high. It is 215 million higher than what was the Revised Estimate for 2021. Can the Minister advise why this figure is so high? What is the reason for the \$215 million budget, above and beyond what existed in 2021?

Hon. Imbert: That is our contribution to CAF, IMF and IDB.

Madam Chairman: Item 005. Item 007. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at line Item 06: Food Price

Support Programme. This constituted a significant part of the Minister's budget presentation previously. Can the Minister clearly advise the number of each class of food price support provided and the number of— Sorry, the value of each class of food price support provided and the number of recipients by geographic location or by constituency?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chair, the Member is sorely mistaken. This is the substantive food card programme in the Ministry of Social Development. The Ministry of Finance just provides the funding and therefore the information cannot be provided because it is based on a false premise.

Mr. Tancoo: Then, can the Minister advise why we have had a significant drop between 2020 Actual of 314 million to your 2022 Estimate of 220 million?

Hon. Imbert: Most certainly. One of the policy objectives of this Government is to continuously eliminate fraud, waste and mismanagement. This food card programme was riddled with fraud as a legacy from the former UNC government.
[Desk thumping]

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, Madam Chair? The Minister is saying that this fall between 2020 and 2022 is as a result of fraud that he has identified and corrected. Can the Minister advise how many persons have been charged and successfully prosecuted for that fraud?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, as I indicated, the Ministry of Finance simply provides the money. That question should have been posed to the Minister of Social Development and Family Services.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 21: Covid-19 Support. The Estimate for 2021 was 200 million, the Revised Estimate was \$160,681,757. Can the hon. Minister provide a breakdown of the recipients of this Covid-19 Support

spend for 2021 by constituency?

Hon. Imbert: That is impossible.

Mr. Ratiram: In writing?

Hon. Imbert: I said it is impossible. What happen?

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise what this \$160 million—what it was actually utilized for?

Hon. Imbert: I have given details in my budget presentation. This is for all of the COVID relief programmes in 2021 such as: salary relief grant, income support grant and other forms of COVID relief. All enumerated in the budget Statement and in numerous answers to questions in this honourable place, and I have also enumerated it outside.

Mr. Ratiram: So, can the hon. Minister advise why it is impossible to account, by constituency, who received these grants? How this money was actually spent?

Hon. Imbert: Because the data is not gathered by constituency. It is gathered by ID, it is gathered by address. It is impossible to go and determine, out of 100,000-plus recipients of grants, which constituency they belong to.

Because we would have to collate all the data and then determine in which address this is in this constituency or that constituency. And in some cases boundaries are on the left hand side or the right hand side of the road. It is impossible. We do not gather data by constituencies.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Well can the Minister provide the detailed breakdown of this 160 in identifying the recipients?

Hon. Imbert: I think I would have to get advice from the Attorney General as to whether that is personal and private information. You can get global figures.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise why \$40 million was not utilized,

considering there are a number of persons out there who have applied and have not received any COVID-19 support to date?

Hon. Imbert: The \$200 million was an estimate.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise how many outstanding applicants there are for COVID-19 support?

Hon. Imbert: I will get back to you on that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Same line Item, Madam Chair. The Minister just indicated that his 200 million was an estimate and he is estimating again 200 million for 2022 going forward. Is it that the Minister is expecting that the same amount of COVID-19 relief that he has provided in 2021 would be required in 2022?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, as I indicated previously, COVID-19 is a virus and it is not possible to—

Mr. Tancoo: It is a yes or no answer.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I waited for them to finish. I am asking you, could you ask them not to speak when I am talking?

Madam Chairman: Please proceed, Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you. COVID-19 is a virus. It is impossible to predict the behaviour of a virus. You can only estimate it. And when we have variants like the Delta variant and we have second waves and third waves, it is impossible with any preciseness to determine what the actual expenditure will be. So you use your best judgment and you make an estimate. And that is what this is all about.

Madam Chairman: Item 00—

Mr. Tancoo: Please, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Sorry, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Line Item 20: Humanitarian Assistance for Trinidad Nationals

Overseas re: COVID-19. The Minister has an Actual spend of \$1.4 million in 2020. Is it that there was no payment made because there is no allocation and there is no Revised Estimate for 2021; that there was no allocation made, no request made from anyone during fiscal 2020, which is October 2020, to current, September 2021?

Hon. Imbert: In local parlance, the Member is asking answers.

Mr. Tancoo: That is immaturity, boy.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 17: VSEP - Central Tenders Board. I see that there is an estimate for 2022 of \$12 million. Is it that the Minister plans for persons at the Central Tenders Board—to reduce staff at the Central Tenders Board through a VSEP programme?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I will excuse the Member, he is suffering from newness. The Public Procurement Act repeals the Central Tenders Board and therefore when we fully proclaim the Public Procurement Act, which we plan to do in this fiscal, the Central Tenders Board would be repealed and the employees will have go somewhere. They would either retire, take voluntary separation, go to another post within the public service, move to the public procurement office or some other option. So that is what this is for.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise the number of employees that this will impact on?

Hon. Imbert: Not at this time but that information can be provided, because it is impossible again. It is a voluntary separation. You do not know how many people would voluntarily separate. Some may opt to remain in the public service. Well, we would give you the basis for this estimate.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I just want to get some clarification. You are on line Item 20: Humanitarian Assistance to Trinidad. Just a follow-up to the Member for Oropouche West. I distinctly remember and I stand to be corrected, that in the budget statement by the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, he did mention that there was some humanitarian assistance given to nationals during the last fiscal year, '21 and I am not seeing it in this line Item here about any distributions made. The only distribution here was in 2020 fiscal. So I am asking: Was there any humanitarian group paid from this line Item of households?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chair, I cannot talk on the imperfect memory of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: I am not hearing you, Minister.

Hon. Imbert: I said your memory is imperfect. I cannot use your imperfect memory that you think you heard the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs say something. "Buh yuh ain sure". I cannot use that as a basis to answer your question. There was no provision and no expenditure recorded. If at the end, the closing of the accounts, new information comes to light, then we can deal with it at that time. But there was no provision for it and no expenditure is recorded. I cannot go on what you think.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 15: Government's Contribution to the Children's LIFE Fund. The Actual spend for 2020, the Government Contribution to Children's LIFE Fund was nil in 2020. For 2022—

Madam Chairman: One minute please.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item?

Madam Chairman: Where are we?

Mr. Ratiram: Under 007.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So it is the bottom of the page. Okay, sure.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: 007, line Item 15: Government's Contribution to Children's LIFE Fund. Minister, the Actual spend for 2020 was nil. For 2022, the estimate is 10.6 million and that is a decrease of 4.3 million from the Revised Estimate of 2021. Can the Minister explain why this decrease in the contribution to this important fund?

Hon. Imbert: Again, I will plead with my colleagues, just ask me what it is for please? The answer is COVID.

Mr. Ratiram: Hon. Minister, COVID makes it even more critical that this Children's Life Fund be well funded to provide lifesaving medical expenses, medical procedures for our children. Why it is you are decreasing it at this point in time?

Hon. Imbert: Nobody is decreasing anything.

Mr. Ratiram: But there is a decrease of 4.3 million.

Hon. Imbert: As I said, COVID is the reason why there is a difference in expenditure. The reason being that because of travel restrictions implemented by countries all over the world, it was not as easy for children to travel overseas for medical treatment. That is the reason. If and when travel restrictions are relaxed, for example, it is very difficult now for someone from Trinidad and Tobago to get into countries of the European Union because of their vaccination passport. You can go to North America if you are vaccinated with a WHO vaccine. You can go to England but you still have some level of quarantine involved. And, therefore,

because of the travel restrictions, the Children's Life Fund is primarily used for treatment of children overseas. So this is why this estimate has been done in this way. If there is need to supplement it, it will most certainly be supplemented.

Mr. Ratiram: But Minister, that travel restriction has been relaxed for 2022, versus what was experienced for 2021. So your answer just not making sense.

Hon. Imbert: Because you are not making sense.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 18: Salary Relief Grant. And I know you would have distributed Salary Relief Grant in the fiscal year 2021, why is there not any line Item firstly? And if there are any outstanding amounts owed, why nothing is budgeted for 2022?

Hon. Imbert: It is under a different Item now. It is under COVID relief.

Mr. Lee: COVID-19 support?

Hon. Imbert: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: So the 160 million constitute Salary Relief Grant for this fiscal?

Hon. Imbert: Look at it very carefully, the 186 million is in 2020. The 160 is in 2021. So we have coalesced everything into COVID-19 support. We pay the Income Support Grant out of this as well.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. To go back to line Item 15, the Minister's explanation for the decrease in the allocation was because of COVID. However, can the Minister explain why then in 2021 when COVID was significantly present we had a \$15 million Estimate and we still have a \$15 million Revised Estimate at the end of the fiscal year, but he is decreasing it this year in 2022 when restrictions are being lifted?

Hon. Imbert: I have already answered this question.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, you indicated that there was a decrease because of COVID. In fact you had a one-word answer for everything, COVID. But that COVID restriction did not prevent you—

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, we are wasting time you know. I answered that question already.

Mr. Tancoo:—from having an Estimate and a Revised Estimate of 15 million in 2021.

Hon. Imbert: He just keeps asking the same question over and over. He does not like my answer, too bad.

Madam Chairman: So, I think the questions are a little different. Minister, what is your answer, the same thing, COVID?

Hon. Imbert: I have answered this question already, Madam.

Mr. Tancoo: This Minister has grave difficulty providing answers to anything.

Hon. Imbert: You could grumble all you want, you know.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 42: Fiscal Incentive Programme for Farmers. Hon. Minister, this Item was estimated in 2021 for 500 million. That 500 million was for the stimulus package for the agriculture sector. You boasted about that stimulus package about putting agriculture first and all the different plans and programmes that you had last year for the agriculture sector. However, the Revised Estimate for 2021 is only \$10 million. So it is, or I should ask: Can you kindly tell us why \$490 million that was supposed to be utilized for the stimulus package for our farmers was not utilized?

Hon. Imbert: In the first instance, during the mid-year review there was reallocation of a considerable amount of money out of this particular line Item.

And in the second instance, we in the Ministry of Finance provide the funds. This is just like the food card, we provide the money. Those operational issues are best directed to the line Minister responsible for this programme. I can assure you that every request that was made of the Ministry of Finance was accommodated, but we simply provide the money.

Mr. Ratiram: So you are saying, hon. Minister, that this line Item here provided money for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries that did not utilize these funds?

Hon. Imbert: I said that during the mid-year we reallocated a significant amount of money out of this line Item. The food basket, for example, almost \$60 million in food baskets were taken from this line Item.

With respect to the operational details of the farming programme, that is best referred to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. We in finance make the money available. We are not responsible for the programmes themselves.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister?

Hon. Imbert: And you could ask me that question a hundred times, you would get the same answer.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, \$10 million in the mid-year review was transferred to Head 14: Office of the Prime Minister under 005/01. That 10 million was utilized by the Office of the Prime Minister for the religious bodies. However, the remaining sum, if you are saying that it was transferred, I am seeing the 10 million accounted for. If you are saying it was transferred why it is not being reflected here?

Hon. Imbert: A transfer and an expenditure are not the same. Go and do some ABC accounting please.

Mr. Ratiram: All right, Minister, now I am seeing that this financial incentive

programme has been reduced from 500 million to 300 million. Can you explain why the reduction, if it is that we are putting agriculture first? Why are we cutting down this stimulus package?

Hon. Imbert: The \$300 million is a provision that the Ministry of Finance has made available to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for its programmes, based on representations made with respect to a number of different programmes. I suggest you refer those matters to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. We simply provide the money.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Minister, line Item 44: Loan Guarantee Programme - Small and Medium Enterprises.

I know in your budget statement you have made it a bit more friendlier for small and medium business to access, but I see no allocation for 2022. And I am sure you would have distributed funding for '21.

4.00 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: Done. With this programme we have made a fund available to the four commercial banks that are managing the SME loan facility: First Citizens, Republic, Royal and Scotia. And there is money in an account, that is where the 268 million came from. It went into an account en bloc. And as the loans are actioned that account is drawn down. So that is why you see at the beginning in 2020 the 268 went, we still have \$196 million available in that facility which would be now made available for the phase two of the SME loan programme, which, I must say, is a very generous programme.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 41: Business Stimulus Programme. The Minister had estimated a \$25 million expense for 2021 but only

spent 5 million, he is now proposing to return to a 25 million again. Can the Minister advise how many applicants we had under this programme and how much money was actually spent on each applicant?

Hon. Imbert: Again, this is a programme that is managed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. We simply provide the money, and we have put \$25 million back in 2022 because we expect full reopening of the economy as far as is possible in fiscal 2022. So we expect additional expenditure. But those details, we will not have them in the Ministry of Finance. We would have to get them.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, are you not responsible for accounting for this money because this is under your Head. Even if you transfer it out, it is approved under the Head of the Ministry of Finance. You are directly responsible for accounting for this money. If it shows up in another Ministry then clearly we could ask, but this is 25 million allocated here, 5 million spent here, under the Ministry of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: What is the question please?

Mr. Tancoo: I am asking for a breakdown of the recipients of this \$5 million.

Hon. Imbert: I answered that. I said we in Finance we do not manage this programme. We do not have the details that you require. We will get them for you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Now you are saying something different.

Hon. Imbert: I thought I spoke in the English language.

Mr. Tancoo: Now you are saying something different.

Hon. Imbert: I said that already. You are not even listening.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 17: Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Fund GATE. That is on the following page.

Madam Chairman: Number 17?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Page 106.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, under this line Item, 400 million has been allocated for 2022. Minister, I know that there has been a policy review. There has been a policy review in the last financial term where students are allowed one programme up to the undergraduate. However, the pre-science students have been funded under this programme, but when they complete their pre-science and they are accepted to the University of the West Indies to pursue their first degree, their first undergraduate degree, they are not being allowed access to this programme because of that policy review, that change which took place. And some of these students are willing to repay the GATE funding for pre-science to allow them to pursue their first undergraduate programme. Hon. Minister, can you consider the necessary changes to allow these students to refund their payment of pre-sciences to the Ministry so that they will be able to access this programme to complete their first undergraduate programme?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I hope next year Members will understand that under Head 18, funding is provided for transfer to another Ministry for it to administer its programmes. The Ministry of Finance does not administer the GATE programme. All of what you ask there, I am sure you are well aware. Firstly, those are policy issues which is out of order in this Standing Finance Committee. And secondly, those are matters you should have referred to the Minister of Education when you had the chance.

Mr. Ratiram: Hon. Minister, there is not a line Item under that Ministry that dealt this allocation here of the 400 million.

Hon. Imbert: I have said what I had to say.

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

Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam, again, we are going to ask the question and the Minister will probably have no answer. Line Item 85: Community Improvement Services Limited CISL. There is a \$43 million—\$43.8 million increase in the allocation for 2022. Can the Minister account for why this allocation has significantly increased?

Hon. Imbert: This is something managed by the Ministry. This is one of the companies—all of these companies for example BWIA, WISCO, et cetera, TRINTOC, companies like that. Whenever a state enterprise is wound up or is in the process of being wound up, the entity is transferred to the Ministry of Finance for the Ministry of Finance to do whatever is required to wind up the company. In this particular case CISL is in the process of being wound up. The decision was made in 2017 and the winding up process includes the termination of employees on the establishment, persons on contract in accordance with good industrial relations practice and the law, settlement of severance benefits to employees, disposal of the assets of the company, as well as settling outstanding litigation matters.

In this particular case there is a particular court matter *CV 2018/0416, Kall Co v CISL* and a provision been made for the settlement of that court matter. This is why there was a provision of this magnitude in this particular Sub-Item, in this particular Sub-Head. So I do know.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, if I may continue? Line Item 57: Caribbean Airlines Limited. There was an allocation of 64 million in 2021, but a Revised Estimate of 433 million revised for 2021. Can the Minister account for why this multi-million dollar increase in the allocation for Caribbean Airlines Limited for 2021 fiscal?

Hon. Imbert: COVID. I am sure you know. I mean, it has been all over the press that Caribbean Airlines has not been able to fly as it should but it has expenses.

Mr. Tancoo: Sure. Sure Minister.

Hon. Imbert: So COVID severely affected Caribbean Airlines, and Caribbean Airlines had to be subsidized by the Government.

Mr. Tancoo: And I thank you very much for your input.

Hon. Imbert: And you should know that.

Mr. Tancoo: I thank you very much for your input that this was because of COVID. However, in 2021 when you estimated \$64 million in 2021 COVID was present. So your Estimate during COVID when you made this Estimate was 64 million. Still during COVID you are proposing to spend 443 million. Was this an oversight on your part? Did you not cater for COVID?

Hon. Imbert: No. It was not an oversight. As I have said twice already, COVID is a virus, and COVID has developed variants. It is impossible—not even the mighty United States can predict what is going on with COVID. Developed countries cannot predict what is going on with COVID. All of us thought that we would see the end of COVID—

Mr. Tancoo: All of us?

Hon. Imbert:—in 2021. We did not. We are now into 2022.

Mr. Tancoo: All of us?

Hon. Imbert: We do not know—I am talking about everybody in the world—we do not know what is going to happen with COVID in 2022. We do not know what is going to happen with COVID in 2023. And therefore, the \$64 million allocation was based on an expectation that COVID-19 will come under control in 2021; it did not. And we made a decision to keep our national airline, and therefore we made a decision to bail out our national airline, and that is why spent intent this money here. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: To continue, Madam Chair. Line Item 93: The Couva Medical and

Multi-Training Facility Limited. There was a \$1 million Estimate in 2021 and Revised Estimate for 2022 is still 1 million. Is this another one of those facilities, these companies that are being wound up?

Hon. Imbert: No. This is a company—

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister then advise why there is no allocation for 2022?

Hon. Imbert: You are asking whether this is being wound up. I said no. And I am going onto explain why there is a difference in allocation. This is a company that is under the control of the Ministry of Health.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 07: Debt Servicing; Item 001. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I am sorry. I will hold until we get to 09.

Madam Chairman: Item 009. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Madam Chair, I have noticed a significant increase in the interest on the overdraft allocation. Can the Minister indicate what is the current value of the overdraft which is attracting this interest of \$750 million for the year? What is the current value of the overdraft?

Hon. Imbert: I am unable to give you that information. Do you want it down to the last cent? Because it changes every minute, eh. So you want it down to the last cent?

Mr. Tancoo: I would appreciate, Madam Chair, if the Minister can provide the value of the overdraft as at end of September 2021, on the basis of which we can determine and we can look at the interest that is being attracted under this Head?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, could I ask the Member to clarify? You want to get the overdraft at the end of September 2021, this is with respect to which one of these?

Mr. Tancoo: Every single overdraft that is listed as the basis on which we have an

interest on overdraft. Every single account that attracts this level of interest, Madam Chair, I would appreciate if the Minister could provide those line Items, those items, those accounts, and the level of the overdraft at each of those accounts?

Hon. Imbert: There is only one.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. So Can the Minister— I am going right back to my original question. Can the Minister advise what is the value of the overdraft?

Hon. Imbert: Could I ask what is the relevance to that? In which one of these Items you talking about? 20? 21? 22?

Mr. Tancoo: I am dealing with Item 01. I have asked specifically for the value of the overdraft as at end of September this year.

Hon. Imbert: I will wait for him to finish. Are you finished?

Mr. Tancoo: I am. Well, apparently I am.

Hon. Imbert: Are you finished?

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I have asked a straightforward question. Can you please answer it?

Hon. Imbert: I do not understand the question, so I want him to finish.

Madam Chairman: Please proceed, Minister.

Hon. Imbert: Are you referring to the Estimate for 2022? Because you are dealing with a line Item here—

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we have listed here actual estimates, revised estimates, and estimates for going forward. On the basis of those estimates for going forward, Madam, we have interest laid out. I have asked for the hon. Minister to provide the value of the overdraft as at now. Which would have affected—fiscal which would be September—that would be fiscal 2021? Fiscal 2021 in case the Ministry does not know, the interest at fiscal 2021 based on his

figures is \$1.15 billion. That is what I am referring to Minister, I am asking for what is the value of the overdraft as at September, which is at the end of fiscal 2021?

4.15 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: And that question is being asked in the context of these numbers here?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Minister, because these are the interest—this is the interest being paid on the overdraft.

Hon. Imbert: Okay—

Mr. Tancoo: This is the interest paid on an account.

Hon. Imbert: Will not stop, you know. I am trying to get the information so I can answer you. So, you are asking for the level of the overdraft as at the 30th of September, 2021, in order for you to understand these Estimates here?

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, just to translate. Can you provide the value of the overdraft as at September 2021 which attracted \$1.15 billion in interest?

Hon. Imbert: I allowed the Member to finish his question, and I will now explain, hopefully without interruption that the overdraft changes every single day. And therefore, if you get the overdraft amount on one out of 365 days, it is irrelevant. So can I get a question with respect to these numbers here please?

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, the Minister's figures advise that at the end of September 2021, the interest paid on the overdraft was 1.15 million. Going forward from that period he is estimating a \$750 million payment on interest going forward. I am asking—that is 750 on the current value of the overdraft going forward into 2022. I am asking for the Minister to advise the value of the overdraft, which would have attracted interest at the end of September 2021. I do not

understand why the Minister cannot seem to figure that figure out. I do not see the difficulty, Madam Chairman, there is a number that exists in an account.

Hon. Imbert: I am waiting on him to finish, he is just rambling on. Madam Chairman, I hope he is finished. Let me now explain. The overdraft on the 1st of October, 2020, could have been 5 billion. And on the 2nd of October, it could have been 7 billion. And then on the 20th of October, it could have been 3 billion. And then on the 1st of November, it could have been 8 billion. It changes every single day. And the 1.15 billion here is the aggregate of the charge on the overdraft account on each day added up for every single day. And therefore, what the overdraft was at the 30th of September is irrelevant. So I would like a question in the context of these numbers here because if you ask an irrelevant question, I cannot answer you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, if the Minister is unwilling to provide the value of the overdraft as at September—

Hon. Imbert: “I done.”

Mr. Tancoo:—30, 2021, then that is a matter for him and his failure to account to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can I ask the Minister in this—in the same follow up question to my colleague. 2022 you estimate interest of \$750 million. Could you provide this House, what is the rolling average that you would have utilized to come up with \$750 million?

Hon. Imbert: At last, a sensible question. That will be provided. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Item 011. 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*. 07 - National Lotteries Control Board. We are at page 145. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Remuneration to Board Members, Item 06. There is an increase in the number—in the allocation to remuneration. Can the Minister advise why?

Madam Chairman: 27, 500, why, that is the question.

Hon. Imbert: In the big book? The Member is asking why there is an increase? Because we increased the size of the board. I thought he was here when we did that.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister advise the number of persons—

Hon. Imbert: Was he not in Parliament when we did that?

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister advise the number of persons that have been added—can you tell me how many more persons have been added to the board?

Hon. Imbert: None.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, you just said that there has been an increase in the number of Members on the board and now you are saying there is none.

Hon. Imbert: Again, this demonstrates a misunderstanding on the part of Members opposite of these documents. This is an estimate looking forward for the next 12 months. Since we changed the law and increased the size of the National Lotteries Control Board, we expect in the next fiscal year to appoint additional members and increase the size of the board, and therefore, we have made provision for it.

Mr. Tancoo: So Minister, by your own words you have increased the size of the board, you estimated in 2021—

Hon. Imbert: We increased it by statute. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: I have explained, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Just, just one minute, just one minute. I think some things are said with a presumption that we are all on the same page, okay. When the Minister said we have increased the size of the board, the assumption is that we would have all remembered the legislative measure which increased the number of people who can now sit on the board. The size of the board was increased by a legislative measure by which we all participated. So I guess that was the underlying assumption that we would remember. You then ask them by how many people it was increased. You are now asking actually if the board was increased by a number of physical people and his answer was no. So that there is no hiding, there is a disconnect between your understanding of what the Minister said, because it is on a presumption that we remember something that we did, okay? And I think that is a lot of what is going on here in this discussion, and I would like it to stop.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, Madam Chair, thank you very much. The Minister's projection is that he will increase the size of the board in fiscal 2022, yet his Estimate is the same as it was in 2021 when we had an actual board in place. In 2021 his Actual—his estimated figure was 396,000, with the current board, in 2022 going forward, he has made the same estimate so, he is not catering based on these figures for an increased board.

Madam Chairman: Member, if you would look at the Revised Estimate 2021. And I am only trying to assist so that we do not waste precious time. Okay? So maybe, that might help you in looking at your 2021 Estimate.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, I will leave that issue there for now and return to it at another point, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: No more questions here? Member for Couva North, yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Can the Minister advise the number of persons on the establishment that fall under this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: That will be provided.

Mr. Ratiram: And the positions when you provide it in writing please.

Hon. Imbert: It will be provided.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 16: Contract Employment. There is a significant increase in this line Item of \$5.18 million. Can the Minister identify the number of persons currently in the organization under this line Item and the proposed number of persons expected to be recruited with this \$5.1 million?

Hon. Imbert: Right now, we are working on a strategic plan and the number of persons will evolve out of that.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. Minister, line Item 22, would the same undertaking previously given commit to this line Item 22?

Hon. Imbert: Remember, this is statutory board, eh, so, it is not directly managed by the Ministry of Finance. So, we will have to ask them what they contemplate in terms of short-term employment.

Mr. Ratiram: And can you provide that in writing, once—

Hon. Imbert: We will ask them.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Same line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Your Estimate for 2021 was 2.4 million. Your Revised Estimate is 5.2 million. Can the Minister provide a list, this is for 2021, can the Minister provide a listing of the persons hired and what positions they occupied, a list of the number of persons hired and what positions they occupied under this Head, Short-term Employment which would have caused such a drastic increase in the allocation for 2021?

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head—

Mr. Tancoo: One more, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman:—one more question. Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: We have a similar situation under Other Contracted Services. Can the Minister advise what constitutes under this Head, Other Contracted Services which would have accounted for a \$1 million increase between the—it is a little bit less than a million—between the Estimate for 2021 and the Estimate for 2022?

Hon. Imbert: We will obtain that information from the NLCB for you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. There is an increase of \$17 million there for financial year 2022. In 2021, the Revised Estimate was 17 million. Can the Minister provide us in writing a breakdown of this 17 million, what it was utilized for, who the service providers were and the cost associated with those services? And also an explanation why the additional 17 million for this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: We will get the information for you.

Mr. Ratiram: Also, line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. Can the Minister provide us with a breakdown for the spend in 2021 and an explanation for the increase of 875,000 for 2022?

4.30 p.m.

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

Hon. Members, we will now move on to *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans two pages, which are pages 48 and 49, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. A. Administrative Services. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 014: Upgrading of Information Technology - Inland Revenue Division. In 2021, there was an Estimate of \$5 million but you only spent \$2 million based on your Revised Estimate. Can the Minister advise why is it that this expenditure was cut by \$3 million?

Hon. Imbert: This was a project that it was hoped would be fully completed in fiscal 2021. Because of issues with respect to suppliers, services and goods, as a result of COVID, the project was not implemented as quickly as one would have hoped, as has happened throughout the country.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister advise the status then? Is this project now going to be completed at the end of fiscal 2022 with this allocation?

Hon. Imbert: We expect so.

Mr. Tancoo: So, Minister, you would have completed the project in 2021 with a 5 million, that you will now completing the project with a \$7 million cost?

Hon. Imbert: It is a project—I am being advised now the project extends over more than one year. So you have a year two and a year three.

Mr. Tancoo: I refer to now line Item 048: Electronic Document Management System - Ministry of Finance - Head Office. There was an Actual spend of 556 million—sorry, 556,832 in 2020, but no allocation estimated and no Revised

Estimate for 2021. Can the Minister advise why? Because you now have an allocation of 500,000 for 2022. Can the Minister advise why is it that there was no allocation and no spend in 2021?

Hon. Imbert: This was simply converting paper files into digital format and there was no requirement for expenditure.

Mr. Tancoo: A similar question for the Upgrade of the Information Technology. Item 050: Upgrade of the Information Technology Infrastructure. Actual spend 2020 was 585,725, but no spend for 2021. It appears that both Items 048 and 050 were abandoned for the year 2021, but restarted in 2022.

Hon. Imbert: COVID has put a severe strain on the capacity of the ICT resources at the Ministry and, therefore, we had to divert resources into remote working, virtual meetings, upgrade of the systems and so on and, therefore, the expenditure in fiscal 2021 was not as anticipated, but we expect it to increase in fiscal 2022.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 57: Establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority. You actually had a spend of \$2 million in 2020 and another 2 million for Revised Estimate for 2021, with a projected 4 million for 2022 going forward. So just within these books that we have here, between 2020 and 2021, you would have spent \$4 million on the Establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, which has not yet been established. Can the Minister advise what that money was spent on?

Hon. Imbert: In a project as complex as that, you must have proper planning. So over the last couple years, the Ministry has been engaged in determining the establishment for the new authority; a business plan; a strategic plan, looking at the jobs specifications for each person and looking at all of the necessary planning works required to establish the authority and, therefore, consultants were hired to look at human resource practices; look at business practices; established rules and

regulations, protocols, et cetera. That is what that money was spent on.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister undertake to provide a list of the expenditure Items under this Head that would account for the 2 million spent in 2021.

Hon. Imbert: We will provide general information.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I turn now to line Item 059: Implementation of Property Tax Regime. In 2020, you had an actual expenditure of 1.5 million with a projected expenditure estimate for revenue for 2021 of 1 million and 2022 of 1 million. Can the Minister advise—but, firstly, the property tax regime has not been implemented. So, therefore, I am not sure what the minister spent 1.5 million in 2020 on. But can the Minister advise whether this allocation that he has described here is sufficient, given that in his Estimate of revenue, he estimated \$100 million for financial 2022 but you are estimating here \$1 million to implement the property tax regime?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I would like to educate the Member. This is the Development Programme. Expenditure comes in two ways: recurrent expenditure, capital expenditure. We believe this is adequate for the capital expenditure on this project, but there is quite a bit of other money under recurrent expenditure.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, line Item 58: Upgrade of Integrated Global Payroll System and Integrated Human Resource Information System. Madam Chairman, this line Item was estimated—was allocated \$10 million for 2021, but only 5 million was utilized and there is no allocation for 2022. Can the Minister advise if this project is completed?

Hon. Imbert: No, it is not.

Mr. Ratiram: If it is not completed, Minister, why it is there is no funding for this project in this financial year?

Hon. Imbert: It is being transferred to another Head.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 63: Establishing a Gaming Commission. It has been budgeted at 1.5 million for financial year 2022. Can the Minister provide for us the duration of this project? Will it be completed in this fiscal term?

Hon. Imbert: That is the plan.

Mr. Ratiram: Also, the line Item 130: Infrastructure Upgrade of the Container Examination Station (CES) at Port of Spain.

Madam Chairman: We have not reached there as yet. So just let me take the Member for Couva South. Member for Couva South?

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, you have allocated \$63 million for the Inspection Scanners Customs and Excise Division as a new project. Could you provide this meeting with a breakdown of how this \$63 million will be spent and for what?

Hon. Imbert: The money is to procure new scanners, but we could give you some more details in due course.

Mr. Indarsingh: In due course?

Hon. Imbert: We have to buy new scanners.

Mr. Indarsingh: Right. I accept that. Could you inform this meeting where these scanners will be deployed?

Hon. Imbert: Port of Spain, as is the case now, and in Point Lisas, as is the case now. But the equipment there is old and tending towards obsolescence so we are upgrading to modern—more modern scanners at the two ports—the two main containerized ports.

Mr. Indarsingh: Not at the airport, just the sea ports?

Hon. Imbert: It is—yes. Sea ports, yes, correct.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. With respect to 068: The Design and Implementation of Pension System for Daily-Paid Workers in the Public Service. Will \$500,000—this

allocation—be sufficient as it relates to this line Item which has been stated in approximately three budget presentations? Will this sum bring a finalization and implementation of this plan in fiscal 2022?

Hon. Imbert: This money is for consultancy services. This is a very important project, and if it is necessary to transfer from some other line Item within the Ministry's allocation where we anticipate savings, we will most certainly do so. So that 500,000 is for consultancy services, but if we need to spend more, we will.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. And with respect to 069: Indexation for Monthly-Paid Retirees, have you completed this particular exercise?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Mr. Indarsingh: No. But you intent to finalize the—

Hon. Imbert: Well, this is an old Item.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: You remember—I remember myself, back in 2009, we reached pretty far with this, with respect to indexation of pensions, and then your government came in and shelved the project. So, I will go back to Cabinet and see if I can get a fresh mandate from Cabinet on this.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Based on your track record as a—

Hon. Imbert: Well, you shelved the project—

Mr. Indarsingh:—in your previous incarnation—

Hon. Imbert:—so you should blame yourself. Blame yourself.

Madam Chairman: Public Buildings. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chairman, I just wanted to ask on line Item 068 which is at E—

Madam Chairman: On Item—what line Item?

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 68. Can I?

Madam Chairman: Quickly.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise if the 63 million for the scanners—

Madam Chairman: That is 67. Which one you are on?

Mr. Ratiram: Sorry, 67. Can the Minister advise if it is to purchase and install or if it is just for the procurement, and if the installation will be completed in this financial term?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam President: Public Buildings, F. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 130, can the Minister advise when this project will be completed?

Hon. Imbert: The plan is to start and finish in the fiscal year coming.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 132. Can the Minister advise when this infrastructural work will be completed in this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: It is a two-year project. It will begin in fiscal 2022.

Madam President: Infrastructure Development Fund, page 191. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 18 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, PS and thank you, Ministers. And thank you, the representatives from the Ministry of Finance.

4.45 p.m.

Head 67: Ministry of Planning and Development, \$294,255,200.

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

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chairman, it

is indeed an honour to be here to appear before the Standing Finance Committee with the members of my staff headed by the Permanent Secretary. The Ministry of Planning and Development continues to work assiduously on fulfilling its mandate of national development concentrated in four main areas, economic, social, spatial and environmental development. As the leading agency for the development planning process, the Ministry is responsible for providing technical support and guidance to all Ministries, Departments and agencies in the formulation of policies, plans and strategies that are vital for the development of our country.

The Ministry has been in collaborative discussions with all other Government agencies to ensure that their proposed plans, projects and programmes are in keeping with the National Development Strategy, *Vision 2030*. Madam Chairman, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has disrupted our way of life and served to reinforce the importance of constructing versatile policies that restructure, digitize and transform our economy while emphasizing the need to implement mitigation strategies and measures that build socioeconomic and environmental resilience.

It has therefore become necessary for us to recalibrate and reposition ourselves within our development trajectory to ensure that we could address the needs of all citizens as we chart our way forward as a country and for Trinidad and Tobago to reflect the peculiar development needs arising from the current situation and solutions. So our development strategy now comprises not only the *Vision 2030* but the Road Map to Recovery reports and the community recovery reports and their recommendations.

We are in the process as a Ministry of developing a national performance framework to monitor and measure the performance of the national development initiatives and we will be tracking the progress of all recommended interventions

which will lend to the accomplishment of our vision. Madam Chairman, the transformation of the CSO to the National Statistical Institute of Trinidad and Tobago is therefore an important step towards intensifying the autonomy of the current national statistical system and we have done several things in that regard.

Madam Chairman, of particular interest is the fact that in 2022 we will be conducting the population and housing census and that proposal has been completed but because of the pandemic situation we will now have to move to ensure that the dissemination of data and the collection of data is done in such a way as to minimize the risks associated with COVID-19.

The Ministry has already embarked on digitizing our Town and Country Planning Division and we will be digitizing our Human Resource Department and we continue to work diligently to ensure that measures are put in place for the protection and sustainable management of the environment whilst we continue to ensure that we take action as it relates to climate change and move towards an e-mobility policy to facilitate the transition to the use of electric vehicles.

The Ministry serves as the focal point for international agencies such as the IDB, the CDB, the United Nations, the European Union and our supporting statutory bodies and agencies; the Advisory Town Planning Panel, the Chaguaramas Development Authority, the Green Fund Executing Unit, the Environmental Management Authority, the Institute of Marine Affairs, the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute.

Madam Chairman, as I close, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the Permanent Secretary, Deputy Permanent Secretaries, the staff of the Ministry of Planning and Development as well as our statutory agencies for their hard work and dedication towards the achievement of the Government's vision for national

development. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 67 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$294,255,200 for Head 67, Ministry of Planning and Development is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 313. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration; Item—sorry, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. And welcome to the technical staff of the Ministry of Planning and Development. Madam Chair, I am at line Item 04: Allowances for Monthly Paid Officers, I note that the Ministry had an Actual spend of 610,000 in 2020, a Revised Estimate for 2021 of 600,000 but you are now proposing to increase almost to double that figure. Can the Minister advise what would have constituted that need to increase to almost double the allocation for allowances?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you for the question. Madam Chairman, this is to facilitate the payment of acting arrears for Deputy Permanent Secretaries and we are waiting approval from the DPA.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair, again. Line Item 08: Vacant Posts-Salaries & C.O.L.A. (without incumbents), can the Minister advise the number and classifications of the various posts and positions being considered for this

allocation for 2022?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The number, Member for Oropouche West?

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Did you say the number of posts?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am, the number and classification if possible.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. The Ministry has a total of 525 employees. There is a total of 770 posts on the permanent establishment. There are 354 posts that are currently filled, whilst 416 remain vacant. It should be noted that 251 of these vacant posts have bodies in them comprised of either acting on temporary incumbents leaving a total of 165 posts without bodies. There is also a total of 342 positions on the contract establishment with 131 filled and 211 vacant.

The Ministry also has three associate professionals, eight on-the-job trainees and 29 short-term employees. As at September 30, 2021, the total number of employees in the Ministry is 525. There are 354 public officers that are permanent, 131 contract officers, three associate professionals, eight on-the-job trainees and 29 short-term employees.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, if I could ask the Minister, she reeled out a list of positions—well, numbers and so on, if you could put that in writing to us, please.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The same information that I just gave?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah. I did not get all—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You want me to repeat it—

Mr. Indarsingh:—at the rate you were going.

Hon. Robinson-Regis:—instead of—Okay. I could—you want me to—

Madam Chairman: But would this not be on the *Hansard*.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Because it will be on *Hansard* would you want it still?

Madam Chairman: In the interest of time, it will be on *Hansard*.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Okay?

Mr. Indarsingh: I was trying to get—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. So it will be on *Hansard*.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. Item 003: Technical Co-operation, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Minister, you had an Estimate of 2.5 million in 2021 and then you raised the Estimate; your Revised Estimate now for 2021 is 2.78 but then your 2022 Estimate has dropped—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Where are the specifics?

Madam Chairman: 01?

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry. Yes, Madam, line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay.

Mr. Tancoo: Your initial Estimate for 2021 was 2.48 million but you increased in your Revised Estimate to 2.78 million, based on that I am curious to find out now why is there now a decrease from your revision by 229,000?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: At the time we had arrears of acting to public officers, this was paid in 2021 and so it is no longer needed in 2022.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Central Statistical Office. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: A similar question, Minister, you had an initial Estimate, you increased the Estimate and then your revised to lower for 2022 going forward. Is that the same reason, payment of arrears?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yeah. Arrears of salary was paid to officers of the CSO

who were previously under delegated authority. Currently, all the arrears are paid to bring persons up to their correct salaries.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Chair. I am just enquiring, 01, and this relates to public servants from the Central Statistical Office and where are we in the transition towards the National Statistical—the new body and are there any moves to transfer or rehire, terminate, et cetera?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No. Madam Chairman, as I said, this does relate to public servants. With regard to the new organization, the Member for Naparima will recall that we did bring the National Statistical Institute Bill to the Parliament during the Eleventh Parliament. However, despite the fact that we had a joint select committee, the Members of the Opposition were adamant that because it demanded a special majority that they were not supportive of the Bill and consequently we are now working with the Attorney General to see how we can work on that piece of legislation to make sure that we can bring something where we will get the support.

Mr. Charles:—that you do not need the Opposition. I will take it as that.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Where we will get the requisite support.

Mr. Charles: You do not need the Opposition support. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 005, Item 006, Item 008, 009. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer to Item 05: Telephones. There was an Estimate of 1.5 in 2021 but an Actual—well, not an Actual but a Revised Estimate to 4.5 million in 2021. So we move from an Estimate of 1.5 to a Revised Estimate of 4.5. Can the Minister advise what would have caused that significant increase in the allocation under the Head, Telephones?

5.00 p.m.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Certainly, Madam Chairman. Between 2017 and 2020, we owed money to TSTT and FLOW and we have been able to pay off the amount that was owed. This was paid in full and we, therefore, recognized for 2022, the amount that we are budgeting is sufficient to keep us current, but we have paid off the arrears.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, just to pick up on that, Madam.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, I am not hearing the Member clearly.

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry. If I am to pick up on that, your actual spend in 2020 was 3.8, but you are proposing to spend in 2022, having cleared off your arrears, \$792,000. That would cover your current—well, your cost for telephone expenditure for the year 2022?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That is what we are assuming.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I assume then that you have no further arrears to your service providers under this Head going forward?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That is what I said.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I may move on to Item 16: Contract Employment. Would the Minister be able to provide a listing of the number of persons and portfolios under which they would have been employed under this Head, Head 16: Contract Employment?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, there are seven persons in the Minister's personal staff. There are 11 persons in the Legal Unit. In the Corporate Communications Unit—there are nine persons in the Corporate Communications Unit. There are 31 persons in the Information and Communications Technology Division.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, if I may, would it be possible for you to give the actual designation, rather than the number?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. So in the Minister's personal staff, there is an advisor to the Minister. There is a personal assistant to the Minister; personal secretary to the Minister; personal chauffeur to the Minister, Parliamentary Affairs Advisor to the Leader of Government Business in the House of Representatives. Executive Assist—

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, if I may, would you be able to provide that in writing since you already have it, in the interest of time?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, I thought you wanted me to answer the question. I am quite prepared to do that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You want me to continue giving you the list?

Mr. Tancoo: I will not be able to write it, I will have to still wait on the *Hansard*. So I would appreciate if you could provide the answer—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, you could read it from the *Hansard* after I read it out.

Mr. Tancoo: Up to you, Madam Minister, proceed.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Shall I go ahead, Madam Chair?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: There is an executive assistant to the Permanent Secretary. There are two executive assistants to the Permanent Secretary, both are vacant. So that is the personal staff.

In the Legal Unit there is the position of Director Legal Services. There is Legal Officer II; Legal Officer II; Legal Officer II; Legal Officer II; Legal Officer II and Legal Officer I. There is a paralegal, another paralegal, and there are two

Business Operations Assistants, and that is in the Legal Unit.

In the Corporate Communications Unit, Manager Corporate Communications, Senior Corporate Communications Officer, Corporate Communications Officer, Corporate Officer. There are four corporate communications officers.

There is a graphic designer. There are three Business Operations Assistants, two are at the level of a II and one at the level of a I.

In the Information and Communications Technology Division, there is an Information Technology Director. There is a Manager Solutions Development and Implementation, which was formerly the IT Manager. There is another Manager Networks and Infrastructure, which was formerly an IT Manager. There is a Senior Information Systems Specialist. There is an ICT Security Specialist. There is an IT Analyst Programmer, which was formerly Business Analyst Programmer. There is an IT Analyst Programmer, another one, and there is another IT Analyst Programmer.

There is a database specialist, a network specialist, two network specialists. There are seven ICT technical officers, and these were formerly designated systems support technicians. There is a Web Technology Specialist. There is a Business Operations Assistant II. There is a Senior IT Infrastructure Specialist; Senior Network Specialist; IT Infrastructure Specialist; Senior Database Specialist; Manager Service Delivery and Support; Senior Information Systems Support Specialist, and then an Information Systems Support Specialist. There are three Business Operations Assistants I.

In the National Transformation Unit, there is a Programme Director Monitoring and Evaluation, and this was formerly a Programme Director of the National Transformation Unit. There is a Programme Coordinator Implementation.

There is a Programme Coordinator Monitoring and Evaluation. There is a Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, and we have six of those, and we have four Monitoring and Evaluation Specialists.

We have five Implementation Coordinators. We have a Business Operations Coordinator, and that was formerly Administrative Support Officer. We have two Business Operations Assistants, and they were at Grade II. They were formerly executive administrative assistants. Sorry, we have four business operations assistants, and we have four Business Operations Assistants I. We have one Driver/Courier, one Hospitality Attendant, one Office Support Assistant.

In the Town & Country Planning Division, we have an Assistant Coordinator. We have two Assistant Coordinators. We have five Senior Land Use Planners. We have a Development Control Specialist, 10 Land Use Planners. We have two Senior Planning Assistants. We have 11 Planning Assistants.

Mr. Charles: You are wasting time.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, you asked for it.

We have 20 Junior Planning Assistants. We have a GIS technician, a GIS assistant by three. *[Interruption]* I am just answering the question that was asked. *[Crosstalk]* No, I have it here. We have a Specialist Land Use Planning Advisor. We have a change management specialist. We have an Enforcement Supervisor. We have three Enforcement Officers at the level of Grade II. We have eight Enforcement Officers.

In the Human Resource Management Division, we have a Human Resource Analyst. We have two Business Operations Assistants, and we have HIV/AIDS Coordinator.

In the Project Planning and Reconstruction Division, Project Monitoring Officer, we have five. Public Sector Investment Programme Advisor, we have one.

In the Pension and Leave Division, we have a Business Operations Coordinator and three Business Operations Assistants Grade II. We have one Business Operations Assistant Grade I.

In the Socio-Economic Policy Planning Division, we have three sector specialists and one Technical and Research Training Consultant.

In the Economic Development Advisory Board, which is now closed off, we do not have anybody there.

In the European Development Fund—[*Interruption*] No, we still have the European Development Fund. You are talking about the Economic Development Advisory Board, yes, they all resigned. The European Development Fund: we have the Assistant Programme Coordinator; Senior Programme Officer; Programme Officer Accounting; Programme Officer Projects, Business Operations Assistant II.

Technical Co-operation Unit, we have a Project Manager, Research and Policy Specialist. We have a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Statistical Analyst and two project support officers.

In the Projection Execution Unit, Coastal Zone Management Programme: Project Coordinator. In the National Spatial Data Infrastructure Unit, we have an Executive Director. We have an Administrative Director Geographic Information Systems Analyst, Geographic Information Systems Analyst.

In our CSO, we have the Senior Statistical Analyst, Statistical Analyst II.

Madam Chairman: So Minister, I really have to intervene now in terms of—there is five minutes really, speaking time.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Oh, sorry, Ma'am. My five minutes is up?

Madam Chairman: Yes it is.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay, the rest I will give in writing.

Madam Chairman: Regrettably. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Member for Oropouche West, you are still on 001?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes I am, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Yes, please.

Mr. Tancoo: Apparently the entire Ministry is on contract, but, however, line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Can the Minister provide a listing of the number of persons that are paid under this line Item, that have been paid for fiscal 2021, as opposed to the estimate? There is a reason why I am asking, Minister, if I may be allowed. Your estimate for 2021 was \$1.8 million, but your revised estimate is 4.7. So you have gone from 1.76 million to 4.7 million. Can the hon. Minister explain why the significant jump in contract employment, and what Heads they fall under?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You want me to go through the Heads that they fall under?

Mr. Tancoo: If possible if you could provide it in writing, again in the interest of time, Madam Chair. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 08, together with 17 and 22. I cannot, for the life of me, understand why in these times when the economy is in a tailspin, buildings are free, that rent would go up by 418. There is an increase, 418,000, but your training—training which is significantly important, you only increased it by 37,000, and short-term employment you reduced it by \$1 million. Why is priority being given to paying rents to friends, family and financiers, and cutting things like short-term employment and training, which deals with capacity building and moving us into a First World?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, first of all, none of us here has any friends, family and whatever the Member might be talking about, who we are giving money for rent.

Secondly, our staff must be properly housed, and as a consequence of that

we do pay rent. We were in arrears with some of rent, we have been able to pay off quite a lot of the arrears, and we insist that our staff is properly housed. We do have some issues with regard to housing staff but, in the main, we have tried to house our staff as effectively and as comfortably as possible.

5.15 p.m.

With regard to training, because of the COVID situation, Madam Chair, quite a lot of the training opportunities are now done online. And I can, in fact, list all of the training opportunities but I do not know, it may take a little longer than the five minutes that I am allowed.

Mr. Charles: Send it in writing.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: So I will send it specifically to the Member for Naparima because our staff is properly trained and they have benefited from the best that the world has offer in terms of training [*Desk thumping*] particularly because the Technical Co-operation Unit resides in the Ministry of Planning and Development and we do have the exposure to be able to get the best training for our staff.

Mr. Charles I admire your concern for the staff. But when I look at 22—yeah, when I look at 22, I do not get the evidence of that concern. Because if you move from 5.1 million in 2020, to 3.7 million, it means that you are either sending people home or you are employing less. So your concern for staff does not extend to employing them and keeping them happy—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No.

Mr. Charles:—well paid.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: As a matter of fact our Green Fund staff which is where you are looking at, they were on short-term. A number of the members of staff were on short term and because of our concern for their welfare, they are now on full contracts, no longer on short-term and that is why you see that change in the

figures.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Library Service Unit; Item 003: Technical Co-operation; Item 004: Central Statistical Office. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 04: Electricity. I am noticing an increase between the Estimate and the Revised Estimate for 2021 from 948,800 to \$1.3 million. Can the Minister indicate whether this too has to do with payment of arrears to the electrical supplier?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 0—

Mr. Charles: 004.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Sorry. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 08, again, an increase—could you explain that increase? Is it a normal increase, arrears or an increase in rent of 1.3 million. Is it new buildings or the same building with \$1 million more? I think the taxpayers need to know.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No. This is not an increase. What happened is, in September we did not make any payments, so this will cover September and going forward. Whereas normally you would have it for just the 12—well, the fiscal. This will include September which is not normally done.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Urban and Regional Planning Division; Item 006: Green Fund Executing Unit. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sub-Item 43: Security Services. I note that there was an increase in 2021 between the Estimate and the Revised Estimate. Your Estimate for 2021 was 160,000. Your Revised Estimate however was \$1.4 million. Can the—and you have gone back to \$160,000 as your Estimate for 2022. Since this was not catered for, there is no heading for it in 2020, my question then,

Minister, is: What has caused the substantial increase in the allocation for security services under the Green Fund Execution Unit for 2021?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Previously they were under public utilities but now we meet the cost directly, so we also have arrears and we also have to provide unarmed security services for the Tobago regional office.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Item 008: Project Planning and Reconstruction Division; Item 009: Environmental Policy and Planning Division. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Library Service Unit; Item 003: Technical Co-operation; Item 004: Central Statistical Office; Item 005: Urban and Regional Planning Division; Item 006: Green Fund Executing Unit; Item 008: Project Planning and Reconstruction Division; Item 009: Environmental Policy and Planning Division. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organisations; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 005: Non Profit Institutions. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, there is only Sub-Item here that is the National Trust Council. But I note that there was an Estimate of 2.6 million in 2021 but you revised the Estimate upwards of \$1 million for 2021. Can the Minister advise what would have caused this \$1 million increase in the allocation for 2021?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sure. Certainly, Member. In fiscal 2020 to 2021 we made an allocation of 995,000 and that was to cover maintenance for the Mille Fleurs building which the National Trust would be occupying in the future and that was for a six-month period. And we also paid arrears to former and current elected

council members of the trust.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Educational Institutions. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Similar sort of question here. I note your Estimate for 01: Caribbean Industrial Research Institute. The initial Estimate was 28 million which seems to be consistent across from your Actual to 2022. Your initial Estimate was 22 million, your Revised Estimate was 43 million. Can the Minister advise what caused that increase?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: After 2021 we had retroactive payments to staff which was arising from the period 2014 to 2016. And it was also agreed that from January 2021 there would be—the monthly subvention to CARIRI would be increased to allow for the payment of these increased salaries. And with the agreement to make that increase, it would facilitate the actual payment and so the amount received was 29.48 million. And now the decrease represents the deduction of the amount allocated for the retroactive payment. And that amount was 13.55 million at the time and there is a further decrease of 1.48 million.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister responded to my colleague on that particular Item.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households; Item 009—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, that is settlement to cane farmers. Couva South has to ask.

Madam Chairman: Where you are you? Under 007?

Mr. Indarsingh: 07.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yeah.

Mr. Indarsingh: 03. Minister, I see that there is an allocation of 900,000 in your 2022 Estimate. Is that sum—will reflect a full and final settlement to all cane farmers?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, as you are aware, Member, there is the court matter that is still subsisting. And we are really waiting until a decision is made by the court. No final decision has been made as yet. During the last fiscal not many cane farmers came for payment and we have put it down to the COVID situation. But in addition to that, we are awaiting on—we are awaiting the court's judgment in this matter.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards & Similar Bodies.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. We are at page 455. 02 - Institute of Marine Affairs; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 04: Electricity. I note an Actual expenditure of \$584,844 for electricity in fiscal 2020 and there are Estimates going forward for fiscal 2021 including a Revised Estimate of 425,000. But there is no Estimate for electricity for 2022. Can the Minister advise whether in the IMA has gone completely solar? Or they are not going to be using electricity in this current fiscal year?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: There will be a block allocation to the IMA of \$17,940,450 and they will make their payments as they arise.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam, would that also be true for line Item 05: Telephones which also has no allocation for fiscal 2020?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: For fiscal 2022?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: I move onto line Item 08. I note that this is the first time I could see the Actual for 2020. The Actual for 2020 was 260,000 for line Item 08 for Rent. But thereafter I am seeing a \$19,000 Estimate for 2021 and 2022 going forward. Can the Minister advise how is it that we have now almost literally a very small cost for renting and leasing whereas we had 259,000 Actual spend before?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Madam Chairman, as I said before, the allocation for the IMA will be just over 17 million and they will make their own arrangements in terms of all these various payments.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam, if I may, then should we simply not go through the Estimates since the answer will be similar. Every Item you may indicate that the IMA has gotten a block and therefore you are unable to explain the differences in the figures and the queries that we may have.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007 Households. 49 - Chaguaramas Development Authority. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam, I am looking at an increase in the allocation by \$675,000 between the Revised Estimate 2021 and the Estimate for 2022. Can the Minister

advise?

Madam Chairman: Member, could you give me the line Item please?

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry. My apologies. 01: Salaries and C.O.L.A. of \$675,000 increase. I am just asking if the Minister can advise why.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry. He is just asking what?

Mr. Tancoo: What will be the basis on which there has been an increase?

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. Are we at Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services?

Mr. Tancoo: No. I am not. I am at 01. But I will take your guidance if you want to stick with 02.

Madam Chairman: I am long past that.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay, Madam. Sub-Item 04: Electricity. I know that we have moved from an actual 328,000 in 2020 to an Estimate and a Revised Estimate of 1 million in 2021, and 1.3 million in 2022. Can the Minister indicate what has caused this movement—drastic movement upwards between 2020, 2021 and 2022?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, I think it would help if I just indicate how the CDA operates. The Ministry of Planning and Development, even though the CDA falls within the remit of the Ministry, the Ministry does not give the CDA a subvention as such. The CDA raises its funds—what we have here is an indication of what they intend to do with the money. Because remember, they are landlords so they collect rentals, they do various other things to raise funds. The only funding that we gave the CDA in the last fiscal was \$10 million which was going towards their pension fund because the CDA was supposed to establish a pension fund. They did so, but they did have a shortfall in the value of the fund. So that question that the Member is asking me, what is here is the CDA's indication of how they intend to spend money that they raised. So, it is really not to the

Ministry's account.

Mr. Tancoo: I thank you for your guidance, Minister, but that means that we have no accounting for—what is this figure?—we have no accounting for a proposed \$40 million expenditure under the Chaguaramas Development Authority except for the documents that we have here, which we are not—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Except what, sorry?

Mr. Tancoo:—except for the documents which we have here, which we are not able to devil. We are not able to get explanations for.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: What we do get, Madam Chairman, apart from the board's minutes and so on, we also get audited statements from the CDA. But that has always been how the CDA operates.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam, allow me to express my concern though that the Committee is being asked to approve expenditure without being able to get answers to questions on how that expenditure has been incurred.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, I think if my friend would understand how the Parliament works, there is also the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, there is the Public Accounts Committee. All of those committees can question the CDA's work.

Mr. Tancoo: And all of that is after the fact, Ma'am. All of that happens after the fact. This is current.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, you know that really became an issue for us, Madam Chairman, when we came into Government and the last government had tried to give out all the land that was under the CDA.

Mr. Charles: You have to mention that.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, yes, I have to mention it. But we are not like that—

Mr. Tancoo: Madam, we are still—

Hon. Robinson-Regis:—and, Madam Chairman, that is all I can say in response to that question. The CDA sends their audited accounts. If the Member has issues at that time, he would really have to raise it at that time, because there is nothing more I could—no more information I can give, except to say that we, of the Ministry of Planning and Development, we maintain oversight over what the CDA does and this is an indication of what they plan to do with the money that they raised.

Mr. Tancoo: I thank you, Madam Minister. However, then it makes no sense going through this Item either because it is a done deal. We cannot question or query any of the responses being provided here by us—to us.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You can question and query it, but I cannot give you the kind of information you need until I get the audited accounts. And at that time, they are laid in the Parliament and you will have them, and you can go through them, and you can ask any questions.

Mr. Tancoo: So, we are proposing expenditure but not being able to challenge the expenditure? Not being able to get an explanation for expenditure going forward?

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

Hon Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. We are at page 136. Item 001: Pre-Investment; Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 057: Population and Housing Census: Conduct of the 2022 Population and Housing Census, allocation of \$12 million, and it is a new project. Could you give this meeting the time frame

for that census to be done, and when will it start?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, as I said when I opened, the census would be a little different from what we know a census to entail. However, in 2021, we did undertake the following activities which was to ensure that we have approval to hire a census administrator and a business operations coordinator. We have a census proposal that has been submitted for approval. We have a special listing exercise which is currently ongoing, and that is the preparation of maps, hiring and training of field enumerators, and this will be to enumerate all the households on the electoral districts within Trinidad and Tobago.

And we have been developing the census manuals, finalizing the census questionnaire and the visitation record. Also, this sum of 12 million will facilitate the purchase of IT equipment, including servers and census software, and the purchase of over 3,500 tablets, as a lot of the information we will have to do digitally. We have received assistance from the UN agencies to help us to do this census as one that is being done during a pandemic. So, it is going to be a lot different from what you are accustomed to having the census done, because it is going to be very digital, a lot of telephoning and the visits will be relatively minimal.

Mr. Lee: Just a follow up, Madam Chairman. Minister, do you have an end date in mind given this new way of doing the census?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The collection of data should take us in the region of two months, but then after we do the collection, then we have to do the analysis and so on, and that sometimes takes up to a year.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Line Item 055: Conduct of the 2018 – 2019 Household Budgetary Survey/Survey of Living Conditions. I know that COVID would have affected the actual conduct of the survey, but can the Minister

indicate—I see an allocation for \$6 million—what is the status and the projected time frame for delivery of the results of this census— this Household Budgetary Survey?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, COVID did affect it but we also felt that because of COVID, even if we were to collect a fair amount of information in 2021, it would be somewhat skewed because of the effect of COVID. So, in 2022, we will be spending the funding on the listing. As I had indicated, it is a similar kind of listing as with the national census, and also, on IT equipment. Because still, because of the effect of the pandemic, we will have to do quite a lot of the work digitally, but we will be having field staff and they will be going out into the field, but we are trying to make sure that people are as safe as possible.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: “Oh”, sorry. We also would be mounting a publicity campaign so people will understand what the household and budgetary survey is all about.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So can we go on to the project group A. Culture? Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, I am enthused to see a project by the Ministry of Planning and Development in my constituency, the establishment of an archaeological heritage site at Banwari Trace with an Estimate of a \$100,000. The Revised Estimate is a \$100,000. But I am not seeing any further Estimate for 2022 going forward. As the MP for the area, can the Minister advise then, what exactly was done with this \$100,000 to get to an establishment of an archaeological heritage site at Banwari Trace? How has that site been established?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. If I had known it was in your constituency, I would have just moved it out and brought it to mine, but—[*Laughter*] No, the answer is—

I am just joking.

Mr. Tancoo: Unfortunately, the site is a heritage site for a reason. I am not sure what was found in your constituency, but I am sure that you are aware that bones and so on were found in mine.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We have a heritage site in our constituency too. But this is the archaeological heritage site at Banwarie Trace. Yes, we have already done quite a bit of work there, as you probably know. We have had some input from international agencies like the UN and so on, and we have been able to get to a certain point. At this point, because of the fact that we have said that the National Trust is moving now towards being able to have corporate citizens invest in sites of this nature and in buildings and so on, this will move forward in that way.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chairman, I just want to advise you that the only thing that is in existence at that site is what is in fact toilets and fencing. There is nothing else on that site that marks it as a proper archaeological site, and I am hoping that you will reconsider and put some more funding towards that development of that site.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: What we—*[Minister consults with Technocrats]*

Mr. Tancoo: And the toilets are locked and the fencing area is locked.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Approximately two years ago we had an archaeological team that actually came here to make sure of what the site entailed, what was the value of what we found, and that is still being processed by the National Trust. So it is not that we are not doing anything. It is just that on the site itself, the information that we needed, we were able to access and further work will be done.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chairman, but I am still not sure what this \$100,000 was spent on. I have seen no change between 2021 when I took office—sorry, 2020 when I took office and current. There has been no change on this site.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Any other further information we can provide it for

you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans four pages, therefore I will also announce the project groups: C. Caribbean Industrial Research Institute. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam. I noticed line Item 005: Recycling of Tyre Crumbs into Asphalt Mixes. Can the Minister advise what is the status of that project at this point? What is the status of the project? Is this being used now on our roads in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I believe that in 2021, testing was conducted on imported rubber crumbs to establish performance characteristics and a down payment was made for the purchase of a tyre rubber power production line in order to produce rubber crumbs. And for 2022, the goals are:

1. The rental of a facility to house a small-scale production facility, and to store the crumbs;
2. To undertake a market research exercise to identify local and export market potential;
3. The development of prototypes for two downstream rubber crumb-based products with high export market potential; and
4. To prepare a business case for promotional purposes for local production of rubber crumb and associated downstream products.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Tancoo: Continuing with line Item 007: Establishment of Hydrocarbon Oil Field Chemical Pollution Management. I note an Actual spend of 99,000 in 2020, but there has been no allocation subsequently in 2021 and in 2022. Can the Minister advise whether you have given up on the establishment of this facility especially bearing in mind that in my constituency of Oropouche West we have

had multiple instances of Heritage having leakages into the environment.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: In 2020 we did dispersant effectiveness testing and we have also done toxicological investigations and finger printing investigations, and we have completed all the toxicological investigations of five crude oil and three dispersant samples and the physical characteristic testing of five crude oil and those three dispersant samples. For 2021 we did complete developmental work for the dispersant effectiveness and the conduct of analysis for crude oil and dispersant samples.

You would understand that with regard to the IMA, in particular, the IMA has a mechanism for finger printing oil leaks, but they have been very effective in that in particular. So what this project is intended to do is increase the effectiveness and to ensure that we are able to deal with identifying the location of these oil leaks more effectively. So really speaking this will be continued in 2023. But at the moment the IMA is quite effective in getting this done.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 005. What do they use that for?—recycled tyre crumbs. I am blissfully unaware.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is to be mixed into the asphalt—

Mr. Charles: For landslips?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, with regard to landslips what we are trying to do though is use plant material rather than the heavy rocks and so on. So the vetiver grass is one of the plant materials that we are using. So we are trying to be more environmentally friendly with regard to landslips.

With regard to the tyre crumbs, because I am sure you understand that there is a serious problem with regard to the disposal of tyres, not only in Trinidad and

Tobago around the world. So we are trying to make sure that instead of having to dump tyres and it causes a problem we develop this system where we mix it into the asphalt and we can reuse the tyres in this way.

Mr. Charles: I take it you are in consultation with the Minister of Works and Transport to utilize this facility.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Moruga/Tableland could give us some—
Moruga/Tableland could probably give us some points on how to use tyres on roads.

Mr. Charles: Send it in writing. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: D: Chaguaramas Area Development. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Item 036: Upgrade of Chaguaramas Golf Course-Phase 1. Minister, I am seeing that there is an allocation of \$950,000 being used here and I will ask the question in this context. I am seeing that there is no allocation for the development of nature trails and parks which is number 37 and you would realize that a lot of persons actually utilize the Tracking Station more than the golf course I would say and I see that there is no allocation for the Tracking Station trail but rather, an almost \$1 million allocation for the golf course. Any explanation for that please.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Two things. First of all, the golf course refurbishment is practically completed, it is about 95 per cent complete. So this one million would be to pay off whatever debts there are and to complete it because it is already at 95 per cent. The CDA did not request any funding for the development. Under the Development of Nature Trails and Parks, what they had been doing was a sewer lift station and that has been completed.

In terms of actually keeping those parks and trails clear and available they

have been doing that. But what happened recently there was such a large turnout of people that we had to close off some of those trails because we are in a state of emergency and so we have to keep numbers down. But the CDA has been doing quite a good job in making sure that the parks and trails are kept in a way that people can enjoy them.

Mr. Hosein: I could say, Minister, I go up there a couple of times and the trails are normally kept, the grass is cut—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein:—and things like that, but sometimes the grass is overgrown at times. So maybe the CDA can even look at that for a bit more routine upkeep of the area.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Frequency. We have talked about that and they will be doing it more frequently.

Mr. Hosein: Okay, thank you. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Just for clarification, I am not sure that cutting grass and so will under DP. Okay. All right. So Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Next one.

Madam Chairman: A: Administrative Services; C: Foreign and Technical Assistance; F: Public Buildings. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Member I note that we have a listing, an Item here, Construction of the Institute of Marine Affairs, estimated for 809,000, 2021 but none spent in 2021 Actual—well none in the Revised Estimate. We now go on to \$1.16 million in 2022. If I may ask the Minister, what exactly is this in reference to? It says construction of IMA. Is it a new building proposed to be constructed or is it an expansion or completion of a building given that there was no allocation previously?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: As the Member—well, I hope the Member knows that the

IMA has a building down at Chaguaramas—

Mr. Tancoo: Yes Ma'am.

Hon. Robinson-Regis:—where they do operate. So it is essentially to improve the building and ensure that they have a location that is suited to the kind of work that they do.

Mr. Tancoo: So this is a refurbishment as opposed to an actual construction? Is it a refurbishment instead of construction? Is this how you word it?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: What it is, is that this money that has been allocated is to ensure the completion of variation works that they are doing to an existing building and to provide the groundwork for increased office space on the land that they occupy.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: B: Administration. Infrastructure Development Fund, we are at page 238; Item 003: Economic Infrastructure; Item 004: Social Infrastructure; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 67 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister, thank you PS, thank you other officers of the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Head 30: Ministry of Labour. And for the guidance of Members we are starting at page 195 on the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, page 185; on the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and on page 72, for the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

Head 30: Ministry of Labour, \$414,688,000.

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

Hon. Mc Clashie: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is an honour to meet with the distinguished Members of the Standing Finance Committee to discuss the budgetary allocations of the Ministry of Labour for the fiscal year 2021/2022. At the start of the 2021 fiscal year the portfolio of the Ministry of Labour was realigned with the removal of entrepreneurship and small business development from its mandate. Labour administration which encompasses the facilitation of job creation, employment matters and industrial relations issues is the core focus of the Ministry of Labour.

This realignment has afforded us the opportunity to adapt and to prioritize work to promote decent work, equal opportunities for all in the labour market and industrial peace. Our labour legislation reform agenda was adversely affected by the restrictions of the pandemic. However, through our creativity we have been able to commence paper-based consultations for the Minimum Wages Act and the Maternity Protection Act. Paper-based consultations will continue in fiscal 2022 for other pieces of legislations, including legislations to govern HIV and AIDS in the workplace, legislation for the prevention and elimination of the worst form of child labour, the Employment Standard Bills and the Workmen's Compensation, (Transfer of Funds) Act.

Additionally, in fiscal 2021 the Ministry was able to tender for consultants to undertake a study under the determination of minimum wage on the economy, a national base line survey on knowledge, attitudes, benefits and practices on HIV in the workplace and to conduct a private sector vacancy survey. These initiatives will be pursued further in fiscal 2022. Madam Chair, the Ministry was able to continue operating serving its stakeholders during the course of this pandemic by

harnessing information and communication technology in the course of our daily work. The Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies, for example, was able to transform fully to online teaching and learning which has proven to be quite successful.

In fiscal 2022 we intend to effect our digital transformation plan and redesign of the official website of the Ministry of Labour as critical components to our thrust to improve accessibility of the Ministry's services to the public and enhancing service delivery. The Ministry continues to be innovative in implementing its initiatives geared towards modernization and the labour legislative and policy frameworks. We will continue on this strategy through 20— from 2016 we started and it is likely we will complete our full complement by the year 2030.

6.00 p.m.

The National Performance Framework, the Road Map to Recovery of Trinidad and Tobago and our core policy documents are all being used in the best interest of our citizens. In closing, Madam Chair, we are prepared to participate in an informative and productive session and look forward to discussions and recommendations of the Committee. I would also like to thank my staff at the Ministry of Labour and all the ancillary agencies for their hard work dedication and welcome them. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 30 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$414,688,000 for Head 30: Ministry of Labour is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory*

Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly and the Draft Estimates of Development Programme. We now proceed to consider the Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure.

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

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much. Minister, very quickly, with respect to vacant posts under Salaries and Cost of Living, could you inform this meeting how many vacant posts currently exist within your Ministry?

Madam Chairman: Are you on line Item 08?

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, 08.

Hon. Mc Clashie: Madam Chair, we have 192 vacant positions right now in the Ministry.

Mr. Indarsingh: And do you foresee filling of these vacant posts in the coming financial year?

Hon. Mc Clashie: We have 108 bodies in place and we are working assiduously to get our—not full complement, but given how we are operating to strike an equilibrium of what we actually need. You would appreciate that in the COVID pandemic that we are still rotating, and therefore, we are not back to full capacity. So we will play that as we go along—play that by ear.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Minister, with respect to 06: Remuneration to Board Members, I see that your expenditure or projected expenditure for 2022 will increase by \$980,425. Have you increased the complement of members on your respective boards under your purview?

Hon. Mc Clashie: No. There were several boards in 2021 that were not functional. So, for instance, the productivity council and a number of the other such bodies we will be filling those board vacancies, and therefore, in 2022 we expect to see an

increase in that cost.

Mr. Indarsingh: So you will fill positions on the National Productivity Council and which other entity?

Hon. Mc Clashie: We have quite a few—right. We have eight other boards and at various times they are not all fully manned, and therefore— So we have the Tripartite ILO 144, the National Productivity Council, Standing National Labour Market Council, Boilers Examiners Board, HIV/AIDS Workplace Advocacy, advisory group, Industrial Relations Advisory Committee, National Tripartite Advisory Council, National Steering Committee for the prevention and elimination of child labour, and the Minimum Wages Board.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Co-operatives; Item 003: Friendly Societies; Item 004: Occupational Safety and Health Authority; Item 005: On The Job Training Programme. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, 01 again very quickly as it relates to Salaries and Cost of Living. That 1,545,074 in terms of the increase in your projected expenditure, how do you intend to expend this increase?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Okay. We have approximately 122 people on board. We have a number of vacancies still to be filled. We have 35 people in post. We have 33 vacancies, and therefore, we will be looking at—because of the expanded work we will doing in the OJT, we are now looking at filling those particular positions that are vacant.

Mr. Indarsingh: This is within your established organizational structure or contract positions?

Hon. Mc Clashie: This is established.

Mr. Indarsingh: Established? Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General

Administration; Item 002: Co-operatives; Item 003: Friendly Societies; Item 004, Occupational Safety and Health Authority; Item 005: On The Job Training Programme. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at line Item 17: Training. I assumed that this \$300 million Estimate for 2021, that covers the trainees in the OJT Programme. That is correct?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Yes.

Ms. Haynes: Right. And so in the Estimate was \$311 million but you would have only utilized some \$268 million. My question is: Is that due to fewer people applying for the OJT Programme or was there a decision that we would not hire as many persons?

Hon. Mc Clashie: No. That had to do with COVID, and the fact that many students, although they applied, we did not have a lot of takers because people were in lockdown and rotation and so on. So 2021 was a bit of a skewed year in terms of placing trainees into the programme. We do, however, expect that in fiscal 2022 that that would be expanded. So we moved from 4,900 in 2020 down to 3,928 in 2021, but we were hoping to move that up to 6,000 in 2022.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. Thank you for that, but then I will note that our Estimate for 2022 is less than what we actually spent in 2020. So how would we be able to facilitate this expansion of the programme?

Hon. Mc Clashie: The expansion is facilitated. If you know the OJT system, we have five different categories. So generally what happens is we have a mix from the lower categories to the higher categories. So depending on where the emphasis is placed in placing people you can actually expand on the number of people entering into the programme. So persons with a master's degree is Level 5 and is somewhere like the 9,000 range, but somebody who is an O' Level graduate or a

technician or something might be around 4,000. So if we double up and we mix and match, we can in fact increase the numbers of people in the programme.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you for that, Minister, very much, but I think we should also have some consideration that as we emerge as best as we can from the pandemic we would have a number of students graduating from university at different levels who are unable to find work. So that is just a point for consideration as we enter fiscal 2022.

Hon. Mc Clashie: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I think that the Minister responded to a lot of the concerns I had on the OJT Programme. Minister, also take into consideration not only university level, but at the secondary level children will emerge into the job market. And in addition to that, you could provide that in writing to us in relation to the different levels, how many persons or bodies you have at the respective levels within the programme.

Hon. Mc Clashie: You want it now or you would like—

Mr. Indarsingh: No, if you have it just put it in writing.

Hon. Mc Clashie: The breakdown by stipend levels is: in Level 1, we have 6,095 trainees; Level 2, 338; Level 3, 74; Level 4, 672; and Level 5, 75. That is the general composition as of now.

Mr. Indarsingh: And the stipend you have no outstanding sums and so on. All in terms of the numbers they are up to date in terms of their payments?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Yes, they are.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 004: Occupational Safety and Health Authority; Item

005: On The Job Training Programme. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 003: United Nations Organizations; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you just give us an indication of what this funding for the liaison officer in Canada is about?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Yes, Madam Chair, that is the farm programme where we have 300 nationals working on various farms in Canada. There is a liaison officer there that looks after their well-being and it is manned by staff from the Ministry of Labour on a rotational basis.

Mr. Hosein: And what services would you offer to the nationals through this liaison office in Canada?

Hon. Mc Clashie: What do we do?

Mr. Hosein: Yes. What services you offer to the nationals who are over there?

Hon. Mc Clashie: We offer a range of services in terms of working with the farmers to ensure that they have good accommodation, that they do not have issues, that their health and safety is taken care of. Some of them have issues with families because they are away from their loved ones, and we also do that kind of liaison to make sure that they are comfortable.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Madam, I am just asking, have you heard that workers on the seasonal farming programme in Canada are getting problems when they return to Trinidad because they have mixed vaccines? Have you heard anything?

Madam Chairman: They have what, excuse me?

Mr. Charles: Mixed vaccines which is permitted in Canada but—

Madam Chairman: All right. So I am not going to allow that under this Item.

Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Hon. Members, we will move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. We are starting at page 185. Item 17: Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: With respect to remuneration to board members, Minister, I know that this is a tripartite board. You have a full complement of members of the different sectors on the board?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Yes, we do.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. No problem.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration.

6.15 p.m.

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: Development Programme, +Consolidated Fund. We are starting at page 72. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans three pages. Therefore, I will announce the project groups. We are starting at M. which is Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, just for the benefit of this meeting, I know that you indicated that the college has gone fully virtual in terms of its teaching and so on. This \$2 million that the facility will spend in relation to the upgrade of its ICT, could you give some further details on how it will be expended?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Okay. The university—hear me, university. Maybe I am prophetic. But the Cipriani College is using this money to enhance their ICT programme. Because of the pandemic, they actually are now streaming content to the wider Caribbean and they have in fact increased their enrolment even in pandemic because of that, so that is an opportunity that we see that we need to pursue and therefore that money would help in buying the servers and the infrastructure and hardware and software to make the experience a much better one for the students.

Madam Chairman: Okay. A. Administrative Services. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 093: Operationalization of the National Tripartite Advisory Council. Just looking at the expenditure over 2020/2021, it is always averaged under the 700,000 mark and we are estimating \$2.5 million. Can the Minister give us some idea of where this is going?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Yes, Madam Chair. The National Tripartite operationalization is we have already identified a building and we are working with PRES D with regard to obtaining that building to house the entire secretariat. We are also looking at hiring and we are in the process now of aggressively hiring staff to fill those vacancies within the secretariat. So that money really would be for payment of rentals, salaries, goods and services and so on to make that particular body operational.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, you spoke about the operationalization of this National Tripartite Advisory Council and it has collapsed on three occasions under the chairmanship of your colleague, the Minister of Planning. How many staff members do you intend to recruit with this allocation?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Nine.

Mr. Indarsingh: Nine. And given the state of collapse, is the Council actually functioning in terms of meetings with the respective stakeholders and the Government?

Hon. Mc Clashie: We are meeting. As you know, the trade union has pulled out but we are very hopeful that 2022 will be a different year and that they would return to the table. So we still see this as an important part of our labour consultative approach and we are not giving up on it.

Mr. Indarsingh: All right. Thank you very much, Minister. So in spite of the pleadings of the Minister of Planning and Development, the chairperson, labour has not returned to the table?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Not as yet.

Mr. Indarsingh: All right. Thank you very much. Under 101: Implementation of National Workplace Policy on Sexual Harassment, Minister, you have no allocation for 2022. Does that mean this is no longer on the radar of the Ministry of Labour?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Yes, it is still on the radar but a lot of work has gone into it and I believe at this time, the Office of the Attorney General is in fact finalizing the issues around that policy and with the direction to turn it into law so that is very much alive. But for us—

Mr. Indarsingh: You have handed it over to the Attorney General.

Hon. Mc Clashie: In terms of the legislation.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, if I may? The Ministry of Labour took very diligent steps, produced a significant amount of work. The Office of the Attorney General and the Law Reform Commission have settled drafts of law and we are at the cusp of bringing that to the Cabinet for consideration and then to the Parliament.

Mr. Indarsingh: And if I can find out one final issue, Madam Chair, with your permission. 091: Development of a Child Labour Policy, and you have projected or your Ministry has projected that there will be expenditure of approximately \$1 million. Where are you with the development of this particular policy taking into consideration that Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the International Labour Organization and I think that we should all work towards the reduction of child labour in the workplace?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Thank you for that question. The Ministry of Labour really undertook an invitation to tender for the engagement of a consultant to conduct research. That closed in 2021 but we received no proposals. So we are going back out to the marketplace to look for a consultant to do primary work. However, we are gathering secondary data through various sources while we do that. So it is high on the agenda but we envisage that the gathering of the data will be critical and in this regard, we do not have the capacity in-house so we are looking for consultants to get this home.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: F. Public Buildings. Infrastructure Development Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 30 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam PS. Thank you to your other technocrats.

Head 11 - Registration, Recognition and Certification Board, \$3,816,000. So while we wait, Members, we are starting at page 48 of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

Head 11: Registration, Recognition and Certification Board, \$3,816,000.

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

Hon. Mc Clashie: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Registration, Recognition and Certification Board is a board that consists of a Chairman and eight other members who are appointed by the Minister of Labour. The Chairman is selected by the President of the Republic after consultation with various organizations.

With respect to the members of the Board, there are three members nominated by such organization as in the opinion of the Minister most representative of workers, three members being persons of such organizations that are representative of employers and two members being persons jointly nominated by the organizations most represented by both workers and employers. The Board has a secretariat which is headed by a Secretary who is the accounting officer. The secretariat is comprised of 25 public service officers who carry out the day-to-day function of the Board.

The duties of the Board generally, under the Industrial Relations Act, are to determine all applications, positions and matters concerning certification of recognition under Part III including the taking of preferential ballots under section 34(2). They are also responsible for the certification of recognized majority unions and the recording of the certification of recognized majority unions held in a book at the Secretariat.

Madam Chairman, the work that the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board does is critical to the industrial climate and industrial peace in Trinidad and Tobago and over the last 2020, they have had some constraints with regard to manpower and so on which we have been working on and which we intend to fix in 2022. But the work of the Board continues apace and I would like to thank the current board and the staff who are here today with regard to making

this particular area of our industrial relations activity almost seamless to date. So, I thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 11 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$3,816,000 for Head 11 - Registration, Recognition and Certification Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to the projected expenditure again for 2022 of \$1,899,575 and I heard you indicate in your opening statement about manpower constraints and so on, and there is a decrease of \$439,425. Does that mean or indicate that persons left the Recognition and Certification Board in terms of categories of persons who are employed there?

Hon. Mc Clashie: I am not quite following. If people— Could you just repeat that last part?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah. If persons retired, they resigned from the organization because you said you have manpower constraints.

6.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: What line Item are you under, may I ask?

Mr. Indarsingh: Salaries and Cost of Living—

Madam Chairman: And you are asking about retired people?

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, the Minister did indicate in his opening statement that he had—there were manpower challenges or constraints at the board.

Madam Chairman: Yes, but in terms of the Item, what is the question that you are asking, please?

Mr. Indarsingh: The question that I am asking—

Madam Chairman: This is Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances that you are looking at, yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: And the decrease, does it mean that there are vacant positions in terms of persons who are integral to the organization would have left, and so on, based on what the Minister stated? Minister?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Yes, we have two vacant positions of examiners that are critical that we intend to fill. We have one retirement—one staff member going out on retirement and we essentially have to look at how our manpower is going in this board over time and we may make some necessary adjustments, if need be.

Mr. Indarsingh: And under Remuneration to Board Members, you have a projected increase of \$48,525. Minister, based on my knowledge of the way that the board operates, you have a full composition that meets on a regular basis? And is this sum designed to fill any vacancies on the board?

Hon. Mc Clashie: Yes, we have a new board that have we put in place in 2021. It is at full complement and yes, they are meeting.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 11 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Secretary. Thank you, other representatives.

We now go on to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal.

Head 75: Equal Opportunity Tribunal, \$2,045,300.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Equal Opportunity Tribunal is a proper creature of law. We do have technocrats with us this afternoon who are en route to the Chamber. I can just simply say that the expenditure set out at Head 75 is one that is to be supplemented at the mid-year review. There are certain adjustments that have to be factored in respect of some of the Items that have been estimated. Whilst we are in discussion, largely on account of the COVID parameters, we certainly intend to come back at the mid-year to address those matters. May I make myself available to answer any questions that colleagues may have on this particular Head?

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Attorney General.

Question proposed: That Head 75 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,045,300 for Head 75: Equal Opportunity Tribunal is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Attorney General, with respect to the Sub-Item 23: Salaries - Direct Charges, does that take into consideration or cover the payment of lay assessors at the Equal Opportunity Tribunal?

Hon. Al-Rawi: Most certainly, yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: Certainly. And I see an allocation or an increase, or a projected

increase for the 2022 expenditure of \$40,300. Could elaborate whether this will take into consideration the recruitment of or the appointment of an additional assessor?

Hon. Al-Rawi: The answer is yes. It is intended to meet the expenses. As I did say, we have certain adjustments to be made at the mid-year. Our intention, as the Government, is to ensure that the full complement of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal goes to work, including assessors as are required under law.

Mr. Indarsingh: And, of course, I would—the very name Equal Opportunity Tribunal, I hope that it will lend itself to ensure that physically challenged persons, and so on, who have been appointed as lay assessors, and so on, would be employed by the Equal Opportunity Tribunal.

Hon. Al-Rawi: The Office of the Attorney General has publicly stated that it supports the exact position that you have said. There is a dispute that is to be considered in another forum but we are absolutely clear that that position is to be fully supported.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much. I did not want to go into much detail.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Household.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 75 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, AG. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Registrar. Thank you other representatives of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal.

Head 65: Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs.

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, as we continue the session, we are at Head 65: Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. Welcome to the hon. Minister, Senator of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. Welcome to your Permanent Secretary and also to the senior technocrats of the Ministry. Welcome.

Head 65: Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, \$249,245,824.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Over to you, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good evening to you and all Members of the Standing Finance Committee. When last I appeared before this Committee in October 2020, I gave the assurance that the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs is keenly aware of the need for the stringent management of the financial resources allocated for the 2021 fiscal year.

I am pleased to report that despite the challenges of the last year and the economic constraints occasioned and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry rose to the occasion, managing, not only to do more with less, but also significantly to fulfil our mandate.

In view of the reduced allocation for fiscal 2022 and the imperative for even more prudent management of increasingly scarce resources, I assure the esteemed Members of this Committee, through you, Mr. Chairman, that the Ministry is always ready to step into the breach to maintain and expand this country's regional and international footprint. This is a critical pillar of our national development goals to improve the quality of life of all our citizens.

Indeed, the Ministry's unique role as a primary interlocutor between this country and other states and international entities was proven to be invaluable in the last year, when we played a pivotal role in mobilizing and facilitating support

from our international partners at the bilateral and multilateral levels in the acquisition of vaccines, materials and supplies such as oximeters and ventilators to bolster the capacity of our public health system.

The Ministry also identifies and pursues opportunities in the regional and international sphere for all other Government Ministries and a wide range of stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago. So we are serious about improving our efficiency and improving the quality of service to our clients, particularly through the digitization of key services.

Mr. Chairman, I take this opportunity to thank the Permanent Secretary and her team, as well as all the caring, patriotic and hard-working members of our staff at headquarters and overseas, as well as our partners in the diplomatic corps and the wider society. This is team T&T within which we are proud to serve. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I am available to assist with any questions that Members may wish to share.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$249,245,824 for Head 65: Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Members, we are in the current expenditure booklet, page 306. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Overseas Missions. Member for Naparima, I recognize you.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Chairman. Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living. Could

the Minister just give us an idea of the reasoning behind the \$12 million increase? Is this the new appointments of Ambassadors and High Commissioners?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you for the question, Member. Through you, Mr. Deputy Chair. There has been some increase in salary of staff posted in the United States of America, in Canada—*[Interruption]* Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. Yes, Member, there has been some increase in salary in certain categories of overseas staff within the United States of America as well as in Canada. We have also mobilized some additional staff members to Guyana to fortify our High Commission there. So that would account for the increase.

Mr. Charles: Excellent. Item 04: Allowances Monthly Paid. It is \$21 million estimated in 2022 and salaries 39 million of which 21 million allowances. Is this normal in the Foreign Service? That the allowances approximate—

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, one second.

Mr. Charles: I am at 04: Allowances.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, but you have—

Mr. Charles: So, Allowances \$21 million—

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. Charles: Which is roughly two-thirds of the \$38 million and I am just asking if this the normal pattern where allowances are about the two-thirds of the salaries?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, this is pretty standard, Member, and as you can see this is the ballpark that has been used over the years, and the expenditure has been fairly close to the estimate. So you are on track with that.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. My apologies. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, pages 307 and 308. I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: 05, Minister, Audit of Overseas Mission. Am I to take it that over the past two years there has been no audits done at overseas Missions and—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, the fact of the matter is with the COVID-19 pandemic there have been challenges with movement of staff including staff that would be assigned audit duties. As you can see, we have an allocation for 2022 and it is our intention once conditions permit that we will resume this very important mission of auditing our overseas Missions. So that accounts for lack of expenditure in the recent period. But the Ministry is certainly committed. We understand the importance of conducting these audits and in this fiscal year it is our intention to engage in audits of overseas Missions.

Mr. Charles: Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance Buildings. Is this local or abroad? I take it this is local.

Hon. Dr. Browne: This is local, yes.

Mr. Charles: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Browne: General Administration.

Mr. Charles: Item 51: Relocation of Overseas Staff. There is an increase of 2.2 million. Could you just give us some background behind that increase?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, we are looking to fill a number of positions and as I would have indicated in a previous answer Member, the Ministry is mobilizing more. As travel has been regularized in many circumstances, it is our intention to ensure that our staff balance is improved at various overseas Missions. So, fortunately the Budgets Division and the Ministry of Finance has been able to ensure some provision for this in 2022.

Mr. Charles: Item 63: Repatriation of Nationals. Could you just explain what—that is bringing back citizens who are in difficulty abroad?

Hon. Dr. Browne: No. Thank you for the question, Member. This repatriation of

nationals is an ongoing role of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to render assistance where repatriation is necessary. This is separate and distinct from the programme of financial assistance that was afforded to nationals who encountered financial difficulties while caught overseas during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Charles: All right. So I take it that if we look at in 2021, nothing was spent in that area.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes, well, again, you would recall there was a closure of our airports, et cetera. This is part of the environment in which we would have had to work. I can report to the Committee that three persons were actually assisted and repatriated. But this was late in the financial year and that would have not been captured in these estimates. It would be taken up subsequently. So the Ministry has been able to provide repatriation assistance to three nationals despite the conditions that I would have referenced.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Overseas Missions. Pages 308 to 309. I recognize you, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings Overseas Missions. How do you go about identifying which building needs to be repaired and setting a priority listing? And I am asking this in the context of the fact that many years ago there was an idea put forward that there should be an inspector of missions, who would go around and identify problems based on standards. And I just wanted to know, you know, what the process is for identifying this expenditure?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Member. Mr. Deputy Chair, through you, I acknowledge the idea that has existed. There is a Missions inspectorate team at the Ministry which has as part of its role receiving requests—soliciting requests and receiving requests from overseas Missions which are asked to identify

infrastructure challenges and issues of maintenance areas that require improvement. This is placed into a matrix and the leadership of the Ministry would work with the Missions inspectorate team to establish priorities and ensure that our staff who are abroad can be reasonably comfortable and safe while they provide assistance and fulfil their responsibilities abroad. So I hope that has answered your question.

Mr. Charles: Item 08: Rent/Lease official accommodation—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Office Accommodation.

Mr. Charles: Office Accommodation and Storage. I found many years ago that that was not well structured. I think you might have had that experience. For example, the Channon Building, we were renting it and I could just say that property values were going down at that time in the United States, but we had negotiated a 10 per cent increase. And I think that was based on us extrapolating from what took place in Trinidad. Do we have a mechanism to ensure that we get value for money that our rents are consistent with realities abroad?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes. Thank you, Deputy Chair. Member, you have touched on a very important theme. The Ministry is constantly looking to extract more value from the resources that are available to us. This is an area of significant expenditure. What we saw during the pandemic is that costs would have fluctuated a bit. Sadly, in the United States and other jurisdictions those rates are going back up again, and the Ministry is constantly assessing and balancing ownership versus rental. And it is not a case of just closing your eyes and going for ownership because in some cases with older structures it is actually more economical to lean towards rental as opposed to holding on to buildings that can cost a lot of money.

Mr. Charles: Right. Thank you for that clarification and enlightenment. Again, on 08: Rent. What is the position at— [*Inaudible*] —where I take it that a segment of

that building is rented out? And in the past we had issues where all the rents were sent to Trinidad in the Consolidated Fund, and we did not take out for the tax because it was not given tax exemptions because it was a commercial part of the Mission. And what we found out, it grew and there were penalties, and it became significant, and it made the rent not as beneficial to the citizens as it should be. What we did then, and I am just asking if that is being done now, we insisted that we pull out the tax part, the tax part of the rent that we got. So if we got US 40,000 a month we took out the 10,000 tax, paid that to the New York City and sent 30,000 down. This is to ensure that it did not build up and we had liabilities. Am I making sense? And therefore, I just want to make sure that we are not exposing the Trinidad taxpayer to penalties that are not—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. And I thank the Member for some reminiscing and maybe there is some advice in the journey he shared with us. What I can say Mr.—[*Interruption*] Mr. Deputy. Yes, okay. Mr. Deputy Chair, what I can say is that we are required to ensure that all the funds that we would receive go into the Consolidated Fund. The Member has indicated that at that particular Mission there was some creativity utilized to ensure that the Mission does not incur any penalties from the City of New York. No such penalties have arisen during this fiscal period and that is the best I can say. If there is further detail being sought, we could explore. But again, thank you for sharing.

Mr. Chairman: I now recognize the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Through you, hon. Minister, line Item 58: Medical Expenses. Just curious, is this medical bills? Or is this a group health plan for overseas Missions?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Yes. Member, I am not crystal clear on what you are asking,

but this is to cover medical expenses outside of the insurance coverage available to overseas staff.

Dr. Ragbir: So basically it is a health plan that all our overseas Missions persons would have been incorporated in? Rather than if they get ill and they go to the hospital, private?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, with respect to the health plan that you are referencing, there is no centralized health plan for overseas Missions. It depends on each jurisdiction.

Dr. Ragbir: Uh-huh.

Hon. Dr. Browne: The Mission would be responsible for perusing the landscape and identifying the most appropriate and efficient coverage available. So outside of insurance coverage there are medical expenses that arise and there is provision for same.

Dr. Ragbir: You have answered my question. Thank you.

Hon. Dr. Browne: That is what I try to do, thanks.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Overseas Missions. Sub-Head 04; Current Transfers and Subsidies, and we are now on page 310. Item 001: Regional Bodies. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies. Item 003: United Nations Organizations. Item 007: Households, page 311.

Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 0— Who? Member for Naparima.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Charles: 01: Other Transfers.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Let me just—Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad, 311. I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 06: Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC). Could the Minister indicate what is the annual fee?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Member.

Mr. Charles: Yes Sir.

Hon. Dr. Browne: With respect to 06 and GRULAC there is no specific annual fee. This provision would allow for—as you would be aware, various Missions, depending on the city of posting, would be part of a GRULAC team, which is the group of Latin American and Caribbean Representatives. So, this provision would allow for—there are circumstances for example, when a head of mission is departing, there is a collection of resources from the members of that GRULAC team. So, this is not a—

Mr. Charles: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. Browne:—a specific fee—

Mr. Charles: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. Browne:—that is identified on an annual basis. As you can see, we have not really drawn down on this but there is provision, should a mission or missions be required to make a contribution to GRULAC activities there is provision for same.

Mr. Charles: Minister, well I think I—

Hon. Dr. Browne: This is not a regional organization that we are referring to.

Mr. Charles:—well, well at the UN GRULAC is, that is one example. But I know that there are annual contributions that were made and I am seeing—and this is just advice—I am seeing nothing, no actual in 2020, Revised Estimate, nothing. And I see an estimate of \$10,200. All I am saying is make sure that we are up to date with our contributions, because GRULAC as you know they have nominated—we

are nominated for the presidency of the 78th, and GRULAC has endorsed that. So it is very critical that whatever contributions we are required to make that they are up to date and that is only advice.

Hon. Dr. Browne: So, Mr. Deputy, I appreciate the suggestion but again, Member, I do not want to put this in perspective. The entire schedule, page 310, et cetera, represents Trinidad and Tobago meeting its obligations. And so therefore, in the general sweep, despite our financial challenges that we and other States are experiencing, Trinidad and Tobago, our national footprint is exceptionally good and therefore, we are by no means to be deemed non-participatory or failing to meet our obligations. With respect to GRULAC in particular, I certainly have taken note of the recommendation of the Member of the Committee, but I see no cause for any particular distress on this. [*Interruption*] [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: All I am saying, yes. If we look at Item 05, for example, group of 77, you see that in 2021 we did not make a contribution. And I am just—and I note in 2019, that we were delinquent in paying our mandatory annual contribution to the United Nations regular budget and working capital fund. So all I am saying, on this side, is to be mindful of our obligations to our regional organizations to which we belong, and to make sure that our payments are correct. That is all.

Mr. Chairman: And again, hon. Member, I think the Minister's—[*Interruption*] I will give you the opportunity.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Duly noted, the only thing I would want to add and it cuts—it goes beyond the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, we would always need to be cautious when interpreting this column of 2021 Revised Estimate. And if you do not see expenditure reflected there, to make an assumption that there was no expenditure there. You can go with what is before you, but you need to understand exactly what it reflects on— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Charles: Yes, but— [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Members, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Minister. [*Crosstalk*] No Members, wait, hold on.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to *the Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 134. Item 005: Multisectoral and Other Services, Infrastructure Development Fund, page 236. Item 005: Multisectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 65 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Permanent Secretary and also the technocrats for coming this afternoon. Do reach home safely.

All right. So, Members, at this time we will suspend the Standing Finance Committee for today and the Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Thursday, October the 14th 2021 at 1.30 p.m.

7.07 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*