

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Thursday, October 14, 2021***APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2022) BILL, 2021**

[Third Day]



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

[Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George]

1.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: The meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will resume.

Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, \$709,144,000.

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

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I want to make five points in the introduction, and the first point is to acknowledge that I know my colleagues and the country are very interested in this 500 million stimulus package. And I want to make the point that when we go through the books of this Ministry under Head 77, there will be no opportunity really to discuss the 500 million stimulus package simply because it is a line Item, it is a fund created under the Ministry of Finance, the Minister referred to that yesterday and the funds are made available to the Ministry to use as required.

But for the purposes of letting the country know what has happened with the 500 million, I want to say right away that if anybody expected that cheques would have been written and handed out to people in the way they have done it in the US, that is not the intent of it. What we have done on that 500 million fund is that we have designed projects that we believe will help not only the farmers but the country. And I could say that we have made commitments in respect of about 400

UNREVISED

million of that 500 million. And those commitments are essentially in homestead projects, two homestead projects in El Reposo and in Talparo.

We have made commitments in respect of projects within the Ministry to the tune of about \$20 million. We have made commitments and we have made payments in respect of the Food Box COVID Relief Programme and that is in respect of at least \$62.5 million. We have made commitments for a Road Programme that was announced by the hon. Minister of Finance, \$80 million. We have made commitments in respect of digital transformation in particular in relation to land administration and that is about \$18 million. We have made commitments to a number of smaller projects with farmers and across the country and those commitments are in respect of about \$400 million.

The 300 million that you see in this year's allocation under the Ministry of Finance, represents the component of that 500 million that we believe we will ask the Minister of Finance to pay in this fiscal year. So what I have described are those things that have been developed and are ready for tender and are ready for implementation. And we believe out of that 400 million that we have made commitments to, we have asked the Minister of Finance to pay out 300 million of that and that would leave us out of the fund of 500 with another 100 million to access in the fiscal year that follows.

I want to draw attention quickly to the Road Programme, \$80 million, the continuation of the Food Box Programme. I want to say that as we go through the books you would find that in the Development Programme we have fallen short mainly because for 60 per cent of this last fiscal year we have been with limited staff and COVID restrictions, and we have not been able to execute some of the infrastructure works because of the restriction on construction activities, and we are ready to do that in this fiscal year once we are able to operate with full staff.

And I want to close by saying there will be observation regarding Salaries and COLA and that has to do with the continuing exercise of the Ministry of Finance to ensure that we allocate, make provision in the Estimates for only those positions that are either filled or filled with a body who is acting and we continue to avoid making provision for those positions that are entirely vacant. Thank you.

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

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$709,144,000 for Head 77 - Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001. Item—Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning to the hon. Minister and all the other persons who are providing support to the Minister. Minister, you indicated in your opening—line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, you indicated in your opening remarks the limit of staff, the COVID restrictions and upgrade of the full staff, however, what I am seeing in this line Item is a decrease of \$996,000 for this financial term. Can you kindly advise on that decrease?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I am trying to find the line Item that my friend is referring to.

Madam Chairman: It is on page 352, 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I thought I had avoided that recurring question by indicating that the provisions have been made in respect of those positions that are either filled, or in respect of which there is somebody acting and the reduction represents the fact that as I said, we continue to review and the Estimate represents what we estimate the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance would be in this fiscal year.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. Minister, if it is we are continuing to review and this is the Estimate for 2022 with a decrease of 996,000, can you indicate to us how many persons that are currently in the system that are estimated to no longer be part of the system for 2022 because there is a decline in this Vote for Salaries?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I am tempted to set aside the book and pull out the crystal ball; it is an estimate. It depends on what goes on during the fiscal year, the Public Service Commission may make appointments, for example in the last fiscal year, we were happy to receive 25 new Game Wardens, meant that positions, vacant positions were filled. It would have required an adjustment and that adjustment is made by changes within what is allocated to us. And it is impossible to say what will happen in this fiscal year because we do not know what the Public Service Commission would do in respect of filling vacancies. You have 631 positions in the Ministry, in which there are no bodies acting or otherwise.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Minister, can you advise if the praedial larceny squad is paid for under this line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: No, it is not.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 05 please. Given that the response of the Minister in respect of line Item 01. Minister, how do you reconcile

the fact there is a decrease in the number of personnel but the contribution to the NIS increases?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, at no point I have said there is an increase in the number of personnel. I have said that it fluctuates during—it will fluctuate during the fiscal year and the other thing is that these are estimates, sometimes an increase does not necessarily mean that you have increased the personnel, an increase may represent the fact that you have an increased expense based on an exercise in terms of reconciliation that takes place so, it is impossible to equate that 535,000 increase to an increase in bodies simply because we do not know if we will have additional persons filling vacancies in the next fiscal.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 06: Remuneration for Board Members. Hon. Minister, in the last financial year Standing Finance Committee, this line Item, you were asked by my colleague from Oropouche West, with respect for the recurring allocation of \$43,000 in this line Item and your response was that the board may not have been appointed. I am not seeing any Revised Estimates. Can you advise if it is that this board has been appointed?

Hon. Rambharat: It is not a board, it is in respect of if board appointments are made and the Ministry has to make payments, then the provision is made for those payments to be made. So, you would see Cabinet appointed committees later on, you would see in the agencies and state enterprises under the Ministry you will see provision and this is in respect of something that may or may not happen in the fiscal.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Minister, line Item 27. The Actual spend for 2020 was 553,000. The Estimate for 2021 was 495,000 but the Revised

UNREVISED

Estimate was again 636,000. What I am seeing here for the 2022 Estimate is a decrease of 141,000 from the Revised Estimate for the estimated year, for the year 2022, the Estimate is 495,000. Is this a matter of under-budgeting taking into consideration the Actual spend for 2020 and the Revised Estimates for 2021 for the Contribution to Group Health Insurance - Monthly Paid Officers?

Hon. Rambharat: This is not under-budgeting, these are payments that we must make, we must make contributions to the group health insurance for the daily-rated workers. The issue is, what are those contributions likely to be?

Mr. Ratiram: Not the daily-rated, the monthly paid.

Hon. Rambharat: Right, so whether it is daily-rated or you—okay, well, it is the same thing, whichever one but you are on 27. So, we make provision for it. And the extent of the contribution is a variable for the same reason I gave before. We may have additional persons coming into the employment of the Ministry. So it varies and that Estimate is what we estimate it to be. But in the management of payments and expenses during the fiscal year we have the opportunity to move funds around.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Hon. Minister, could you advise how you go about estimating, knowing fully well that what the Actual spend was in 2020—knowing what the Revised Estimate was—and yet you are still decreasing this line Item by 141,000?

Madam Chairman: Okay. One minute, Minister. Member, I am not going to allow that question. That has been a recurring question over the last four days since we have been engaged in this exercise. I think all Ministers and the Minister of Finance have been at pains to explain the budgeting exercise and how Estimates have been come to. So, I am not going to allow that question. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Maybe you have another question you could ask later.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Through you, hon. Minister, line Item 29: Overtime payment. Hon. Minister, I am just curious, which division of the Ministry would the workers be affected as much as there is a decrease in the overtime payment?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, no worker is affected. We have 300, and a provision is made. So we expect that from time to time workers will require to work overtime. It is something—I heard my colleague, the Minister of Finance say over and over, Permanent Secretaries have been mandated to manage overtime. We pay careful attention to it. We have made provision on the assumption that we will continue to manage overtime. We have also considered that the restrictions, which I mentioned before, I do not know when they would be removed and we will have a full turn out of our workers, and we have taken those things into consideration. Keeping in mind the overarching thing about budgeting is that if we do, in fact, incur more than we estimate, the budgetary—the way the budget works allow us to deal with that.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. There was a spend for 2021 in the Revised Estimate there. Can the Minister advise what this Cabinet-Appointed Committee's function was? And would the Minister provide us in writing with the members of this Cabinet-Appointed Committee?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, I will provide that in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Also, if I may, line Item 04: Allowances - Monthly-Paid Officers. Again, the Actual spend was 1.5 million in 2020. The Revised Estimate for 2021 was 1.3. However, there was a decrease in the Estimate for 2022 of

400,000. Can the hon. Minister advise why this decrease?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, I think I have offered that explanation a few times already. The way the budgeting process works, in terms of the previous year, it is not because you have additional bodies or anything. You may have had unpaid liabilities or you may have had claims which were not made. PSs across the public service grapple with persons who are entitled to certain types of allowances who make claims beyond the period limited to do so, and it distorts the budgeting process. That is one factor. And the other factor is, if we have projected based on the positions which are filled or in respect of which they are acting persons, and if that changes on the basis of what the Public Service Commission does within the year, then we will take the appropriate measures within the allocation.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Minister, you indicated that in the budgeting process there may have been claims that the line Item would have been utilized for. Can you advise us if there actually were claims in the last financial year that had to be settled? And can you also advise us if there are any outstanding claims at this point in time for this line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: I would definitely do that in writing, Madam Chairman.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chairman, asked and answered. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 002. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, under 002: Agriculture. There is a decrease here of \$3 million from the Revised Estimates of 2021. Can the hon. Minister advise why this significant decrease in this line item?

Hon. Rambharat: Absolutely, Madam Chair. For the seventh time since I have appeared today, this has to do with the efforts, the directive of the Minister of

Finance that we do not make provision for those positions which are vacant, and for that reason you see that reduction. And if it is that on account of the work of the Public Service Commission, any or all of the 631 vacancies that I spoke about on six previous occasions today, they are filled, the budgetary process allows us to meet the cost of those positions and we will do that. Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. Minister, can you advise the number for vacant positions under this line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: Absolutely, Madam Chairman. I would be happy to provide the listing of the 631 vacant positions I have alluded to on seven previous occasions since I have been here. I would be happy to provide that in writing to my friend.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, for the ease of moving swiftly into this Committee, all vacancies under 01 that exist in future Items, will the Minister provide that so I would not have to keep asking concerning the vacancies? Also, Minister, can you advise—

Madam Chairman: Just now. I am happy that you are willing to adopt an approach that will help advance but I also want us to sort of pay a little more acute attention. I allowed the Minister to answer but that 631 posts, without bodies, even in his initial answer to you on that first question under 002, that number was mentioned. So, let us try and also pay a lil more acute attention to responses. I know it is hard because we may come with set questions, but sometimes the responses anticipate the question and it would help if we recognize that.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Chairman. On this same line Item: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, can the Minister advise if persons under the praedial larceny unit are paid under here?

Hon. Rambharat: No, Madam Chair, they are not.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister advise if there is a future line Item under 01

for praedial larcenies, so that I do not ask the same question under all the different Sub-Items? Because yesterday when the Minister of National Security was here, he advised that it was not paid under that Ministry. So praedial larceny, most likely, you can advise us which one of the—

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I would await your ruling, but I am quite prepared to answer that question, if it could save us a couple hours this afternoon.

Madam Chairman: Well, you know, the only thing is that, Member, I guess, it might be a bit novel but the books that we are given would also give you a breakdown of staff in the books, so that some of those questions would be there to guide you in the booklets. And, basically, I think when we ask questions here, is that we know what we are asking and we are not fishing. Right? But, therefore, I would ask you to ask another question and maybe you will find your praedial larceny and put it under the correct line Item.

Mr. Ratiram: Well, if the hon. Minister will want to advise in going forward, so I do not have to ask the same question continuously until we reach to the correct answer.

Mr. Young: I think what the Chair was saying is to read the book.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Animal Production and Health. Item 004: Horticulture. Item 006: Surveys and Mapping. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, under line Item 01, there is a significant decrease of 1.2 million there. Can the Minister advise what this decrease specifically is for?

Madam Chairman: Serving at 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: I thought we adopted a position with respect to all 01's?

Mr. Ratiram: Is there any specific reason other than what we talked about with

the budgeting process that this line Item referred to?

Madam Chairman: Member, given your own suggestion, with respect to the Minister—and I think the Minister agreed that he will give you a response in writing with respect to all 01's: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Okay? So can we go on? Do you have another question under Item 006?

Mr. Ratiram: No, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 007; Item 008; Item 010. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, line Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. Can the Minister advise what was the function of this Cabinet-Appointed Committee and if he can also provide in writing the Members of this Cabinet-Appointed Committee?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, under 010: Forestry, there is at least one Cabinet-Appointed Committee, the Wild Life Conservation Committee, which is contained in the Conservation of Wild Life Act. And I would be happy to provide the details of that committee and any other committee remunerated under that Item 010: Forestry, Sub-Item 14.

Madam Chairman: So the undertaking is, as far as Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees, for the entire Ministry, you will give a breakdown in respect of them?

Hon. Rambharat: I will, Madam Chair, for all committees.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Good.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, could I just get a clarification? If something is already in the public domain, either by way of an answer to a question in Parliament or a press release or any other public medium, is it necessary to give those details again here or simply say it is in the public domain, X, Y, Z?

Madam Chairman: Well, once it is the public domain, it is taken as known. If it is even on *Hansard*, it is taken as known.

Mr. Young: Madam Chair, it will also be in the administrative reports from the various Ministries. Again, they have to read.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, based on—

Madam Chairman: You have a question under line Item 010?

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I just want to seek some clarification based on the intervention of the Minister of Finance. Will I be allowed?

Madam Chairman: Well, if you are talking about Item 010: Forestry, I will allow that.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, in the context of the information with respect to Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees and so on. Sometimes I know that there are matters in the public domain, but in relation to the allocation of projected expenditure for \$52 billion, I think that in the interest of transparency and the wider citizenry who may be interested as it relates to the expenditure, we may be inclined to provide further information and so on.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, just to clarify on this line Item, I heard the Minister refer to the Wild Life Conservation Committee and the membership of that committee has already been published in the public domain, and that I was being very specific. Because if Members opposite are going to keep asking for details that are already in the public domain, it seems to me that that is a breach.

Mr. Indarsingh: I do not know, Minister, if they are projected Cabinet-Appointed Committees for the financial year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. And, you know, it is something

that is happening and recurring in this Committee. Statements are made in a particular context and it is stretched to universality. All right? And I think you and the Minister are not at odds with respect to what you are saying. The Minister is talking about a specific question, you are talking about a generalization. Let us move on.

2.00 p.m.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration.
Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 05: Telephone. Minister, this line Item in 2021 the Estimate was 3.7million whereas the Revised Estimate was 4.6 million, can the Minister advise if it is that the increase in this Revised Estimate had anything to do with arrears on the Telephone expenses?

Hon. Rambharat: Absolutely. Thanks for answering your own question, Member. You would remember that last year I pointed out that in 2015 as Minister I met with \$11million in bills to be paid in terms of Internet and telephone and about a similar amount on security. So this represents continuous payments towards the reduction and we are getting to a point now where we have to deal with Actuals in the particular financial year. And again, the Ministry through the PS is very active in trying to manage telephone costs and reduce it using the technology that is now available.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, for this line Item for the 2022 Estimate there is 958,000, a decrease of 3.7 million, whereas the Actual for 2020 was 7.2 million; that is some significant difference with the Actual spend in 2020 versus what we are actually budgeting for in 2022. Can the Minister advise if this 11 million in arrears have been paid off or if there is still outstanding arrears?

Hon. Rambharat: The arrears, as I said before, the movement of the figures from 7 million to 4 to the provision we made now represents reduction of the liabilities which we met in 2015 and the figure represents an Estimate that we have made in respect of what we are likely to incur in this fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Items 16 and 22, can the Minister advise if any of these line Items cover the payments to the officers at the praedial larceny unit?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes. Madam Chair, the Praedial Larceny Squad is paid under short-term employment, line Item 22, and this represents what we had expected in this fiscal year to use for short-term employment which is not restricted to Praedial Larceny Squad alone. It covers those things—the Minister of Finance has spoken about that, those short-term engagements that we do from time to time. Unfortunately, in the management of it do not go beyond short-term but this is what is provided in this fiscal year as an Estimate.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Minister, I am seeing a decrease in this line Item of 2.038million from the Revised Estimate of 2021, significantly less than what was actually spent in 2020. Can the Minister advise if this budgeted figure for 2022 will be sufficient to efficiently provide the human resource personnel that is required for the efficient running of the praedial larceny unit?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, as I said, this is not exclusively for the Praedial Larceny Squad and it represents the Estimate. And if I may say, that is simply because we have gone through an exercise of trying to bring efficiency to this Praedial Larceny Squad. As a first step in previous fiscal years we have improved the office accommodation for the squad. We have made available, transport equipment. I am on record as saying we have had delinquent officers who have

done a good job at mashing that up.

Yes, it is right here next to me, she knows my reports on that. And in order to make the squad a little more stable the PS has also gone through an exercise of identifying officers to fill the positions which exist in the squad. And once those officers were identified and able to fill those positions, they were then moved to contract employment and not short-term employment. And we hope to do that with at least 30 officers in this fiscal year and it will reduce the reliance on that line Item.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. Minister, would you be able to provide us in writing a breakdown of the unit and the number of officers assigned to the unit at the various divisions?

Hon. Rambharat: I undertake to do so, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Also, on line Item 13: Maintenance of Vehicles, Minister, is this line Item which deals with the maintenance of the vehicles for the praedial larceny unit?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes, it does.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, can you advise if the praedial larceny vehicle in the central unit is functional?

Hon. Rambharat: It is impossible to say at this moment. The officers might be out there mashing it up as we speak.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, can you advise how long the vehicle has not been functioning?

Hon. Rambharat: I would be happy to give you the details in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, I am seeing the Estimate for 2021 was 400,000 however the Revised Estimate was only 362,000, the Estimate was not utilized. Can you advise why it is this Estimate was not utilized to repair the vehicles for the south

and central division of the Praedial Larceny Squad?

Hon. Rambharat: But there is nothing to say that the Estimates were not—those are Estimates and there is an allocation so at the end of the fiscal year, as you may or may not know, Ministries settle accounts up until midnight on September 30th, so this does not take into consideration payments actually made.

At the end of the year when we have the out-turn fiscal, the fiscal year, we will know the exact figure. But in that document you have asked me to provide, which is the details of 13, I would be able to provide for you in real time what was done in the last fiscal.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, yes, these are Estimates but what is actual in the public domain is that the vehicles at the praedial larceny unit for south and central have not been functioning for the longest while.

Hon. Rambharat: Well—

Mr. Ratiram: That is actually in the public domain.

Hon. Rambharat:—the person who put that—

Mr. Ratiram: Can you give an undertaking—

Hon. Rambharat: Member—

Mr. Ratiram:—how soon these vehicles will once more be functional—

Hon. Rambharat: The—

Mr. Ratiram: May I finish please, Minister? Can you give an undertaking what timeline we are working with during this financial term—

Hon. Rambharat: I will not give such an undertaking.

Mr. Ratiram: Can I finish please, Mr. Minister?

Hon. Rambharat: Yeah.

Mr. Ratiram: If you can kindly advise in this financial term under this line Item when it is that we can expect to have these vehicles in south and central

functioning so that the praedial larceny units can efficiently and effectively carry out their function?

Hon. Rambharat: I cannot give that undertaking, Member.

Mr. Ratiram: But you are the Minister in charge.

Hon. Rambharat: I cannot, no. You have a complete misunderstanding of a Minister. I, in response to a question posed to me in the other place, told the country—I told the country about the bad behaviour of delinquent officers who once vehicles are given to them for use, they are damaged, destroyed and used for personal—I also said that the PS has been asked to deal with that matter and I said, a few minutes ago, that I am satisfied that the PS is taking the appropriate steps. We are committed. There is no question that we are committed.

I initiated a review of the Praedial Larceny Squad in 2016 and we are committed to equipping these officers and to ensuring that they are there to support the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service which is responsible for crime-fighting in the country. I cannot as a Minister say that what I would like to have done is done. I cannot say that but, I, of all the persons in this country have signalled the significance to us in this country of a functioning Praedial Larceny Squad.

Mr. Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chairman. And just with regard to the Minister's comment that you hope to have members of the Praedial Larceny Squad moved from short-term employment to contract employment, has any engagement or any consideration been taken towards establishing a permanent establishment of praedial larceny officers to make it a permanent structure so that it is not changed and dismantled on the whims of, you know, the political winds that may blow? And I know you have spoken a lot about establishing a Praedial Larceny Squad but the concern is that because of the conditions of employment being short-term and

contract that this squad and these officers could be removed at any time. Have any steps been taken to establish a permanent Praedial Larceny Squad?

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you, Member. Those things have been considered and, as I said, in 2016 the report was commissioned; OLEP, the Office of Law Enforcement Policy provided advice for us. There have been discussions with the Commissioner of Police and there have been interventions by the Police Second Division, Welfare Association. And it is, one, to deal with the squad in its present form and the OLEP report pointed to absenteeism, engagement, more time being spent on non-agriculture matters and so on. And it has been quite an effort to manage the operations of the squad. And eventually if it is determined that this should be a permanent squad—if this should be a squad under the TTPS then those steps will be taken, but for in most places like us, we have six law enforcement sections of the Ministry and managing those, given the nature of the Ministry, is sometimes very, very difficult because we have a dual role of the Ministry itself and these officers having a line of responsibility to the Commissioner of Police under the law.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, in your response you indicated that, under line Item 22, the Praedial Larceny Squad, you are looking to move them to contract employment, however when we look at 16: Contract Employment the Actual spend for 2020 was 12 million similar in the Revised Estimate of 2021 but we are seeing a decrease in the Estimate for 2022. If it is that we are moving this unit from short-term employment to contract in this financial term, then why it is we have a decrease of 2.16 million?

Hon. Rambharat: Because, as I have said, Member, the Minister of Finance has directed and our Permanent Secretary has complied for the need to manage the

resources in the Ministry. So a reduced provision does not mean a reduced provision for the Praedial Larceny Squad, it means that we have looked at the numbers and we are providing for fewer. We are not going to fill contract positions because we believe that in the circumstances of the country we can manage without certain positions being filled, contract positions.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002—you still have—

Mr. Ratiram: Yeah, I had another question.

Mr. Chairman: Item 001?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Please proceed.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 001, 96: Fuel and Lubricants, Minister, this Estimate for 2021 was 800,000 but the Revised Estimate was 400,000, can you say if this is as a result—the reduce in the Revised Estimates to the Estimate of 400,000, if this was as a result of the vehicles of south and central Trinidad not being functional for a major part of the financial term which is why we are seeing such a significant reduction in the Revised Estimates versus what was estimated?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, you keep—it is almost like a fairy tale, the vehicles not being functional in south and central—

Mr. Ratiram: No, Minister, it is real. You could go down and visit the place. It is not a fairy tale.

Hon. Rambharat: Are these magical—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North, would you allow the Minister to answer the question.

Hon. Rambharat: Are these magical vehicles that only work in north and other parts of the country and just “doh” work in south and central? The provision is for an increase. The Estimate is 500,000 for the fiscal which represents an increase of

100,000.

Mr. Chairman: Can we go on to line Item 002? Item 002: Agriculture. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, line Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence, what we are seeing in this line Item is a significant decrease again of \$3.874million; the Actual spend for 2020 was 13million. The Revised Estimate was 13.6 million for 2021 but the Estimate for 2022 is 9.8million. Minister, can you advise why the significant decrease in this line Item?

2.15 p.m.

Hon. Rambharat: Member, it follows from the Items that you have been pointing out before, salaries and allowances. The reason and the logic is the same. We are not making provision—we are not making provision. There are 631 vacant positions without bodies. We are not making provision for travelling and subsistence claims in respect of those provisions.

In addition to which, I also pointed out to the more astute management of claims. I pointed out that it is not unusual, or was not unusual. When Forestry Division came from the former Ministry of Housing and the Environment, when it came to this Ministry in 2015, it brought with it years of travelling claims which were not submitted in the time limit, and it had been an issue. I have said that the Minister of Finance has directed that there be more astute management of this in line with the regulation that requires officers to submit claims within a limited period. We now believe that these claims, if submitted in the time limit, would result in us having to pay an estimate of 9.8million in this fiscal.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. On the said line Item:

Travelling and Subsistence, Minister, you actually incurred expenditure of \$13.6 million, approximately, and you just indicated to my colleague about the submission of claims. Is it that claims were submitted late, or you found officers of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to be involved in questionable submission of claims?

Hon. Rambharat: No, the submissions were late, which in itself is questionable, because there is a time limit for that, but the issue was the late submissions. Of course, once it is submitted late, and in the volumes they were submitted, the auditing process that goes on and the need to allocate funds and all of that, by the time we got to 2020 it resulted in back pay basically being paid.

Mr. Indarsingh: So, in the last financial year, has anybody been held accountable based on your audit within your Ministry and so on, disciplinary action being instituted against anyone?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I would be happy to advise of that in writing.

Mr. Indarsingh: You would be happy to advise in writing, because— Has the complement of travelling officers, has it declined in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

Hon. Rambharat: The establishment remains the same. The permanent establishment remains around 2,015—in the permanent establishment. Of course, not all are travelling officers, but in the 631 vacant positions, some of them will be travelling officers. Now, I know that in dealing with the issue of travelling, the Permanent Secretary is also looking at the granular part of it, which is the actual claims, they are looking at patterns. So I know, from my interactions with the Permanent Secretary, that some officers are likely to—some officers the claims are almost predictable, and the Permanent Secretary is paying careful attention to those patterns to ensure that the claims properly reflect the travelling which was done.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 08: Rent, Lease, Office Accommodation and Storage. Minister, last year you told us that these funds were going to be utilized for the relocation of the Land Mapping and Surveys Department. Can you advise if a permanent location has been found?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, no. We have not found a permanent location for our Surveys and Mapping Division.

Madam Chairman: Item 003; Item 004; Item 006. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 08: Rent, Lease, Office Accommodation and Storage. Minister, last year under this line Item, we requested copies of the lease agreement for office accommodation and storage. You said it would be provided in writing, however, when we got the response, the response was no lease agreement currently exists under this line Item. So no lease was provided. Can you advise if there is a lease that has now been entered into?

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

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, we are seeing an Actual spend of 1.6million, a Revised Estimate of 1.6 million for 2021. Moneys have been spent without any kind of lease arrangement in place?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, I would not say there is no lease arrangement in place. In fact, if you go to Frederick Street, you would see the Surveys and Mapping Division in the place they have been for a long time. But as the Auditor General has pointed out on numerous occasions, there are times when leases have come to an end and they have not been renewed on a timely basis, but it does not mean that

the relationship between landlord and tenant and the obligation to pay does not exist.

Mr. Ratiram: I am now seeing an Estimate for 2022 under this line Item of 800,000, a decrease of 847,000. Minister, can you advise how you came up with this figure?

Hon. Rambharat: The Estimate is based on exactly what I said, and what you in fact reminded all of us of, that we are actively engaged in efforts to relocate. This may or may not result in the payment of rent. We are looking at the facilities that are available to us, and that is why we have made that provision. If it is that the efforts to relocate do not bear fruit in this fiscal, then we would make the payments of rent from the overall allocation that is made to us.

Madam Chairman: Item 007. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 08: Rent, Lease, Office Accommodation. Minister, in the last Standing Finance Committee last year, similarly we asked to provide a copy of the existing lease agreement for the property located in El Socorro. You gave that undertaking, however, when we received our bundles of documents, the response was "no lease agreement currently exists". That is for Japan Lane. Can you advise if a new lease has been entered into for this upcoming financial term?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will have to advise of that in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Same line Item please, Madam Chairman, 08. There is a decrease Minister of \$183,640. Can you indicate what is the reason for the decrease?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I will have to do that in writing. I undertake to do so.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: I move to line Item 43: Security services. The Actual spend in 2021—

well, the Revised Estimate, is 571. I am seeing a figure budgeted this financial year of \$400,000, a decrease of 171,000. What will be the reason for this decrease in allocation to security services?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, the Permanent Secretary, the Minister and the public sector have been directed by the Minister of Finance to manage our costs. In the Land Management Division, we continue to increase the use of technology available to us, and across the Ministry, we continue to manage our security costs. This represents the expectation that we will continue to lower the cost of external security services.

Madam Chairman: Item 008. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 21: Repair and Maintenance of Buildings. The Estimate for 2021 was 100,000, however, the Revised Estimate was 22,000. Can the Minister advise why there is this significant disparity?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, as I said before, 22,600 represents what was incurred in the fiscal, based on the publication of this, and it was an estimate, so you may spend less than or more than in this case. We only know the exact figure when it is available at the end of the calendar year, but there is a reduction. It has to do with us not spending the full amount of the estimate.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 08: Rent, Lease, Office Accommodation and Storage. Minister, would you be able to provide us in writing the lease that would be covered under this line Item, for the upcoming financial term?

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

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases—I am sorry, Item 010: Forestry.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, in 2021, line Item 05: Telephone, the Estimate was

350,000, however, the Revised Estimate was \$1.2 million. Could the Minister advise on this significant increase on this line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I have already pointed out that the numbers in some years had to do with, and I specified telephone and Internet and security. It had to do with debts inherited and the efforts made to pay down those debts, and I also pointed out to the stricter management of telephone expenses and the shift towards technology-based telephone system. This represents what the PS estimates as the likely cost of telephones for this section of the Ministry in this fiscal.

Mr. Ratiram: So, Minister, are you saying that the additional cost from the 350, what was budgeted for, to the 1.2, was to pay outstanding arrears?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I have said on too many occasions, there is a difference between Actuals and Estimates. The Actual in 2020 was 336. There was a 2021 Estimate. There is a revised estimate based on a projection, and there is a projection now based on what transpired during the last fiscal, which we would know at the end of the calendar year, when the outturn is available, and then we would understand what was actually incurred in the last fiscal.

Mr. Ratiram: Taking into consideration the Actual, as you have pointed out hon. Minister, of 2020 of 336,000, why it is we are only budgeting 100,000 for this line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, as I have said on many occasions before, that represents what the Permanent Secretary and the Ministry believes to be the likely costs of telephone charges in this fiscal year. If it turns out that it is less than that, the money will be used elsewhere. If it turns out that it is more than that, the budgeting process allows for us to pay our bills.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 43: Security Services. I am

seeing here a decrease of \$1.6 million in this line Item. Can the hon. Minister advise the reason for the decrease?

2.30 p.m.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, I thought I was making life easy but I must admit that I failed on that one. I had pointed to Security Services and Telephones and it is something that in particular with forestry we inherited. I answered a question in the last fiscal year in the other place on Security Services and in answering that question I pointed to debts inherited.

In the case of Forestry Division, what we grappled with was the fact that there was no evidence that in that period 2010 to 2015 that these companies were even engaged. There were no contractual documents, there were no tender documents. All we got was an avalanche of claims. In fact, Madam Chair, I will go so far as to say, one day in the last fiscal I went to the Caroni Bird Sanctuary, that pristine spot, very close to my friend's constituency if not in his constituency—no. It is close, not in. And I saw at the security booth, Member Indarsingh, the security guard was operating a parlour and offered me a Fanta for \$3 because he had not been paid. An upon investigation they found that he was yet another person working for yet another security company who operated between that 2010 to '15 period and thereafter without—so this represents, this money represents, as I said before, a continuous effort to pay those debts, reduce reliance as much as possible, manage things and estimate going forward what with prudent management the likely costs will be. And all of what I have just said is on the record in response to that question which was asked of me in the other place.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Minister, can you advise under this line Item if there are any outstanding bills yet to be paid?

Hon. Rambharat: I would answer that in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: And a decrease in this line Item, will that be sufficient for the upcoming financial year?

Hon. Rambharat: It is what we Estimate, Member. That is what I have said. That is what I said based on prudent management, on managing the resources, we have estimated that the Forestry Division is likely to include \$2million in security costs in the next—in this fiscal year.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, there was no Estimate for 2021 under line Item 01 however, there was a spend of \$1,050,000. Can the Minister advise what this spend was for?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, [*Inaudible*] this particular issue a few times that I would provide the response in writing.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Agriculture; Item 003: Animal Production and Health; Item 004: Horticulture; Item 007: Land Management; Item 008: Fisheries; Item 010: Forestry. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Sorry. Another Item.

Madam Chairman: All right. Item 003: United Nations Organisations; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. This is where you are at?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, 04/005/01: Caribbean Fisheries Training & Development Institute. There has been a decrease of \$2.2 million. Can the Minister advise the reason for the reduction in the 2022

allocation?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, this institution has been under review. We did, we made some changes via the Cabinet. And during the COVID period, of course, this institution exists mainly to provide training to citizens in skills related to fisheries, both operators and in small engine repairs and so on. But it also provides training to the Tobago House of Assembly and to some territories of the islands, in particular Antigua. With the COVID restrictions, of course, they had limited functions. And we have also been taking a second review at CFTDI. We expect in this fiscal year to make some changes and to deal with what we feel needs to be done there and we believe that the allocation, the Estimate will cover the cost of the institute for this fiscal year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. And through you, hon. Minister, line Item 08: TTSPCA. I am just wondering if this programme has been stopped or transferred to another Ministry.

Hon. Rambharat: Member, this was actually introduced for the first time in the last fiscal year, so it is something new. You would be surprised to know that the TSPCA had not been provided with a subvention before and this was introduced in the last fiscal.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 04: Sugar Cane Feeds Centre. There is a decrease in this line Item of \$2.4million. Can the Minister explain this decrease?

Hon. Rambharat: Sugar Cane Feeds Centre, Member, has been with us for now over 40 years. It has outlived even sugar cane and sugar cane feed. And this has been a facility that has been under close examination. In 2015 I commissioned a

review of it and in the last year we have done some exercises there. It is a unionized employer and we believe that in this fiscal we would make some changes, of course, in consultation with the recognized majority union. And we believe that the provision being made of \$6million would cover the cost we are likely to incur in this fiscal year. And when I say in consultation and changes and so on, it is meant to make better use of that asset that is available. I had said before that it is the ideal location for a farm school for young persons in particular. So there are things that we are looking at to put, position this to be of better use without having to increase the expense profile.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The Minister was able to pull my interest as it relates to the Sugar Cane Feeds Centre. Minister, you indicated that you or your Ministry is currently involved in a restructuring programme at the Sugar Cane Feeds Centre.

Hon. Rambharat: A review. A review.

Mr. Indarsingh: A review. That review entails any intended job losses and so on?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, I was very clear to say anything we do will, of course, be in consultation with the recognized majority union and that does not—that has nothing to do with job loss as you know, as a trade unionist, it may mean having to use workers differently and to provide services in a different way. So we have not gotten to the point of reduction in numbers but it is really to—it is a very important asset particularly for central Trinidad and the young people in central Trinidad. And we believe that after 40 years we really need to look at making it more efficient.

Mr. Indarsingh: No problem in terms of what you have stated. In relation to your allocation of projected expenditure of \$6million, did it include and I know that you

may tell me the collective bargaining process has not been completed but be very mindful that it may warrant additional expenditure to cover that particular issue when it is concluded. And if you could inform the meeting how many periods of the collective bargaining process are outstanding?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, Member, I am not in a position. The CPO deals with that and I am not in a position to say but, I mean—

Mr. Indarsingh: As line Minister you may be keeping an eye or have it on your radar.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, you have asked this line of questioning earlier and I think the response in that other Ministry this falls under and the Minister of Finance and the CPO and therefore it might be more fairly a question posed to the Minister of Finance—

Mr. Indarsingh: Well—

Madam Chairman:—and not the line Minister.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am guided, Madam Chairman. It is just I am pointing the Minister in relation to his projected expenditure of the need for an increase probably in the mid-year.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I just want to say that these are Estimates and appropriations will be made in the mid-year if necessary. Nobody could look into the future and see what will happen.

Mr. Indarsingh: In my crystal ball you can see.

Mr. Imbert: You do not have a crystal ball.

Mr. Indarsingh: You obstruct the collective bargaining process based on—

Mr. Imbert: You do not have a crystal ball.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households. Now, you see when we are not being efficient what happens. Member for Couva North. [*Interruption*] No. I am sorry.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 08: Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Thank you. Hon. Minister, this institution's Actual allocation for 2020 was 250,000. However, the Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, there is nothing being estimated in the 2022 financial year. And we have seen within recent times, animals are being struck down on the side of the road and institutions like this are not receiving any sort of financial allocation. Can you kindly advise why there is no allocation—

Hon. Rambharat: Member—

Mr. Ratiram:—for this institution?

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you very much. I would go so far as to say that, the decision to introduce this subvention—the decision to introduce this subvention was the recommendation of the hon. Minister of Finance. And I have listened to the hon. Minister of Finance and he has spoken about errors and omissions and I am sure he is going to correct that. But I myself when he cornered me one day and accused me of all sorts of things, I was shocked to know that the TTSPCA had never received a subvention.

We have passed, as you know, last year July, this Government passed the most modern legislation for the protection of animals [*Desk thumping*] and prior to that appointed and engaged the attention of 17 groups to prepare animal welfare standards for the first time in the country's history and we have demonstrated, just as you just have, our love for animals. And the Permanent Secretary that sits next to me went so far as to personally present the subvention cheque to the TTSPCA [*Desk thumping*] leaving me out of the photo opportunity. So I think the Minister of Finance has taken note, the subvention, the intention, in fact, the Cabinet decision was to grant them the subvention for three years in the first instance.

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

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 07: Emergency Food Support Measure, COVID-19. This line Item is what we received the transfer of \$57,310,000 for the Food Box, the NAMDEVCO food box in the mid-year review from the 500 million stimulus package. The Minister indicated it was approximately \$80 million that was utilized for that programme. Can the hon. Minister advise why it is that the only—we are seeing here in the Revised Estimate only 62 million transferred to this Ministry and not the 500 million that was supposed to be utilized for agriculture. Now, in your opening remarks, hon. Minister, you indicated several plans and promises. We heard those plans and promises last year, but for the entire financial term, none of those promises materialized, and you are coming here again making lots of plans and promises, not with the 500 million but with 300 million less. So, can you kindly shed some light on this?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, you have made so many improper assertions there. I listened to the hon. Opposition Leader make some promises, which I have heard for the last 15 years from the Opposition, and I am not sad. But I did not make promises. I said specifically what we are going to do. May I remind you, Member, that reflecting on the period 2010 to 2015, if I give you the rest of the fiscal year, you cannot point me to one project in agriculture that your government achieved. You cannot point me to one, neither a PPP or anything, a private sector project.

Mr. Ratiram: I can point you to several, Minister.

Hon. Rambharat: And I could say confidently—

Mr. Ratiram: I can point you to several, several work that they did during that period.

Hon. Rambharat: I could say confidently that there is, at this time, \$200million in private sector projects in agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] On the *Trinidad Express* this week, there is a company called Novo featured. A company—a private sector company that has commissioned—it is completed and they have started distribution from a \$60 million private sector facility. If that is not confidence in the Government and our ability to provide the support, then you will never find confidence anywhere. And this line Item has nothing to do—absolutely nothing to do with the \$500 million. I have been careful in explaining—as the Minister said yesterday, 500 million is a fund housed in the Ministry of Finance.

And in the mid-year review, the Minister made provision to transfer from that fund a 62.5 million fee—figure for the food box programme for the period May 2021 to the end of September 2021. When he referred to the food box programme, he referred to the overall cost of it, the cost incurred previously, prior to the mid-year review, and this represents the cost during the period. And as I said before, the food box programme, this was funded to the end of September 2021. This figure does not represent the Actuals. We would know that at the end of the calendar year when we see the out-turn of the last fiscal. This has nothing to do with the many other things in the \$500 million. I heard you say the 500 is reduced, and I thought I was doing a good deed by explaining it from the outset, but I realized that I did not.

So I would repeat, it is a fund. The way the Government operates, the way the State manages its budget, it started off as the Minister of Finance making available a fund of \$500 million. Now, I could have done like you did in August 2015 and awarded 10 road repair contracts via EMBD which costed 400 million, and I would have been able to come here today and say I spent 400 of the \$500 million. In fact, I would have gone out there, like you, and cut ribbons on all those

10 roads. But at the end of the \$400 million in road expenditure, under EMBD, all that has happened—

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, I did not cut any ribbon. I think you are misleading by saying that I went out to cut ribbon.

Hon. Rambharat: There is not a significant two-acre plot of land serviced by those \$400 million in roads. And you would see in another Item where this year, out of this \$700-something million allocation, I have to service a loan by EMBD, a principal payment, a loan taken, arising out of one of those construction contracts awarded by EMBD in the Caroni VSEP. So, it is not a fairy tale that as a Minister, I have inherited tremendous debts from your administration, which I am in my sixth year of trying to manage, and it is not fairy tale, it is in the Estimates to which—and you would never—you would never when we get to that page ask me what is that line Item of the 29 million for PSAEL and the 90 million for EMBD? You would not ask me that. You would ask me all these \$1 questions, but you would not ask me those \$100 million questions. [*Desk thumping*]

And what I have articulated and gone so far as even the Minister of Finance has put it in his budget statement, the \$500 million—the \$500 million includes \$11 million to my colleague the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla for Plum Mitan. Not only is it there, when you get to the Development Programme, you will see specific allocations for Plum Mitan. I spoke about homesteads in El Reposo. I have heard you talk about young people wanting jobs. Well, young people want places to live and places to plant, and the homestead programme would cost us about \$250 million spread over a few fiscal years. And next year, this fiscal, of the 300 million that I saved, we will actually pay out, part of that is for the homestead programme in Talparo, and one in El Reposo in Sangre Grande. I have spoken about digital transformation—

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, Minister, I have allowed you some leeway based on the intervention by the Member on the other side, speaking with respect to promises not materializing, which I thought you needed to respond to. But I think the question was really on line Item 07, and I think you have answered that, and the five minutes is now up.

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers. This was estimated at 5.5 million. However, the Revised Estimate was 2.3 million. Can the Minister advise this significant disparity—reason why?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, yet again, I say that this has to do—these gratuities, it is a liability that arises at the end of the contract period. The contract period varies. It goes through an auditing process; a very complicated process. The Minister of Finance was the subject of a joint select committee of which I was a part—a standing committee of the Parliament, sorry, Madam Chairman. And the Minister of Finance has directed that Ministries and Permanent Secretaries, in particular, accelerate the settlement of these claims. The figure varies from year to year, and during the financial year, you would see that what you see there is an increase over the Revised Estimate and the figure there represents what we estimate would be paid out in this fiscal year.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, can the Minister advise the number of contract officers that gratuity payments are outstanding to?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will have to advise of that in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 008: Subsidies. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 01: Agricultural Incentive Programme. This programme has decreased by \$12.1 million. Minister, can you advise the reason for the decrease in this line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I have said in previous appearances in this Committee and also in responses to questions in Parliament, that in 2015, I met, at least seven years, maybe longer, of unpaid claims for subsidies and incentives. With the support of the Minister of Finance, the provision each year continued to be increased for us to cover those debts. My colleague sitting on the right of me, Sen. Avinash Singh, in one of his budget contributions in the other place, surprised me, when he said in five years we had paid out \$250 million in subsidies, incentives and flood assistance claims. So what this represents is that this represents making a significant dent in what was owed and had piled up, and what we continue to accrue. And I could safely say now, at the end of that, of the last fiscal year, by 30th September, 2021, we had paid out \$15 million in claims. And the figure shown there represents what we believe we will pay out in this fiscal year. So that we have made tremendous strides in reducing those liabilities in bringing them current and at any time, the waiting time of the average person is seven months or less compared to seven years or more.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 02: Incentive Programme. Hon. Minister, this line Item: Incentive Programme, from my understanding, is for the reimbursement or the rebate for registered fisher folk. Can you kindly advise why it is the Revised Estimates is nil for 2021, when it was estimated at 500,000? Is it that no rebate was provided for this financial term for our fisherfolk?

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

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad;

Item 011; Transfer to State Enterprises. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards & Similar Bodies. Hon. Member—

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman:—we will now proceed

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, line Item under this Head, line Item 08.

Madam Chairman: Yes, we are now going to that Head, and we will look at that Head in the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. At 369, it is a summary statement, we now go into the details. So for your guidance, Members, we are at page 473, 08: Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: What page again, Madam Chair?

Madam Chairman: We are at page 473.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Do you have any questions on Item 001?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes, please.

Mr. Ratiram: Under General Administration, line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. The Estimate for 2021 was \$537,600. However, the Revised Estimate was \$163,290. Can the Minister advise the reason for this decrease in the Estimate and the Revised Estimate?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, I was holding to see if there was another question you were going to ask, but I think, as we have said before, during these proceedings this afternoon, the Minister will give details for all 01 falling under his Ministry. Okay?

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise if it is he has met with the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago and discussed the matters that they are being affected by under this line Item?

3.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: I will not allow that question under this Item, okay.
Anything else you have under Item 001?

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 06: Remuneration for Board Members. There is no Estimate for 2022 and no Estimate for 2021. Can the Minister advise the reason for no Estimate for 2022?

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you, Member. Member, I credit my predecessor Devant Maharaj for raising publicly a number of issues relating to the Agricultural Society. We went one step further and commissioned through the hon. Minister of Finance an audit by the Central Audit Committee of the Ministry of Finance. A report was tendered to us in 2019. A copy of that report was made to ASTT. The Permanent Secretary has had numerous meetings with the ASTT. The ASTT has received numerous letters from me pointing to an increase in liability of about \$4million related to failed litigation involving the ASTT and its then President. There are judgments in the court that have not been paid, judgment gathering interest. There is far as I know one judgment creditor who has taken bankruptcy proceedings against the former President and part of that audit report pointed to the fact that there was no authority for the payment of board fees to Agricultural Society. And the Permanent Secretary on the basis of that did what she is required to do and stopped making those payments and those payments are no longer provided for.

Mr. Ratiram: I am not sure which audit report the hon. Minister is referring to. What has been brought to my attention is that no audit report has been signed off.

Madam Chairman: Okay, all right.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise—

Madam Chairman: One minute, please. I am not going to allow us to go into audit report. I allowed the Minister to give you an explanation because of the question you posed which in itself should not have been allowed, because as you quite rightly pointed out there is no Estimate for 2021. So that this should have been an issue which was settled in 2021. I allowed it because I figured that you all are new here. But in terms of the audit report and so on, and all those details, I am not going to allow us to further expand that discussion.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you for your guidance, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Anything else under 01?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. With respect to the Remuneration of the Board Members can the Minister advise if there is in fact a board in place at this time?

Hon. Rambharat: Yes. Consequent upon the ASTT wrote to me earlier this year advising me that elections were held and there is a board in a place.

Mr. Ratiram: And this is a B board, right?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I am totally lost.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay. Does this board— do the operations of this board or is there to be remuneration for the board that is in place?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, the risk of offending the hon. Chair of this Committee I gave a lengthy and from what, Madam Chair, has said to us, unnecessary and ultra vires, the rules of this Committee. I gave you a lengthy explanation of an Item that does not exist. And it is not the first one. I gave you two lengthy explanations of the 500 million which does not exist.

Mr. Ratiram: We are dealing with board.

Hon. Rambharat: Let us not abuse the Committee.

Madam Chairman: Okay, all right. [*Crosstalk*] So Member for Couva South, one

minute please. Can we move on?

Mr. Ratiram: Just one—

Madam Chairman: I am not allowing any more questions under 01; 001; 06. There is no estimate—

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister provide a copy of the audit report that he used in his response?

Madam Chairman: I am sure—

Mr. Ratiram: He made reference to that.

Madam Chairman: I am sure, Member for Couva North, there are other facilities open to you to investigate and interrogate these matters that to you, may be of interest, yes? Let us go on.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, we must ensure the interest of the minority—

Madam Chairman: 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; 09: National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation, we are at page 478. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. This has an increase of \$7.7 million. Can the Minister explain what these additional other contracted services are going to be for this financial term?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, based on, one, the Food Boxes Programme which is continuing and which is continuing out of NAMDEVCO's Woodford Lodge facility, which is in, ironically, in the constituency of Couva North. I do not think my friend is aware of that. We intend to upgrade that facility so that it can

continuously carry out this programme. It is just a warehouse facility. We intend to convert it into a complete packing house. We intend to upgrade the facility at Piarco which requires some significant work and we are engaging, entering into a public/private partnership in relation to the unfinished, incomplete yet comprehensively launched Brechin Castle facility which is in my friend's constituency, Couva South, Mr. Indarsingh. [*Crosstalk*] A facility that in July 2015 was opened with much fanfare, notwithstanding the fact that power was not connected, the place was empty, it was a shell, the lease for the land was not in place, the operation plan or anything. So that 7.7 is meant to supplement or to be NAMDEVCO's contribution. What I have just described will be funded out of the stimulus, the 300. We had already committed ourselves to that expenditure executed in this fiscal and that is part of NAMDEVCO's contribution amongst other things related to the functioning of NAMDEVCO.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, line Item 23: Fees. Can the Minister indicate, what is the purpose of these fees? Line Item 23. What is the expenditure used for?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will give that in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 16: Contract Employment. Can the Minister advise the number of persons in the organization on contract employment and the number of vacant positions?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will give that information in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Other Contracted Services—okay. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Alright, Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; 11-Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago, we are at

page 486. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 12: Material and Supplies. This line Item has a decrease of \$1.6 million. Can the Minister advise why this decrease in 1.6 million?

Hon. Rambharat: The Zoo, Member, has since 2007 been doing this upgrade and it is funded in part by the Zoo through this line Item and in part by the IDF which is coming up later on. So that this represents the advance state of the main project which we expected to be completed in—by April 2022. And this simply represents the completion of the spend that the Zoo itself incurs on that project.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 16: Contract Employment. Can the Minister advise the positions in contract employment and the salaries for those contract positions? Can the Minister also explain for this line Item why there is a decrease of \$217,000? If it is that there are persons who are going to be laid out.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, the provision made in the past had to do with—my friends managed to go for five years without even paying attention to the need to renew these contracts. We inherited—and we did in fact renew the contracts. We inherited liability for the gratuity that is payable at the end of the contract year. So, for example, having missed the formal renewal of two contract periods when we got to having to renew for the third one we inherited gratuity payments which were due for three contract period. And what you see appearing before represents the settlement of those liabilities and what you see estimated now represents the estimate of what we are likely to incur in this fiscal year in relation to those contract positions.

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

Hon. Members, we now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, we are on page 151. Head 09: Development Programme Consolidated Fund. Item 002: Productive Sectors. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, line Item 053: St. Augustine Nurseries. Hon. Minister, this line Item was estimated for 500,000 in 2021, but the Revised Estimate is only 102,000. Can the hon. Minister explain the significant difference there?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, at the start, in my opening I pointed to—I made five points and I pointed to the fact that it is 60 per cent of the last fiscal year we did not have the full complement of staff in the Ministry as with all other Ministries and where it affected us was in our ability to execute these infrastructure projects where it involved both internal staff and external contractors. And I said, that we used the opportunity to do some more planning in terms of this fiscal in terms of execution. And throughout you would see—I made the point that throughout you would see in this, the Development Programme, you would see a shortfall of \$30million, it may be less than that when we get the final out turn, but it really was on account of those COVID factors. And the line Item: St. Augustine Nurseries represents one of many in this DP which did not utilize the full allocation.

3.15 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Hon. Members, Item 003 spans four pages. Therefore, I will also announce the project groups. D: Fishing. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 278: Port of

Spain Wholesale Fish Market. This was allocated 500,000, but no moneys was spent in 2021 based on the figure in front of us here from the Revised Estimate. Can the hon. Minister advise why it is?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, for the reason I just outlined, it was not possible to execute this project in the last fiscal.

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

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 287: Upgrade of Fish Landing Sites. Minister, this line Item was allocated \$2 million in 2021 with a lot of promises that you made for fish landing sites at several locations across the country. However, what we are seeing here is only approximately 10 per cent of that was utilized, \$292,000, and at this point in time there are several fish landing sites including that in Orange Valley where fishermen have to go through the rubble and the rocks to get to their vessel when they are going out and when they are coming in. Can you advise if this \$3 million that is allocated for this line Item will include the upgrade of the fish landing site for Orange Valley; and if you can elaborate also on the additional plans that you have taken into consideration what was not completed in the last financial term?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I would have been able to answer that with great confidence as I answered your colleague for Pointe-a-Pierre, Member David Lee, when I said to him very clearly that Claxton Bay would definitely be executed in this fiscal year given his numerous representations, his discussions with me and so on. I have never seen or heard you at a fish landing site anywhere in this universe. You have made no representation—you have made no representation on behalf of your own constituency. Whether it is food boxes you have never—

Mr. Ratiram: You were sleeping like Hinds. You were sleeping. You are the Minister.

Hon. Rambharat: You have never come to the Woodford Lodge facility—

Mr. Imbert: You do not know where this is?

Ms. Ameen: No.

Hon. Rambharat: You do not know where this is. But to answer your question, NAMDEVCO, we are talking about the facility there—NAMDEVCO intends to spend money again at the facility in Orange Valley. We have made representation to the corporation—if you talk to them they will tell you that—to repair the road leading to that facility. We have been working with the fisherfolk, and the former MP Ramona Ramdial who I see more often than you, to deal with the fish landing site. But I am on record as saying that these sites, there are 64 landing sites in this country and I have said that many of them are used by bona fide fisherfolk, but there are also places of criminal activities and places where riff-raffs engage and so on. And we have continuously spent—unlike you who built a fish landing site in Grande Riviere that is nowhere near the sea, and one in Guayaguayare that is \$80 million but is in the middle of the sea so you cannot do nothing with it, we intend with the little that we have to continue to improve the lives of the fisherfolk including the ones in Orange Valley who know where I live and can meet me more often than they can meet you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, after all your misleading comments I still put back the question to you. You have not answered the question, 2 million was allocated for this line Item and only 292,000 was spent. You have failed to implement the plans and the promises you made last year. Can you give us, and this Committee, despite all the rhetoric and all the misleading information you choose to present, can you advise if that is going to be repeated in this financial term with this \$3 million being allocated, or you are going to have some level of commitment to wake up and do your job. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I have made a few things clear this afternoon. One, is that I do my job and your job; the second thing is that [*Desk thumping*] I have made it clear that COVID—

Mr. Indarsingh: I see you are aspiring to get further—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Rambharat: All. I have made it clear also that a lot of these projects have been constrained by COVID restrictions, curfew times, the shutdown of construction activity and so on. And I have also said that we are committed to spend this 3 million to do what needs to be done including MP David Lee's project in Claxton Bay, including the ones that I have said NAMDEVCO, and wherever else we need to, recognizing that this is a continuous spend and we cannot spend on everything every time, and it helps if conscientious Members of Parliament, like Mr. Tancoo does, even Ms. Ameen does, conscientious Members of Parliament make representations.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Madam Chair, same line Item: 287. Can the Minister undertake to inform this House in writing the proposed project at the different location in the costing in the sum of \$3 million please?

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

Madam Chairman: E: Forestry. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 23: Forestry Access Road. This was budgeted for in 2021 at 2 million, only 1.5 was utilized and there is no budget allocation for 2022. Can the Minister advise if this project has been completed or what is the status with respect to the forestry access roads?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, this is an ongoing—this it is not—it is roads, and we have forestry access roads. So in every fiscal year we do work on forestry access roads. This year the road programme is being funded out of two particular

Items, one I spoke about earlier and the Minister of Finance announced in the budget it is out of the stimulus, and we also have an allocation elsewhere in these provisions for roadworks. So it is not that we are not doing any works. We are funding it out of two areas that are elsewhere in the provision.

Madam Chairman: F: Land Management Services. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 67: Surveys and Sub-Division of State Land for Distribution to Farmers. This Item was budgeted for in 2021 at 200,000, but none was utilized. Can the Minister advise why?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, this line Item existed when the State had to undertake surveying exercises to survey and create what we call food crop projects, and it was for payment to be made to private land surveyors. A lot of this work has already been done and what we have been focusing on is delivering on the actual leases, and another policy change took place where the intended lessees are required to pay the surveying cost. So what we have been doing is, with this line Item is paying down some of the outstanding bills, and again from the stimulus we have made provision there to do an exercise to be funded out of there on the matter of land surveying.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 69: Establishment of a Land Management Authority. Again, this line Item was allocated 500,000 for 2021, however nothing was utilized. Can the Minister advise why?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, it is mainly because what we have done so far has been, I do not want to say free work, but work that did not incur a cost. So what we have done in the last fiscal through Cabinet is to appoint a committee to

do the work that will determine what a single point of authority for state land in country would look like, and that committee has been working. They have tendered an interim report. Some of what they have recommended is being implemented, and eventually in this country we will have some sort of single point of authority for land management whether it is a new authority or a collaborative mechanism. As it is now, we know that it requires an IT backbone and that is what I spoke about, the 18.5 million we have allocated to execute that. In fact, this is a sixth year of work on that and we have now, via iGovTT, entered into an arrangement to purchase the hardware and part of this work. So that line Item will continue to appear there and it is only when we actually incur cost it will be reflected.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon Minister. Minister, would you be kind to provide us with the names of the persons appointed to that committee and the proposed remuneration that they would be receiving?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I just said they worked for free. They all from the public sector and so on. I just said they worked for free.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Can you provide us with a list of the names of the persons?

Hon. Rambharat: I will.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Line Item 071: Establishment of Land Adjudication Tribunal estimated for a million dollars, nothing was utilized there in that line Item. Can the Minister advise why?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, this is as a result of legislative work undertaken by the hon. Attorney General and this is part of the four pieces of legislation which were passed in June 2018, and different aspects of the work is being done including that work on the Land Management Authority. In the last fiscal we did

not reach to the point of having to appoint the tribunal because the preliminary work really involves a desktop exercise involving the survey plans and the aerial surveys which will be used as part of the adjudication process. And again, when the tribunal is appointed then you would see expenses being reflected under that line Item.

Madam Chairman: H: Research and Development. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 559: Zoonotic Disease Management Plan. I see 100,000 was budgeted in 2021, but none in 2022. Could you give me an idea of what this plan is in terms of the national management plan of zoonosis as well as why has anything not been budgeted given the fact that these viruses and diseases could cause such a devastating impact on our society?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, that is simply because the Ministry has the capacity to do this work, and the work that has been undertaken so far has been done by the zoo, by the Ministry, sorry. If it becomes necessary to—if in having to implement something it becomes necessary to access funding under this Development Programme, then the Ministry will vire funds from within the Development Programme. But so far the work that we have been able to do has really been done using our internal Ministry resources.

Dr. Seecheran: Okay. Thank you.

3.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, hon. Minister, line Item 544, I am happy to see that we have Marper Farm, and you Minister and the junior Minister know the value of Marper Farms and I hope that lots of attention would be there because it is a propagation

unit. I see 400,000 allocated there and I know with the new fiscal year, more and more resources will go towards this area to be one of the areas to feed the nation.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Hon. Minister, I am trying to do 536 and 548 at the same time. Can you indicate where these projects will be undertaken and whether there are any facilities within Caroni Central which will benefit from these programmes?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, I think I have said it previously that the interest—community based—aquaculture on the whole has been about Tilapia and there was significant interest in the past with communities and aquaculture. The Ministry itself has had and still has in Sugar Cane Feeds Centre a facility. There has been reduced interest in it and we have not been actively promoting community aquaculture because we continue to do the training, we have the training that is available. We have the extension support that is available. And if it is that your community, you find that there is interest in there, we would be very happy to consider it. So it all depends on the approaches but a lot of work has already been done on aquaculture and if there is an interest in your constituency, the Permanent Secretary I am sure would be happy to hear from you.

Did you point to 548?

Mr. Ram: 548 as well.

Hon. Rambharat: 548 is really the project at Chaguaramas that has been reinvigorated. I am sure you received our Grow Trinbago seed packages. Those are produced at the National Seed Bank in Chaguaramas. “Yuh shaking yuh head, Member. Yuh did not get the beautiful packages?”

Mr. Ram: No. Check back with your—

Hon. Rambharat: I am astonished. Well, those seeds, the packages, 50,000 of those which were delivered, distributed across the country to Members of Parliament.

Mr. Ram: We will still be happy to receive them at this point in time.

Hon. Rambharat: Yes, I would make sure you do. Sen. Singh will take responsibility. Anyway, the seed bank is that place where the Ministry produces seeds for sale to the national public at highly, highly subsidized rates. It is really some of the traditional seeds and also cassava. That project is one that we revived post-2015, it is doing well. And in the last fiscal, the main issue down there has been water and the project that you see there is in two parts. One is a tank farm that would supply the water needs of the facility that the contractor is going to be on site from Sunday and the project is expected to take 60 days and will give us access to about 20,000 litres of water on a daily basis. And the second part of that is to restore a well that has been out of service for a while and I believe in consultation with WASA that if we restore that, we will be able to permanently solve that water issue down there.

You may or may not have seen a request for expression of interest published by the Ministry for private partnership in the development of a modern nursery down on that site and that is recognizing that north-west Trinidad we believe is underserved in terms of nursery facilities and also it is a step towards having more private sector involvement in the development and provision of planting material to farmers across the country.

And the intention I want to tell you is that if we get more private persons involved, they would be able to focus on one aspect of the planting material including edibles and ornamentals and the Ministry will focus on doing contract orders for farmers so that we could focus on delivering to a farmer 5,000 plants of a specific

type while the private sector does the general public in terms of smaller amounts.

Madam Chairman: Couva North. Thank you. I. Production and Marketing. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 346: Wholesale Market Upgrade at Macoya. Minister, this line Item was estimated in 2021, there was an allocation for the 2021 Estimate, however, there was not any for the Revised Estimate. It appears that no work took place or I do not know if the work took place for free. But can you advise us if it is that what was projected to be done with this \$500,000 was completed and if this allocation for 2022 is for new works or outstanding?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, you would be happy to know that through the two wholesale markets, the one at Macoya and the one at Debe, a quarter billion dollars in produce passes through there on an annual basis. In the period 2016 to 2018, NAMDEVCO upgraded both wholesale markets. This particular one was upgraded to the tune of about \$8 million making it safer, accommodating more farmers and being able to engage in wholesale trade at a more significant level and dealing with some of the traffic issues.

What you see there, 500,000, was to complete, was to do some minor works which remain before we get into the further expansion of that facility in Macoya.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like the Minister with regard to line Item 347, if he could give us a breakdown as to how the Ministry plans to out-roll this line Item?

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you very much for that question, Member. Well, you see Hill Rice there. This is a new line Item and I see my colleague, the Minister of

Planning and Development there and I want to tell you that she is almost entirely responsible for that line Item and it deals with a recognition that comes out of the work that we have been doing and COVID in particular that some of these subsectors require a little more support than we have traditionally given.

So hill rice, for example, your farmers are there. They have land issues as you know. They have processing issues, packaging issues, market issues and we have made a lot of headway in terms of dealing with some of them and they would benefit from a part of this because even as we launched the co-operatives project, the question is where they will continue to get a product, where they will continue to get the packaging. You know we have entered into an arrangement with the private sector to give them support and this funding, specifically on hill rice, part of this will go towards supporting those farmers down there.

Likewise with honey. Trinidad and Tobago has been the subject of a complaint to the CCJ about honey. We have a lot of threats to our market. We have an excellent product that our beekeepers provide and this is meant to give them additional support in meeting some of the challenges of the marketplace.

And forestry products as you know, we took the step of banning the export of teak except in some specific forms. It had to do with the fact that notwithstanding an investment made over more than 60 years in pine and teak in Trinidad and Tobago, for a significant part of that period, the teak was just being harvested at subsidized prices and being exported as logs and we were not—our saw millers, including yours in your community, were not benefiting from that. So we have done a few things. One is to ban the export of teak in that form. Two, is in making the annual allocation of fields a more transparent process. Three, in enforcing the law and the regulations on the saw millers so those are poor performers will exit the industry and those who can be brought up to scratch would be brought up to scratch so that

funding is also to give support on that aspect of diversification in relation to those types of industries.

And again, this is open to suggestions from Members of Parliament for those who believe that a particular aspect of what happens in their community requires support.

Ms. Benjamin: Okay, Minister. I will write to such.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, thank you for your explanation as to the status of agricultural products under Head 347 and the crisis that we are in now that you are now seeking to address.

However, what we would like to get from the Minister is a listed breakdown, in writing preferably, of the expenditure items projected for each of these niche products as described. We would like to know how much money is to be assigned, to whom it is going to be assigned, which company, which contractor, which businessman, which farmer. That is the information we would like to get, Minister.

Hon. Rambharat: Thank you very much.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I get a commitment that you will provide same?

Hon. Rambharat: Of course.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North. Okay. J. Other Services. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 001: Provision of Agricultural Access to Targeted Commodities and Strategic Crops, estimated at 5.5 million but only 747,000 was utilized for 2021. Can the Minister kindly advise what is the status with respect to this project?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, that is what I alluded to earlier. I said that our

Road Repair Programme is funded in two different places and now the third one being out of the stimulus. The Ministry has since in 2015, we have consistently done road repairs. I could say that in the last five years, we have repaired 105.78 kilometres of road at a cost of \$27 million.

I heard a murmur about south, central, north, that sort of thing. Well, I do not think you would be surprised to know that of the 105.78 kilometres, 97 per cent has been in south and central Trinidad through no strange science and a few have been in north-east and one or two along the East-West Corridor. And part of it has to do with the allocation that was available and this road programme out of the stimulus funds really tackled some of the roads that could not, because of the extreme condition like those in north-east Trinidad like Matelot and Grande Riviere, those with damaged bridges and so on, and coming all along the East-West Corridor, those in Paramin which were repaired by my predecessor, the now Prime Minister, and they do require repairs now. And this part here, as I said, we were not because we could not have site visits, we could not engage contractors and so on.

But we have done the work to be able to execute this in the dry season as early as January next year and this in addition to what the Minister of Finance announced. And we believe that we will have a very robust road repair programme in this fiscal year.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Minister, I was hoping to hear you say that because I know the Minister in his budget presentation, he highlighted some of the areas in the stimulus package. However, no mention was made of most of the agricultural access roads in the constituency of Couva North and mainly in central Trinidad. And I expect when you give your budget contribution in the other place, you might elaborate a little more and highlight some of the other areas that the hon.

Minister of Finance did not make mention of.

However, Minister, I am just making a humble plea on behalf of the farmers of Couva North, especially in that Felicity area where there is a significant amount of agricultural access roads to be refurbished and repaired, I will kindly appreciate if you can conduct a site visit and the hon. Senator next to you can advise you also on these roads because he is very familiar with the area. The road is in a very dilapidated condition and we will kindly like your assistance in getting it repaired.

Hon. Rambharat: Member, let me say to you that it is not for lack of familiarity. I once lived in the Couva North constituency. And as a Minister, I have been there many, many times. I know the roads, but let me tell you the criteria for selecting a road is first and foremost—and this is the Ministry's work, not the Minister's work. The Ministry has county officers and county offices. There is one in your constituency in Chase Village. And each county officer would put forward a programme and it is judged based on the impact—the number of farmers to be impacted. So if you have a million dollars to spend and 50 farmers are going to be impacted here and 10 in another place, we go with 50.

And recognizing that that—simply because of the availability of funding. And while we have done that for several years and we have done 105.78 for that period, including some in Couva North, we recognize that some equally important roads need our attention and that is being funded out of the stimulus. And if there is any farmer or any community, you have to engage the county officers and the extension officers, and make the representation so it gets into the system and it gets the traction.

Remember also that road repairs are not just Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, it is the corporations; it is the Ministry of Works and Transport; it is—there are different ways in which we get it done. But understand that not every inch

of road—not that the farmers are not in need and not that the farmers or a particular part of the country is less than, it is just that in managing the funding, we do in fact have a criteria. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Planning and Development.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to add a little to what the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has said. In the Development Programme, we have also put money into the PURE fund, which is under the Ministry of Works and Transport, in terms of road repair and it will also take into consideration agricultural access roads. So just to indicate that it is not that we are being neglectful in any way, but we are trying to make sure that the roads of Trinidad and Tobago, including minor roads, major roads and the agricultural access roads are all taken care of. And PURE has a very effective mechanism for executing. So we have done that in terms of some of the agricultural access roads. So have no fear.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, line Item 001, under K, I am just wondering if the flood control programme—

Madam Chairman: Where are you at, K?

Dr. Ragbir: Are we in K?

Madam Chairman: No.

Dr. Ragbir: No. All right. I apologize.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am sticking with line Item 001. Minister, both yourself and your colleague just indicated that there are several Heads under which agricultural access roads are taken care of. Is that correct, Minister?

Hon. Rambharat: I did not say agricultural access roads. I said several—I did not use the word Heads. I said that roads fall under corporations, the Ministry of Works and Transport, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. So that, sometimes in making—and I will use Caltoo Trace bridge in Member Rai's constituency—sometimes it is not clear. Because some of these roads like Caltoo Trace—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. Minister, I think once you have corrected what the Member has put, let the Member put the question he would like on the line Item. We have had a very exhaustive conversation. I must say, Minister, and I mean this with the greatest respect, you are one of those guests that really takes advantage of their host. Yes, Member.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, based on your comment just now, can you provide—*[Interruption]* Minister, if I may, can you provide a list of the agricultural access roads that will be addressed in the coming fiscal year, so that we may know? Because although you indicated that there are several roads that will come via the stimulus package, we have no way of knowing what those programmes and what those activities and which roads are supposed to be repaired.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Member for Oropouche West, I will ask you to use another opportunity to get that information because what we were on is Item 001. I allowed the Minister an opportunity to develop things so that Members will get some sort of background, but really and truly, I think we are going way off our exercise this afternoon. It is nice for us to have all these nice educational discussions but really not within our remit. And while I enjoy the Minister's—the presence of both Ministers, we have other Ministers we would also love to engage.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, if I may just stick purely then to script. You had a 2021

Estimate of 5.5 million with which you proposed to do certain access roads, but you only spent 747 based on your Revised Estimates. Can the Minister advise which roads were proposed in 2021 and which were not completed, based on the fact that you now have close to a \$4 million shortfall in expenditure under this line Item 001?

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

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you very much. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under this same line Item 001, I would like to invite you to come and see the agricultural access road off Chin Chin Road in Caroni East, which is Laloo Trace. And I would like you to see the bridge that has fallen into the watercourse. Is there any way your Ministry can assist us, because the farmers that supply the NAMDEVCO programme—there are 50 farmers in this area—they have very little recourse in terms of getting their produce in and out as this bridge has fallen into the watercourse, and we need some help in repairing this bridge?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So I hear you, Member for Caroni East, and I think the Minister was very exhaustive in dealing with the issue that there are lots of roads, lots of access that need addressing but there is a certain formula by which they go. So I am sure you can use some other mechanism to advance the particular interest with the bridge. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Under Item J., 001: Provision of Agricultural Access, first of all, I want to say to the Minister that this amount allocated, although you have spoken so well of your intention for agricultural access roads—

Madam Chairman: One minute, are we under 001?

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Chairman: I have not seen any allocation under 2022.

Ms. Ameen: Under? Yes, so—sorry. You have zero allocation but last year you had—

Madam Chairman: But we have we treated—

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member, we have treated with that. All right? And we are really looking at Estimates for 2022. We have had over 10 minutes treating with the variants, et cetera, et cetera. Could you please carry us to another place?

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair, I just want to bring to the attention of the Minister, the St. Augustine constituency, Norris Deonarine Wholesale Market at Macoya is one of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries' major facilities.

Madam Chairman: Would that be under—which Item?

Ms. Ameen: And the road there—

Madam Chairman: Give me an Item.

Ms. Ameen: Yes. And the road there is also an agricultural road—

Madam Chairman: All right. Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Ameen:—and I just want to bring it to the attention of the Minister. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: I would say to you what I have said to Caroni East, what the Minister has said to Couva North, what I have said to Oropouche West. All right? There are other mechanisms that are available to you all, with respect to treating with your specific road in your specific constituencies. Okay? Can we go on? K. Drainage and Irrigation. I believe that is where Cumuto/Manzanilla was.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you again, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, the line Item 001, just a simple question: Does the flood control programme—does Nariva Swamp fall under this line Item, or 003?

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, under both; 001 is used in collaboration with the Ministry of Works and Transport for water management across the country and those are based on projects that the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Drainage Division worked with us on, and 003 is specific to Plum Mitan.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, under line Item 005: Development of Water Management Infrastructure for Caroni/Bejucal area, I see that the 2021 Estimate was a million, the Revised Estimate was zero and the 2022 Estimate is 975,000. Firstly, why was any of the allocation not spent? I probably think you may say COVID-19 restrictions but I would let you give your answer. As well as, what is the scope of works for fiscal '22 that is planned in this area?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, that is not, strictly speaking, a COVID issue. As I said, in relation to 001, 005 is a line Item that is executed with the Ministry of Works and Transport, Drainage Division and that line Item is meant to deal with the infrastructure, particularly for the rice farmers but it is an infrastructure used by everybody. It means that in the last fiscal, there was no work that was required of us. As you know, the Ministry of Works and Transport had a very aggressive drainage and water management programme. They would have taken up work that we may have done in collaboration with them but the provision is still made for this fiscal in the event that we have to do anything on that particular part of the country.

Dr. Seecheran: So what you are saying is that line Item is specifically just for the rice farmers and their areas in—

Hon. Rambharat: I did not say that at all. It is the Caroni/Bejucal area, I said that is where you have your rice farmers but the water is used by farmers. Even in the rice land now, we have corn and sweet potato, and so on taking place. It is meant

for that particular geographic area.

Dr. Seecheran: And as far as you are concerned, it is sufficient right now?

Hon. Rambharat: Well, it is based on—as I said, we work with the Ministry of Works and Transport. They are the ones with statutory responsibility for the watercourses and they are the ones we would work with. And if there is need for us to incur an expenditure, for example, this expenditure may be incurred in a pump or in doing some piece of infrastructure work, then we would do that. But in the last fiscal and the one before, the Ministry of Works and Transport had their very aggressive drainage programme, and last fiscal we did not have to extend anything.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you very much.

4.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the line Minister's attention to 001: Water Management and Flood Control Programme. Minister, this was allocated in 2021, 3 million but only 1.3 was utilized. And taking into consideration the quantity of flooding that has taken place especially within the constituency of Couva North which is more or less on the western coast where most of the watercourse from central Trinidad come down to Couva North, when it is exiting into the ocean. There is a significant amount of watercourse that was traditionally maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries previously, that is not being currently maintained at this point in time. Can the Minister advise why is it this \$3 million was not utilized for the proper maintenance of these watercourses?

Hon. Rambharat: Member, as I said when I dealt with 001. The responsibility, as you may or may not know for watercourses, lies under law with the Ministry of Works and Transport. They are the ones who maintain watercourses. If there was a

time in Couva North that drainage and those large drains were maintained it was because of Caroni (1975) Limited maintaining—

Mr. Ratiram: That is correct.

Hon. Rambharat:—looking after its own interest, and maintaining the infrastructure for which the State at the time may have made allocations. What we are required to do is when something has to be done in relation to a farming facility that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is responsible for, we do that. So it might be pumps, like in Plum Mitan where we are responsible for pumps. In Caroni/Bejucal where we assist the farmers with our mobile pump when we are in the dry season. Those things—this allocation, that line Item is meant to support things that we may be required to do on the advice of the Ministry of Works and Transport in areas for which we are responsible. And we are not responsible for the exit of water into the sea, the Gulf which is the western boundary of your constituency, and many other things that you have spoken about.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Same line Item: 001. Can the Minister indicate—which I can speak from Oropouche West, I have substantial numbers of farmers especially in places like Rahamut Trace, who have not benefited from any of this money in this allocation, \$1.4 million spent in 2021. Can the Minister advise if his projection for 2022 involves any possible expenditure on flood control programme? This particular Head is Water Management and Flood Control Programme. I want to know if his allocation for 2022 envisages the expenditure of any money that would help the farmers of Oropouche West treat with, and address the problem of flood control?

Madam Chairman: Ministers, I am not going to allow you to take advantage.

Hon. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I am afraid of you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. No. I am not sure we have understood what the Minister has said about 001 and 003, which he has said repeatedly from the inception when the question was first asked by the Member of Cumuto/Manzanilla. Okay. As I have said before to Members, with respect to their concerns for their constituency, it may be tangential to these things but there are other avenues where available to, not in this exercise, but other avenues available to you where you can bring focus on a particular issue in your constituency, all right. So I am not going to allow that question. I hope that helps guide us in going forward. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 003. I am just asking the status of the Plum Mitan project and what is expected in the next fiscal year?

Hon. Rambharat: So Members, as Minister of Finance indicated in the budget statement, for this 003 is in addition to what we committed to do in the budget out of the stimulus. So as you know, we have committed to replace the pumps. The pumps are, one is in the country and the PS is consulting with the Ministry of Works and Transport to determine a few things. One, was remote operation, and we have gotten the advice that remote operation is not feasible. And the other one was how the pumps are going to be. Are they going to be diesel driven or driven by electricity? And you know some of the challenges with supplying it continuously with diesel and the loss of the diesel. We have now sought advice from Ministry of Works and Transport on that also.

But for that, in addition to the stimulus funding, it will deal with the issue of the pumps. And we still have—the Ministry of Works and Transport as you know had a very aggressive programme in clearing the channels. That has been done and there might still be some road repair programme in Plum Mitan. So that is what

003 and a portion of the stimulus is for.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you. I think the people of Plum Mitan will be very happy.

Madam Chairman: K: Land Acquisition. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Item 005: Multi-Sectorial and Other Services. Hon. Members, item 005 spans three pages. I therefore will also announce the project groups. L: Agricultural Youth Apprenticeship Programme. A: Administrative Services. F: Public Buildings. K: Lands and Survey.

We now go to Infrastructure Development Fund. We are at page 247. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Item 004: Social Infrastructure.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 77 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you to the Minister. Thank you to the Minister in the Ministry. Thank you to the PS, and to all the technocrats.

Head 42, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, \$2,332,469,000.

Madam Chairman: Members, just so that we can make use of the time, we will be starting at page 241 on the *Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, then we go on the *Draft Estimates for the Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and we start there at page 224, and then the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, we will start at page 94.

Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, \$2,332,469,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. As always, it is my privilege to report to this Standing Finance Committee and to the people of the Republic of

Trinidad and Tobago, on the progress made by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. We at the Ministry, through the 14 municipal corporations and our two state agencies, remain dedicated to delivering good governance and service excellence by putting people first. Despite the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic situation impacting not only our Government, but across the world, we continue to do our very best with the resources available. Our aim is to ensure all citizens, regardless of the municipality in which they reside, are provided with much needed services of the corporations and state agencies under our remit.

As the first servant at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, I am immensely proud of the unreserved efforts made on a daily basis by our local government practitioners, all Mayors, all Chairmen, all Deputy Mayors, all Vice-Chairmen, Aldermen and Councillors, to represent and protect the everyday interest and needs of their burgesses, especially during this global pandemic. I want to especially thank the Permanent Secretary, Deputy Permanent Secretary, the Chief Executive Officers, and all employees across the local government fraternity for their continued dedication and commitment to the people of our beloved country.

Madam Chair, we at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and by extension the 14 corporations and two state agencies, are very pleased with the proposal for allocation in the amount of 1,656,000,000 that will allow us to continue delivering the essential goods and services to the citizens. Thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 42 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,332,469,000 for Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, 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*.

4.15 p.m.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much. Minister, under 08: Vacant Posts, that ends with Salaries and COLA, (without incumbents). I see that your Ministry intends to spend \$3 million for 2022. Could you indicate to this meeting how many vacant posts will be filled with this allocation?

Hon. Hosein: We have—we filled 595 and vacant is 1,334.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I just want to make the point that the filling of the vacant posts is a matter for the Commissions. Be aware of that. It is not a Government decision.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah, but—

Mr. Imbert: So even though—what is that? I did not interrupt you, so even though—

Mr. Indarsingh: You go ahead, you go ahead.

Mr. Imbert: I would like to. So, even though there is a provision, the actual expenditure will depend on the number of vacancies that are filled by the relevant authorities, which is not the Government, and if there is need to put more funding, more funding will be put. These things are very difficult to estimate, because you have no idea, the speed and the intensity at which the various Commissions will do their work.

Mr. Indarsingh: I just am asking the Minister, Minister of Finance, has his Ministry gone against the Cabinet decision as it relates to the freeze of vacant hiring in that—in filling vacancies.

Mr. Imbert: That is not a matter for the Minister. It is the Ministry of Finance that determines the expenditure under Vacant Posts, and we have put allocations, as I said before, that will cater for up to 50 per cent of the vacancies to be filled, if they are filled. And that is a matter under the discretion of the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Indarsingh: So, the Ministry of Finance has ended the moratorium on the hiring of public officers that was announced in the 2021 Budget.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, through you, I answered this question already, you know. You are trying to twist my words. I said, we have made an allocation and I said this before, and I will say it again, for up to 50 per cent of the vacant posts, which we will monitor and take appropriate action as the circumstances dictate.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head, 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration.

Ms. Ameen: No, Madam Chair, I had my hand up. I wanted to ask one under 001. So, if you would permit me? Item 14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. Can the Minister provide in writing the list of the Cabinet committees currently functioning, its members, and the remuneration to those persons?

Hon. Hosein: I just want to inform that we do not have any at this moment.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister 03: Uniforms. Could you inform or advise—

Madam Chairman: Just a minute, sorry, sorry, I went back to 01 because I did not see the Member for St. Augustine. Are we finished with 01? And therefore, I will call the Head again and I will take you, just so that we all on the same page. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, you have an increase under 03: Uniforms to spend \$7.8 million approximately. Could you inform this meeting how this sum will be expended under the sub Item?

Hon. Hosein: Okay. We are preparing for the new intake of the Municipal Police Officers and this money will be spent there.

Mr. Indarsingh: And that will be expended on how many officers?

Hon. Hosein: One officer, the amount will be 20,000.

Mr. Indarsingh: So Minister, you are telling me one—

Hon. Hosein: We intend to— *[Interruption]*—do 290.

Mr. Indarsingh: 290 officers? Municipal Police Officers?

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, two questions really but just to follow up on what Couva South asked earlier. Can you indicate what is the current complement of municipal officers as it stands?

Hon. Hosein: 705.

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Hon. Hosein: Presently.

Mr. Padarath: And you expect to intake how many further?

Hon. Hosein: 90, 9-0 by December and 237 by next year September.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. Minister, I know you may not have the information with you right now but if you would give the undertaking to give us the breakdown by regional corporations, I will be grateful, by the end of this year. The other question, Madam, if I can continue?

Madam Chairman: Yes, you may.

Mr. Padarath: Line Item 04: Electricity. The Minister of Finance announced in his budget that there will be a harmonization across Ministries with an effort to conserve electricity at Ministries but there is an increase of 200,000. Does this reflect arrears from the past?

Hon. Hosein: So we have outstanding bills to be paid.

Mr. Padarath: So it is arrears?

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Item 08: Rent and Lease of Office Accommodation and Storage. Under this Item there is an increase of \$93,350. I want to ask the Minister, what accounts for this increase? Have you rented additional properties?

Hon. Hosein: At the Ministry, we have a lot of old equipment and photocopying machines, et cetera, and we intend to use it for this purpose.

Ms. Ameen: This is—sorry, Rent or Lease of Office Accommodation and Storage, not the equipment, 08. If not at this moment, can the Minister provide in writing what accounts for the expenditure here? Perhaps give the list of rented properties, the date that they were rented, and the value of the lease or rent—

Hon. Hosein: Was two buildings.

Ms. Ameen:—and the landlord please.

Hon. Hosein: It is two buildings, the trade center and the decentralization building.

Ms. Ameen: All right. But you will be able to provide that?

Hon. Hosein: Certainly.

Ms. Ameen: The date of, the value, the name of the landlord?

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair, line Item 05: Telephones. I note that the 2021 you had an Estimate of 200,000. But your Revised Estimate for 2021 is 800,000, which is a 300 per cent increase. Can the Minister advise what accounted for that substantial increase in the allocation for telephones?

Hon. Hosein: We have a lot of outstanding bills that have to be paid off.

Mr. Tancoo: Just as a follow-up. Minister, you now have an allocation of 500,000, would that clear—that 800,000—would it clear all existing arrears which means that your 500,000 proposed for 2022 would be for pure day-to-day yearly expenditure as opposed to arrears? My question, just to abbreviate, is whether or not having spent 800,000 in 2021, you have now cleared off the arrears so you no longer have any areas moving forward.

Hon. Hosein: This will be done from April to the present day.

Mr. Tancoo: I am not sure I understand. What would be done from April to present?

Hon. Hosein: The outstanding bills that we have is from April to the present day.

Mr. Tancoo: So Minister, would this figure clear off all outstanding arrears for 2021 and previously, so as of 2022, we have no arrears?

Hon. Hosein: What I would like to suggest; if we—if it cannot be paid off, we will wait to the mid-year review to apply for more funding.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, do you know at all if you are entering 2022 with current arrears, and if you do, can you advise what the value of the arrears is going

forward in 2022 as of today? In the interest of time, Minister, if I can ask that you can provide that response in writing.

Hon. Hosein: Sure.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, 16: Contract Employment. Minister, you are going to extend an increase of \$16.6 million on Contract Employment. Can you inform this meeting how many officers during or contract officers you intend to recruit via this increase allocation?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, while the Minister is getting his notes, I just want to point out that my information tells me this is for the filling of several critical positions within the Ministry and municipal corporations, such as: Chief Disaster Management Coordinator; Public Health Officers; Corporate Secretaries; Financial Officers; Regional Planning Personnel; Litter Prevention Wardens; Facilities Managers; Business Operation Assistants; Employee Assistance Officers; and so on. It is to fill out vacant positions within the corporations.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much. Through the Minister of Finance now it seems that I will have to pose this question. Could we be provided, for this meeting, in writing a breakdown of the respective classification because the Minister of Finance has provided and in terms of where the different classification in terms of how many will be deployed, whether it is at head office, whether it is respective departments with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and regional corporations.

Mr. Imbert: Sure, I will liaise with the Minister and that information will be provided.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Mr. Imbert: Either by myself or through the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Indarsingh: Could we clarify for the benefit of this meeting whether we will be posing questions to the Minister of Finance or is it the Minister of Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government?

Madam Chairman: Well, I think it is customary that you pose to the line Minister—

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—but the Minister of Finance, his own Ministry has always assisted this Committee.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, but I—

Madam Chairman: It happened even in the first Committee meeting.

Mr. Indarsingh: I see he is now undertaking to provide—

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

4.30 p.m.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, I want to clarify, through you, to the hon. Minister, line Item 04: Electricity. This outstanding—

Madam Chairman: Excuse me, Member—

Mr. Padarath: Sorry?

Madam Chairman: What number you said? What Item?

Mr. Padarath: 04: Electricity. The Minister indicated that this has to do with arrears. Could the Minister indicate that this increase will clear the arrears owed to T&TEC?

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Padarath: It will clear out the outstanding amount?

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Padarath: And, Madam, line Item 17: Training. The Minister has an increase of 7.145 million. Can the hon. Minister give us an idea whether or not this has to do with the digital thrust or what this allocation will be utilized for, seeing it is a major increase?

Hon. Hosein: This is for primary training for the municipal police.

Mr. Padarath: For the municipal police?

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 22: Short-term Employment. There is an increase of double the amount this year compared to your revised of last year in terms of you are being allocated twice the amount you utilized in the last year. Can you indicate what type of employment will be done under this Vote and, perhaps, you could give us the category and the number of persons you intend to recruit?

Hon. Hosein: Okay. At this time, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is only filling critical positions, and as we move closer to local government reform, the aim is to ensure that vacancies in the permanent establishment are filled and that the necessary non-permanent jobs are brought onto the permanent establishment. Currently, there is only one person on contract employment at the Ministry. We intend to fill established positions first, then fixed-term contracts and short-term if we cannot find persons with the specialized skills required.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, to the Minister, Item 43: Security Services. I noticed that nothing was allocated for 2022. Can the Minister explain?

Hon. Hosein: Okay. I would like to inform you that no funding requested, it is

true, because we have the municipal police from the Port of Spain City Corporation.

Ms. Benjamin: I am so guided, Minister.

Hon. Hosein: You are welcome

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to this \$7.1 million allocation for Training, could you inform this meeting, is your Ministry engaging service providers and so on in relation to this sum or consultancy services as you indicated in relation to training for the municipal officers?

Hon. Hosein: Yeah. As I said before, this would be used for municipal police training for batch 1 of 2021 which comprises of 92 trainees. Additionally, it will be used for training of staff at head office, and we have an average of, as I said before, 20,000 officers. It is spent on the training. Any additional information, I could provide it for you in writing.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah. Could you provide—if you are outsourcing these services, could you provide the meeting with the consultancy or external service providers and provide a breakdown of the cost that would be incurred for the provision of these external providers?

Hon. Hosein: Certainly.

Mr. Indarsingh: And with respect to 58: Medical Expenses, I see that your Ministry spent \$3,000 in 2020, \$3,000 in 2021, and now you have sought from the Minister of Finance an increased allocation of \$1.5 million. Could you provide a breakdown in relation to medical expenses?

Hon. Hosein: This is to pay medical expenses for senior members of staff and for medical for the newly appointed municipal police. The first batch of 2021 was 92 recruits and the second batch of 2021 is expected to be 150 recruits.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, if we turn our attention to 23: Fees, there is an increased allocation of 25,000 bringing it to the Estimate being 50,000 for this final year. Minister, as you are aware, I have been raising the issue for the past three or four years of the sick building that the Princes Town Regional Corporation is subjected to in terms of having to operate out of. Every year, as part of the Standing Finance Committee it is something that we discuss. Under this line Item 23: Fees, would this have anything to do with consultants or organizations with respect to inspection of these buildings and so on in terms of OSHA? Because Minister, you have been speaking a lot about these municipal police, and I am looking 23 and I am looking at line Item 17 and you justified 17: Training, by saying it is for municipal police, but we are hiring all these municipal police but we have nowhere to put them. That is, at least, my challenge in Princes Town and that is something, as I have said, I have been raising for the past three or four years. So, I am hoping under one of 17 or 23 if you could shed some light on that.

Hon. Hosein: Okay. With reference to 23: Fees, this is used for legal fees, if any, and software licences and technical support, and also it would be used in the area of the GIS software, which would be used for the Regional Planning Unit and Disaster Management, and 23 also is for head office.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to return to line Item 58: Medical Expenses. Minister, you indicated that there was this substantial increase from 3,000, the Revised Estimate 2021, to 1.5 million proposed for 2022, because of the employment of additional municipal police, but you already have municipal police catered for. You have municipal police in existence now. Is it that they were not considered and now we are providing medical support to all of them, because they were not catered for before? Is this figure now for all but none was provided before?

Hon. Hosein: I just want to explain. We are on a continued drive to hire more municipal police and that is where it comes in. Our target is 100 municipal police in each corporation except Port of Spain, which will be 200 municipal police and the drive and the process is ongoing.

Mr. Tancoo: Agreed, Minister. But you already have in-house, at this point, municipal police who should have been catered for medical expenses. Is that not so?

Hon. Hosein: But this is for the new intake of police.

Mr. Tancoo: So where would I be able to find the medical expenses for the current municipal police that currently exist?

Hon. Hosein: In the corporations.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. There is a large increase of 434,000 at a time when several other parts of the Ministry have been severely cut. Can the hon. Minister indicate what sort of programme do you envisage that would warrant a \$434,000 increase in the area of Promotions, Publicity and Printing?

Hon. Hosein: Well, the explanation I have is that this is being used for advertising vacancies in the Ministry and also it would be used for the local government reform implementation.

Mr. Padarath: And do you have a timeline for this in light of the answer you have provided under 62, a timeline for this local government reform?

Hon. Hosein: Within the next fiscal year.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, you are aware that this is a promise of the PNM for the past two decades.

Hon. Hosein: Well, as you know Member, that we just came out of the joint select committee and it was laid in the Parliament and—

Mr. Padarath: So you live in hope.

Hon. Hosein: I have the hope.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. [*Interruption*] We did not promise local government reform. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Ameen: The question has been asked and answered. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, 02: Office Equipment. In 2021 you spent \$10,000 on Office Equipment. This year you have requested \$50,000. Can you indicate what plans you have for this additional money?

Hon. Hosein: Member, this is to purchase copiers, fax machines, scanners, et cetera, office equipment.

Ms. Ameen: In 2021, you had an allocation of 50,000 again, however, you only utilized 10,000 out of it. Was there a challenge with procuring the equipment? What was the challenge to utilize the money?

Hon. Hosein: Because of the COVID period, a lot of the suppliers were closed at certain periods and so on and we could not get the parts imported into the country.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Chair, I just want it to be noted there is a tremendous decrease of 54 million, 54.6 million, to Regional Bodies that includes the Current Transfers and Subsidies to regional corporations and I want to express concern, but ask the Minister if he as Minister would have requested less funds from the Ministry of Finance under this Item.

Madam Chairman: Remember, the exercise is a line-by-line Item rather than this global category, so.

Ms. Ameen: Well, we will go into each regional corporation. So, perhaps, the Minister could better explain there.

Madam Chairman: These are not regional corporations, these are Regional Bodies. These are not regional corporations, these are Regional Bodies. That is where I am. Current Transfers and Subsidies, Regional Bodies. Okay? So can we go on? Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 007: Households. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, line Item 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers. Mr. Minister, this is an Item that, more or less, the Ministry will have some idea in advance in terms of when these persons' contracts are going to come to an end and when the gratuity is to be paid. I am seeing a difference in the Estimate and the Revised Estimate of approximately \$2.3 million. Can you kindly explain this difference?

Hon. Hosein: Payment of Gratuities to Contract Officers, payments have been made given the additional funding received in the mid-year review for the last fiscal year. Currently, there are only three persons awaiting payment at this time. The total contract workers is 155. Three persons whose documents have been processed are awaiting payment in the amount of \$167,664.31. If insufficient, we will revisit at the mid-term.

4.45 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, could I just come in here? If the Member looks closely, one will see that the original 2021 Estimate was 3,046,640. The 2020 Estimate is very close to that at 3,042,500. As the Minister has pointed out, supplementary funding was given to that Ministry to deal with gratuities that were

due and payable in fiscal 2021. There is no anticipation that that magnitude or that level of payment of gratuities would occur in 2022 and, therefore, it is an error to assume that the decrease will result in any disadvantage to anyone. In fact, based on what the Minister has just said, there may be a surplus of funds in this Sub-Item.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Minister of Finance, for that additional explanation. Minister, however, what I ask is that this is something that can be calculated prior to the end of the contract and what we are seeing here is additional spending from what was estimated in 2021 of \$3.046 million increasing to \$5.3 million. So is it a case that it was underbudgeted last year, taking into consideration that the Ministry will have, in advance, the persons whose gratuity will be required to pay to? And in 2022, even though it is similar to what the Estimate was for 2021, is there going to be any additional funding that this line Item will require in the mid-year review?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. I would just like to come in to explain the concept of gratuity in the hope that this line of questioning will cease. A gratuity is due at the end of a contract period. Contracts are sequenced. They overlap. They do not all end at the same time and, therefore, the payment of a gratuity will be different in every single year, therefore you cannot look at the 2021 expenditure and draw the conclusions that you are drawing.

Mr. Ratiram: That is understood.

Mr. Imbert: The fact is that the Ministry has been adequately provisioned in 2022 for gratuities and it was adequately provisioned after the supplementary appropriation last year in 2021.

Mr. Ratiram: That is understood, Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Not by you.

Mr. Ratiram: What you are saying there is understood but that does not address the question being asked.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I think I have made the point that the provision was adequate in both '21 and '22. I do not think there is any point in belabouring a dead horse.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: My question will be on 009.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: So then, Minister, based on your explanation that you gave to Couva North with respect to the Ministry will know exactly whose contract is going to end and exactly how much gratuity that they are owed, can you then tell us how many persons you anticipate this allocation of \$3 million to pay for fiscal for 2022 for gratuities?

Hon. Hosein: Member, I could provide this in writing for you.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. Thank you. Can you also provide how many persons were paid for fiscal 2021 also?

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Chairman, on the last occasion we were here, I had asked the Minister to provide in writing the list of contractors or CEPEP workers—

Madam Chairman: You are under 04?

Ms. Ameen: Yes, 04.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. Yes, please.

Ms. Ameen: CEPEP. Yes. On the last occasion, I had asked the Minister to present in writing the list of contractors and the number of teams by constituency. I also made that request in the mid-year review and I have not received it. I just want to put that on record. And I want to express concern here where there is a \$67.4 million decrease in the allocation to the CEPEP. And I want to ask, Minister, does the Government have intention of cutting the CEPEP programme in any way? Will workers be affected? Are you going to terminate workers? What accounts for this \$67.4 million decrease?

Hon. Hosein: I want to assure you, hon. Member, that we did provide the information that you requested last financial year. And concerning the shortfall, there would be no cutting of workers and when the mid-year review comes up, we would be requesting additional funding. Because as we all know, CEPEP was doing a fantastic job in this country in every single constituency—in every region, I should say; every region.

Ms. Ameen: Well, Minister, I want to tell you, in some more than others. And I still would like if you could provide me with the list of contractors or teams—however you want to call it—in writing by constituency. St. Augustine constituency is tremendously underserviced and I know that when I write you for specific complaints, you do respond. However, in general, the area is tremendously undermaintained and underserviced. And I sit amongst neighbouring constituencies, represented by people from other political parties, who have nice lawns and nicely cut parks so I am a bit concerned that there may be some political discrimination.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Ameen: Chair, I did not get if the Minister did agree to provide the

information in writing.

Hon. Hosein: I will provide the information in writing but by the environmental work areas.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. On the last occasion, one year ago, when we asked about the listing, I noticed that Oropouche West had 12 CEPEP gangs. I now see, based on your figures here, that there was a \$42.8 million increase in fiscal 2021. Can the Minister advise if any of that increase was spent on increasing the number of gangs or the number of contractors in the constituency of Oropouche West? And if he cannot—if not specifically in Oropouche West, if he can provide a listing for fiscal 2021 of where this \$442,800,000 was spent, how many CEPEP contractors existed and how many gangs? This is for fiscal 2021. I expect that fiscal 2022, which is the commitment he just gave to my colleague, will be provided as well to show that there is no loss of employment in CEPEP as proposed.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: I just want to make a general point. Members opposite throughout this Standing Finance Committee have demanded information by constituency. We do not operate in that way. We operate by counties and regions and, therefore, I would ask Members opposite to stop asking for this kind of information by constituency because we do not collect data in that way.

Mr. Tancoo: Perhaps the Minister is unaware but one year ago, even confirmed by the Minister just now, documentation was provided to the Standing Finance Committee by constituency. I refer to that in my introduction to my question, therefore if the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government—I am

asking if you would be able to provide for the Standing Finance Committee a list of the contractors and a listing of their quantity of gangs by constituency for fiscal 2021 and proposed for fiscal 2022. I think the Minister of Finance is completely unaware of how this thing is being done.

Mr. Hosein: The salary grants “doh” exist then?

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair—

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, if I may, I have not gotten—I am not aware if the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government has responded and confirmed he will provide the information in writing.

Hon. Hosein: The information will be provided to you, hon. Member, but by the environmental work areas.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, I just want to find out if the Minister can also provide us for the salaries of the CEPEP executive members. The reason I am asking this is because in the last fiscal year, I remember CEPEP, the workers were not being paid but yet the executive management of CEPEP was being paid. So I want to know whether or not—what is their remuneration package at CEPEP?—the executive management that is.

Hon. Hosein: I am just being advised, Member, that all the workers were always being paid.

Mr. Hosein: But what about providing the salaries for the executive management?

Hon. Hosein: Yes, we will provide it to you.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, on this same line Item 04, on the 8th of June, 2021, it was reported in the *Newsday* newspaper that:

“The Prime Minister last Saturday said CEPEP workers would be paid two-thirds of their wages for the time they were at home during the covid19 pandemic.”

Hon. Minister, I am seeing for this line Item, in 2021, it was budgeted at 400million but yet in the Revised Estimate, it is 442 million; an additional \$42 million was spent in this programme while workers were at home and were being paid two-thirds of their salary. Can you kindly explain the reason for this additional 42 million and where did this money go?

Hon. Hosein: The original amount for this was 400million and because the workers were home, we were able to save—

[Confers with Permanent Secretary]

I am just getting the—

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Hon. Hosein: We were able to save about 50 million because of the pandemic and when the workers were home. And I could provide those figures in writing for you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. If that being the case of 50million was saved, then why is it that in the Revised Estimate we have an additional 42 million from what was budgeted? It means 92million here is unaccounted for now. Can you kindly explain what this 92 million in additional spending entails? Where did this money go?

Hon. Hosein: I am advised that this fiscal year—well, the workers started back out to work so they would be getting their full salary and that would be the full amount they would be getting—the full salary.

Mr. Ratiram: I am not talking about this fiscal year, Mr. Minister, I am speaking about fiscal term 2021.

Hon. Hosein: Fiscal year 2021, we requested 542 million and we got 404million, hence the reason we are saying we got some savings because the workers were home.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, we have no idea in this Committee how much the request is. We have no idea when the corporation requests funding how much they asked the Ministry. What we have is what is written in front of us. What is written in front of us is the allocation in 2021 of 400 million which is what the organization was expected to utilize to fulfil its responsibility and its mandate. What we are seeing here is an overspending of 42 million. It does not reflect any savings. And what I am humbly asking you is can you advise on that?

5.00 p.m.

Hon. Hosein: CEPEP requested. The request we made, we got 542 million. We received 400 million, and we went back in the mid-year review and we got 53million.

Mr. Ratiram: So then, Minister, is it that when we are looking at the 2022 Estimate we also have to ask you the question for all the line Items, how much you requested? Because what we are seeing here is an allocation for 2022 of 375 million, and this is what the plans are for the upcoming financial year. We have no idea if it is you requested two times that amount. Can you advise us how much you requested for this financial year?

Hon. Hosein: Five forty-seven requested.

Mr. Ratiram: 547, and you only received 375. So, hon. Minister, can you advise us how it is you plan to run this organization with this funding. It is significant underfunding, under-budgeting we are seeing here.

Hon. Hosein: No, we will utilize what we have and we will go back at the mid-year review to request more funding.

Mr. Ratiram: So then there is under-budgeting happening here in front of us.

Hon. Hosein: What we requested, that is what we got, and we have to work with it until we get the next set in the mid-year review.

Mr. Ratiram: With all due respect, hon. Minister, you did not work with what you got in the last financial term. You went beyond your budgeted allocation.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North, I would ask you to allow the Member for Princes Town to join the conversation. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, under line Item 04, I know the Member for Barataria/San Juan has asked for a breakdown of the salaries for the executive of—the remuneration package, and your response to that we look forward to it. But something you said earlier was that employees received two-thirds of their salaries during the COVID pandemic. Was a similar approach adopted for the executive, where they only received two-thirds of their salary remuneration?

Hon. Hosein: No.

Mr. Padarath: And, Minister, on the same line Item, can you indicate with respect to the cut of the 67,000,400, over the next few months until the mid-year review comes around, and you would be able to access additional funding for CEPEP, what areas of CEPEP would be affected by this cut, until you get that money?

Hon. Hosein: I am advised none.

Mr. Padarath: None?

Madam Chairman: 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

[Mr. S. Hosein raises hand]

This is under Transfers to State Enterprises?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: So, Member for Barataria/San Juan, and then we will take Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Hosein: 03—the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago, line Item 03. Minister, can you indicate why there are no allocations for this particular company for fiscal 2022, and no money spent in 2021?

Madam Chairman: Well, Member, I am not going to allow this. There was no allocation in fiscal 2021, not to say that there was an allocation and there was no spend. There was no allocation in 2021. That issue would have been dealt with in 2021.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, what I am saying is that there were some Items we saw in the budget where there were no allocations—

Madam Chairman: Well, we are not talking about some Items. We are talking about 03.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, Ma'am, and the thing is that there were Items I saw before where there were no allocations in 2021, and the revised moneys were spent.

Madam Chairman: And this is precisely the point I am making, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, so then can I ask—

Madam Chairman: There are no allocations/estimates 2021—unless I am looking at something different.

Mr. Hosein: No, you are looking at what I am looking at.

Madam Chairman: If I am looking at the right thing, I have already determined. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, can I ask—

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Line Item 09: The National Re-afforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme. [*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: I am having great difficulty hearing the Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 09, the RDC, National Re-Afforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme. Mr. Minister, I saw a \$20.7 million allocation, Actual spend in 2020, but a Revised Estimate for 2022 of, in effect, \$79 million. Can the Minister advise whether this meant that we have more contractors listed under this programme for 2021, because we seem to be going into 2022 with a similar figure?

Can the Minister provide a listing of the contractors under this programme for 2021, and proposed for 2022? But definitely we have a \$60 million increase between 2020 and the revised estimate 2021. I would like to know what accounts for that increase, and if it is additional contractors or an expansion in the number or employment of contractors, if the Minister can provide such a breakdown by constituency?

Mr. Imbert: You are not getting it by constituency, so stop asking.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, either you give a formal answer or you allow the Minister—

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Madam. I would like to intervene again. That information will not be provided by constituency. The data is not collected like that, and the work is not arranged like that.

Mr. Tancoo: Then can the Minister provide it by region, by geographic region?

Hon. Hosein: It will be provided.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair, the Rural Development Company is a special purpose

company that played a tremendous role, or is supposed to play a tremendous role in delivery. Regional corporations previously could utilize their funding, and give it to RDC to execute projects. Seeing that RDC is no longer getting a direct subvention, is this still an option for larger projects, projects that require expertise, engineering expertise and so on, that the regional corporations may not be able to deliver?

Madam Chairman: Member, again, what we are looking at are estimates, where provision is being made. There is no provision. This is a general question you are asking. It is not allowed under this exercise. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 03: Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago. The Actual spend was 389,000 in 2020. Can the hon. Minister advise what that spend was about and why it is no funding is being provided in 2022?

Madam Chairman: Member, both questions are not allowed under this exercise. We are not examining 2020, and as I said, if there is no allocation, there is no subject of enquiry. Apparently Members do not seem to appreciate that it is not that they are not entitled to certain information, but not in this exercise.

For the simplest example I can give: If you go to a cabinet and there are drawers, dependent on the drawer you open, you will get what you are looking for. If you open the wrong drawer, you are not going to get it. So let us try and understand that in the exercise that we are about.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, this is the only time that we have the actual figure in front of us, and this is the only time we are allowed to ask on the Actual.

Madam Chairman: So, Member, there are many ways under the Standing Orders that are open to you right through the session, many ways. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. I am on line Item 8: RDC Principal on Demand Loan

Facility. Minister, can you indicate what this loan is for?

Hon. Hosein: This is being used for infrastructural projects throughout the country.

Mr. Hosein: Would you care to give us a list of those infrastructural projects that this \$40 million is allocated for?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, let me come in here. As you have correctly pointed out, there was no allocation in 2020, or 2021 original or revised for this. This is going forward.

Mr. Hosein: So?

Mr. Imbert: It is impossible to give a list of projects going forward in the manner in which the Member wants.

Mr. Hosein: It is obvious, Minister, that you must have a projection of where you would have projects, in order to get \$14 million.

Mr. Imbert: That is not so.

Mr. Hosein: Because you are not going to pull it out from the sky or from the air. You are going to have a project list.

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. Is this Item not principal on demand loan facility? So it is a payment. Just one minute. This Item is a payment on a loan. So, Member, you may ask what is the principal of the loan or the interest, but not what you are asking. The Item may come in another place in the estimates that you can interrogate.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, you see, based on the line Item—

Madam Chairman: I have so ruled.

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, well then I want to ask this question, that based on the line Item—

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

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair, 08. Can I ask, what was the total loan, and what it was used for, or will be used for? Thank you.

Madam Chairman: So Item 8 is the principal on the demand loan. So it is called “principal”. Look at the difference between 8 and 7, 7 is interest. So if it is the principal, you cannot be asking really what is the amount of the loan, that is what “principal” means. Okay?

Ms. Ameen: There two parts to this question, so if the Minister could provide the other information I will appreciate it.

Madam Chairman: Well, if you could kindly ask the question, then we will know. You have not asked the question as yet.

Ms. Ameen: Sorry. I think he heard. The question is: What will this be used for?

Madam Chairman: I already said, having regard to the Item, and that is what I answered Member for Barataria/San Juan. It is the same question that is not allowed under this Item. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you then explain why there was no allocation for this loan in 2021, but an allocation in 2022? Is this a new loan? Is this a new loan?

Mr. Imbert: I will explain that. There was no loan before, that should be obvious.

Mr. Hosein: Exactly. So then I am asking, what is the purpose of this \$40 million loan, because it is a new loan.

Mr. Imbert: You are not listening to the Speaker, obviously.

Mr. Hosein: It is a new loan, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: It seems that you cannot understand simple English.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, you cannot take a loan for no reason. You must have a—

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we shall now be moving on to Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. We are at Item 005: Local Government Bodies.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*.

Members, this meeting is now suspended for 20 minutes. We shall resume at 5.30.

5.13 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*

5.31 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee resumed.*

Madam Chairman: This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is now resumed. We are now at 23: Port of Spain City Corporation, page 224. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Public Health and Disposal; Item 003: Abattoirs, Markets and Dining Shed; Item 004: Transports and Cleansing; Item 005: Squares, Playgrounds and Trees; Item 006: Stores, Works and Repairs; Item 007: Cemeteries and Crematorium; Item 008: Woodbrook Estate.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Public Health and Disposal; Item 003: Abattoirs, Markets and Dining Shed; Item 004: Transport and Cleansing; Item 005: Squares, Playgrounds and Trees; Item 006: Stores, Works and Repairs; Item 007: Cemeteries and Crematorium; Item 008: Woodbrook Estate.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 01: General Administration; Item 002: Public Health; Item 004; Transport and Cleansing; Item 006: Stores, Works and Repairs.

Sub-Head 04: Transport and Cleansing. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Public Health; Item 004: Transport and Cleansing; Item 006: Stores, Works and Repairs. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

San Fernando City Corporation, we are at page 242. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: City and Departments of Maintenance; Item 003: Institutions; Item 004: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries; Item 005: Transport; Item 006: Local Health Authority.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: City and Departments of Maintenance; Item 003: Institutions; Item 004: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries; Item 005: Transport; Item 006: Local Health Authority.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: City and Department of Maintenance; Item 003: Institutions; Item 004: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries; Item 005: Transport. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

25 Arima Borough Corporation. We are now at page 259. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: Item 002: Public Health; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Parks and Recreation Grounds; Item 005: Works.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Public Health; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Parks and Recreation Grounds; Item 005: Works.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 004: Parks and Recreation grounds.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

26 Point Fortin Borough Corporation. We are at page 269. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Local Health Authority; Item 003: Public Places; Item 004: Transport and Roads.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002:

Local Health Authority; Item 003: Public Places; Item 004: Transports and Roads; Item 005: Corporations Properties.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Upkeep of Public Places; Item 004: Transport and Roads; Item 005: Corporation Properties.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

27 Chaguanas Borough Corporation. We are now at page 279. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair, I have a concern with the decrease in the allocation by \$2.1 million for Personnel Expenditure. Again, this pertains to employees and you have a certain amount set that you would need and this decrease is less than the amounts utilized in previous years.

Madam Chairman: So, Member, you may have forgotten because we had a little break. What I said is engaged in this exercise you are not dealing with global figures, so you could interrogate the figures, that global figure is broken down in details, you cannot interrogate the specific details. Okay? So if you are ready to do that, I will allow you. If not, I will take somebody else and come back to you.

Ms. Ameen: Okay. You can move on.

Madam Chairman: Okay? Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, we are on—

Madam Chairman: Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay. Next Item.

Madam Chairman: Are you ready, Member for St. Augustine?

Ms. Ameen: Yes. Thank you. Mr. Minister, in many corporations they end up in

arrears with NIS and it affects workers when it is time for them to get their benefits. This decrease in allocation, can you explain this decrease in allocation for NIS at this corporation?

Madam Chairman: So you at 05?

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Under 01/001/05.

Ms. Ameen: Correct. Yes.

Madam Chairman: Sure.

Hon. Hosein: In 2022 we receive an increase of 3.750 and this is in keeping with the Estimates of 2021, 3.730.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine, anything else?

Ms. Ameen: That is okay.

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

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 02: Wages and COLA. there is a decrease there of approximately \$60,000. Can the hon. Minister identify how many workers will be affected by this decrease?

Hon. Hosein: The answer will be provided in writing.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 02: Wages and COLA. There is also a decrease there of \$115,000 for this line Item. Can the hon. Minister advise how many workers this decrease is going to have an impact on?

Hon. Hosein: It will be provided in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister advise how many workers are in the system under this line Item?

Hon. Hosein: That will also be given in writing.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: That was my question. I will be satisfied if the Minister gives it in writing.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures. Member for St. Augustine.

6.00 p.m.

Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. [*Crosstalk*]
Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. [*Crosstalk*] Item 007—I can barely hear myself. Item 007: Households.

28 - Diego Martin Regional Corporation. We are going on to page 286. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.
Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration.
Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

We go on to 29 - San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. We are now at page 292. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures.
Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, just one comment. I want to comment the increases in all of these figures. It just seems as though the Minister of Finance, they forgot to do the increases in the Chaguanas Corporation.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, I am on line Item 12 which deals with Materials and Supplies. Madam Chair, I am seeing that of the allocated \$80,000 for 2021, only \$11,000 was spent. And I ask this question in the context of several complaints I have received from the vendors at the San Juan Market, where the fans are not working; they have problems with sanitation; the vendors had to buy their own temperature guns for persons to get into the market; they buy their own sanitizers, and you know how important it is to have these materials on hand to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. And yet, of the allocated \$80,000, only \$11,000 was spent. Minister, can you give an explanation as for why this occurred?

Hon. Hosein: Well, they received an additional amount this year, so I am almost sure that this problem will be fixed with the additional funding received.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. Because, you see, the problem here is that the same allocation was given to them in 2021 and it was not spent, and then the \$80,000 given in 2022, and I am being told that some of the market vendors are experiencing victimization at the market, simply because they had sued the regional corporation relating to the market fees issue and I really hope it is not an issue of victimization. So as the Minister, if you can use your good office to look into that to ensure that these market vendors are comfortable at the market at San Juan because we would not want something like that taking place there. And these are just the concerns that I have received from some of the vendors at the market.

Hon. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]*—*the corporation.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority, Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local

Roads etc.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other transfers.

30 - Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. We are going on to page 300.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc., Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Yes. Madam Chair, the allocation for Wages and C.O.L.A. at Tunapuna Corporation, where St. Augustine constituency resides, is significantly reduced. At this time, I do not know if the Minister is aware, workers who are usually 10-day workers are now working eight days to stretch the allocation you had in the last financial year to meet payments. This reduction—with this further reduction, can we expect workers—workers' days to be reduced even further or do we, as a region, have to prepare for workers losing their jobs at the regional corporation? Over 300 workers are currently working eight days instead of 10 days per fortnight at this time.

Hon. Hosein: If you look at the Estimates, once again, in 2021, it is 48,774,000 and in 2022, it is 48,724,000, a decrease of 276,000.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Minister, that was not sufficient. It was not sufficient to the extent that over 300 workers were reduced from 10 days to eight days. [*Desk thumping*] So there is a need for an increase. The fact that they spent this is

because they cut the number of days workers have been working. So I just want to ask the Minister if representation will be made for supplemental funding to ensure that these workers work the full number of days that are required in this region and to prevent them from losing their jobs.

Hon. Hosein: I will investigate it and take the necessary action.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other transfers.

31 - Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. We now go on to page 307. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

We now go on to 32 - Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. We are at page 314. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration;

Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 02: Wages and C.O.L.A, there is a decrease of \$170,000 in this line Item. Minister, can you advise how many workers this \$170,000 decrease is going to have impact on?

Hon. Hosein: I will get the information and provide it in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Local Health Authority. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to line Item 28:Other Contracted Services, a decrease of \$1.9 million. Could you inform this meeting what contracted services may be impacted as a result of this cut?

Madam Chairman: We are at 005: Local Health Authority. I think you “gone on to” Goods and Services, “huh”?

Ms. Ameen: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: All right. So Item 006—but I want to say, Member for Couva South, I want to congratulate you for trying to advance us. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, you know I always assist you. You know I always assist you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Indeed. Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001—are you here—General Administration, is it here you are at?

Mr. Indarsingh: No, no.

Madam Chairman: No. Okay. Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority—

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. With respect to 28, Minister, Other Contracted Services, and the decrease in allocation of \$1.9 million, as I said, what contracted services may be impacted as a result of this decrease?

Hon. Hosein: We have no arrears, but due to the COVID scavenging, they will request additional funding in the mid-year.

Mr. Indarsingh: I would ask you to pay particular attention to that because there are a number of areas now where lots have been developed for former Caroni workers and it has not been brought under the control of the corporation, and people are complaining about a lack of a reliable garbage collection.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to 12: Materials and Supplies. Now, I see that you have allocated or is expected to get an allocation of \$1.4 million in 2022 and you spent 400,000 in 2021. Now, in terms of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation has a land mass as large as Barbados. It has 14 electoral districts and I hope that that \$1.4 million will actually be released by the Ministry of Finance to improve the dilapidated condition of roads in or under the control of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. Because at the end of day if you divide \$1.4 million by 14 electoral districts it is approximately \$100,000 per electoral district, and certainly Minister of Finance that cannot and will not improve the condition of local government roads in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. [*Desk thumping*] I want you to take serious note of that because there may be some implications down

the road if the conditions of the roads do not improve.

Member: That sounding like a threat. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the Minister's attention also to line 12: Materials and Supplies. Now Minister, I am seeing here for the 2021 Estimate it was only estimated at 400,000 despite the Actual spent for 2020 was 1.4. So what we experienced over the last financial year is a significant reduction in funding for this issue and I was wondering why it is that the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation have some of the worst roads that we can experience in this country, and I am now starting to see that you have basically under budgeted for the financial year 2021. As we move into financial 2022 with the amount of water leaks and the failure of WASA to return the road to a useable condition is this taking into consideration in your Estimate for 2022 in going forward; and can you advise also if this is what was requested by the corporation or is it that the corporation requested more and you cut it down to 1.4?

Hon. Hosein: Well, I know there is an increase, but we will have to provide the answer you are looking for.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

33: Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation. We are at page 323. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads, etc.

Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Market and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Item 28: Other Contracted Services under Local Health Authority. Minister, I noticed that there is a trend to reduce the allocation based on the spending in the last fiscal year, but Mayaro Corporation, like others, has been forced to reduce the scavenging days and thus the expenditure would have been less when there is in fact a need for more funding. So I just want to ask that this decreased allocation that you consider revising to meet the needs of the corporation, and that applies in the Mayaro region where there are areas that previously were never provided scavenging service by the regional corporation and it does put an additional burden on the existing service.

Hon. Hosein: This would be considered.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

We now go on to 34: Siparia Regional Corporation. We are at page 330. Sub-Head 001: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I refer to Sub-Item 22: Short-term Employment. I note that there has been a reduction of \$2.8 million under this Head, this allocation for Short-term Employment. Can the Minister advise why that has happened at this point in time?

Hon. Hosein: Short-term was more under the Local Health Authority.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, in 2021 you had an Actual of 3.6 million.

Hon. Hosein: The additional funding—

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry.

Hon. Hosein: The additional funding—sorry. The additional funding was under that Head, Local Health Authority (LHA).

Mr. Tancoo: So you have a \$2.8 million under that Head? You have an increase of \$2.8 million under that Head to cater for this Short-term Employment? I am not seeing that, Minister. Just for clarification, Minister, in 2020 you had an Actual spend of 3.6 million, in 2021 a revised of 3.5 million, but in 2022 you are only estimating \$682,000, which means under this Head you are short by \$2.8 million for 2022. I am seeing no other Head in which there is a similar increase to match this decrease.

Hon. Hosein: For additional funding we will go back at the mid-year, in this case here, to have the necessary funding available.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I appreciate your commitment to so do, but that means that we are estimating substantially below what we know will be the cost. On average you spend \$3.5 million but you are only budgeting 682,000. Now, the signal you are sending to the Corporation is that they must cut Short-term Employment by \$2.8 million. Minister, if I may, I would take you to your word that you will go back in the mid-year review to factor in this 2.8 million. I just want to make the point though that it means you have deliberately underestimated your intended expenditure under this Head, under this regional corporation, and I am extremely concerned that individuals are not going to be employed in facilities and in jobs that they had previously and that they were working previously, and somehow this is going to negatively impact the ability of the regional corporation to service its

burgesses properly.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I raise the same issue again, Minister. Under this heading where you said that you had catered for, there is a decrease again of \$2.329 million. So what we have is two sets of decreases now.

Madam Chairman: Item 28? Just identify—

Mr. Tancoo: My apologies. My apologies, Chair. We are actually under Sub-Item 28: Other Contracted Services. And I am highlighting again that again here we have a \$2.3 million reduction in the allocation for this regional corporation. So this is the second such instalment. The first one was 2.8 and this one is 2.3 which signals that there is going to be a reduction in the number of persons employed, and definitely this will affect the ability of the regional corporation to service its burgesses properly. I think the Siparia Regional Corporation deserved a little bit better, Mr. Minister. Can you indicate why this decrease has occurred?

Hon. Hosein: The corporation got 11,369,300, and in 2022 they get 11,400.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, in 2021 you had \$13.73 million under this Head. In 2022 you are budgeting 11.4 which is a shortfall of \$2.3 million. I am asking, what is the reason for that shortfall; and if you are going to come to the mid-year review then I am even more concerned that we have under budgeted.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair, if I may add while the Minister prepares to respond, that Siparia region is proposed to be renamed a borough and the services within that region and the town centre leaves a lot wanting, and it would have to be treated with under this vote. So perhaps the Minister could include in his response how he would deal with that upgrade in terms of the services being offered under

this Vote to Siparia.

Hon. Hosein: I will provide the necessary answer for you and the information.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Minister.

6.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures. Item 005: Local Health Authority.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

We move on to 35 Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. We go to page 338. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Cemeteries. Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs. Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures. Item 005: Local Health Authority. Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Yes, Madam Chair. It is my understanding that the Minister or the Ministry has given a directive to regional corporations to turn off their lights and take off their a/c as much as possible and I am seeing a trend for decreased allocation for electricity. Can the Minister indicate if that is the justification for the reduction in the allocation towards paying electricity at the regional corporation?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So are you talking about 02/001/04?

Ms. Ameen: Correct. Electricity under General Administration, Goods and Services. Correct.

Madam Chairman: And you are talking in respect of Penal/Debe Regional Corporation?

Ms. Ameen: That is correct.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Hosein: We also sent out a memo to each corporation, as you rightfully said, to turn off lights and air condition, because most of the times these corporations leave all the lights and the air condition on. Most times, you go around and you see it, and we took the undertaking that in order to conserve electricity and save some money to have this take place, cut down the air condition and the lights and so on in the night because it happens, it happens all over the corporation. I do it at home.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to go to line Item 93 before I come back to any of the others, Operations of Electoral District Offices of Councillors for Municipal Corporations. Minister, before I ask my question, can I just ask a preamble question? Is this the line Item under which the offices of the councillors will be paid for?

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I have raised this issue previously before with you so I know that you are familiar with it but in particular, in the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, we have had a multiplicity of examples over the last year that I am familiar with where councillors have not been able to get funding to pay for their offices and this has run for months on end. Is it that the allocation here is inadequate or is it that the disbursements are late? Because if it is inadequate, we will continue to have this problem occurring where councillors have to beg their landlords not to lock them out.

Hon. Hosein: We will continue to make the request to get the funding.

Ms. Ameen: Madam, if I may on this Vote? Minister, whether the Vote is adequate or not for the entire financial year, councillors have received eviction

notices because the releases were not being made on time and this is a predictable cost to the corporation and it is a standard thing to allow a councillor to have an office and to deprive the councillors' landlords of payment—it is just \$2,500 per councillor. It deprives the burgesses of representation and I want to urge you to ensure that these releases are made in time so not to deprive citizens of access to their elected councillors.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Along the same lines, Mr. Minister, line Item 68: Water Trucking. I am aware that water trucking is a major supplier of water in my constituency of Oropouche West and in Oropouche East, both of which straddle the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. I am also aware that the allocation is inadequate, even with the \$60,000 increase. I want to use this opportunity to appeal to the Minister to increase this allowance significantly more than it is here now because what exists now is simply inadequate to the needs of the constituency of Oropouche East and West under the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation.

Hon. Hosein: It was an increase as you know.

Mr. Tancoo: It is a \$60,000 increase so it is definitely not enough.

Hon. Hosein: Yeah, well it still was an increase and if more is requested, we will go to the mid-year review and we will ask for the money. We always do that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am on line Item 46: National Disasters. Hon. Minister, in 2021, we had Estimate of \$1,275,000 but we had no allocation. I am aware since this regional corporation straddles a significant part of my constituency that we have had flooding. I do not know if there is another kind of natural—if flooding is not a natural disaster for the Minister but I know that we

have had significant amount of flooding in my constituency. It is very disappointing to see no allocation under Natural Disasters to cater for that issue and that problem, especially since we are now budgeting, in 2022, 1.15 million. We did not get the 1.275 million in 2021. I have no expectation that we will get the 1.2 million promised now in 2022.

Question, can the Minister advise why is it that there was no allocation for 2021, none, under the head Natural Disasters?

Hon. Hosein: Member, I would say it now and I would say it again, we, at the Ministry, continue to make the request.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, are you suggesting that you made the request to the Minister of Finance for this \$1.275 million and none was provided to you?

Hon. Hosein: We continue to make the request on behalf of the corporations.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. So does that mean that I can hold no guarantee that constituents of Oropouche East and West would benefit from any kind of support when there is a natural disaster as flooding is? This certainly is one of the constituencies, Minister, where you should be much more aggressive in securing support, especially because these areas flood so badly.

If I may continue, Minister? Line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Again, I see a \$450,000 decrease from the allocation that was provided for in 2021. Can the Minister advise why we have reduced expenditure under this line Item for Short-term Employment. Is it that we will have less people employed?

Hon. Hosein: Once again, as I said, the request, we continue to make the request and I will find out what has caused this and I will inform you in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. One more, line Item 15, a real bugbear for me, Minister. Line Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance of Equipment. We had the paltry sum of \$50,000 allocated in 2021 of which \$4,000, Minister, \$4,600 was the

revised expenditure. The result of that, Minister, was that in 2021, this corporation did not have sufficient money to repair a substantial amount of equipment that it had at its disposal to do the work of the corporation and as a result of that, repairs not being done, we have a significant amount of equipment sitting idle while we have flooding taking place throughout the constituency of Oropouche East and West. To make matters worse, you are now proposing a \$40,000 Estimate for 2022.

Minister, we have substantial amounts of equipment sitting idle unable to be used because repairs are required because you underfunded substantially, both in the Estimates and the Revised Estimate and now you coming to promise them an even less amount. What is expected to happen then is even more equipment, the few that they have in operation, will not be able to function. You are sabotaging the operation of the regional corporation, Minister, [*Desk thumping*] by not providing them with the money to do their own repairs. The result of that, Minister, is that drains are not being cleared, we have flooding because of these kinds of activities, Minister.

Ms. Ameen: The question is whether it is the Minister of Local Government or the Minister of Finance that is strangling these corporations of basic, basic funding for services that are essential. Who is truly responsible for what is being perpetrated on citizens?

Mr. Tancoo: This is unacceptable, Minister.

Madam Chairman: So Members, can we go on to another line Item? And I just want to remind Members— Barataria/San Juan, can I speak now? I just want to remind Members it is now 20 to seven. The curfew begins at 10.00. I would really like that our staff could be relieved no later than 8.45 so that we can get home. Right?

We had a certain sort of occurrence in the last Standing Finance Committee which I hope we will avoid this time. So if we could use our time wisely and Members are reminded, they can still send in their questions in writing. Okay?

Mr. Hosein: Ma'am, just for clarity. Are we ending the meeting at 8.00? Is it 8.45?

Madam Chairman: I do not want us to—the staff. Unless you can carry on without the staff.

Mr. Hosein: So just to be clear, so wherever we reach in whatever Head, we end the meeting?

Madam Chairman: We have to finish the Heads. We have to finish the eight Heads tonight. I do not know if Members are familiar with the Standing Orders, we have to finish the eight Heads tonight. Okay?

Item 002: Cemeteries. Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs. Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures. Item 005: Local Health Authority. Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration.

36 Princes Town Regional Corporation. We are at page 346. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. If the Minister could explain with regard to Item 13: Remuneration to Council Members. I see there is a decrease of 16,000. The members of the Council remain the same.

Hon. Hosein: The Estimates in 2021 which is 1559, it is the same as 2022.

Ms. Benjamin: If the Minister would have look at the Revised Estimate where a 1575 was spent.

Hon. Hosein: They got more.

Ms. Benjamin: So it is just something for the Minister to take into consideration is the remuneration of the hard-working first responders.

Hon. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Cemeteries. Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs. Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures. Item 005: Local Health Authority.

Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Moruga/Tableland.

6.45p.m.

Ms. Benjamin: Just something for the Minister to take into consideration also, Telephones: 05. Minister, I know even as of August month Princes Town Regional Corporation was unable to pay their phone bills because the councillors had no access to their phones. And now I am seeing a reduction in that allocation.

Hon. Hosein: Okay at the end—I just want to inform you at the end of the financial year they received funding and all the arrears were cleared. At the end of the financial year they received funding and all the arrears were paid. The phone had to be cut to be paid back. It was paid back. So the phone was reinstated.

Ms. Benjamin: All right.

Ms. Ameen: So Minister, your late releases are causing embarrassment to our councillors. “Dey phone hah tuh cut before de Ministry could make releases to pay ah phone bill that coming every month.” This is not an unexpected expense.

Hon. Hosein: I made the request and the money was received then.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Cemeteries. Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Madam Chair, if you will permit me, I just wanted the Minister to explain, under Goods and Services there was a reduction in the Short-term Employment of \$131,000. So if the Minister could explain with regard to that

please.

Madam Chairman: Now we are going back to General Administration?

Ms. Benjamin: Yes, if you will permit me.

Hon. Hosein: The 2021 Estimates and the 2022 Estimates are the same figure.

Ms. Benjamin: Madam Chair, if you will permit me I will move on to Item 46 with regard to Natural Disasters. I see that we had no releases in the Revised Estimate for 2021. So if the Minister could give us an explanation as to why the corporation is being starved of this funding?

Hon. Hosein: We at the head office continue to request, make the request to get the necessary funding.

Ms. Benjamin: I hear you on that, Minister, but if you will understand the circumstances that these corporations are faced with on a yearly basis in the sense that natural disasters, as my colleagues would have rightfully said, it is a flood-prone area. The unit is already understaffed with just three personnel. The councillors are out there with only a cell phone that is not paid. So they need the services. They need the releases in order to do their job.

Also, if you would allow me, with regard to the Water Trucking. As everyone is aware, the area has water issues. And I would just like to plead for an increase if possible.

Hon. Hosein: Okay.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Cemeteries; Item 003: Markets and Abattoirs; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; Item 005: Local Health Authority; Item 006—sorry. Item 005: Local Health Authority.

Ms. Benjamin: Yes. Minister, with regard to—and my colleagues would have raised this. In Other Contracted Services we have a reduction of 1.2, and if you can

give an explanation as to why. Minister, if it cannot be provided at this point in time, I will take the response in writing.

Hon. Hosein: All right, thank you. It will be provided. But most of the arrears were paid, eh. Most of the arrears were paid. That was during the COVID-19 period.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads, etc. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 005: Local Health Authority. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item: 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

37 - Regional Corporation Services - General. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. We are at page 354. Item 007: Households.

38 - Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities. We are at page 358. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, and we are at page 94. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 009: Bailey Bridges, and I want to ask the Minister, firstly, if this line Item takes into consideration the wooden bridges replacement programme announced by the Ministry? And, therefore, if this is for emergency repairs or if this line Item envisions the replacement of wooden bridges before a disaster takes place? That is line Item 009.

Hon. Hosein: Yes.

Ms. Haynes: So it is before. And so therefore, I note that the Revised Estimate in 2021 was 1.7million, and then we are estimating for 2022, 1.5 million. So I know there is a case where we apply for additional funding in the mid-year review. But I

can tell you, based on the applications that you would be getting from the Tabaquite constituency, in terms of the replacement of wooden bridges, we will definitely be looking at this allocation. So I just wanted to make the Minister aware of that. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 010: Restoration of Landslips. Can you tell us, the 3.5million, if that allocation includes north Soledad Claxton Bay landslip that is outstanding for the last two years?

Hon. Hosein: I will inform you accordingly, hon. Member.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to 003: Restoration of Local Bridges, I am asking for some help with the restoration of the bridge at Laloo Trace right off of Chin Chin Road in Cunupia. It is in a great state of disrepair and it is impassable to both pedestrians as well as motorists, and if that cannot be done in the short-term if, using 001: Restoration of Local Roads, if some assistance could be had with the rehabilitation of David Toby Road, which is the access road, for the farmers that use that area please.

Madam Chairman: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would just like to ask the Minister with regard to Item 03 and Item 09, if those Items include with regard to the restoration of the bridge in Edward Trace. And also, I know a Bailey bridge was recommended by your technical staff that visited Glod Road and also Warwell First Branch. Hon. Minister, I know you would not be influenced by your colleagues and you will do the honourable thing and you would bring relief to my constituents. I have faith in you, hon. Minister. [*Crosstalk and Laughter*]

Member: Do not burn your bridges, Minister!

Mr. Young: Fire, tyre and brimstone! [*Continuous laughter*]

Member: “Do not burn them bridges at all!”

Member: “It eh have no bridge!”

Ms. Benjamin: There are no bridges. Hon. Minister, and you know—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, may I make a general comment on this line Item?

[*Interruption*] No, I want to make a comment.

Madam Chairman: I believe the Minister of Finance would like to let you know, Moruga/Tableland, that certainly there will be no negative influence. [*Laughter*]
Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, I just wanted to let the Member know that we will be supplementing the budget of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, under this line Item for the disposal of burnt tyres. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ameen: “Dis is after yuh collecting tax fuh tyres? Yuh collecting tax fuh tyres?”

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister’s attention to line Item 03: Restoration of Local Bridges. I see we had a 2million in 2021 Estimate but only 750,000 was utilized. Now we have a projected Estimate for 2022 of 3.5million. Minister, I would like to believe that the bridge that is close to collapsing in Roopsingh Road and the bridge in Korea Village both need to be repaired. I am hoping that you would use your good office to have these bridges refurbished before any sort of accident can occur. Can you give us that commitment, if it is that these refurbishment works will fall under line Item 003?

Hon. Hosein: I cannot give you a commitment but I can give you consideration.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister. Also, I would like you to give consideration to the Ragoonanan Road West, that bridge there, which would have been brought to your attention by Councillor Dubraj Persad on multiple occasions. If you could consider the construction of that bridge, or at least the installation of a Bailey bridge, so that the residents of Ragoonanan Road West and St. John's Road who experience significant flooding in St. John's Road. Whenever it rains, very limited rain and that area floods out and these persons have no way of exiting their homes or even reaching into their homes under the current conditions. So if you could kindly consider that bridge also.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with regard to line Item 010: Restoration of Landslips, I would just like to bring it to your attention that we have a couple of very, very severe landslips on Fletchers Road in Caroni East, and if we could get some attention with that. These areas are totally impassable to the garbage trucks and the residents are in serious need of assistance in these areas.

Madam Chairman: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Minister, I would just like you to give consideration, when it comes to the restoration of landslips, to Glod Road, Pooran Road, Matulia Loney Road, Cumuto South, Cunjal, Oropouche South Trace. Also, I would like you to give consideration to the Fifth Company area.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item 005 five spans 10 pages. Therefore, I would announce the project groups. A. Administrative Services. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Line Item 045: Implementation of Local Government Reform. Minister, this was estimated at

2million in 2021. However, no funds were utilized as reflected here in the Revised Estimates of 2021. Can you advise why it is no funds were utilized for this line Item?

Hon. Hosein: This Item will go hand in hand with the legislation and once the legislation is approved, which it will be, as I said, it will go hand in hand.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, from since 2016, your administration has been talking about that legislation. Can you advise when it is you anticipate that to be completed? Because I am seeing an additional \$1million is being proposed for 2022. Are we expected to utilize that in this upcoming financial year? Do we expect the legislation to be completed and ready?

Hon. Hosein: Yeah.

Mr. Ratiram: And in addition to that, will that 1 million be sufficient?

7.00 p.m.

Hon. Hosein: It might not be sufficient. But I said once it is not sufficient, we will go back and ask for more funding.

Madam Chairman: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, can the Minister, with regard to the new line Item 027, give us break down as to what that Item will entail?

Madam Chairman: So, Member; I take it you will accept this in writing?

Ms. Benjamin: Yes, Chair.

Madam Chairman: F. Public Buildings; A. Port of Spain City Corporation; B. Arima Borough Corporation; C. San Fernando City Corporation; D. Point Fortin Borough Corporation; L. Chaguanas Borough Corporation; M. Diego Martin Regional Corporation; N. San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation; P.

Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation; R. Sangre Grande Regional Corporation; T. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to refer the Minister's attention to line Item 265: Local Roads and Bridges Programme. Minister, this line Item Actual spend for 2020 was 5.1 million, but in 2021, we see a cut down to 3.5 million. Again, with the current conditions of the dilapidated roads that we have throughout the region, do you think that the funding that is estimated for 2022 will be sufficient to complete the task at hand?

Hon. Hosein: If funding is required, we will go back, as I said, in the mid-year review.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, on a general point, I would like to repeat, we are running a deficit budget. We have to be very careful about expenditure. Money does not grow on trees, as the Member obviously thinks.

Madam Chairman: U. Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation; V. Siparia Regional Corporation; W. Penal/Debe Regional Corporation; X. Princes Town Regional Corporation. Infrastructure Development Fund. Members, we are at page—sorry, Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would just like to bring the Minister's attention with regard to 339: Local Roads and Bridges Programme. I know that merely the entire—well, the allocation and we saw an increase of 200,000, but I would ask the Minister if any increase could be given to this particular line Item in the sense that the area has a lot of deplorable roads and we really need your assistance, Minister? Even if you could consider the project with regard to the Rural Development Company. There are a lot of letters that were sent from the corporation, a lot of estimates was done with regard to bridges and the restoration of roadway, and we are seeking your assistance.

Hon. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund, page 217. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 003: Development of Rural Communities. So, I note that this is a new line Item. There was nothing in 2021, but we are estimating \$20 million for the development of rural communities. Now, throughout our discussions here today, it is clear that there is a lot of work needed in terms of roads, drains, bridges, et cetera. But I am asking that—we can get this in writing. But in terms of the development of rural communities, I am asking that we look at more aspirational things: the development of entrepreneurial communities, small businesses, craftsmen and women within rural communities to make this development meaningful for the communities and not simply to access basic needs. So I will accept from the Minister, in writing, the proposals for the \$20 million that would be spent in rural communities. And I hope that we are getting a clear definition of what a rural community is and this money is not going to be spent all over the place. Thank you.

Hon. Hosein: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectorial and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 42 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you very much, PS. Thank you very much all the other technocrats from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Reach home safely.

Hon. Members, we have seven more heads to do and we have roughly an hour and 45 minutes. I remind Members that they can put their questions in writing, I have communicated with the Whip the time by which those questions will be received. I

am certain the Whip, in doing his duty, would have conveyed that information to you all. Out of an abundance of caution, just to ensure that the sum of \$2,332,469,000 for Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government now stands part of the Schedule.

Head 48: Ministry of Trade and Industry, \$211,653,880.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Trade and Industry to make a brief opening statement. Minister, I would have normally said for a maximum of five minutes but I would really like to persuade you to do it in a shorter time period. I am so sorry.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. That being the case, let me say that the Ministry of Trade and Industry has its core responsibility which is leading and overseeing the implementation of government policy for trade, business, development, investment, and consumer empowerment. We are very focused on particular areas, deepening and expanding Trinidad and Tobago's trading relationship by improving market access for our trading partners; building the competitiveness of the private sector; creating an enabling environment for economic diversification, including the growth and expansion of particular sectors, manufacturing, services, et cetera; creating jobs by facilitating increased local and foreign direct investment. I can stop there, Madam Chairman. And, of course, improving the ease of doing business.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 48 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$211,653,880 for Head 48: Ministry of Trade and Industry is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of 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 starting at page 275. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division; Item 004: Research and Planning; Item 005: Consumer Outreach and Protection Unit. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Weights and Measures Inspectorate; Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division; Item 004: Research and Planning; Item 005: Consumer Outreach and Protection Unit. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Minister, 04: Other Minor Equipment; 2021, you spent \$3,000. This year, you are allocated 1.1 million. Could you care to put it in writing what those pieces of equipment would be?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: I certainly can tell you now.

Mr. Lee: Sure.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Given COVID, we now have the experience of doing all of our international meetings virtually, which will certainly save the Government a lot of money and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So we are investing in an entire video conference system to be used to participate in all of our meetings with external agencies and including all our COTED regional meetings which we do twice a month. So they will include the purchase of four non-function, uninterruptible power supply UPS units; the purchase of seven networks switches to replace those that are no longer supported by the manufacturer; the purchase of other wireless equipment, kVA UPS, Cisco, port core switches and telephone routers, hard drives, et cetera. But the mission is to be able to do all of our

meetings virtually to the extent possible.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 003: United Nations Organisations. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, 01: United Nations Organisations; 2021 you allocated \$620,000, the spend is \$300. Is this for fees? Why was no payment made in 2021?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah. These are annual fees and we would have to—we certainly would have to make up for it. So we are going to—this would be used to pay the 2021 contribution. And we would be running a little late on the contributions.

Mr. Lee: That is actually for two years, 2021 and 2022?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: We would catch up with it.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Were there any adverse effects for the country by not paying these?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Absolutely not.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households; Item 008: Subsidies; Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 30: Overseas Market Promotion and Development - Local Manufacturers. I know you had identified that in your budget statement of 2020/2021: 2021, the spent was 200,000; 2022, you now allocated 37 million. You can submit it in writing the locations or the countries that you would be setting up or visiting these overseas market promotions.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: So, yes. This is a very important budgetary item and programme that we have embarked on to expand our exports, particularly our non-energy exports. And in terms of the locations that we are putting in the offices, certainly, we are thinking of the Jamaica which will service Jamaica and Dominican Republic. Then, of course, we are thinking also Guyana to do Suriname. Of course, the Mission in London is also important and we will include the European Union Market as well to service that area. And, of course, we will look at China. And to save cost, what we are planning on doing is to have these commercial offices within the Embassy itself, so you do not have double physical cost and so on. But it is more than just the commercial offices, it is more than just that.

7.15 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad, Sub Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies; Item 004: Statutory Boards.

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*. 44 Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards.

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 115. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, Items 005: Multisectoral and Other Services, Infrastructure Development Fund. We are at page 226. Items 005: Multisectoral and Other Services. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Minister, line Item 314: Renovation of Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort \$5 million. Could you—

Madam Chairman: Sorry, we are at page 226 is line Item 314.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you.

Mr. Lee: Either the Ministry of Trade and Industry or some other organization.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Magdalena?

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: The responsibility is eTeck.

Mr. Lee: The refurbishment of the golf course.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Magdalena is the responsibility is eTeck and which falls under the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Lee: So the Ministry of Trade and Industry is responsible for the hotel.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Can I ask another line Item Madam Chair? 312, Madam Minister.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Which one is it?

Mr. Lee: 312.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: We going back then, hold on, hold on. What is the Item?

Mr. Lee: 312, Upgrade to Factory Road Industrial Park Infrastructure, \$3 million.

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Okay.

Mr. Lee: Is this only for the Diego Martin Factory Road or is it only Industrial Estate that this funding will be allocated for?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: Okay, so this is not the Diego Martin Industrial Estate, you know, this is the Factory Road in Chaguanas.

Mr. Lee: In Chaguanas?

Hon. Gopee-Scoon: That is right. So this is to—it is a 52-acre park. And—so we are just completed the arterial roads within and we are doing some roadside drains, et cetera, and some LED street lighting and that kind of thing. So if—in fact, that park is almost completely sold.

Mr. Lee: Okay, thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 48 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister, thank you PS, thank you other Members. Minister I am sorry to rush you but I want to thank you for having given us such a big leap frog. Thank you very much; reach home safely.

Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. We are at page 236 of the Recurrent Expenditure and we will be at page 92 of the DP.

Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$577,387,703.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to make a brief opening statement and I would really like to say as brief as possibly can.

Hon. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. By now you would have realized my last six years I do not waste words. We are here for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. We are in charge of managing the nation's resources to do with oil and gas resources, a significant contributor to GDP and foreign exchange earnings. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

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

Madam Chairman: We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* at page 236. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 05: Government's Contribution to NIS. In 2021, the Revised Estimate is zero. Could you explain—if I am looking at this Item, it gives me the impression that no NIS was paid on behalf of the staff from your Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

Hon. Young: That is not so Madam Chair, the NIS was paid and what this increase you are seeing here is during this fiscal we are hoping to attract and recruit more persons and also have the Public Service Commission appoint more persons to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in substantive positions. And in light of that, what we are doing is we have gotten more NIS looking forward to being able to pay it when we get more employees.

Mr. Lee: Just a follow up, Madam Chair. Minister, if you look at 2021 it has no—any number there.

Hon. Young: That evidently is a typographical error.

Mr. Lee: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay? Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Go ahead, sorry, sorry Madam, go ahead.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Minor Equipment Purchases—Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001: Regional Body; Item 004: International Body. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister 03: Annual Subvention to Gas Exporting Countries Forum. I know you allocated 5.1 last year, nothing was spent in 2021 and 5.7 is 2022. Could you add some clarity to that line Item?

Hon. Young: The subscriptions were in fact paid.

Mr. Lee: Say that again.

Hon. Young: What is that?

Mr. Lee: Could you add some clarity to that line Item 03?

Hon. Young: Add some clarity?

Mr. Lee: Yeah, nothing is spent.

Hon. Young: Being a part of the very small body of Gas Exporting Countries Forum, the GECF, and you have to pay annual subscriptions to that and in fact, we are current with all of our annual subscriptions.

Mr. Lee: Okay then, let me ask another question. There was nothing allocated or spent in that line Item for 2021. Is it another typo?

Hon. Young: No, well you have to remember what may happen is sometimes as the payments are made towards the end of the year, the documents would have already gone in to the printers and that is what happened here.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 07, Interest Payment on a 200 million US Petrotrin Receivable Purchase Facility. Last year I know you were not the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, but the Minister of Finance answered this question, and he said that they were facilitating the whole restructuring of Petrotrin and the Government was picking up this payment until the subsidiaries became healthy and financially healthy.

Hon. Young: What has happened is that in the whole restructuring of the Petrotrin debt there are a number of different tranches and facilities and this one is a roll-over of some of the old debt that continues to be rolled over what the Ministry of Finance does, it puts it with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and we make the payments.

Mr. Lee: Just a follow up, Minister. Do you know—that 200 million US loan, do you know when it is supposed to end?

Hon. Young: November 2023.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Line Item 08: Minister, Lake Asphalt of Trinidad Tobago, 2021, subventions are sent \$33 million, this year is allocated 5 million. Could you state what is happening with Lake Asphalt base is just \$5 million being allocated?

Hon. Young: What, as is public knowledge and what was said a couple of weeks ago by myself, we have mandated and in fact today, up to today I have been in touch with the board of Lake Asphalt, we have mandated that they cannot continue to live off of Subsidies provided by the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. So we are doing some restructuring of their business, their business model and we are going to introduce a new strategy to get them off of the public purse. So that is what we are hoping to get done in the next fiscal.

Mr. Lee: Okay, so is a whole restructuring is taken place in Lake Asphalt?

Hon. Young: When I say restructuring, is a restructuring of how they operate as a business. It has nothing to do with the jobs, et cetera. So right now is to do with their supply of bitumen.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Madam Chair, I have another line Item. Line Item 06, Minister, National Quarries Company Limited. Nothing was spent in—or most of their subvention was given to them in 2021. This year, you have a subvention of \$53 million. Now, last year, at the same this SFC, your predecessor had stated that they were going to have during 2021, a restructuring of National Quarries because of what was happening there. So asking based on \$53 million, now being given or allocated for a subvention, what is happening in National Quarries as far as restricting?

Hon. Young: What is happening in this fiscal gone is they had to present to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, we put them through some robust questioning, after I was satisfied I took it the Cabinet and Cabinet have approved this, so what you are seeing here for the next fiscal is the sum of \$53.8 million.

That is going to be spent getting rid of their past indebtedness to not only contractors but also to some statutory payments, et cetera. But they are also going to be doing some upgrading of their equipment to also get them back on track so they no longer have to rely on Subsidies.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, as you just indicated under 08, to my colleague Pointe-a-Pierre, the restructuring that is being pursued at Lake Asphalt, is it in keeping with the recommendations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee Headed by Minister Allyson West?

Hon. Young: Well first of all, Minister Allyson West did not hire any Inter-Ministerial Committee. Minister Allyson West and some other Ministers had done some analysis of it, I have looked at that and I took certain things from that but we are also going down a new road as well.

Mr. Indarsingh: This \$5 million allocation, will it also be enough to cover Statutory Payments and so on.

Hon. Young: Well as I just said to your friend from Pointe-a-Pierre, what I am looking to do and get them to be done in the next fiscal is that they will become—they will be able to operate on their own without any need for subvention as they once were able to through the sale of bitumen.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am on line Item 03: The Environmental Indemnity to PowerGen. Can the Minister advise—we have seen a reduction in 2021. Your Estimate was 14 million, but zero spent in 2021 Revised Estimate and a smaller Estimate of 3.3 million for 2022. Can the Minister advise why no money

was spent in 2021?

Hon. Young: Madam Chair, I could not have asked for a better run-up to the wicket, and I would like to thank my friend for that. I want to tell the population of Trinidad and Tobago what this is all about. The Power Generation Company had a contract with the people of Trinidad and Tobago that came up for renewal in 2014 under the then UNC Government, and I intend to make a statement in Parliament on this once we get back into normal sittings.

In 2014, the UNC Cabinet burdened the taxpayers and the people of Trinidad and Tobago with this, in that they inserted a clause into the contract with PowerGen that we, the taxpayers, must pay for all environmental work to be done. Now that PowerGen has made millions of dollars off of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, during their history here, must pick up that tab, but no, the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government inserted a contract in 2014 when they could have negotiated it out. So now, all of the work you see going on there at the end of Wrightson Road at the old PowerGen Station, we the taxpayers now have to pay for all the environmental work associated with that. So that is what this heading and this line Item is about.

And the fact is that we were looking for ways how to deal with it but, unfortunately, and when we went back to the Cabinet decision in 2014, the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in 2014 took a decision, in light of this, that they would burden the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago and, in fact, money was paid this year. But, again, it was paid at the end of the fiscal after the budget books went to the Printery. [*Crosstalk*] Oh yes, it is going to be a lot of money that the taxpayers have to pick up for it. Over \$30 million your government burdened us, the people with. [*Desk thumping*] Right?

Mr. Tancoo: So your Estimates are wrong Minister. These figures provided here are wrong.

Hon. Young: No, the Estimates are not wrong. [*Desk thumping*] The work is ongoing.

Mr. Tancoo: The Estimates are completely wrong.

Hon. Young: We paid for the work by the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Tancoo: You spent six years—

Hon. Young:—thanks to your failed negotiations.

Mr. Tancoo: You have spent six years. These Estimates are wrong. That is what I am saying.

Hon. Young: So, when you were sitting in the corner of the Cabinet that is what you allowed them to do. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: How is that relevant? Where I sit bothers you, Sir? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Young: You could sit where you want; I could not care less. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are at page 92. Sub-Head: 09: Development Programme Consolidated Fund; Item 05: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 004: Installation of Electric Charging Stations for Electric Vehicles, \$11 million, a new project. Could you identify where these would be located and where would be the first EV charging station?

Hon. Young: Fortunately, we were able to launch the first public EV charging station at the Preysal Gas Station, within the last few weeks, and what we are looking to do is implement with this \$11 million a number of other similar public charging stations. I am looking to make sure we have one in Tobago, one in the south of Trinidad, one probably in the east of Trinidad and then one in the Savannah as well. Those are the current identified areas, but not the specific

locations apart from the Savannah as yet.

Mr. Lee: Just for information to the public. Minister, these EV stations, there will be a cost for the charge?

Hon. Young: There will be a cost for charge. So, for example, the one at the Preysal Gas Station, I think you go inside and you pay and then they give you a card and you flash it, and that allows you to charge your vehicle for the amount of time you have paid. So we are looking at a similar system.

Mr. Lee: And these charging stations are compatible to all electric vehicles that are presently in Trinidad?

Hon. Young: It should be. So, for example, the one in the Preysal Gas Station has three charging connections; two of them are fast charges and one is a slightly different one. So, I think we are looking at that model but, of course, we will be guided by the experts.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam President: Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Infrastructure Development Fund; Item 003: Economic Infrastructure at page 215. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 011: Dredging of Sea-Lots Basin Main Channel and Turning Basin. This is critical for the whole operations of that whole Sea Lots area as far as in and out. Nothing was done this year even though 3 million was allocated. I do not know. I am asking if anything was done and was not paid. So, I do not know if this is arrears or if any work was done.

Hon. Young: What we spent this year doing is a certain survey, a bathymetric survey that was undertaken, and now that we have the results of it, we are working with NEC to get this dredging done and dredging done urgently. So NEC are likely, when we sign off on the MOU with them, they will initially pick up the cost

and then we will do a reimbursement.

Mr. Lee: So they would be the subcontractor of the whole dredging aspect then?

Hon. Young: The sub-contractor on the point of view from the Ministry's perspective. We will retain them and then they will go through their procurement process and get it done.

Mr. Lee: One other question. Minister, 014. I know there is nothing allocated this year, but something was allocated in 2021, 014, for the gas station in Sangre Grande. Is that out of the projects as far your Ministry is concerned?

Hon. Young: Yeah, at this stage.

Mr. Lee: That is it.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 40 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you PS, and thank you to other representatives from the Ministry.

Hon. Young: I want to thank Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for the good and great work they have been doing. Thank you all very much.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Do return safety. Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister. Members will be at page 55 of the Recurrent Estimates and we will be at page 5 of the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and then page 15, Development Programme.

Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister, \$499,355,458.

Madam Chairman: I would now invite the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister to make a brief opening statement.

Hon. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we like to think

of the Office of the Prime Minister as really the brain of the Government, to use that analogy. The Prime Minister who, of course, leads. We also have the de facto Head of the Public Service at the Office of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister has very carefully chosen that the Ministry of Gender and Child Affairs and National AIDS Coordinating Committee would be out of the Office of the Prime Minister to elevate it as well as the Communications Division of the Government would also operate out of the Office of the Prime Minister. Thank you.

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

Madam Chairman: We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 55. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 02: Gender Affairs Division; Item 003: Communications; Item 04: Government Printery; Item 005: National Archives. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 01: General Administration; Item 002: Gender Affairs Division; Item 003: Communications; Item 004: Government Printery; Item 005: National Archives; Item 06: Freedom of Information Unit; Item 007: Office of Information Commissioner. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 03: Communications; Item 004; Government Printery; Item 05: National Archives. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organizations; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Barataria San/Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Minister, can you just confirm on line Item 01 whether the increase of \$10 million was because of the COVID grants given to the various religious organizations?

Hon. Young: Yes. The answer is yes. This is a continuation of part of the relief

given during that period we were dealing with COVID. And, as you are aware, we used the Office of the Prime Minister to give to the various religious bodies, and there were reporting that had to take place, et cetera. So this 10 million was somewhat of a top up.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, when these institutions get the grants, do they report back to the Office of the Prime Minister?

Hon. Young: Yes, they actually signed an agreement with the Office of the Prime Minister and one of the conditions that they have to fulfil is that they have to provide reporting and accounting in a specific schedule.

Mr. Hosein: And on line Item 03, I saw there was an increase in expenditure from an allocated 8 million to 11 million. Can you just account for that difference, please Minister—the Contribution to Non-Profit Institutions?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: That allocation treats with our payment per child system for those children who are wards of the State and are at various homes. If needs be, if the internal arrangement cannot meet, they will have to go back at mid-year.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. But it went from 11 million to 8 million now, right?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: So, it is a \$3 million decrease. Will this affect any of the homes in terms of providing the services to these children?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: The payment per child system is based on how many children would be in a particular home at a particular time. So that is how we pay it now. So if internal arrangement, if we have more children that is allocated here, then we will make the necessary arrangements.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: If we cannot do it internally, they will come back at mid-year. But it is based on the payment per child system.

Hon. Young: But to answer your question, as the Minister is saying, what you are seeing reflected in that increase this year, the Minister will come to Cabinet and we will agree to an increase to cover that.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South? Member for Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 18. Can we get a breakdown of the 2021 Revised Estimate in writing?

Madam Chairman: But there is nothing under 18: Religious Organizations, nothing: '20, '21, and '22.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, my apologies.

Madam Chairman: All right. Okay? I know we are all tired. Minister of Finance, we are all tired. Item 07: Households. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, thank you, Madam Chair. Under line Item 03: Children's Authority, can the Minister advise the number of staff at this organization? The breakdown of the staffing at the Children's Authority.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: I have the information here.

Mr. Ratiram: All right. Can you kindly provide it in writing, please?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Sure, no problem.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just on line Item 11: Citizens Initiative Fund. I saw that in the Revised Estimate you spent 65,000. Could you give me an indication of how many person access the fund?

Hon. Young: We will have to provide that information.

Ms. Haynes: No problem.

Mr. Hosein: Just for clarification, that same line Item, sorry. Line Item 11:

Citizens Initiative Fund. What is the criteria for someone to qualify to be a beneficiary of that fund?

Hon. Young: That is money that is utilized based on certain requests. Citizens are always making requests to the Office of the Prime Minister and it is guided by a policy that has been approved by Cabinet.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Board 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*. 53: National Library and Information Systems.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are at page 15. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 004: Social infrastructure; Item 05: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Tabaquite.

7.45 p.m.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 005: Strategic Re-development of T.T.T., we estimated \$3 million in 2021, none was spent, so an explanation for that. And then the 2million estimated for 2022, if we can get a breakdown on how this money will be spent and what the Strategic Re-development of T.T.T. entails?

Mr. de Nobriga: You want that in writing or you want it now?

Ms. Haynes: Well, I would assume it is a longer answer so in writing will suffice.

Mr. de Nobriga: Fair enough.

Madam Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund, we are at page 187. Item 004: Social Infrastructure; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 13 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Ministers. Thank you, PS. Thank you, the other technocrats from the Office of the Prime Minister.

Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities. Hon.Members, we will be starting at page 120, the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

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

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make the briefest of opening statements.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, without restricting my freedom of speech, this Head deals with public officers' pensions and gratuities, widows and orphans, teachers' gratuities and pensions, naval and military pensions, and sundry other pension matters such as judges, Prime Minister's pension, retiring allowances for us inside of here, heads of missions' pensions, fire service, police, defence force and virtually all public service pensions, both in the mainstream public service and also in the state sector.

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

Madam Chairman: We shall proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Page 120, Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 20 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you very much, representatives. Head 02: Auditor General. Members, we will be at page 5 of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

Head 02: Auditor General, \$31,529,170.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make, again, the

briefest of opening statements without affecting his right to speak.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Again, without affecting my right to freedom of speech, the office of the Auditor General is an independent office in accordance with section 117 of the Constitution of the republic. The Auditor General is appointed by the President of the republic after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and holds office in accordance with section 136 of the Constitution.

In serving the people of the republic the Auditor General must audit and report on the public accounts of Trinidad and Tobago and of all officers, courts and authorities of Trinidad and Tobago and is also empowered to carry out audits on financial statements of all state-owned or controlled enterprises.

The reports of the Auditor General must be submitted annually to the Speaker, President of the Senate and the Minister of Finance. The staff of the office of the Auditor General are public officers.

Question proposed: That Head 02 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Tobago Services. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Tobago Services. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 02 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Auditor General. Thank you, other representatives from the office of the Auditor General.

Head 08: Elections and Boundaries Commission, and, Members, we will be starting at page 39 of the *Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and page 11 on the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

Head 08: Elections and Boundaries Commission, \$75,877,680.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement consistent with the previous practice. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I realize Members opposite do not have the energy to continue. I think we all know that the Elections and Boundaries Commission—[*Crosstalk*] Be quiet please. We all know the Elections and Boundaries Commission is an independent body appointed by the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and has the authority for the conduct of elections, both for parliamentary elections, local government elections and for Tobago House of Assembly elections. That is it.

Question proposed: That Head 08 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 16: Contract Employment, 2022, the Estimate is 1.5 million, an increase of 648,000, can the Minister indicate—

Madam Chairman: Where are you?

Mr. Lee: Page 40.

Madam Chairman: Okay. I am still on General Administration.

Mr. Lee: Oh, sorry.

Madam Chairman: If there is not anything on General Administration, Item 002: Election Expenses. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Minister, can you just confirm the 2022 Estimates will be for the upcoming THA elections and whether or not it will also include any by-election for the Debe South seat where there is a vacancy because of the death of the councillor?

Hon. Imbert: We are going to ensure that the EBC is properly funded. We will allow the Elections and Boundaries Commission to do virements and transfers if additional funds are allowed under—are required under any Sub-Item and we will supplement at the mid-year.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. This is where you are, Pointe-a-Pierre?

Mr. Lee: Yes, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Yes, please.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Minister, line Item 16: Contract Employment, 2022, 1.5 is the budgeted Estimate, an increase of 648,000; in 2020 we had an election year, we had 17,000 spent. Could the Minister indicate what is the cause for that Contract Employment, 1.5?—the amount of employees were on short-term contracts?

Hon. Imbert: The Commission has advertised for new positions—well, to fill positions and therefore anticipates it will require additional funding in the fiscal year.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item—sorry, Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. Imbert: Do you want a list of them? Member, you want a list? No.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 17, there is an Estimate of 100,000 here, 2022, is it that we contemplate this sum will be spent on training the additional persons or mainly the additional persons who are supposed

to be taken on under the Contract Employment?

Hon. Imbert: No. That previous Item is for 16 positions already advertised, various positions. This one is just for OSHA and supervisory training. That is what my notes tell me, occupational safety and health and supervisory training.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Election Expenses. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam. On line Item 12: Materials and Supplies, Minister, for 2021 I see that there is an Actual expenditure—well, a Revised Estimate, sorry, of 249,000 and we would have conducted the THA elections in addition to five by-elections in January and the allocation for 2022 is \$2.3million. Can you account for the large allocation for 2022 for Materials and Supplies in 2022 when we are not expecting any general election or local government election?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I realize the Member is new but the EBC is a proactive organization and will plan well ahead to purchase supplies for the local government elections which are due in December, 2022. So in fiscal 2022 which ends in September 2022, the EBC would have made a number of advanced purchases for materials and supplies to make sure they are ready for the 2022 local elections.

8.00 p.m.

Mr. Hosein: So then, the expenditure of just \$249,000 in 2021, and there were five by-elections, and the THA elections, it only cost \$249,000?

Hon. Imbert: If you look at the 2020 Actual, you would see that the expenditure was 4.2 million.

Mr. Hosein: But in 2020, we had a general election—

Hon. Imbert: Yes, I know.

Mr. Hosein:—which would have cost the taxpayers a lot of money also.

Hon. Imbert: Yes, I know.

Mr. Hosein: And that could have been materials and supplies for that elections.

Hon. Imbert: Not necessarily.

Mr. Hosein: Okay.

Hon. Imbert: It should be obvious to you that when the EBC buys its materials and supplies, it buys them in bulk. It does not use up every single every ballot paper, every single card. It is a proactive organization, so they purchased for the 2019 local, the 2020 general, and they had additional supplies which they utilized later on.

Mr. Hosein: Well, I would hope as proactive as they are, they should be as independent too.

Hon. Imbert: They are very, that is why we in Government and you in Opposition. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Exactly, that is why we have problems with the independence—

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Minister, line Item 17. Whilst we are aware that in 2020, the sum that would have been spent, we were dealing with a general election, still in 2022, is a decrease in the amount that we have allocated here prudent at this time, knowing that we are going into locals?

Hon. Imbert: Can you just be clear on which line Item you are referring to?

Madam Chairman: Item 17.

Mr. Rambally: Line Item 17.

Hon. Imbert: You are concerned that the amount for training is inadequate?

Mr. Rambally: No, I did not say inadequate. What I said, Minister, is that granted that 2020, we were dealing with general elections, so we are beyond that. We see

that the figure would have been required and it was, in fact, more substantial; 2022, knowing that we are going into local elections, would this figure suffice in terms of training?

Hon. Imbert: This is specifically designed to deal with training for the polling day staff for the THA elections, and they would have had a lot of people trained already. So some people would require refreshers, some people would be new requiring more substantive training. So yes, I am advised this is adequate.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head—

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, this may very well be my last question on—

Madam Chairman: Election Expenses?

Mr. Rambally: Sorry?

Madam Chairman: You are still on Election Expenses or—

Mr. Rambally: Yes, Training. Minister, just in gest, I know you mentioned proactive and independent, we should probably look at spending more on training for that as well.

Hon. Imbert: I am certain that if the Commission requires more money for training, they would make an appropriate request and we would approve a virement or a transfer, as the case may be. We will make sure they have sufficient money for whatever they are required to do.

Madam Chairman: Member Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Line Item 22. Minister, can you just confirm whether the short-term employment is for the election day staff?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: In the THA elections, what is the anticipated number of persons expected to be hired?

Hon. Imbert: Just over 700.

Mr. Hosein: Just over?

Hon. Imbert: Seven hundred.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases—

Hon. Imbert: Although there would not be any in the Main Ridge.

Madam Chairman: Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 11. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, 005: Upgrading of the Electronic Voter Registration and Election Management System. In 2020, 4 million was spent; 2021, another 4million; 2022, another 4 million is anticipated. Could you give us an appreciation of this constant upgrade? What is really taking place, and when that will end?

Hon. Imbert: It is a three-year programme, that is why you are seeing—sorry, five-year. It is a multi-year programme, so that is why you are seeing it recurring. It is for the Electronic Voter Registration System, its upgrade, its licence fees for software, but it is an annual expense. They have to maintain the licence for the software, of course. They have to get continuous upgrades of the software, so this is an amount which will be running for a couple of years.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, is this line Item—will it include also the issuance of the new national ID card?

Hon. Imbert: That is part of the system.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 08 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chief Elections Officer. Thank you, everyone.

Head 05: Parliament. Members, we will be at page 22 of the Recurrent Expenditure Estimates, and at page 7 of the DP.

Head 05: Parliament, \$140,725,900.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to continue in his established mode of making a brief opening statement.

Hon. Imbert: I will comply. We are the Parliament.

Question proposed: That Head 05 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we shall now proceed to examine the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 22. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Office of the Ombudsman. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Office of the Ombudsman. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Office the Ombudsman. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now proceed to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 7. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 05 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: So, I want to thank you all, Members, for ensuring that our various staff of the various entities has sufficient time to get home. I want to wish you all a safe journey home, a pleasant night.

This Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Friday, October 15, 2021. at 10.00a.m.

Special thanks to the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

8.10 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*