

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Wednesday, October 22, 2025***APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2026) BILL, 2025**

[Second Day]



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

[Chairman: Mr. Singh]

**10.00 a.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will now resume. But before we start, I want to crave the indulgence of Members just for a minute or two simply for the purpose of pointing out and making an admission of sorts, that we have performed very, very poorly, I dare say abysmally poorly, on our time management yesterday. And, whilst I understand that it is important that Members be allowed to freely ask questions to elicit vital information, I think we also have to strike a delicate and proportionate balance with the management of time. We had nine Heads yesterday, perhaps a little more, but we only accomplished four yesterday. I do not think anyone would disagree with me that that is an abysmal time management performance. Okay.

Having made that admission and I think we need to accept it, I think going forward, we need to be a little more considerate and proportionate and reasonable in how we move forward if we are going to achieve this exercise and complete it in the five days allotted. Bear in mind, the Standing Orders do not provide for an extension of this period beyond five days. So let us work in a collaborative manner and make some attempt to move along in a reasonable and proportionate manner.

Can I respectfully suggest that a lot of the questions that we have, some of it

**UNREVISED**

can be obtained in writing? And, we can preface the questions, like those that require very long answers? The Leader of the Opposition, very very reasonably sought to elicit from most of her questions the answers in writing and that is perhaps an example we can follow. In addition to which, there are other avenues in the Standing Orders that where answers require long protracted explanations or lists, we can get it in writing. The Parliament normally works assiduously and efficiently to get these assurances which have been given here.

So with that being said—

**Hon. Member:** [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, I just need to make an announcement. There was a schedule previously agreed to but because of the importance—we understand a conference of circumstances. I understand there is agreement to take the Tobago House of Assembly and Central Administrative Services on Friday morning. That has been agreed. Leader of Government Business.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Chairman. As you are on housekeeping matters, before we going into the substantive work before the Committee, based on something that you said earlier, I would like to place on the public record that this is a process that is driven by the Opposition. The travesty that occurred yesterday had nothing to do with the Government in terms of time management and the way in which the Committee was conducted yesterday by the Opposition. So the travesty that really occurred I think fall squarely at the feet of the Opposition and I would hope that they would seek to do better today.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chair?

**Mr. Chairman:** I—

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chair, for the greatest of respect, that is not true because, you

see, who is in control of providing truthful answers, direct answers to questions, and what the people have us here for, which is to provide illumination on mere figures is the Government. What we saw yesterday was not even an artful dodging but just a plain boldfaced refusal on many occasions not to answer the questions being asked.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I think you were not in the Chamber when I started with the housekeeping matters, and that is behind us. Can I just say, as we say in Trinidad, that is water under the proverbial bridge, okay. Let us move now in a conciliatory spirit trying to achieve the completion—

**Hon. Member:** With who?

**Mr. Chairman:** Well yes, but there are other ways of achieving that as well, as you well know, someone who is intimately familiar with the rules in this black book here. This is not the only forum by which you can get the information, there are other fora which you can get it by, okay. So we have to make a balancing decision; an act to balance how we move forward.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chair?

**Mr. Chairman:** So in that conciliatory spirit, let us move ahead and hopefully we could skip along fairly quickly. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chair, thank you very much. I just want to also put on record in the context of the conciliatory approach to this exercise, Mr. Chair, that the work that we have done yesterday was in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** Whilst, yes, I appreciate what you are saying, Mr. Chair, but in the

context of time management, we will endeavour to do everything that we can to complete within the stipulated timeline. But to say that it was an abysmal performance on the part of the Opposition is downright ridiculous.

**Mr. Chairman:** I did not say the—

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am not saying that you said it, Mr. Chair, I am responding to something that was said and it is something that I wish to reject out of hand—

**Mr. Chairman:** Or, okay.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—because the Opposition did its work and did its work fearlessly yesterday.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. All right, so let us move on to Head 72: Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

*Head 72:* Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training \$1,797,511,900.

**Mr. Chairman:** I now invite the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Good morning, Chairman, good morning colleagues. The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training is a newly established Ministry, or maybe more accurately, a newly reestablished Ministry. It is important that we look at universities and skills training institutes, the purpose being to train skilled manpower to support existing industries and enterprises and emerging ones like those based on artificial intelligence, robotics and automation, renewable energy and fuels, et cetera. Further, Sir, the research emanating from universities will play a critical role in the diversification of the economy through the commercializing of research and through collaboration with private enterprise. So therefore, there is a definite need to focus on tertiary level institutions and skills training.

Now this Ministry has been in operation for approximately six months and we have got together, you know, the information technology division, finance and accounts, general administration, legal, et cetera and this is from existing staff as noted.

Now, Chairman, this Ministry recognizes the situation we are in financially and therefore out of financial prudence and good sense, we are staying in the same building with the Ministry of Education and we are sharing some services with them also. So, to be abundantly clear, we will be sharing some services and we have some departments fully aligned with the Ministry of Tertiary Education in order to maximize the resources. So the Ministry is really a small lean, agile Ministry that we need to use in order to go forward and to set the example in terms of commercialization and enterprise, et cetera, we need to be lean and agile.

So having said so, Mr. Chairman, what the figures indicate here today, is that it is a new Ministry. So, we are trying to establish baseline financial figures as we go forward. So therefore, in the interest of the economy of time that is important as you pointed out, I want to point out that some of the issues in terms of numbers, et cetera, if the allocations are not adequate, we will do some internal virements according to the regulations and rules. Also, we will use the mid-year review to ensure a proper baseline financial position is established. I thank you, Chairman.

*Question proposed:* That Head 72 stand part of the Schedule.

**10.10 a.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$1,797,511,900 for Head 72. Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training 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 Draft Estimates of the Development Programme.*

We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, these Items are to be found at pages 400 to 402; Item 001: General Administration. St. Ann's East.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman. With regard to the line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. How many positions are being paid from this line Item, Minister?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Under 01?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** It is listed. There are 126, approximately, and the Minister and the parliamentary secretary and their staff, basically.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** There are 126?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Approximately.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** It is important to note, Member, that there are a lot of positions in this Ministry that have been vacant for a long, long time, which you will be fully aware of, I am sure. Therefore, the Ministry is in a position of reconstituting.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** If I may, Chairman, I am just asking—the Minister could just take it easy—I am asking the questions one by one. So you have 126 positions?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Approximately.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Approximately. How many of them are filled and how many are vacant?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** The positions? In total, they are all filled, eh.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** But you just said we had a lot of vacancies.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yeah, but what I am saying, the whole Ministry itself, there are over 911 vacancies in those positions which have not been filled, eh.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Minister, if I may, how many positions are being paid under line Item 01? That is the question.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** As I have said previously, those bodies are in place.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, I am asking how many. I am asking for a number. How many positions are being paid under 01? You said 126.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Approximately.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Is that the figure?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes, I said that, yes.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay, and I am asking further, how many of them are filled and how many are vacant?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** The positions are filled.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** All are filled?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yeah.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, in line Item 08, when there is \$100,000 allocated for Vacant Posts (without incumbents), how many posts are those that they are referring to?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** As I have indicated earlier, there are over 795 posts that are vacant in the Ministry. We found the Ministry in that way. We are not paying people who are not there. We have to pay people who are there.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Minister, I am not sure if you are understanding the question I am asking.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I am not sure you understand my answers.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am asking, 01, how many positions are on the establishment of the Ministry? How many are filled? How many are vacant? You replied, 126. You said all are filled, and there are none vacant. Is that the answer you are giving?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** And I am repeating, I do not know how many times must I repeat it, that there are a lot of vacancies in the Ministry, some 911.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am asking how many.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** And I am saying to you, again, that the positions that we are paying, they coalesce for positions that are being filled and are filled.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Minister, I am asking how many positions are on the establishment? Minister of Finance, give him some assistance.

**Mr. Manning:** Minister, why are you ducking the question?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Ducking? I am not ducking any question.

**Mr. Chairman:** You know, San Fernando East, it is a little too early to start that. Either you are going to ask a question, you are going to make an interjection, rather than shout a commentary across. It is a little too early.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Chairman, I did ask a question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Out of term.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, is anybody able to assist the Minister to answer the question because—?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** So, what we are saying, right now, there are 911 positions in the Ministry according to the various Heads, 911.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** In the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, 911.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes.

**Mr. Tancoo:** [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** And Minister of Finance, be calm.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Approximately 126 are filled, and the rest, if you subtract 126 from 911, you will know how many are vacant.

**Hon Member:** [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Well, they have left endless vacant. The Ministry is in a mess.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, clearly, clearly, Minister, from the fact that you do not even know the number of people on the establishment.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Clearly.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Because you left it in a mess. That is why. That is why. You know the record must show it, eh, that for instance, the Ministry of Education, ECIAF, what have you done?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Mr. Chairman, I do not know where this editorializing is coming from.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay—

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chair—

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I am speaking facts—

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chair—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Not sure—

**Mr. Chairman:** Listen, it is a little too early to have—

**Mr. Young SC:** Whilst my colleague from St. Ann's East is collating the very difficult response, if I may—

**Mr. Padarath:** Chairman, I did not hear you recognize the Member for Port of

Spain North/St. Ann's West—

**Mr. Young SC:** Who are you?

**Mr. Padarath:** They must—*[Inaudible]*—

**Mr. Chairman:** Listen—

**Mr. Young SC:** You are not in charge of these proceedings.

**Mr. Padarath:** *[Interruption]*—

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, well, let us proceed in an orderly fashion. Member for St. Ann's East, are you done for now?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am giving way to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. To the Minister, at the start of your presentation to the population, you stated that this is a new Ministry. So, by definition, a new Ministry could not have been filled previously. So, therefore, I am failing to understand why those comments are being made. The simple question put to you is with your new Ministry that did not exist for 10 years, so, therefore, no vacancies under a nonexistent Ministry could have been filled by anybody, not even the UNC—

**Hon. Members:** *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Young SC:**—how many vacancies exist in your new Ministry? Simple question.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Minister, you have selective hearing—

**Mr. Young SC:** I have five minutes—

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, I think—

**Mr. Young SC:** I have five minutes!

**Mr. Chairman:** I think—

**Mr. Young SC:** I am now happy that you are no longer in charge of a tertiary education institution!

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, okay. That is enough. One, and first of all, the first comment I would like to make there is no need to shout your questions at the Minister. We are all right here. The acoustics in this room are outstanding; there is no need for that. The mikes are there. There is absolutely no need to shout your questions and ask them in such a plainly belligerent manner, okay? That is the first observation I would like to make.

Secondly, if we have this constant commentary accompanying questions, we are not going to get anywhere. We are not going to achieve an economic management of time. Thirdly, St. Ann's East, can I say that this is one of the appropriate questions by which you can elicit the answer in response. You can get a more considered, a more fulsome, and an answer with a greater degree of clarity in writing. So, you have asked the Minister the same questions three times.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chair—

**Mr. Young SC:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** It is a suggestion I am making to you.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** So that we can proceed quickly, expeditiously, with the economic management of time to achieve the purpose we have to achieve here. There are 45 Heads. We are now 18 minutes into the session, and we are still on the first set of questions.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, if I may, I asked a simple question and asked for a

simple response. It took the Minister three tries to even tell me how many people on the establishment and how much was filled. So, you cannot blame me on that.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. So, let us move on. Ask another question. Can you?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** How many of those vacant positions, Minister, now that you have identified that you have a number of vacant positions in the Ministry that has been reestablished after 10 years, are you planning to fill any of those vacant positions based on line Item 08?

**10.20 a.m.**

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Chairman, for clarity first, I think to respond to the Member for St. Ann's East, I did not say the Ministry, I said the re-established Ministry. Do you have selective hearing?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** And secondly, Chairman, I did say that the number of vacancies, when they put the Ministry together—and I did point out that. There are a lot of vacancies within the put-together Ministry of Education. So this, what we have inherited, is a very, very complex situation we are trying to, you know, put together. So, it is very important if you know that. So that is for the record.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. To control the management of time, can I ask you, are you able to give a fulsome and accurate answer now, in keeping with your parliamentary duty of full and frank accountability?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes, Sir, I can. So, the positions—the number of positions is: 911, right, 116 are filled, and therefore, the vacancies at this point in time are 795. With regard to the Member for St. Ann's East's question, as we go along, we will see which positions are required within the Ministry, because I did say in my opening statement, we want to have a lean, agile Ministry.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. So, with regard to line Item 08, the \$100,000 that is allocated here, how many vacancies would that be projected to fill?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** That we will work out as we go along.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, the Minister does not know a number at this time?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No, I am saying to you that it is being developed. As I said, it is a re-established Ministry, and you are looking at positions—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, you do not know a number at this time. That is okay.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** If you would allow me to answer, please. We are building over the Ministry, which was, you know, destroyed basically. We are trying to build it back, and as I said, again, I will repeat that we want a lean, agile Ministry. As simple as that, that was straightforward.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, next question.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** St. Ann's East.

**Hon. Members:** [*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Mr. Chairman—[*Laughter*] Mr. Chairman, on line Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees, how many Cabinet-appointed committees exist right now under the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** So far, there is a GATE Standing Committee, there is a scholarship committee and a health committee.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Could the Member many give us the membership of these two committees, please, in writing? I will accept that in writing. If the Minister knows at this time, what are the payments to the members and the chairmen of these committees?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Standard rates that you paid also when you were Minister.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Can I have a number, please, Minister? What are the payments—

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** But you do not know what you paid them?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:**—that are made to each of the members and the chairmen of the committee? Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us just get an answer. Minister, are you aware now—

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** It is about \$3,500 for the Chairman.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** “Mm-hmm”. And the members?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I think I have the numbers here. It is about \$1,000 for the members. I can give you that in writing if you wish.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay, so the names—

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** The names of the people and the payments.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:**—and the payments of the GATE and the scholarships. And those are the only two committees that are under this line Item.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yeah, sure.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay, great.

**Mr. Chairman:** Shall we move on now to another question?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, no, we can move on.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. So, Item 002: Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry. Malabar/Mausica.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. Still on 01, my hand was up. Under the same 001/01, can the Minister indicate how many of the filled positions are permanent and how many are contracts?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, we have moved on from that. We are on Eastern Caribbean

Institute of Agriculture—

**Mr. Romain:** Sir, my hand was up. Your head was down, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sorry?

**Mr. Romain:** My hand was up, your head was down. We had that problem yesterday, Chair, with all due respect.

**Mr. Chairman:** Well, with the greatest of respect to you, I directed a question when St. Ann's East was finished. I said, "Okay, can we move on to the next line Item?"

**Mr. Chairman:** But, Chair, your head was down, so you could not have noticed my hand.

**Mr. Chairman:** That is not so.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Look, I hate to be blunt about it, but that is not so.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** I then announced that we are moving to Item 002: Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry, and your hand was up. So, we are moving to the next line Item: Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry; Item 003: Technical/Vocational Education; Item 005: National Examinations Council; Item 007: Scholarships and Advanced Training Division; Item 008: On The Job Training Programme. St. Ann's East, this is on page 402.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With regard to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, this line Item was previously under the Ministry of Labour, and the revised expenditure was \$2 million in 2025. I noticed the Estimate for 2026 has reduced to \$1.3 million. This is a very important programme, this is for the administration of the programme, I would imagine, to

pay the staff members. Why is there a reduction in the allocation?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** All these programmes are being revisited. There was a flurry of hiring before elections, and we are looking at the numbers again to see what we actually need and to put good use to it.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, therefore, the allocation that shows a reduction means that staff are going to be let go?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No, those who are on the programme will be paid, but we are reviewing the programme to make it more efficient.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** But if it was paid at a level of \$2 million in 2025, and all the allocation is, is \$1.3 million, it means that you would not have enough allocation. You have a reduction of \$700,000, which is significant. Therefore, how many persons are being paid from this line Item right now?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** That is it. You are presuming that people's contract did not come to an end. That is a presumption you are making.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, their contracts will be renewed then?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yeah.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, how many people are paid under this line Item at this point, Minister?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** The total number of people is approximately near to 5,000, but at various levels, people are paid, those in CXC level—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** There are 5,000 persons being paid under this line Item, Minister?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Oh, sorry, sorry, I was talking about scholarships. I am sorry. You are talking about staffing of OJT, right?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I on line Item 008/01.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Staffing, yes. We are reviewing the staffing.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I asked how many persons are being paid under this line Item, Minister.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Approximately 36.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Is that the same number of persons that were on the establishment in the last fiscal, or are there less at this time?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Same number.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, the same number of persons will be paid with less money?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** They are reviewing the positions. Like I said, some are on contracts, some will be going on. So, like I said, I prefaced my presentation by saying that we are reviewing all these things that were going on, wasteful expenditure all the time, you know. And we are looking at it in a serious way.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, these are salaries and you are saying that there is wasteful expenditure in the salaries. So that means, it is a waste to pay people their salaries if they work?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No, I did not say that.

**Mr. Chairman:** You know, St. Ann's East—

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I said that before elections—

**Mr. Chairman:**—we had the same problem—

**Hon. Prof. Persad:**—there was a mass hiring.

**Hon. Member:** With whom?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** And you know whom. And that is what I am saying, that is being reviewed.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, I do not know whom. I actually do not know, Minister.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I am sure you do know whom.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Let us just not engage in an argument. Let us just ask the question.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. So \$700,000 is being taken from this line Item, meaning that the same number of persons who are hired cannot be sustained under this line Item. Is that the fact? I am asking a question, Chairman. Could I ask a question?

**Mr. Chairman:** You have asked the question.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Because I am getting answers that are shifting all over the place. I heard it was 5,000 workers, then I heard it was 36 workers.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No, I did not say 5,000 workers—

**Mr. Chairman:** No, I think that is unfair.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I corrected that, I said it was 5,000 scholars. That is different.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Minister, I am speaking with the Chairman at this time. I am not asking a question.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Well, you are misrepresenting me.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am clarifying with the Chairman, why I have to ask a number of times to get a clear answer. So, Chairman, that is the situation.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Can you ask the question that you wish to ask without the editorializing?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I have established, based on the answers after a number of tries, that there is a reduction of \$700,000, which will not be able to sustain 36 workers as \$2 million did.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** And I said, if there is a shortfall—as I said at the beginning, my preface, we will go back to the mid-year review if there is a shortfall. I did say

that. So I—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So if there is a shortfall, you will need additional funding in this line Item, Minister?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I am saying too, if there is a shortfall, we will revisit it and we will go to the mid-year review.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Is there a shortfall, Minister?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** How many times must I say the same thing, Chairman?

**Mr. Chairman:** The Minister of Finance will answer.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Member, the hon. Minister, in his introduction at the very start, indicated that every attempt will be made to wherever additional requirements for funding exist. If any exist, they will be looking at internal virements and, if required, will come back to the Ministry of Finance for the mid-year review. He said that at the start, why are we belabouring this question?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Because, Minister of Finance, the money is not coming from a well that you could just dip in and take money, and if every Minister in every line Item is under-budgeted and underfunded, it is not as though money can just be created to put in these line Items. A budget exercise—

**Mr. Tancoo:** The honourable—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** If I may continue and finish what I am saying?

**Mr. Tancoo:** Please do, please do.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** A budget exercise, it is required that the proper planning is done and that line Items are funded as they should be.

**10.30 a.m.**

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** When big cuts are made in line Items and the cure-all is that if we need more money, we will come back to the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Do you have a question?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am answering your question.

**Mr. Tancoo:** No you cannot. Are you answering my question?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** If the cure-all is that you go to the Ministry of Education, you go to the Ministry of Finance you are just dipping in—

**Mr. Chairman:** As Chairman, I am exercising my power. I think we have had enough of this long unnecessary dissertation. Move forward, next question. This dissertation is not required. Next question.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I do not have another question. I have established it had been decreased already.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us move on. I propose, if there are no other questions on this line Item. Member for Diego Martin West.

**Mr. Des Vignes:** A very short question for the Minister, Chair. Regarding this Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, out of the 36 employees that the Minister mentioned, how many of them are actually part-time employees?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No part-time, Sir.

**Mr. Des Vignes:** Okay, so is the Minister saying that he plans to pay some of these employees minimum wage? Because 1.3 million divided by 36, by 12, works out to \$3,009 per employee, which means that somewhere along the line, people are being paid less than minimum wage. So I am asking, are any of these employees part-time?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Sir, the—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Member, if I may. Again, the Minister indicated that this establishment, the positions here, are being reviewed. The Minister also indicated that some contracts are coming to an end. So your premise that there is minimum

wage in payments involved here is wrong.

**Mr. Chairman:** I propose to move to Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 403 to 405; Item 001: General Administration. Member for St Ann's East.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, with regard to line Item 16: Contract Employment, can I ask the Minister, how many persons are being paid out of this line Item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** As of April 2025, there are 27 employees.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** How many?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Twenty-seven.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Twenty-seven. Yesterday, the Ministry of Education said 117 workers were transferred to the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, which would have accounted for a \$37 million decrease in this Contract Employment Vote from the Ministry of Education, as the two Ministries were cleaved. So, the Minister of Education said 117 workers, and you are saying that there are only 27 workers under this line Item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** This is contract employment, and mainly OJT.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Mainly what?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I think you are missing the final point.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Again, Mr. Chair, the Member had the opportunity to question the Ministry of Education. She is now going backwards into the Ministry of Education-

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am not going backwards.

**Mr. Tancoo:**—to cross reference here. What you have in front of you is what you should be asking the questions on. Thank you so much, Ma'am.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I do not know that the Minister of Finance could tell me what

I should be asking.

**Mr. Tancoo:** The Minister of—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Let me just make that clarification.

**Mr. Tancoo:** The Minister of—can I speak?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Can I speak?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Can I speak?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No. When you are speaking, is to tell me what I should be asking? No, Minister.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Can I finish my comment?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, Minister.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Can I finish my comment?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, Minister, no Minister. That is not your place.

**Mr. Tancoo:** You like to talk but “yuh doh like” anybody else to talk.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is not your place.

**Mr. Tancoo:** That is inappropriate.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance, let us de-escalate this conversation, and let us move on. So, St. Ann's East, you would have had the numbers yesterday. I do not know whether it is fair to confront this Minister with the previous answers another Minister gave. You can draw the strings together, and you can make whatever you wish, if you want to extrapolate the evidence and make whatever you wish. The Minister has given a clear answer that there are 27 employees paid out of this. Whether we perform a comparative analysis with what the Minister of Education said about transferred workers, plainly, the factual scenario is not

sufficient for you to draw the inference you are wishing to draw now. So, let us just move on to another area. You can supplement it, and you very well know how to do so. So, let us just move on to another area.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Next question.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you. Can I ask on line Item 22: Short-term Employment? How many short-term workers are employed in the ministry?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Fourteen.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Fourteen. Are any of these short-term employees former contract employees, who are awaiting renewal of contracts?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes. Twelve of them.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Twelve of them? Okay. So, I guess your contract employment will go up in a little bit by 12, which is less than the 117, but okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much, St. Ann's East. Mausica/Malabar.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. 001/08: Rent, Lease, Office Accommodation. In light of the Minister's opening statement that they are sharing accommodation with the Ministry of Education and in the economy of savings, can he tell us what this line Item is for?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I did not hear your question. I am trying to—

**Mr. Romain:** Minister, in your opening statement, you indicated that for the economy of savings, you all are sharing accommodations with the Ministry of Education in the same building.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes.

**Mr. Romain:** Therefore—so I am asking, in light of that, what is this Rent, Lease Office Accommodation for?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** This is for the GATE committee, the GATE division, the Funding and Grants Administration Division. It is in Warner Street, St. Augustine. We rent there. And also, there is a storage in El Socorro, the Trade Zone, which we are looking to put an end to. But those are two the rentals. We inherited that also, "eh". GATE has been there a long while in St. Augustine, Warner Street.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you. 22: Short-Term Employment. Can you just define what is the tenure for the short-term employment? Is it months? Is it years? If you could just give us a little definition.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Short-term employment?

**Mr. Romain:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think the Minister of Finance wishes to answer that.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Just for clarification and for further reference, short-term employment is defined in law. It is defined how we treat with it in the principle here. It is defined as for a period of six months or less.

**Mr. Romain:** So can the Minister tell us which tenure is this one? Is it six months? Is it one year? That is what I would like to know.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Well, it is six months or less.

**Mr. Romain:** Okay, so you are saying these persons are hired for six months or less. Thank you so much.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Under all line Items that refer to short-term employment, it is six months or less.

**Mr. Chairman:** So moving forward for clarification purposes, so we do not have to repeat that question.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you so much. Greatly appreciated.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for St. Ann's East?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On line Item number 37, can I ask the Minister how many janitorial firms are employed under this line Item or paid under this line Item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** How many janitorial? They are not going to be separate. We are going to pay part of it to the Ministry also. We say we are sharing services. The janitorial, you know, this—so like certain services are being shared, security, janitorial, et cetera. But we must have a budget Item for it, and that is it there.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am asking how many janitorial firms are paid under this line Item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** One.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** One firm. Are there any arrears owed to that janitorial firm?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No arrears.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** What is the name of the firm?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, is that information readily available?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** We can send that information in writing.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** One firm. You would send the one firm that does janitorial affairs? Send that in writing, thanks. And security services under line Item 43, how many security firms are paid from this line Item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** One firm.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Do you know the name of the firm?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Advanced Security.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** And what premises are they in charge of providing security services for?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** The funding and grants GATE office.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Are there any arrears owed to this supplier?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. If there are no further questions on this Head, I propose to move to Item 002: Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry. I propose to move on to 005: National Examinations Council; 006: Spanish Secretariat; 007: Scholarships and Advanced Training Division; 008, On-the-Job Training.

**10.40 a.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for St. Ann's East.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, under line Item 17: Training, the 2024 allocation or expenditure was 294 million. In 2025 the expenditure was 320 million. I noticed that there is a 45 million decrease in the 2026 allocation, which is \$275 million. Is this the line Item that is used to pay the actual OJT trainees?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, with a reduction of 45 million, would the same number of trainees be able to be used or to be employed as in the previous year?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Well, there are different levels of trainees, eh. There are five levels, and they are paid a different amount, varying from CXC people to degree people. So, you can have the same amount or more with the same quantum—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, there is an intention to higher at the lower level?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** It depends on the level in which you have them employed at.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, there is an intention to spend \$45 million less, but hire the same number of people. Therefore you will be hiring more of the lower level?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I did not say that.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, I asked that, Minister.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** What I am saying to you once—Minister please.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Alright. I am sure that the former Minister, the Member for St. Ann's East, is aware that OJT training is for a particular period of time and therefore, once the time passes those persons get out of the system and others may have come in. So, that would explain the reduction. Some people would have moved out having served their two-year period, and then others may or may not have come in. So, that would have explained reduction.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, Minister, frankly, that does not explain the reduction. What that says is that as people move out of the programme, you will not be taking in as many people. So, it means that there will be less opportunity for young people to be employed in the OJT programme, because \$45 million less has been allocated. That is what it is saying, and that is why I am asking these questions very carefully, because if you are hiring the same amount with less money—So, you are saying we are hiring less. The Minister is saying we are hiring the same amount. So, it is either you are hiring less or you are hiring the same amount at a lower level, and it means that persons who have degrees and so on will be less able to find opportunities. The fact is, if you are funding 45 million less then how could you be hiring the same amount?

**Mr. Tancoo:** So, Ma'am, just again for your clarification, for simplicity—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Please.

**Mr. Tancoo:**—OJT training is a temporary measure. The Government has clearly announced the employment and filling of vacancies at a national level. The Government has also engaged in a recruitment drive for that purpose. The intention of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this Government, is to

provide strong, sustainable, reliable, well-paying jobs to young people.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Tancoo:** I trust that answers your questions, Ma'am.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, I am asking again. So, are less people going to be hired under the OJT programme?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Chairman, the former Minister seems to have forgotten how the OJT works over there. We have different levels. Level 1, we employ 1700—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Sir, I am answering the question, please—1,756 people. Level 2, 838; level 3, 174; level 4, 1613; level 5, 108, and they get different pay. You know, the values are different. So, it depends on which level you are hired at. So, it does not mean you are hiring less. How do you know—? Right now the lower level there is a great demand for people in the schools to help with the autistic children, et cetera. So, I think, the Member for St. Ann's East needs to look at the details a bit more closely in order to ask a question that makes more sense.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman. You have said nothing about the pejorative language that has been used by the Minister. So, when I say—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** I think—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** When I say, that the Minister—It is a very good thing for UTT, that the Minister has moved and is now in this programme—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:**—but it is bad for the country, but I guess that will be a

problem.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The Minister cannot answer one question clearly. Not one.

**Mr. Chairman:** St. Ann's East. St. Ann's East.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I moved from UTT when it was collapsing. I became the president when it was collapsing under your watch.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright. Okay. Let us—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Because if I cannot speak and if the Minister insists on being pejorative, then I can also be.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us stop it now. Let us stop this now. I appealed to everyone at the start. Let us proceed with this bearing in mind the economy of time. You have asked the question, the answer has come, you have asked it in several iterations, and the answer has come. Perhaps it is time to decide to move to another question. Make a strategic decision to obtain the answer in a different format, which you are fully entitled to do.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chair. The Minister is very disrespectful and he is unhelpful to his colleagues.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, no. Arouca/Lopinot, I—

**Hon. Member:** [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Chairman:** I did not invite any observations. I am inviting questions. I want everyone to please refrain from making unnecessary—I appeal to everyone, we do not need to editorialize every comment, every question. If we just ask questions, we could move along and achieve these Heads that we piled upon ourselves from

yesterday to today. So, Member for St. Ann's East, let us move to another area, please. Another question.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, I am not finished with this line Item. If I may?

**Mr. Chairman:** Well, go ahead.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Based on the funding of 275 million, how many persons are projected to be hired under the OJT programme in the upcoming fiscal?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Projected new hires are 40 per month. 40, sorry, 40.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Forty for the year?

**Mr. Chairman:** *[Inaudible]*

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No, 40.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, if the Minister could answer. Every time the Minister is answering—Chairman you are prolonging it too, because you are coming in the answer.

**Mr. Chairman:** Because you obviously did not hear the answer. I am merely trying to facilitate the process.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Jesus. Minister, 40?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** New hires, 40 at level 4.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Forty per month at level 4?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Forty at level four.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Forty or 14 are you saying? 4-0?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** 4-0 at level 4.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Mm-hmm. Per month?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** 4-0 at level 4.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Jesus Christ. Is it per month? Is it per year, for the year? Forty? That is the total hires you are projecting?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** We look at it starting that way, and then we will look at how much we will hire after. But we are starting at 40 and then as people leave—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Minister 40 for the year, 40 for the month?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I did not say that. You are saying that.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** But the Chairman just interpreted your statement as 40 per month.

**Mr. Chairman:** Perhaps it my mistake that I did.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, 40 for the year?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No, I did not say that either. We start off hiring 40 as the need arises, and then we look at it again.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. So, that is 40 in level 4. Any at the other levels? Are you planning to hire persons?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Sorry, I did not hear you.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** At the other levels, are you planning to hire any other persons?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes. People come in and leave, and we hire as demands as it come up forward.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, you made a projection of 40 at level 4. Are there any other projections for the other levels?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** We will review that.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So there is no projection at this time for the other levels?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** At this time it is being reviewed. I mean how many times must we say that?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, no projections for the other levels.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No, I did not say that.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well then, tell me what they are.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I am saying that before you can have projections you must have a review. This Government does not operate by guess, eh.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Wow.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** We review and then make a decision.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. So, Minister how many persons are being paid from the programme right now at the different levels?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** The total number being paid 4,489.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Do you have the different levels?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I told you before. I will say it again. I will repeat it for you. Level 1, 1,756—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** One hundred and how much?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Mr. Chairman, 1,756.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Minister, you just told me you have 1,489 persons being paid.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** What? No, no, no. I think you have a problem with your hearing.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think it is a different answer.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** May I ask again? How many persons are currently being paid from this programme under this line item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Totally.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** That is what I am saying; 4,489. I mentioned that before.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, 1,756 is level 4 or level 1?

**10.50 a.m.**

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Level 1.

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& Skills Training (cont'd)

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Right.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Level 2, 838.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** “Mm-hmm.”

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Level 3, 174.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** “Mm-hmm.”

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Level 4, 1,613.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** “Mm-hmm.”

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Level 5, 108.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** “Mm-hmm.”

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Cumulatively, 4,489.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay, so the 4,489 being paid now and your projection—at this point the only projection you have in numbers will be 40 at level 4?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Well, it depends on who leaves.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** As I said, it is being reviewed.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. So right now you have 1,613 at level 4 and only 40 you are projecting to take in further? Okay. I am fine.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** That is your assumption not mine.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. Malabar/Mausica.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. 008/08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, 473,000, could the Minister tell us which premises that applies to?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I did not hear what you just said. Please repeat.

**Mr. Romain:** 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, 473,000, could you please tell us what accommodation that applies to?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Are we going backwards, Chairman? I did—

**Mr. Romain:** No, this one is a different figure, the last one was 500,000. This one is 473,000. It is under a different line Item.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yeah, this is the warehouse storage for accounts and human resources, there is an internal registry storage and arrears for rental for the ANSA building.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Proposed now, Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; 008: On The Job Training. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 001: Regional Bodies; 002: Commonwealth Bodies; 004: International Bodies; 006: Educational Institutions; 007: Households; 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Item 004: Statutory Boards, at page 409.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. 01: National Institute of Higher Education (Research, Science and Technology). Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; 56: College of Science Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 006: Educational Institutions; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move onto the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. This is at page 177 in that volume. St. Ann's East.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, you are taking D., G., any of the numbers, right?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, for the economy of time these are comprised of D., G. and J. So I will permit any question along those. Once you identify for sufficient clarity for the Minister to give a proper answer.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. Thank you. Under line Item G. 002. Could the Minister indicate how many nationals scholars are being paid under this line Item currently?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** 290.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** How many?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** 290.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Would you like the breakdown of the countries?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No. Are there any arrears to be cleared under this line Item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No arrears.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Are Cuban scholars paid from this allocation?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Under line Item 003: Annual Scholarship and Technical Assistance Programme, how many students are going to benefit from this 300,000?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** It is about six existing scholars and three will be completing in June '26.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That is the Cuban scholars?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes. They were sent to a hellhole.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Are there any additional Cuban scholars that are new to be taken on, and paid under this line Item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No. When we heard the conditions to the students, we said no this year. We declined the offer this year.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Line Item 004: Establishment of Undergraduate Scholarship, 400,000. How many students have benefited from this?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** This is a programme we are looking to implement and we are looking at the costing involved in it. Because I think we have focused a lot on, you know, we want to have undergraduate scholarships as opposed to postgrad scholarships basically. So that is being reviewed.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So at this point you do not have any projection as to how many students would benefit under this line Item—this allocation?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No. At this point, no.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** And how are the students to be chosen?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** I beg your pardon?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** How are the students to be chosen?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** We set a fixed criteria that is based on their academic performance, not on other things as was previously done.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Where exactly will the students be chosen from?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Where?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yeah.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** That is being reviewed also.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So—it is under review or it is being formulated?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** We have preliminary ideas and it is being reviewed and formulated to have a final formulation.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So the programme has been allocated 400,000 but you are not sure how many students will be getting any money from this, you are not exactly sure where the students will be coming from. Is that correct?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No. I did not say that. I said it is being reviewed and the details will be revealed at the appropriate time.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** But how many students will be given the opportunity to benefit?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** It depends on the value of the scholarship. That is common sense.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Where will the scholarship be offered? To which students? Which undergraduate students? Would it be available to UWI, UTT, COSTAATT, everywhere?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Everywhere. But it is under review, as I said. Chairman, how many times must I explain—should I explain what “under review” means?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, what is patently clear, Minister, and why we are asking is because there is an allocation here, and there are people listening, young people as well, to understand what exactly are the details of a programme that has been allocated 400,000 under the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, and they will be very disappointed, because when I am asking the Minister who has to know, the Minister does not know.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. St. Ann’s East, let us get the question in. Let us move forward by getting a question in.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** The students will be hopeful that something is coming that did not happen before.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** But nothing is coming because there are no details to come.

And the question is, I am asking the questions but I am not getting any answers.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us not let this devolve into an argument of sorts. Ask a question, St. Ann's East.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay, and I am still on the same line Item and I am asking, will students from COSTAATT—undergraduate students from COSTAATT be able to access this programme?

**Mr. Chairman:** Asked and answered. That was answered just a minute ago.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. When will this programme come on stream, Minister?

**Mr. Chairman:** Asked and answered. It said it was—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, no, no, no, no.

**Mr. Chairman:**—under review.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I have asked when will the programme come into place for students to apply? That is not answered.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Minister gave an answer.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So there are no details about this programme that has been allocated 400,000, Chairman? And that is reasonable?

**Mr. Chairman:** The reasonableness or otherwise is not for me to judge.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, then the public will judge it.

**Mr. Chairman:** The only thing—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** The public will judge the reasonableness.

**Mr. Chairman:**—for me to judge is the admissibility of your questions. So ask another question.

**11.00 a.m.**

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Under 005: Scholarships and Bursaries (previously Arrears of Scholarships), how many students are presently paid under this?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Line Item 005, 995 existing bursary recipients.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** And those were students who would have applied for the new national bursary programme, of which there are many details for students?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Excellent. Excellent. Under 001: National Skills Development Programme Centre at Macoya (MIC), what is this allocation meant to pay the Minister?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Well, you have a balance of payments for—a lot of these institutions were left in a state of disrepair, so these are like outfitting the learning factory, the supply and installation of fume extractors and also, balance of payments for commitments for a fire hose reel and a PA system.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, the \$2 million that is allocated is broken down into what payment?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Oh, mercy.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Are you sure you are on the right line Item?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yes, I am on the right line Item.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay.

**Hon. Persad:** So, the National Skills Development Programme Centre at Macoya (MIC)—

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Macoya. So I will repeat. I will repeat. Electrical upgrade, the value is 867,161.45, there are some outstanding arrears there. The supply and installation of a fire hose reel at the centre, there are some arrears there also. Supply and installation of a PA system in the centre, there will be arrears there also. Refurbishment of the roof of the centre, there are arrears there also. Outfitting at the learning factory, that is now going to be done, there is an awarded

contract. And supply and installation of fume extractors, all of these things add up to the value there.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. So, the arrears that are to be paid, is that for ongoing work?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** The work for the electrical upgrade was completed. Normally, in normal contracts, there is a 10 per cent retention fee, so you pay it, and once we establish that the time, it works for the year—the retention period—then we pay. So, again, for the fire hose reel, that again is a similar value, just under \$100,000.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So then, these are payments for the ongoing works in the normal process?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yeah.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay, thank you. Not arrears. Moving on to 002: Metal Industries Company - Training Subsidy (Legacy Project), \$500,000: What is this allocation used to pay for?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** For balance of payments, procurement of personal protective equipment and materials for the trainees.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. So this was \$1 million in 2025. What is the reason for the reduction in 2026?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Well, it depends on the number of trainees and the number of personal protective equipment you need to buy; the numbers will go there. So, right now, we estimate for 145 journeymen trainees and then engineers, so it is based on the cost for each one.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, with a reduction, it means there is a reduction in the number of trainees?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No, that is an assumption.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** “Hmm”. So if you said the allocation is based on the number of trainees and there is a reduction in allocation, does it not follow that there is a reduction in the number of trainees?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Not necessarily.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. Well, what is the explanation?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** It depends on the cost of the protective equipment, and it depends on how many raw materials were there. You know, we have lab materials, so you do not need to buy all, all the time. The review was there, and that is a process taking place right now. We do not want to buy endless materials, for which, you know, it is overstocked, eh.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, even though you have reduced the amount—

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** “Mm-hmm”.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:**—how many trainees are at the institution right now that this line item would refer to?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** What we are looking at—the new cohort we are looking at, this is for the new cohort—the materials—is 145 journeymen trainees.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, the new cohort requires less funding than the previous cohort?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** You are presuming that this new cohort is less than the previous cohort. I am not doing that.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Minister, I am not presuming anything, you know.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** You are only assuming.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** I am just following on from exactly what you are saying. You have allocated—you have slashed the budget for trainees in MIC in half.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, ask a question. Ask a question.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** But I am asking the question, Chairman. You have slashed the allocation, which refers directly to MIC trainees in half, and I am asking, how could that allow the same number of trainees to be trained? Is it that the equipment has gone down?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No. You are assuming that there is a less amount of training. I am not saying that. I am saying that the cost of what we have here, we are going to use it to buy for the trainees.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** So, with less available to provide for the trainees, then there will be less trainees to provide for.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** That is your assumption, not mine.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Well, that is just the fact in black and white.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** No.

**Mr. Chairman:** No. You see, again, we could move along if we stop drawing inferences in the Chamber.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** We could move along if the Member answers the questions, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no. You know, we could move along if you stop drawing inferences and repeating them into the public record. As I have said yesterday, the answer which stands is that of the Minister. Your—and I want to be very neutral in what I say. Your drawing of inferences really does not take the matter further insofar as the answers given and the public record. So let us just move on. Let us get to another question, please. Are you through, St. Ann's East?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes, I am.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, I am under line Item J. 001: National Skills and Development Programme Centre at Macoya (MIC). In 2024, the allocation was about \$2.2 million for this programme. In 2025, there was a \$3 million Estimate, however, we are seeing the Revised Estimate under that line Item is \$500,000, \$2.5 million less than what was appropriated. Can the hon. Minister indicate what was the reason for that \$2.5 million less being used in fiscal year 2025, please?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Which line Item? J.? I did not get you clearly.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Line Item J. 001.

**Hon. Persad:** Line Item J. 001, right? Okay, from—

**Mr. Marcelle:** So, it was previously under the Ministry of Education. In 2024, 2.2 million spent and in 2025, \$3 million spent. Originally appropriated but the Revised Estimate showed \$500,000, \$2.5 million less.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Well, remember, there is a delay in the procurement in getting things built, so there was a sort of rollover. So there was no need to allocate that amount.

**Mr. Marcelle:** All right. Could the hon. Minister explain what this line Item, the MIC—what this line Item is usually spent on?

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Which one? Same—

**Mr. Marcelle:** Line Item J. 001.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** Yeah. I think I listed all the costing so far—

**Mr. Marcelle:** No, I understand in this fiscal year, but I am asking in terms of—you said that some of the things were not procured in 2025 at the time. So I am asking what that entailed.

**Hon. Prof. Persad:** This is how the PSIP works. You put money and the money

is never fully utilized. It is for upgrades, and the upgrades were listed here. I listed them a short while ago.

**Mr. Chairman:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Marcelle:** Noted, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. Item 005: Multi-Sectorial and Other Services; F. Public Buildings:

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 72 ordered to stand part of the Schedule*

**11.10 a.m.**

[*Chairman: Dr. Ali*]

*Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board, \$3,808,550.*

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

**Hon. Tancoo:** Good morning and thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Tancoo:** The Public Service Appeal Board has been established to listen to appeals from various arms of the public service. I therefore look forward to your questions and queries with regard to the allocations that are proposed for fiscal 2026.

*Question proposed:* That Head 12 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$3,808,550 for Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found at the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 52; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General

## Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board (cont'd)

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 12 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. I just want to thank the Secretary of the Board, Ms. Charles-Belfon for being here today.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

*Head 07: Statutory Authorities Service Commission, \$6,424,185.*

**Madam Chairman:** Now we await the Executive Officer. I now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Statutory Authorities Service Commission is an independent body established by the Statutory Authorities Act, Chap. 24:01, with a specific and significant purpose. Its creation is rooted in the British civil service tradition, which holds a core principle, that is to insulate the appointment, promotion and discipline of public officers from political influence. This measure was deemed essential to ensure that an impartial and merit-based public service exists.

The SASC therefore, acts with transparency and human resource management for the nine entities under its purview. The SASC is an independent body established by Act No. 16 of 1996, now considered as Chap. 24:01 in the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. The Act was assented to on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1966 and the Commission was operationalized on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967. The Section of the Act, Section 5 of the Statutory Authorities Act grants the Commission exclusive power over all HR matters, specifically to, one, appoint individuals to roles within the

statutory authorities. Two, transfer, promote and remove personnel as needed and three, exercise disciplinary control over all appointed persons. I look forward to questions and queries from colleagues opposite.

*Question proposed:* That Head 07 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$6,424,185 for Head 07: Statutory Authorities Service Commission is comprised of monies proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 01, page 36, Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund, Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 13, A. Administrative Services.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 07 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** I would like to thank the executive officer, Mrs. Ali and the accounting assistant, Ms. Ramkhalawan for being here with us.

**11.20 am**

**Hon. Maharaj:** Thank you, Madam Chairman and colleagues. The Environmental Commission of Trinidad and Tobago was created by the Environmental Management Act, Chap. 35:05. Since its establishment in 2000, the Environmental Commission has been part of the judicial infrastructure of Trinidad

and Tobago as a superior court of record possessing all inherent powers of such a court. It is empowered to enforce its orders and judgements, along with the authority to punish contempt akin to the High Court of Justice. Serving as a forum for persons to address specific violations outlined in the Environmental Management Act, its primary purpose is to uphold the provisions of the Environmental Management Act by resolving disputes that arise between in the EMA and persons pursuant to the EMA's enforcement action or between persons for a violation of an environmental requirement as identified in the Act.

Mr. Chairman, 2025 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Environmental Commission. The Commission is made up of six members who hear and determine environmental matters brought before the court. There is provision for the appointment of a seventh member pursuant to an Act, which has not yet come into force. Its chairman and deputy chairman must be attorneys-at-law of not less than 10 years standing. The other members must have knowledge and experience in environmental issues, engineering, urban and regional planning, natural science or the social sciences. All persons are appointed by the President to hold office for a term not less than three years. The staff of the commission is headed by the registrar, an attorney-at-law. The registrar is the principal administrative officer of the commission and manages the registry and the other support services to ensure that the Commission's objectives are met in the most efficient and effective manner.

The registrar is supported in this role by the registry staff. The staff of the Commission is employed by the Government and operates in accordance with the Government's fiscal human resource management policies. Being, however, the staff of a superior court of record, the staff remain dedicated to supporting the

objectives and goals of the Commission and preserving its integrity and independence as a superior court of record.

Madam Chairman, we are pleased to take any questions with regard to the measures before you.

*Question proposed:* That Head 38 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$7,002,605 for Head 38: Environmental Commission is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01, page 260, Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we now move to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund, Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 38 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** I would like to thank the AO II, Ms. Narine, and the Accounting Assistant, Ms. Alleyne, for being here with us.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

*Head 39:* Ministry of Public Utilities, \$3,270,777,074.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

[CHAIRMAN: MR. SINGH]

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, are you ready?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, \$3,270,777,074. I will now invite the Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, for fiscal 2026 the Ministry of Public Utilities has been allocated the sum of \$395 billion, representing the fourth largest allocation in the national budget. This significant investment is a clear demonstration of this Government's unwavering commitment to enhancing the quality, reliability and sustainability of public utilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Public Utilities provides essential services to the people. The staff at these state enterprises and at the Ministry's offices are dedicated and hardworking, but had been left rudderless in terms of providing critical leadership, direction and vision. Mr. Chairman, for the past nine and a half years under the former administration, there has been steady decline in water production and distribution to an abysmal 17 per cent when they demitted office. Poor working conditions of employees, inoperable equipment and decay across the utility sector is what we met. Mr. Chairman, this occurred against a backdrop of billions of dollars having been spent on transformation that yielded no results. This resulted in millionaires being created overnight. This resulted in one Member, and those associated with Members in this House, receiving hefty state contracts in CEPEP and WASA, which is on the public record. While all this happened, the Ministry of Public Utilities and state enterprises under our purview

collapsed. But, we have given the commitment to Trinidad and Tobago that we will fix it.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, the plan of action and the scope of work with the allocation of over \$3.3 billion will work in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago as we cut out the inefficiencies, the corruption, and the feeding of the trough by the PNM and their financiers. I am at your disposal, Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

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

**Mr. Chairman:** The sum of \$3,270,777,074 for Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Board and Similar Bodies and of the Trinidad and Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. These Items are to be found in that volume between pages 264 and 265. Item 001: General Administration.

Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

**11.30 a.m.**

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much. Chair, to the hon. Minister, I am looking at Sub-Item 05: Government's Contribution to NIS. I note that there are no—it is \$791,000, it is the same as last year. Can the Minister indicate whether or not the proposed increase in NIS would impact the allocation for this fiscal period?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. Member, the Minister of Finance has already articulated the Government's policy on that particular matter.

Obviously, there may be a need to review and, therefore, based on what was articulated by the Minister of Finance with regard to what is happening with NIS contributions, we will review if necessary.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Referring now to Sub-Item 08: Vacant Posts - Salaries & COLA, I am seeing that there is an increase, Minister, of \$450,000. Can you indicate the number of vacant posts that this allocation is going to be dealt with?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes. Thank you, Member. The Revised allocation for 2025 is a result of a virement to Vote 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance to meet expenditure due to increase—for officers under the purview of the SRC. The increase is fiscal 2026 is expected to be utilized to fill vacant positions. The ones you are asking are, one Senior Economist; two Economists II; one Complaints Officer, six Clerk Stenographers, I and II; one Auditor, one Stores Attendant; and one Estate Constable.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, to the hon. Minister, Minister, can you indicate whether or not these positions are both contract and establishment positions?

**Hon. Padarath:** I am advised that these are the establishment positions, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And how far are we in terms of the service commission filling those positions?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, I think you would recall during your time at the Ministry and how difficult it is to work within the parameters of the Public Service Commission in terms of filling these vacancies, but it is a work in progress.

**Mr. Gonzales:** But do you expect those positions to be filled within this fiscal year?

**Hon. Padarath:** It is our hope that it would be. We are aggressively pursuing

that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 002: Meteorological Services; Item 005: Electrical Inspectorate. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Item 005/04, Electrical Inspectorate, these are people who are required—officers who are required to go and do exactly as the name suggests, inspect and pass certification of the electrical components of various buildings, et cetera, a very important role, or to oversee really what T&TEC is doing. I see a reduction in the allowances of \$23,000. Now, whilst it does not appear a significant sum in a billion-dollar budget, when you look at the history of this, why is there that reduction? What is that about? Is it not going to affect the performance of this important unit?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member. I am advised that there are some vacancies under this particular line Item and even though we wish to ensure that the vacancies are filled, I am advised that this allocation will satisfy the allowances under 04.

**Mr. Young SC:** Alright. Thank you very much. And then when you look at the Vacant Posts - Salaries & COLA, 08, there is an increase of \$400,000, so I assume that means you are hoping to fill vacancies there and that is what that new and additional sum of \$400,000 is for, correct?

**Hon. Padarath:** Actually, Member, the Revised allocation for 2025 is a result of a virement to Vote 39, 01/001/01, which is Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance to meet expenditure due to the increases for officers under the purview of the Salaries Review Commission. The increase is expected to be utilized to fill vacant positions which are listed, and those listed are, one Electrical Inspector III and seven Electrical Inspectors I.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Padarath:** So that will account for that increase.

**Mr. Young SC:** Well, no, but thank you. It does not answer my—so you have said that you are hoping to fill those vacancies that you have just usefully listed—

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Young SC:**—and of course it does not surprise me that there was a virement because, as you said, the posts were vacant. If there was money there, you vire it here to pay salaries and wages for persons who are in posts. But what I am focused on is you are now looking at, hopefully, filling these posts that you have just listed, one Electrical Inspector, and I think it was 12—how many?

**Hon. Padarath:** Seven.

**Mr. Young SC:**—seven lower-ranked officers in that area. If you are able to do it and utilize the \$400,000, how then does it equate with the allowances that you have reduced?

**Hon. Padarath:** Well, we have looked at the historical pattern of the allowances and therefore we are satisfied that even if we do satisfy by filling the vacant positions, that this will be sufficient enough.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you. And these are positions on posts? These are permanent establishment positions?

**Hon. Padarath:** Correct. Yes.

**Mr. Young SC:** And you just said that you have been aggressively attempting to fill these establishment positions. Are these not establishment positions solely under the purview of the Public Service Commission?

**Hon. Padarath:** Of course, and therefore it requires us to have some level of engagement with them, so—

**Mr. Young SC:** But the Public Service Commission is the body, the constitutional body that is charged with the responsibility of filling these posts, of advertising for the posts and doing the assessment for the posts. God alone knows what else before they fill the posts, but it is something that successive governments have been hamstrung by, correct?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, Member. What I meant by “aggressively pursuing” is the follow-up with the Public Service Commission, not usurping their role and their responsibility, but rather simply following up to see how quickly—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** I would not dare suggest that you would be usurping their responsibility, and we are all familiar with your energy and how it can come across in the manner that it does. It was not that at all. It was really to establish the difficulty that successive governments have had, and I dare say, will continue to have once we have this constitutional arrangement of filling permanent posts by this Public Service Commission. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, 265 to 268, Item 001: General Administration. I think Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West had his hand up first.

**Mr. Young SC:** Just one area—thank you—on page 266, under 02, a line Item 53: Refunds to WASA Re: Water Improvement Rate, sort of in the middle of the page, on page 266, line Item 53. It is easiest to look at if you look across in the Decrease column and see it is a reduction by \$13.3 million. So my question is, looking at the historical nature of refunds to WASA, Re: Water Improvement Rate, we have seen that significant sums have been allocated and spent, approximating \$250 million in this area. Knowing the importance of water provision to all

households, not based on geographical location, to Trinidad and Tobago, why this reduction of \$13.3 million?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member. Member, I am advised that this has to do with the computation. Now, the refunds to WASA regarding the water improvement rate over the last couple of years, the decrease is directly related to the Point Lisas Industrial Estate consumption, which has been projected at a lower consumption based on historical trends over the last three to four years in particular. For example, the closure of two companies over the last three years has resulted in the—

**Mr. Young SC:**—in the reduction of consumption at Point Lisas?

**Hon. Padarath:**—reduction and consumption that we are seeing. Yes.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. Just one follow-up question and maybe a piece of unsolicited advice to the Member for Fyzabad and the Minister of Finance. Based on what we are seeing taking place right now in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and the running from Trinidad and Tobago of very important companies, international companies on that estate, this may be another area of savings for you on the WASA side, but it is going to provide serious difficulties on the revenue side. So it is something to keep an eye on. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Young SC:** I said unsolicited advice. I would not send you a bill.

**11.40 a.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On that same line Item, Minister, you have indicated that based on historical trends, you have observed, or perhaps WASA may have observed a decrease in their collections on this line Item.

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Head 39: Ministry of  
Public Utilities (cont'd)

But if you observe from 2024, you have \$250 million; \$248 million, 2025; Revised, \$248 million; and then a slight reduction—well, in 2026, the allocation is \$235 million, from 2024 to now, I am not seeing that trend where you are seeing a gradual reduction in that rate that is collected, very important to WASA's revenue drive. So, I am just trying to get from you—

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—Minister—

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—just to be clear.

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay.

**Hon. Padarath:** I am advised that what would have caused the figures being reflected in the Recurrent Expenditure would have been arrears.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Say again. I did not get that.

**Hon. Padarath:** It would have been arrears.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, it is arrears owed to WASA by the Government?

**Hon. Padarath:** Based on the computation, yes. As you know, or rather, you would recall, that almost for the last four to five years, the arrears have been something across the utilities sector that has been reflected and has been carried over, and that continues to be the challenge. And that is why, at this point in time, it is being reflected here. It is a drop.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, the decrease represents what, actually, WASA may recover in this financial year?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, I am advised that, yes, it is arrears that has been computed over a period of time. I am advised that the arrears are in the vicinity of

\$69 million and counting. It has been rolled over from year to year, and it still has to be brought to account for fiscal 2025.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. So just to confirm on this point—hopefully, the last question on it—that WASA will not be collecting \$13,000,000 under this line Item for this fiscal year? That is the estimation?

**Hon. Padarath:** As I had indicated earlier before, this is a projection—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes.

**Hon. Padarath:**—based on the historical trends.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. Mr. Chair? Line Item—Sub-Item 0—

**Mr. Chairman:** No. No.

**Mr. Gonzales:** No. It is—

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Go ahead. I will get to San Fernando East after.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Oh, yeah. So, I will just ask all my questions on this—

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—Item and—

**Mr. Chairman:** So we will have some structure.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Correct. Yeah. Minister, 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. I observed that there is an increase of \$60,000. Can you explain the reason for the increase in the allocation here?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes. Thank you. Member, the allocation here for 2026 will cover rental for the Ministry's head office at \$675,000 per month, that is, the infamous One Alexandra Place, and the external storage facility at \$10,000 per month to house Ministry documents, et cetera.

**Mr. Gonzales:** No. I am seeing an increase of \$60,000 in this fiscal. Can you explain the increase?

**Mr. Young SC:** It was to pay the landlord surcharge.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I was wondering about that.

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, let me provide that to you in writing—

**Mr. Gonzales:** In writing?

**Hon. Padarath:**—to seek some clarification on this matter.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. Thanks. Mr. Chair—

**Mr. Chairman:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** No, Mr. Chair. I am still under the line Item. Mr. Chair, what I am proposing to do is ask all my questions under this line Item, so that we can move on—

**Mr. Chairman:** So that we will move along—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:**—quickly.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, Sub-Item 09: Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment, I observed there is also an increase of \$210,000. Can you explain the reason for the increase here?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, Member. 09: Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment, a variation of 210,000. Member, this expenditure will focus on the rental of multifunction and single-function printers. Going into the Ministry, the complaint from the IT department had to do with that there was a lack of IT support, particularly with respect to printers that had become—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Outdated.

**Hon. Padarath:**—outdated, unable to be used. I think across many Ministries and

state enterprises, sometimes it is cheaper to buy a new printer than to buy the outdated cartridges for them, and so on. I think we experience that from time to time, even in our parliamentary offices. So, this would have accounted for that across the Ministry.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. Contract Employment, Sub-Item 16, there is an increased allocation of \$1.8 million for this fiscal year. Can you give a reason for the increase in allocation here?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you. The increase is a result of 15 advertised positions, which are expected to be filled in fiscal 2026 on a phased basis. Those positions are in the units of the communications unit, the asset management, the legal unit, monitoring and evaluation, procurement unit, sectoral and programme and project units.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Are they new positions, or positions already approved by Cabinet to be filled?

**Hon. Padarath:** These were positions that I met at the Ministry. So, it would have been positions existing before.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yeah. Sure. Thanks. Are there persons employed in the positions already?

**Mr. Gonzales:** No. Those that I have listed, in instance of the communications unit, these are vacant; asset management, vacant; legal unit, vacant; monitoring and evaluation, vacant; procurement unit, vacant; sectoral and programmes and project unit, vacant.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, under this line Item, this is for head office, am I correct?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, hon. Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Right. Can you also explain whether the ministerial secretariat—

the Minister, Parliamentary Secretary and junior Ministers—whether you are filling contract positions under this line Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** For ministerial staff?

**Mr. Gonzales:** The ministerial secretariat.

**Hon. Padarath:** No.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Under what Item the ministerial secretariat would be paid?

**Hon. Padarath:** I am advised it is line Item 60, 6-0.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Line Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, 60, 6-0.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Is it under Goods and Services?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, Member. It is under line Item 16, 1-6.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chairman, 1-6?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, you are confirming that the ministerial staff contract positions will also be paid under this line Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** All right. And how many positions do we have for the senior Minister, Parliamentary Secretary and the junior Minister?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, we will provide that to you in writing.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. Can you also provide the positions in the ministerial staff, the senior Minister, the positions for the Parliamentary Secretary, as well as the positions for the junior Minister?

**Hon. Padarath:** Okay.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Can you also provide the names and a breakdown of the salaries being paid to those contract officers?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, we will have to review that with the legal unit of the Ministry.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Review the request—

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—to provide the information?

**Hon. Padarath:** To provide that level of information.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Laventille East/Morvant—okay. San Fernando East.

**Mr. Manning:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. 02/001/42: Street Lighting, I see an \$8 million increase here in the street lighting programme. How much of this is earmarked for San Fernando?

**11.50 a.m.**

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, all of this is earmarked for all of the areas in Trinidad and Tobago. So the increase would have been because of bill payments for electricity charges for parks and recreational grounds, street lighting, and lighting repairs. The increase will be expended for the last fiscal outstanding payments as well. You would appreciate that the new administration coming into Government would have had bills that would have been accrued, and therefore, this will assist in satisfying outstanding payments.

**Mr. Manning:** So much of this is going into the payment of arrears?

**Hon. Padarath:** Some of it, yes.

**Mr. Manning:** Some of it, okay. Also, I believe under the last administration there was a Community Water Improvement Programme that is usually under this Head, has that programme been eradicated?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, this is Street Lighting.

**Mr. Manning:** Under this Head.

**Hon. Padarath:** Head 42 or, you are speaking about General Administration?

**Mr. Manning:** Sure.

**Hon. Padarath:** Are you asking me to direct you to which line Item that is?

**Mr. Manning:** Sure. Yes.

**Hon. Padarath:** Read your documents, Member.

**Mr. Manning:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Malabar/Mausica.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. Under the same line Item, Street Lighting. Could the Minister indicate what is the process for MPs to access this street lighting? Because I have been sending letters to the Ministry and I have had no response.

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, Member. The requests do come from Members of Parliament, and do come from other public officials and so on. You would appreciate that on coming into office by the end of April, going into May, a lot of what was allocated in that financial year had already been either used or earmarked for use, and therefore if MPs and so on are sending in new requests, then that will be treated with in this financial year.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Chairman. To the hon. Minister, line Item 02/001/22: Short-Term Employment. Can the hon. Minister, indicate how many vacancies are there under the Short-Term?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, for Short-term Employment, the Ministry would engage persons based on a needs basis. I am advised that right now there are 28 positions and there are warm bodies in those positions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. Item 002, Laventille East, did you want to ask a question before I move on?

**Mr. Birchwood:** Yes, to the Minister. Through you, Chair, line Item 02/001/42 under Street Lighting. The types of lighting that would be installed is that solar lighting by chance?

**Hon. Padarath:** I am advised it is LED.

**Mr. Birchwood:** LED.

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Birchwood:** Okay. Solar powered?

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. Item 002: Meteorological Services; 005: Electrical Inspectorate; Sub-Head 3: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Meteorological Services; 005: Electrical Inspectorate. Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Chairman. Line Item 02/005/43: Security Services. I am seeing an increase of 250,000 in this new fiscal. Can the hon. Minister, indicate, one—let me ask first, which facilities are these security services provided to?

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, can I ask the Member to repeat the line Item, please?

**Mr. Marcelle:** Sure. 02/005/43: Security Services. There is an increase of 250,000.

**Mr. Chairman:** Laventille West, I am advised that we are currently on page 269 and that the request you are making does not fall on those line Items and line Items you are asking for came before. So perhaps, you can send a request via question and we can move on?

**Mr. Marcelle:** No problem.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001: Regional Bodies. Port of Spain North.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, 04/001/05, is this to pay the arrears? I see an increase of \$4,624,000 for the Caribbean—

**Hon. Padarath:** You are correct, Member, this is to pay the arrears.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the Minister, on that same line Item, Minister, can you indicate that once this \$4.6 million is paid to the CMI, whether it would be sufficient to settle all outstanding arrears owed to that organization?

**Hon. Padarath:** I am advised that it should, yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am not hearing, sorry.

**Hon. Padarath:** I am advised that it should satisfy the outstanding.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Can you also indicate what the annual amount paid to the CMI?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, I am advised that the annual estimated subscription is US \$680, 000 at a rate of 6.80 which is the equivalent of roughly about TT\$ 4.6 million, which is for the annual subscription.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 003: United Nations Organisations; Item 007: Households, 009: Other Transfers.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think Port of Spain North wanted to—

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And to my colleague, the Chief Whip. I am focused now on looking at line Items under 009/04, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23. These are significant loans, well not loans, the last two are loans,

22 and 23, alone, for US \$523 million. So if we can start with 18 and 19, the \$812.6 million fixed-rate bond and I see at line Item 18 an increase of just about \$4.8 million, this is the principal payment that is due at this point in time?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, Member. This increase is to cover the principal payment.

**Mr. Young SC:** Right. But then right underneath for the same bond there is an interest payment and, of course, you have reduced the interest payment by roughly the same amount.

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes. I am advised that the payment on the principal results in a reduced interest.

**Mr. Young SC:** But that is not how—it may result obviously, if you are reducing your principal sum, it may result in a lower interest rate payment, but now no interest is being paid for the year on this bond and quite frankly, that is not how this bond operates because the investors in the bond have invested in the interest payment strips. So is this going to create a default situation?

**Hon. Padarath:** I do not believe so, Member. I mean, obviously, you will recall how the Government operates. If it does result in a challenge that we have under this particular line Item, we will go back to the Ministry in terms of virement [*Member confers with technocrat*], and there is an allocation.

**Mr. Young SC:** Where is the allocation?

**Hon. Padarath:** There is an allocation. But if there is a need that may arise, then we will address it at that time.

**Mr. Young SC:** Then, of course, these three Items are to pay money owed to NGC historically right, because T&TEC historically does not pay NGC for the gas. What is the current amount owed now to NGC for the gas by T&TEC?

**12.00 noon**

**Hon. Padarath:** The last figure we had as of April 2025 was in the vicinity of about \$8 billion.

**Mr. Young SC:** Right.

**Hon. Padarath:** So it is currently under review right now in terms of the computation.

**Mr. Young SC:** Is it intended that the Government, through the Ministry of Finance, will once again borrow to provide this money to NGC?—because NGC, in the meantime, is paying for the gas?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, you would recall that this was the situation that was allowed to languish over the last nine and a half years.

**Mr. Young SC:** Well, not nine and a half. Over the past few years because there were loans taken out, too.

**Hon. Padarath:** Essentially, the debt between T&TEC and NGC has not been addressed for a number of years under your administration, and therefore, currently there is a review process. We have engaged NGC and we are at the drawing board in terms of how we address this particular situation. The Government has no intention of allowing it to continue unaddressed, so we will be able to provide you in the coming weeks and months ahead with additional information on that.

**Mr. Young SC:** Well, I look forward to that. So let us now move to line Item 19 and 20.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** Sorry, 20 and 21. Line Items 20 and 21, again, are now on \$800 million fixed-rate bond. We are seeing that what has happened is an increase for the payment of the principal sum of \$2.9 million, but then a decrease on the

interest. Is this really being done to have a neutral cash flow? So, in other words, nothing really is being paid out there?

**Hon. Padarath:** This is with respect to the—

**Mr. Young SC:** The \$28 million bond at line Items 20 and 21.

**Hon. Padarath:** 20 and 21. Member, with respect to line Item 20, the increase here is to cover the principal payable as determined by the amortization schedule. And then the 21 is the payment on principal, results in reduced interest, which I had mentioned on a previous line Item. So there are allocations that have been made. So, I do not see a sinister attempt here to not have a payment made. A similar approach will be adopted; should there be a need, then we will go back seeking some assistance to get additional funding.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Minister. Because you see for all of these the amounts being increased and decreased on principal and interest are almost identical. That is mathematically impossible with a reduction of the principal and the interest being the identical sums.

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, you would appreciate—

**Mr. Young SC:** It is really to highlight to make sure that we do not going into any default situation on these. Thank you.

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, I take what you are saying, Member. But as an experienced Member you would know that these are projections, so therefore, while the numbers may be very similar, these are projections. There will be adjustments where adjustments are needed going forward. So we will keep a close eye. I take your advice in terms of the concerns you have raised, but we are pretty satisfied and comfortable with where we are.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Member, under that same line Item 04: Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation, I observe that there is a massive cut and/or rather a decrease in the allocation by \$16.4 million to the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation. Can you explain the reason for that drastic reduction?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, I think you were present for the mid-year review, if I recall. The decrease in allocation is a result of the supplemental funding for fiscal 2025 to meet expenditure for the settlement, in particular of three industrial relation disputes, payment of corporation tax, green fund liabilities and payment of value added tax liability. So a number of these expenditures would have been addressed in the mid-year review, which I believe you were present for, that would have resulted in this variation.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Can you just remind for the listening and viewing audience of the three trade disputes that were settled under this line Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** I will provide you with that detail in writing.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Do you have the figure in terms of the amount of money that was spent in settling those trade disputes?

**Hon. Padarath:** No, Member. But I can tell you what we do have with respect to persons taking legal action against the Ministry of Public Utilities. The former Minister of Public Utilities' personal assistant has taken the Ministry to court, and the settlement has moved from an initial \$150,000 to now a \$350,000, and that is a trade dispute that will impact the operations of the Ministry and ultimately in terms of how much we would be able to provide to the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, can you say whether or not that person is employed with

TTPost?

**Hon. Padarath:** Essentially, what will happen is that once the money comes out from the Ministry in terms of the allocation, it will impact TTPost in terms of how much they would be able to receive.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So you are saying that this allocation will be utilized to pay an outstanding trade dispute with the Ministry of Public Utilities?

**Hon. Padarath:** No. What I am saying is that the figure that has been provided to the Ministry of Public Utilities will obviously be impacted, and especially if TTPost requires additional assistance, it will impact them as well. So I think that was very easy to follow, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Member, I am asking. You are saying that this \$16.4 million was utilized in the last fiscal year to settle three outstanding trade disputes.

**Hon. Padarath:** Part of it.

**Mr. Chairman:** I do not think that was the complete answer.

**Hon. Padarath:** Therefore, we will provide that information to you in writing in terms of the details of the trade disputes, hon. Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am just asking, Member, the three trade disputes, are those three trade disputes relating to TTPost—

**Hon. Padarath:** Correct.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—or the Ministry of Public Utilities?

**Hon. Padarath:** TTPost.

**Mr. Gonzales:** TTPost.

**Hon. Padarath:** Which is under the Ministry of Public Utilities.

**Mr. Chairman:** Malabar/Mausica, did you want to—

**Mr. Romain:** Asked and answered, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Diego Martin West.

**Mr. des Vignes:** Thank you very much, Chair. Looking at line 009/24: Community Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), I would like to know what is this \$7 million that is associated with this line Item? What particular Items is this to pay?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member. Line Item 24 CEPEP, an allocation has been made by the Minister of Finance with respect to an allocation of \$7 million. The Government has clearly articulated that CEPEP will be closed and therefore, there is a process and there is a cost associated with winding up the liabilities of the company, and this will be utilized for that.

**Mr. Des Vignes:** Thank you very much, Member.

**Mr. Chairman:** Malabar/Mausica.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. Under this same line Item. In light of the closure of CEPEP, is there still a CEPEP board in place? Are the members being remunerated?

**Hon. Padarath:** Obviously, Member, yes. There is a CEPEP board in place.

**Mr. Romain:** And how long would that board remain in place?

**Hon. Padarath:** As long as it is needed to wrap up the operations of the company.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** San Fernando East.

**Mr. Manning:** Thank you. Same line Item. In view of the winding up here of CEPEP, is there any other programme within the Ministry of Public Utilities that will be used to absorb the former CEPEP and URP workers?

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, that does not arise from this line Item, and further the Government has already expressed that in phase one we will be rolling out 20,000

jobs. So stay tuned for phase two and the other phases to come.

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin West.

**Mr. Des Vignes:** Same line Item for the Minister. Would this winding up, the winding-up fees associated with this \$7 million, would it include payment outstanding to any contractors?

**Hon. Padarath:** No. Because this Vote was under the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and therefore the payments were being made through the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government where the initial Vote was. So therefore, this does not address that particular matter.

**Mr. Des Vignes:** But it was transferred from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Ministry of Public Utilities, so would that responsibility not fall under your Ministry?

**Hon. Padarath:** We will check with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government with respect to outstanding liabilities. But on the last occasion that I did speak with the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government on this particular matter, they were completing satisfying the outstanding liabilities for contractors.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Chair—

**Hon. Padarath:** Including the PNM contractors.

**Mr. Manning:**—if you will, but I could have sworn going through the documents—

**Hon. Padarath:** Laventille West.

**Mr. Manning:**—yesterday with the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government that there was a line Item for exactly the same thing in those documents. So how is it that there is a line Item here under Ministry of Public

Utilities and a similar line Item under Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government?

**Mr. Chairman:** I do not think that is a fair question.

**Hon. Padarath:** It does not arise.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Chairman, it is the same context.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Hon. Padarath:** But this is a different—

**Mr. Manning:** It is for the same purpose.

**Hon. Padarath:** It does not arise.

**Mr. Chairman:** I do not think these documents are prepared by the Ministry of Finance. The Minister—

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Chairman, I am so sorry. I am asking about this particular line Item.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hang on a second. I am trying to explain to you—

**Mr. Manning:** Sorry. Mr. Chairman, what I am saying—

**Mr. Chairman:** San Fernando East, I am speaking. We cannot both speak at the same time and you very well know the Standing Orders on that. Turn off your mike.

**12.10 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** It is not a fair question. These documents are not prepared by the Minister, whether or not there is a similar line Item, you have already explored that. The Minister has answered the cost of the winding-up. You can seek the advice of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, he is a very experienced insolvency lawyer. He will explain to you what is the cost of a winding-up. There is a liquidator to be appointed, there is an application to the court to be made, there are

lawyers to be retained, there are affidavits to be filed, there are accounting records to be obtained, many, many, many things. It is too numerous for me to go through.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Chairman, I am sorry, but you are incorrect. The Minister would have been involved in making these very line Items in this document.

**Mr. Chairman:** First of all, I am telling you it is an unfair question and I am not allowing it, let us move on.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Chairman, you are incorrect. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** I thank you for your unsolicited opinion and your palpable attempt to draw me into—

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Chairman, I do not have to draw you into anything, you do it yourself.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** I am going to ignore that.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** I am going to ignore that. No, no, no, no. Yes, Diego Martin West.

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, if you would allow. The level of hooliganism that we continue to see exhibited by my colleagues opposite will not be tolerated.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Mr. Chairman, I take strong objection to that.

**Hon. Padarath:** Whether it is strong—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Strong objection to the use of that word.

**Hon. Padarath:**—whether it is in the House or whether it is in the Standing Finance Committee.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** There is no hooliganism that should be referred to and be referring to us as hooligans, and I take strong objection.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, okay.

**Hon. Padarath:** But you behave like a hooligan.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, okay, let us not exchange barbs with each other. We have been getting along nicely, let us move on.

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chairman, point of order, 48(4), it shall be out of order to use offensive and insulting language about Members of this—

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, let us—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** I am asking for a ruling and a withdrawal of that language please.

**Hon. Padarath:** That is not offensive, it is the truth.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us move on. We are going now to Item—

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chairman, 48(4), I have asked for a ruling.

**Mr. Chairman:** I am overruling it. Let us go on. Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises; Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, Item 004: Statutory Boards.

**Mr. Gonzales:** 06?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** We are moving to the books?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. Item 004: Statutory Boards.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. 51 - Water and Sewerage Authority, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. This is to be found at page 247 of that volume. Item 001: General Administration, Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chairman, on page 246 are we examining those figures?

Water and Sewerage Authority?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, we have moved on to 247.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Are we on 01?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, General Administration at page 247.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. Minister, I am looking at Sub-Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. I observed that there is a decrease of \$26.4 million. Member, can you explain the reason for the decrease in this line Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** Hon. Member, this computation was done based on approximately 40 monthly paid employees. This computation was done based on approximately 40 monthly paid employees who will obtain the retirement age in 2025/2026.

**Mr. Gonzales:** That is the reason for the decrease?

**Hon. Padarath:** Oh, the decrease.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am also seeing at 03: Overtime - Monthly Paid Officers, a decrease in \$17.2 million, can you explain the reason for the decrease?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly. WASA will be embarking on a planned implementation of automation tools, such as CADA and biometrics; filling of vacancies, system operators, and process plant operators, via their reassignment from the lower level roles. The reengineering of business processes is expected to reduce labour intensive processes. So essentially, Member, this is to make the operations a bit more efficient in utilizing the automation tools, and other technological areas from within the company.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, you are saying, Member, just to be very clear, that with the increased drive to automate a lot of WASA's processes, that the authority would be

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less reliant on human labour and by extension the need for overtime in the execution of some of its duties?

**Hon. Padarath:** No Member, I think you are getting it wrong. This is for Overtime - Monthly Paid Officers. What we are saying is to get greater efficiency, we are utilizing the technology, the automation system to work in tandem with the warm bodies that we have there, to cut down on the amount of overtime. So, people will remain employed, which I know is the point you are getting at. People will remain employed, people will be using the technology to cut down on the overtime, and therefore, get greater efficiency in the service.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chairman, Minister, line Item 29: Overtime - Daily - Rated Workers. I am also seeing a reduction, as well as, 30, perhaps, I think they are both the same. Overtime - Daily - Rated Workers, Allowances - Daily Rated Workers, seeing \$26 million and a \$5.6 million respectively in those two areas, can you explain the reasons?

**Hon. Padarath:** Sure. Member, there has been—under line Item 29: Overtime - Daily - Rated Workers. So the financial year 2025, the authority received \$23 million under line Item 29, and therefore, the variations here—we do believe that this sum will be sufficient to meet those expenses. Should there be a need then we will revisit this, but we believe it will be sufficient. Similarly line Item 30, the planned implementation of alternative work arrangements, such as the introduction of a shift system in some instances, the reengineering of business processes, increased efficiency and reduced cost. So, in some areas what we have sought to do with the WASA evolution plan, is that we have sought to harmonize some of these operation expenses, in terms of productivity in areas such as overtime and so on. To utilize the technology, utilize different work schedules to see how we can

cut on the overtime, and the allowances, but still maintain good levels of efficiency.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, Minister, at 30, I am seeing Allowances, you are also cutting it by \$5.6 five million. So, you are saying, with all of the efficiencies that you now seeking to introduced in the operations of WASA, that you are expecting that WASA would see reduction in \$26 million in overtime, \$5.6 million in Allowances, \$22 million—not, 22, I am sorry. Yeah, overtime for monthly paid officers, \$17 million, almost \$90 million in cost savings in these areas?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, as you would appreciate, having sat here once upon a time, that these are projections. But these projections are a far, far, far cry from sending home thousands of WASA workers, which your Government planned to do.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** So, we are seeking to make it efficient, work with employees. If there is a need to supplement, obviously, there is a process for that, which you familiar with. But this is a far cry from what we inherited when we first arrived, based on the former administration's policy.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and hon. Member, you would also recall that it is this, the previous PNM administration inherited a transformation plan that was approved by the UNC Government to cut over 3,600 workers.

**12.20 p.m.**

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, can you tell us which line Item you are on?

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am responding, I am responding, I am responding. Please allow me to respond and to clarify.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, let us ask a question.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am asking—I am going to ask a question. I have five minutes, according to the Standing Orders, and I will not take five minutes. I give you that guarantee. So it is the PNM Government that refused to implement the UNC's plan to fire 3,600 workers in the Water and Sewerage Authority.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** And the transformation that we implemented would have resulted, and already resulted in huge sectors of the population getting an improved supply of water. That is—

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Is there a question to that?

**Mr. Gonzales:**—the incontrovertible fact, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. So, now that you have made your preamble, can you ask the question?

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yeah, so I am asking, Mr. Chair, that—

**Hon. Members:** [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am asking. I am asking the hon. Minister, Mr. Chair, whether he is confident that the streamlining and the efficiencies that he is seeking now to introduce in WASA will result in cost saving of \$96 million?

**Mr. Chairman:** What is the line item, really?

**Mr. Gonzales:** [*Inaudible*]—under 001. And all of these things are referred to, payment of overtime and allowances and what have you.

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, the Member had quite a mouthful to say. So I would like to respond to each point because I made a note of it. I am very happy that the Member has taken ownership of his performance that when they left government, 17 per cent, 1-7 per cent—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:**—of Trinidad and Tobago was receiving a 24-7 supply. That is bolted to the chest of the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, in terms of the performance that he so proudly speaks about. The second issue that the hon. Member raised had to do about some plan to cut WASA workers. This administration, led by the hon. Member for Siparia, both between the period 2010 to 2015, and now in Government in 2025, says, “Judge me by not what I say but what I do.” And the ripping up, essentially, of that WASA transformation plan is the Government’s commitment to keeping WASA workers—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:**—in their jobs. And while we keep thousands of WASA workers in their jobs, we also gave them the commitment that we will seek to make the company more financially viable, review the operations of the company to ensure we cut out the waste mismanagement and corruption that we found on our arrival on April 28<sup>th</sup>. And therefore, Mr. Chairman, these projections, while we have placed some figures in the area of line Items 29 and 30, and so on for cost-saving measures, it is an area that we intend on embarking on aggressively as well. So, I am pretty satisfied with this, that it will keep WASA employees in jobs—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:**—which is the most important thing to us, but making the company financially viable and sustainable, so we can keep those persons employed in their substantive positions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, for the population’s illumination, the reality of the line Item we are dealing with is 01: Personnel

Expenditure, and immediately one sees a reduction of \$96.7 million. That is spread between Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, which is line Item 01 of \$26.4 million reduction; Government's Contribution to NIS at 05: \$22.5 million; Overtime- Daily-Rated Workers of \$26 million; and Allowances- Daily-Rated Workers Of \$5.6 million. So, the reality is no amount of political gymnastics and "ole" talk from the box will result in a saving of jobs.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** So, the question to the Minister, in my five-minute allocation is, please explain to us and the country how it is, by reducing \$98 million from daily-rated workers, contribution to NIS, and salaries and cost of living, how many workers do you really intend to terminate, because that is the "maths that will maths".

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, it is almost laughable hearing this coming from the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Because I would like the hon. Member to look at the fiscal package in 2024, where the former administration cut NIS contribution for WASA by \$60 million and then had to supplement the funding further down the road.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** So the Member is playing smart with foolishness, knowing very well that there is a process once these are required. We are very committed to keeping WASA workers in place.

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chair—

**Hon. Padarath:** And therefore, we are working hand in hand with the PSA, and therefore, the Member can mislead as much as he wants and as much as he tries, but this is something that has occurred under their administration. We have looked

at areas of overtime, in terms of bringing down the amount of overtime. The amount of NIS contributions, I am almost certain will be revised, but essentially, the Government is giving the commitment that this will impact, in no way, in terms of sending home WASA employees.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** That was not the assurance that was given in 2024 by the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, when they told the country—when I asked this question in the very Standing Finance Committee, the Member confirmed, under the People’s National Movement, with the cut of \$60 million in NIS contribution, that WASA workers were going home. That was the commitment that his administration gave. So, to hear that question and that long diatribe from the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West is laughable because I can tell you with certainty that this administration, led by the hon. Member for Siparia, is hell-bent on keeping WASA employees in their jobs.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Padarath:** We will revise once the need arises, but these are projections.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, Mr. Chair, just again—because unfortunately, the public that the hon. Minister seeks to mislead do not have the numbers in front of them. Line Item 01/05: Government’s Contribution to NIS, for 2024, the Actual amount was \$59 million, just short of the \$60 million, which means that is what was allocated and spent, compared to your estimation for this year of \$38.8 million. And what was the revised allocation for 2025, meaning the amount that is expected to be spent, is \$61 million. So all of your diatribes, and ranting, and raving, and that

type of behaviour—I will keep it within parliamentary language on this side—is simply not true. And the same goes for every single line Item. When you look at the amount spent for overtime in 2024, it was \$60 million actually spent. This year, you have allocated \$25 million, which is almost one-third of it. So therefore, what you are going to do is you are going to slash.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** No amount of green tie by the Minister of Finance for the PSA is going to help.

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** I think we have exhausted this, unless the Minister wishes to respond.

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West went through the histrionics with respect to the Actuals. But, Mr. Chairman, the Member forgot that they came back for supplemental funding and therefore, that is why they were able to meet those expenses in the numbers that he mentioned. So, he is talking about illuminating the issue, so that the national population will understand what is happening. On the occasion that they cut those very line Items, they gave no satisfaction, they gave no assurance to WASA workers that they were keeping them in jobs. They kept a guillotine over their heads of WASA workers, not knowing if there was going to be supplemental funding. The Minister of Finance has indicated that if there is a need, we will meet those expenses but we are committed to keeping WASA workers in their jobs.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. I think the questions on this line Item are exhausted. We can move on to the next one. Goods and Services; Item 001: General

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

**12.30 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, you are going a little too fast.

**Mr. Chairman:** Oh sorry.

**Mr. Imbert:** 02, 02, 02. You are going too fast. You are just rushing through everything. I would like to speak on 02 please.

**Mr. Young SC:** Correct.

**Mr. Imbert:** The main Item, not the Sub-Items. May I? Thank you. If I go to 02/001: Contract Employment: 16. It has been cut by \$50 million.

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chairman, 50.8.

**Mr. Imbert:** What impact would this have on the Authority?

**Mr. Young SC:** They are getting rid of workers.

**Mr. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Dr Gadsby-Dolly:** Bye Felicia.

**Hon. Padarath:**—it is often said “Sometimes, be careful what you wish for.” I will tell you why. Under Contract Employment for Financial Year 2025, the Authority received \$463 million. Under line Item 16, the \$19 million reduction on this line Item is primarily due to—

**Mr. Imbert:** What is he talking about?

**Hon. Padarath:**—the restructuring of the executive management level. So, all of those people that they brought in to pay exorbitant salaries to, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am sorry. I do not have the figures—

**Hon. Padarath:** Millions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, under Contract Employment has to do with the restructuring of the executive management level that is what the Member asked about.

**Mr. Imbert:** No I did not.

**Hon. Padarath:** So, therefore this is essentially how much we will be saving.

**Mr. Imbert:** No there is no 19 million here—50 million, not 19. “Where you get this 19 from?” It is 495 going into 444.

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** What is that? “Where that 19 come from?”

**Hon. Padarath:** Nineteen of which Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Imbert:** You are making up your own numbers.

**Hon. Member:** Nooo.

**Hon. Padarath:** Listen, if you cannot read properly—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Who cannot read properly?

**Hon. Padarath:**—I cannot help you with that.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think the Minister is disaggregating the composite number.

**Hon. Members:** Correct. Correct.

**Mr. Imbert:** Composite number? It is a single number of \$50 million.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. So, he is disaggregating it and breaking it down. Diego Martin—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, my question was, how will this \$50 million reduction in Contract Employment impact the Authority? That is my question. How will it impact the Authority?

**Mr. Chairman:** I would have thought that the Minister was in the process of answering you.

**Mr. Imbert:** No. He was talking about something else.

**Mr. Chairman:** That is not for you to judge, I am afraid.

**Mr. Imbert:** I could certainly make that [*Inaudible*] on my own.

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, I have indicated that this is a reduction in terms of savings with the change of approach with respect to the executive management. As well, we have already said that we are aggressively working to ensure that those who are on the establishment, that those vacancies are filled. When we got into Office, hundreds' of positions inside of WASA have not been filled. Those vacancies have been left to languish.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** People have been acting in positions, perpetually acting, 20 and 30 years.

**Mr. Imbert:** When the Minister have finished his ranting.

**Hon. Padarath:** Totally unaddressed. So, I have answered the question.

**Mr. Imbert:** Because we are accused on this side of history. So when he has finished his rant, I would like a follow-up question based on his answer. If you are cutting the allocation for Contract Employment by 50 million—how can you use a reduction to fill vacant posts? I would like to know. That is mathematically impossible. Reducing but you are filling vacancies.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Okay.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is what he said.

**Mr. Chairman:** The answer of the Minister is, he has been asked and answered. Let us move on.

**Mr. Imbert:** Ok hold on, I am not finished. 02/001/12: Materials and Supplies.

One of the biggest problems that WASA has is its inability to purchase supplies for simple little things, like patching potholes created—

**Hon. Member:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman. I do not need a running commentary from the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Let the Member ask his question.

**Mr. Imbert:** I do not need that. I am asking the Minister of Public Utilities. If the Minister of Finance wants to come in afterwards, he could. So, can we go to 02/001/12: Materials and Supplies? One of the biggest problems that WASA has is its inability to purchase basic supplies for defective pumps, patching of excavations and so on. There is a reduction of \$28 million in this vote. How will this reduction impact the Authority's ability to purchase essential materials and supplies?

**Mr. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, it was not very long ago that this same Member, Diego Martin North/East stood in this Parliament and cut Materials and Supplies. A critical area he speaks about.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am asking about 2026; 2026.

**Hon. Padarath:** A critical area that he speaks about—

**Mr. Imbert:** “Ah doh want ah history lesson:”. I have not asked for a history lesson.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, I do not think you should—

**Hon. Padarath:** He cannot determine how I answer my question.

**Hon Member:** Exactly. “Fass and outta place”.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**12.35 p.m.**

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Padarath:** He cannot determine how I answer my questions.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Tancoo:** Exactly, exactly.

**Ms. Ameen:** Fas' and out of place.

**Mr. Imbert:** And Mr. Chairman, with all that pounding—

**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** If Opposition is difficult—

**Mr. Imbert:** With all that pounding—

**Hon. Padarath:**—if Opposition is difficult for you to deal with—

**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous desk thumping*]

**Mr. Imbert:** I will have to raise my voice, eh.

**Hon. Padarath:**—see a psychiatrist.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are allowing them to—

**Hon. Padarath:** If Opposition is difficult for you deal with, see a psychiatrist.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, no, no, no. There is no need for that. There is no need to do that.

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, I hope I am allowed to answer the question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, your answer, go ahead.

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, not long ago, the same Member for Diego Martin North/East stood in this very Parliament and cut material and supplies at WASA in the amount of over \$230 million. I was the Member sitting down across there,

asking how this would impact WASA.

**Mr. Imbert:** To answer my question—

**Hon. Padarath:** Today, the Member sees a cut of \$28 million when we have what was spoken about utilizing the IDB funding in different areas for projects, which would offset some of what we are seeing here. Because, we have sent some of these projects to the IDB for review. Also we are looking at cutting out the waste, mismanagement and corruption.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** So, therefore, when you see an allocation of a cut of \$28 million, it is nothing in comparison to when the Member stood here as the Minister of Finance and cut materials and supplies in the amount of \$230 million, affecting the operations of WASA. So we can tell you where we are, possibly going to make up in terms of being able to utilize additional funding from other areas for other projects that may fall within the area of material and supplies.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, we are now on recurrent expenditure. We are not dealing with the Development Programme, which is funded by the Inter-American Development Bank. There is no way funding for development could be used for this recurrent expenditure, and I would like to know. I have not had an answer to my question. How will this cut impact the authority's ability to purchase goods, materials and supplies? How? It has no impact.

**Hon. Padarath:** Simple answer, Mr. Chairman, it will not.

**Mr. Imbert:** No impact?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, well, I think we have had the answer. We can move on now.

**Mr. Imbert:** But no answer.

**Hon. Padarath:** I said it will not.

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin West.

**Mr. Des Vignes:** Thank you very much, Chair. Looking at 02/001, Items 12 and 16. Combine these two items—*[Interruption]* Okay, a Member's phone went off there. So, we have approximately \$80 million cut. Given the recent—and I address this matter on behalf of my constituency—because given the recent inability of WASA to repair roads after repairs in Diego Martin West. And also, the fact that we had a recent water pump that took over three weeks to repair and there are still residents without water. I ask the Member: With this massive reduction, how can we be assured that these issues would be rectified?

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, one of the things that we discovered on coming into Government was that Ministries and state enterprises were working in silos. We are attempting to address that challenge. The Minister in the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Member for La Brea, Mr. Elder, has been charged with the responsibility of leading an interministerial committee that also engages the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, which also addresses the issue of road restoration, paving et cetera. In harmonizing the work of these three Ministries in addressing things like road restoration and so on, that would be cost effective. Therefore, that is why we can say with certainty that once there is a harmonization of the work across Ministries and we stop operation in silos, therefore we get greater efficiency. But, we would also maximize the amount that is spent by one Ministry, as opposed to three different Ministries on the same issue.

**Hon. Members:** *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Chairman:** Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Chairman. To the hon. Minister line Item 02/001/08 Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, I am seeing an increase of \$3.5 million for this fiscal year. Can the hon Minister indicate what accounted for that increase? What is it going to be used for?

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, the authority has consistently received a shortfall of approximately 3 million in terms of this particular area per year under the line Item 08: rental/premises expense. For financial year 2026 the authority has received its requested amount of \$19.3 million based on the current property listing. Member, had you had the opportunity to serve in Government, you would have realized that part of the challenge is the accommodation that public servants sometimes have to operate out of and WASA is no exception. Therefore, this is the Government's commitment to putting employees in better workspaces for greater degrees of productivity, which has been left to languish. You would have seen recently we had a similar situation with Met and I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** Because, for nine and a half years this arrangement was left to languish and employees were left to work in the most difficult circumstances. It may be unparliamentary to say, but in some instances, the most disgusting circumstance in terms of the accommodation that they had to operate out of. So this essentially is to address an issue that really should have been addressed a long time ago Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Mr. Chairman, just for clarification. So there would be any new buildings rented in this fiscal year, or is it just to deal with the deficit?

**Hon. Padarath:** As I said earlier, Mr. Chairman, I do not think the hon. Member

heard when I said the authority has received its requested amount based on the current property listing and therefore, there might be a harmonization of both.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Mr. Chairman, line Item 02/002/09 Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment. I am seeing an increase of \$2.5 million. Can the hon. Minister indicated what this increase would be used to purchase? What type of equipment? To rent, sorry?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, Member. The line caters for the rental leasing of light vehicles and major equipment required in the execution of the day-to-day activities of WASA. WASA has 200 vehicles leased as follows: 116 pick-ups, 84 three-tonne trucks. The authority needs an additional 20 vehicles to maximize its operations. They are looking at 15 pick-ups and 5 three-tonne trucks. They would be assigned for operations and the wastewater division to support the additional projects undertaken by in-house crews. So essentially this allocation would be utilized to get greater degrees of productivity and water in citizens' taps.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Mr. Chairman, line Item 02/002/28, Other Contracted Services. Can the hon. Minister indicate—I am assuming that these are to be granted for external contracts. I ask this on behalf of my constituents, whether the sewer works carded to take place, as indicated by WASA publicly in this fiscal year, whether the increased allocation of the \$22 million would include any part thereof relative to addressing the sewer issues there, please.

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, the latter part of the question asked by the Member for Laventille West is treated with in another line Item. Member, this line Item 28: Other Contracted Services, primarily reasons for the increase in contracted services are due to the increase in IT software, licenses and infrastructure required for automation and digitalization of services. There is also the critical repair works

required at various water and wastewater facilities to ensure compliance under the Water Pollution Rules (2019), in accordance with section 29 of the EMA Chap. 35:05 Act.

This is also the ongoing pipeline repairs and maintenance to minimize non-revenue water. So, those are some of the areas that this allocation would be utilized for. I know you are concerned about that particular issue in your constituency, Member. I can have a conversation with you in terms of addressing that, but it is something that we are actively looking at.

**12.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you very much, Minister. Chairman, line Item 02, 001, 43: Security Services, I am seeing an increase of \$22 million for security services. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is this increase going to be used for, please?

**Mr. Chairman:** The question pertains to Security Services at 43.

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, Mr. Chairman. The increase here will bring the subsisting outdated private security service rates in line with current market rates.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Can the hon. Minister indicate which security services are currently being used under this line Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** The same services we inherited when we came into Government.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Most respectfully, Mr. Chairman, I was not in the Government before so I am asking realistically who are the security services, whether it is MTS, whether it is private security.

**Hon. Padarath:** We can provide that to you in writing, Member.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Last question on this line Item, 02/001/62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, I am seeing a significant increase of almost 100 per cent, \$3.7 million for publicity and so on. Can the hon. Minister indicate

what items would this be used for?

**Hon. Padarath:** Sixty-two.

**Mr. Marcelle:** 62, yes.

**Hon. Padarath:** Promotions, Publicity and Printing, we are advised by WASA that there is a need for an increase with respect to digital marketing technologies which is expected to impact their media campaign and advertising costs associated with.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Could the hon. Minister indicate what procurement process would be followed for these additional services?

**Hon. Padarath:** Most definitely we will be following the OPR laws.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Mausica/Malabar.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. Line Item 43, again, Security Services in light of that significant increase, has the Minister considered looking at other security services to see if cost savings can be had?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes Member, we are currently reviewing that right now.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you. 68: Water Trucking Services, an increase of \$7.7 million. Can the Minister indicate which constituencies that service will be provided to?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you. Chairman, there are several constituencies across particularly south, central and eastern Trinidad, there are some along the corridor including that of the Member for Arouca/Lopinot who served as the Minister of Public Utilities with responsibility for WASA and I can provide the exact constituencies in writing. Obviously, Member, there will be from time to time where we will divert attention outside of those that may come to you at this particular time.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am waiting for you to call my name, Sir. Thank you very much. Okay. 02/001/43, the same Item my colleague from Laventille West referred to, Security Services. Is there a plan in fiscal 2026 to introduce any new security service providers?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, a few weeks ago, I was advised that all existing service providers at WASA in the area of security services are on a month-to-month basis, therefore, there is a review right now to ensure that the proper procedure is followed to bring on service providers, whether it is the existing ones or new ones, through an open transparent process to address the security arrangements at these facilities.

**Mr. Imbert:** The answer is yes, thank you.

**Hon. Padarath:** But you left it month to month.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, let us move on. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007: Households. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the Minister, I am looking at Sub-Item 02: Gratuities and Pension. Yes, Households.

**Hon. Padarath:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** Sorry, 007/02: Gratuities and Pension. I am seeing a reduction, Minister, by \$7.9 million. Can you explain the reason for the reduction in that line Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, Member. I am advised that this reduction is based on 37 employees who will attain retirement age in 2026.

**Mr. Gonzales:** You are saying that there are 39 employees who have reached—

**Hon. Padarath:** 37.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thirty-seven employees that have reached retirement age?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, shall we move on? Yes. Item 009: Other Transfers. Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, there are two issues here. One is, firstly, how will the \$230 million reduction in depreciation impact the authority? First question, and secondly, if there is a \$230 million reduction in allowance for depreciation, why is this added to the running total?

**Mr. Chairman:** I think the Minister—

**Mr. Imbert:** The first question is the—

**Mr. Chairman:** The second part of the question the Minister of Finance is asking for it to be repeated.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is okay. That is all right. Let us deal with the first question. How would the \$230 million reduction in depreciation impact the authority? Or is that a typo?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly. Mr. Chairman, if you would allow, to the hon. Member, that we will get back to you with respect to that.

**Mr. Imbert:** No problem. No problem. It is all right. Do not bother about it. When you get back to me, we will deal with that.

**Mr. Chairman:** 55 - Regulated Industries Commission. Sub-Head 01. This is to be found at page 267. Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. 267. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-

Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007: Households. Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09. These are to be found Consolidated Fund, pages 110 to 112. Under the rubric, Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, A. Electricity. Member for Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Chairman. To the hon. Minister, line Item 05, A., 581, National Street Lighting Programme, I am seeing an increase of about 4.5 million to 10 million. Could the hon. Minister indicate which areas would be allocated these funds and if perhaps not able to provide a breakdown today, if it can be provided in writing please?

**12.55 p.m.**

**Hon. Padarath:** Sure. Member, there is a current work schedule, in terms of the areas that are targeted. So, I would like to provide you with that in writing because it is a bit extensive.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Chairman, as it relates to line Item 583: Development of Disaster Preparedness Capability in T&TEC Phase II, I am seeing a reduction of \$4.5 million, \$1 million being allocated this year. Could the hon. Minister indicate whether, in the last fiscal year, the development project was completed or is very close to?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, this has to do with the purchase of three 40-foot mobile substations. The contract was signed by both parties on April 25, 2025, three days before the general election. The purchase order was issued to the supplier on May 06, 2025, and a 30 per cent down payment was made on October 03, 2025, in the sum of \$7.288 million. These mobile substations will cost \$24.29 million and are

anticipated to arrive at the close of fiscal 2026, with the remainder of \$17.5 million to be paid upon arrival. As I have indicated earlier, we are looking at the latter half, in terms of the delivery of these mobile substations.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Mr. Chairman, line Item 586: Lighting of Parks and Recreational Grounds. A similar question to my first, I am seeing an allocation of \$9 million for this fiscal year. Can the hon. Minister indicate which parks and/or recreational grounds are targeted for this fiscal year?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, Member. This was a request fully funded. T&TEC made the request of \$9 million for this particular area. And having looked at the file with respect to lighting of parks and recreational grounds, historically, they will have an idea of what their projections are, going forward, in terms of the number of requests that come in on an annual basis.

But obviously, the Member Arouca/Lopinot will recall having to sign off voluminous files that Members of Parliament will make recommendations, councillors, et cetera. So, I cannot give you an exact number, but it will be based on the recommendations coming in and the requests coming in.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yeah. Can the hon. Minister endeavour to have the projected, at a later date, provided in writing, please?

**Hon. Padarath:** Sure.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Line Item—

**Hon. Padarath:** But it will not be limited to that, which is the point that I am making because—

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yeah, understood.

**Hon. Padarath:**—on an annual basis, you will get, down to the last day before the budget is presented, from colleagues on both sides of the House, sometimes.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yeah, deeply grateful. Mr. Chairman, line Item 596: Replacement of Aging Transmission Infrastructure. I am seeing that in 2024, \$4 million was allocated; in 2025, \$3 million; and this year, a drastic reduction of \$1 million. Can the hon. Minister, explain the rationale for such a significant decrease in this *Development Programme*, please?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, Member. This project will ensure that the country has access to a robust and reliable supply of electricity, and it has to do with the existing transformers that have been changed out over the last couple of years, sometimes, in some instances, months. So, what you are seeing here is, based on the scope of work that is needed, there was a subtraction after reviewing what has been achieved or completed, and that would have accounted for the variants in this instance.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Mr. Chairman, can the hon. Minister indicate, under this said line Item, which areas are the remaining replacements of these, and if it cannot be provided today, whether it can be provided in writing at a later time, please?

**Hon. Padarath:** Sure. We are still looking at the assembly and insulation works for two transformers at the Wrightson Road substation. We are looking at the replacement of the gateway of Belmont 33-kilovolt cable circuit, the replacement of insulators, and the refurbishment of a section of the Brechin Castle to Debe, 132-kilovolt circuit.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Thanks, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Malabar/Mausica.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. Mr. Chairman, 15/C. 016: Restoration of TTPost Legacy Post Office Building. I notice there is no allocation for '26. Is it that the project has been completed, or has it been abandoned?

**Hon. Padarath:** We are moving on to TTPost? We are not there yet, Chairman. We are still at T&TEC.

**Mr. Chairman:** No. I was distracted, Member, but I do not think that we have gotten there as yet. We are still at the T&TEC.

**Mr. Romain:** Noted.

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the hon. Minister, under the National Street Lighting Programme, I see you have an allocation, for 2026, of \$10 million. Is it correct to assume that this \$10 million would be to fund the rural electrification and grid upgrades for 8,000 LED street lights that the Minister of Finance would have mentioned in his budget?

**Hon. Padarath:** Just give us one moment.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Sure.

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member, for your patience. Member, I am advised that this figure represents 2,500, not the 8,000. I have conferred with the Minister of Finance, and this is for the installation of an estimated 2,500 LED luminaries and 150 poles. That is what it will be utilized for.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much. Minister, the Minister of Finance gave the assurance to the country that the Government will be spending \$250 million for the installation of 8,000 LED lights, and \$10 million has been allocated for street lighting under the *Development Programme*. So, it is quite clear that—unless you can show me where else in the allocation in the *Development Programme* for the Ministry of Public Utilities that you are going to get the funding to move forward with this major electrification project that the Minister of Finance would have mentioned in his budget.

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member. Member, you would have heard the Minister of Finance say, “Promise made, promise delivered.” This is the first tranche of these luminaires and therefore, you are asking for the funding for the rest of it. I have spoken with the Minister of Finance. We are going to roll this out, the first projection of 2500, and therefore, obviously, it will come from supplemental funding.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, the \$250 million that the Minister spoke about in his budgetary statement is not reflected in the allocation to the Ministry of Public Utilities.

**Hon. Padarath:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes. The Minister said \$250 million. That is the cost of the electrification programme.

**Hon. Padarath:** As I have indicated to you earlier, Member, this is the first tranche upon delivering. Therefore, as we go along, it is a review, but the funding has been committed in this first instance. Therefore, we will seek the progress of this particular project as we go along, and once supplemental funding is needed, the Minister of Finance has given his commitment to support.

**1.05 p.m.**

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, do you agree, Minister, that the \$10 million allocation under this line Item is a gross underbudgeting for this major \$250 million—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:**—for the programme that the Minister spoke about?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, you would recall that in doing projects, you need to have projections and a scope of work. So, these things are done on a phased basis, particularly since it is a new and recent initiative. And I want to congratulate the

Minister of Finance on this initiative.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** Because many of the rural constituencies are represented in the Government, La Brea, Cumuto, Manzanilla, Point Fortin, Toco, Sangre Grande, Princes Town, Naparima, Siparia, including, but not limited to. And, therefore, you would recognize that there is a need to embark on such a programme, but obviously, it will be done on a phased basis. So, I would not say at all that this is an under-representation in terms of the budgeting process. It is a phased process, so we are kick-starting this, and as we go along, the Minister of Finance has indicated he would lend his support. The target, I think, is what the hon. Minister of Finance is projecting in his statement—the target.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much for your response, but Minister, this is the line Item that is used to fund new streetlights all over Trinidad and Tobago. The statement by the Minister of Finance is a new programme to target rural communities that is the understanding, and if this new programme is to target rural communities, and you are saying that this \$10 million is to start this new programme, then what is going to happen for street lights in Port of Spain, in Diego Martin—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:**—in Arima, in Maraval—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:**—in Arouca, in Lopinot, because those communities—Maloney, this is an example, La Horquetta, these are not rural communities, and this is the line Item that will normally be used to fund streetlights in communities all over Trinidad and Tobago. So, again, the question is that if the Minister of Finance is

creating a new line Item to target rural communities, then you cannot use this line Item to introduce this new programme.

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, what I am simply saying is that—and I mentioned that we work in silos, that is what we found when we arrived on the scene, and therefore, there must be a harmonization of both. It cannot be a duplication of efforts. And therefore, Minister of Finance, through the Ministry of Public Utilities and other state agencies, inclusive of T&TEC and others, is looking to see how we can streamline it and work in tandem with each other.

So, therefore, I am happy that you raised Arouca, Lopinot, Maloney and all of these places because one of the things that we found coming into government as well is that there was a great need to address the national Street Lighting Programme. There were many areas, especially on the highways in where there were large spots. Up to yesterday, I was calling and complaining to the PS, “PS, there is no streetlight on the highway coming northbound in the vicinity of Chaguanas around the Divali Nagar area.” And we were able to get those things accomplished, so over the last couple of months, we have been able to repair, through the national street lighting, over 482 that were left unaddressed.

However, as I have said to you before, the Minister of Finance has indicated that we will work together in tandem with this particular programme to see how we can harmonize both projects. But, as of now, this is the allocation going forward, and we will continue discussions with the Ministry of Finance, in terms of how we can assist in carrying that programme forward.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And the harmonization would be to target both rural and urban centres.

**Hon. Padarath:** Of course, of course, yes, Member.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item C. Postal Services; I. Water and Sewerage. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes, sorry, Chair. Under Postal Services, I observed in 016: Restoration of TTPost Legacy Post Office Building, Member, that there is no allocation for 2026.

**Mr. Imbert:** What page is that?

**Mr. Gonzales:** Oh, I am sorry. I am at page 111. Given the fact that there is no allocation for 2026, Member, my understanding is that in the Town of Sangre Grande, there is a project to restore that old TTPost building, and a contract may have been issued. Given the fact that we have no allocation in 2026, is it that the Ministry of Public Utilities or TTPost, rather, will not be proceeding with this project and other projects where TTPost were seeking under the development programme to restore old legacy buildings around the country?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member. Member, I am familiar with the issue that you have raised. It is a discussion the Permanent Secretary and I have been having in terms of aligning the critical needs of TTPost at this time. There are several challenges at the headquarters of TTPost in Piarco which pose a significant threat to the welfare and the safety of the employees there. So that is where our—our focus is on that right now in terms of allocations.

However, these legacy projects, we are in discussions with the Ministry of Finance in terms of not abandoning these projects, but just simply looking at doing them at a later time, whether or not supplemental, I know a contract has been awarded for that one in Sangre Grande. Minister of Finance and I have been in discussions that the possibility of supplemental funding later down to execute that contract may come on stream, but that is the approach that we are taking right now

in terms of a review of the critical needs of TTPost, at this point.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, that same item. The official ceremony to launch that project took place six months ago, and a contract had been awarded to a contractor.

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** Are you saying you have either stopped or suspended that construction project in Sangre Grande, restoration of the old Sangre Grande Post Office? Have you stopped it or suspended it?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, I am advised that no work has started on that project just yet.

**Mr. Imbert:** So, the project is suspended, the construction work is suspended, the contract is suspended? What is going on there? A contract was awarded.

**Hon. Padarath:** We are looking to align the needs—

**Mr. Imbert:** No, I have got that.

**Hon. Padarath:**—of TTPost right now.

**Mr. Imbert:** I have got that part.

**Hon. Padarath:** So, you have gotten that part of it. The other part is that we are in discussions with the Ministry of Finance at this point in terms of a review, in terms of the execution of the project.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is a question I did not ask. I did not ask going forward. I asked you if you have stopped it or suspended the construction work on that project.

**Hon. Padarath:** There is no construction work on that project.

**Mr. Imbert:** I see, so you have stopped it.

**Hon. Padarath:** There is no construction work that commenced, so it did not start. So if you did not start, you cannot stop it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Malabar/Mausica.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair, C. 005: Refurbishment and Construction of Post Offices, \$10 million. This suggests, Chair, that there is going to be more emphasis being placed on the use of post offices, but in my own constituency, I have had many requests from constituents for an improvement in the home delivery service. So, can the Minister indicate if there is an intention to place some emphasis as well on the expansion of home delivery for mail? And perhaps the establishment of mailboxes at some of these sites, particularly some of the HDC developments, which is where I have been getting a lot of requests as well.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, I was distracted a bit. Can you ask the hon. Member to—

**Mr. Chairman:** Can you repeat the question, please?

**Mr. Romain:** Sure. C. 005: Refurbishment and Construction of Post Offices, so I see there is an allocation there of \$10 million. So I was asking the Minister if this would suggest that there is going to be a focus or more emphasis being placed on services at post offices. In particular, as it pertains to the collection of mail, in my own constituency I have had a lot of request from constituents for the expansion of the delivery, home delivery of mail. In particular, the HDC developments where persons are asking for the establishment of mailboxes, to save them the trouble because some constituents are complaining that the post office close at four and they are unable to get to the post in time to be able to collect their mail, and if it is emphasis could be placed on expanding home delivery.

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, Member. Member, this allocation involves some work that is already ongoing. There are a few projects, particularly in the areas of Curepe, Morvant and Santa Flora, and there will be an attempt to expand as we go

along. However, the status of those projects, the one in Curepe is at 83 per cent; Morvant, 76 per cent; and Santa Flora, 84 per cent.

**1.15 p.m.**

**Hon. Padarath:** So, I know that there is a request coming from some Members to expand the service delivery in some of these areas. So it is something that we will give the undertaking to review and see how we can expand it. But with respect to these allocations, this is to complete several ongoing projects which we would have inherited. So we are not abandoning these projects; we are carrying them out.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you Minister.

**Mr. Chairman:** Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Asked and answered.

**Mr. Chairman:** I. Water and Sewerage, Item 004: Social Infrastructure; C. Welfare Services. I will ask the out-of-seat Diego Martin Central to ask his question nevertheless.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Thank you, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Perhaps the choice of his seat speaks of his intentions.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Minister, I see the Residential Electrification Assistance Programme estimate for this year is 1 million.

**Hon. Member:** *[Interruption]*

**Mr. de Nobriga:** We are on Welfare Services.

**Mr. Gonzales:** 130, 130.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** The junior Minister should be following.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes, not paying attention.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Not paying attention.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I “doh” know what role La Brea is playing. You are not

supporting.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Correct.

**Mr. Gonzales:** You are not paying attention.

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, hon. Member.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Thank you Minister. So C. 002: Residential Electrification Assistance Programme, I am seeing that the Estimate for 2026 is a million dollars. Minister, this, as I am sure you well know, is a programme out of the Ministry of Public Utilities that directly impacts the most vulnerable and in particular the aged, at least in my experience as a Member of Parliament. I have to say I am concerned about the reduction and how this is going to impact the many applicants for the programme.

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you Member. Member, you would have heard me say earlier that there is an attempt to harmonize programmes across several Ministries. The Actual for this expenditure in 2024 was about \$642,822 and the programme which is now being reviewed in terms of working in tandem with established programmes across the public sector to identify duplications of efforts between the MPU, Self-Help, Social Development and the Ministry of Housing is being done right now.

So when I look at the Actual in 2024, we are waiting for the Actual for 2025, with an Actual project in 2024 of \$642,822 and allocation of 1 million, knowing that you will get support from Social Development, Self-Help and the Ministry of Housing. We are satisfied, but if we are inundated with requests, obviously there will be an effort to make sure supplemental funding is provided. But again, based on the Actual and the pattern and the harmonization across the public service, I think it is achievable. But again, it will be based on the number of applications.

**Mr. Chairman:** Before I proceed, can I just indicate to Members and welcome the cohort of the 2025 Youth Parliament to the Chamber. They are all there.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** On behalf of all Members, welcome cohort 2025. We move now to Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services at pages 114 to 115. A. Administrative Services. I understand San Fernando East has put his hand up first.

**Mr. Manning:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. 005/06/061: Community Water Improvement Programme. I see an Estimate of \$25 million. There was a programme started under the last administration in Pleasantville called the Pleasantville Water Improvement Programme, which would have benefited over 5,000 residents of the community who have had water issues in the past. Will this programme be continued by this Government and the Ministry of Public Utilities?

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, with respect to that particular project that the Member has spoken about, the short answer to that is yes. Even the people of San Fernando East will win when the UNC wins.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** And next time Maka will win.

**Mr. Manning:** Can I ask the Minister if this programme will be completed within this fiscal year?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, we would be very happy to deliver to the people of San Fernando East.

**Mr. Manning:** Thank you very much. Greatly appreciate it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the hon. Minister, on that same line Item 061: Community Water Improvement Programme. I am happy

that the current Government has seen it fit to continue with a very good programme under the People's National Movement that benefitted—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** In that regard, Minister, can you provide the Parliament or the Opposition in writing with a list of the projects that you propose to implement under this line Item for this fiscal year?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, while I do give the commitment, I want to say under the Community Water Improvement Project, while I could have given the assurance to my colleague from San Fernando East, many constituencies, when in opposition, did not receive the benefit of this programme. Therefore, we do not intend to govern like our colleagues opposite by cherry-picking based on who you voted for.

Mr. Chairman, I will go as far to say that the worst served constituency with respect to water, sometimes for weeks if not months, continues to be that, and we are fixing it, of the constituency of Siparia. And, if that is not spite Mr. Chairman, under a programme like this, to the people of Penal, the people of Debe; it impacted on Oropouche East, Oropouche West. Mr. Chairman, as I said, I am happy to tell my colleague from San Fernando East, we will provide the assistance that he seeks under this programme. But, those areas that I mentioned before, Penal, Debe, Siparia, et cetera, did not have the benefit of such an approach when my colleagues were in Government.

**Mr. Chairman:** Malabar/Mausica.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. Item 067: The National Rainwater Harvesting Programme. I noticed there is no allocation for 26. Is it that it is under review or has that programme been abandoned?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, The National Rainwater Harvesting Programme has been subsumed into a new project, essentially, where other countries have utilized these tank farms in rural areas in particular that do not get pipe-borne water for weeks and months. We are harmonizing that Rainwater Harvesting Programme with these tank farms that are going to be established in several constituencies across the country to bring a greater degree of relief, particularly to rural constituencies and constituencies that have been underserved, especially over the last nine and a half years. We can provide you with more information on that, and I will speak more on that in another place.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, whilst I have heard what you just said with respect to the establishment of tank farms being associated with the National Rainwater Harvesting Programme, I can tell you that with this programme, you do have tank farms being established, especially in those rural communities.

**1.25 p.m.**

Speaker ID: So, a couple of months ago before April, I think it was in October, 2024, a number of rainwater harvesting projects had been approved. Namely in rural communities, for example, in Mayaro, Moruga, parts of La Brea, I think some in—[Inaudible], in Sangre Grande, and just targeting rural communities, community centres, schools. An integral part of the programme is the establishment of those same tank farms, it is not separate and apart. They are all the same.

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member.

**Mr. Chairman:** I suppose there is no question there.

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, you would appreciate, and you mentioned some timelines there. Looking back at October, these areas that we are aggressively pursuing with these tank farms, when you look at the data provided by WASA in particular, is informing where these tank farms go. Now, you mentioned some areas but almost nine-and-a-half years, some of these areas saw no improvement. As I said earlier, there are programmes that are operating in silos, and it is not only operating in silos, in Ministries. Sometimes it operates in silos inside of these state enterprises themselves.

What we discovered, was not what you mentioned earlier at all. So, I do not know who has providing you with that information, but we are now on an aggressive approach based on the data coming out of WASA in terms of the lack of supply in some of these areas. So, I think Mr. Chairman, we can move onto another line Item, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** I was hoping so, especially since you had given an undertaking to provide more details in writing. Would that satisfy you? And we could move on to meteorological. Thank you. Meteorological, page 114; Sanitary Services.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I do apologize. Mr. Chair, the Minister, under Meteorological 015: Purchase of one Ranger-X5, X-Band Dual Polarity Weather Radar System. Minister, I observe that you have an allocation of \$5 million under this line Item. Can you say whether or not the Ministry or rather the Met Office has commenced the procurement process for this particular Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member. Member, as you will recall, this is an area of critical concern to the nation because of the work that the radar informs. Member, the radar will be purchased from the IDB funding under the Ministry of

Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence and they are currently engaged in that process.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, are you saying that it is the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence that will be purchasing, procuring and purchasing that radar system?

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And, what then is the purpose for this allocation under the Ministry of Public Utilities?

**Hon. Padarath:** Because the funding will come from the Ministry of Public Utilities.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Alright. Because I am asking if it is the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence is the procurement—

**Hon. Padarath:** They are assisting in the process. So, Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence is assisting in the process, obviously the funding in terms of the payment will come through the Ministry of Public Utilities.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence is providing technical assistance. I am assuming that is what you are saying, that the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence will provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Public Utilities on the purchase of this particular Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, as you would recall in your previous incarnation, there are stipulations with respect to the IDB and IDB funding. So, they are helping to guide this process, and that is why we have the involvement of the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, the Government is seeking to get loan financing from the IDB

for the purchase of this Item?

**Hon. Padarath:** I want to be kind to you. You should know that this project, well one would have hoped that you would have known, that this project received IDB funding, because the IDB funding started during your time.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, the IDB funding is for the Water and Sewerage Authority. This is a MET services project. This is two completely different matters.

**Hon. Padarath:** This is the radar system.

**Mr. Gonzales:** No, Minister. The IDB funding is to provide funding for the water improvement programme.

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes. But not for—

**Mr. Gonzales:** This line Item, Minister—

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, that is just one. You are playing smart with foolishness, you know that IDB funds many programmes.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** So, I have to read and spell for you, Member?

**Mr. Chairman:** I think we have exhausted the usefulness of this discussion. Can I move on now to—I think the response, we have exhausted the response, the exchange. So, I am going to take the decision to move on to G. Sanitary Services. Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Chairman. Line Item 17/G./013: Upgrade of Recovery and Recycling Facilities, Plant and Equipment. I am seeing an increase of more than \$3.1 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is going to be achieved under this programme for fiscal 2026, please?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, please repeat the question.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Line Item 17/G./013: Upgrade of Recovery and Recycling Facilities, Plant and Equipment. There is an increase to 5.1 million, an increase of 3.1 million for this fiscal. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the intended project under this fiscal?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, Member. Member, this has to do with SWMCOL's aim to roll out phase 4 of the upgrade works to the recycling facilities. There is a much needed thrust for works to be done in this regard, by undertaking a pilot project to convert the local plastics into building products using a modular recycling plastic system, and you would see that this is operating in tandem with the policy established by the Hon. Minister of Finance when he made his presentation last Monday. I can provide you with some additional information should you wish in writing on this, but that is essentially what is the use of it.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I would appreciate that in writing. Thank you very kindly.

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

**Mr. Marcelle:** One more question. Line Item 17/G./019: Upgrade of Access Roads at the Landfill Sites. I am seeing that in 2025, 2 million was allocated. Only 45,000 spent, and I am seeing 2 million in this fiscal being allocated here. Can the hon. Minister explain what would have transpired for only 45,000 to be used? And whether it is the same project or whether it is a new project please in this fiscal?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, I am sad to say that, really it is the inefficiency, the lack of competence by the administration you supported that resulted in only 45,000 being allocated for such a critical area and therefore there is much needed work to be done. There is the rehabilitation of over 2,080 square miles of roadway at the Guanapo Landfill site that also requires the installation of speed humps and traffic

signs, this will be done. There is the final retention payment for the roadworks at the Guanapo Landfill as well that will be addressed with this.

The project seeks to improve the health and safety conditions for both employees, and users of the Guanapo site that really has been left to languish in a state of decay that is no pun intended. Two, reduces the dust emissions, improves access to landfill site by users. You will be hearing us speak more about these landfills as we proceed, but we intend on using this allocation here to complete the upgrade of 1,730 miles of the Kangawood roadway, inclusive of drainage works at the Forres Park Landfill at an estimated cost of 8.5 million.

So, Member, you would also appreciate that we are not only looking at just the restoration or paving of the roadways, but we are also looking at long-term, and that is why when I speak about the drainage works that are necessary in particular at Forres Park, we are already signalling to the Minister of Finance that we may need some further assistance. But this allocation here, Member, will be able to help us to start those works.

**1.35 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** Infrastructure Development Fund: Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, this is at page 266; B. Local Water Sources; F. Other Water Projects. Diego Martin North/East, Local Water Services.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, I heard the Minister say that the constituency in Trinidad that is most underserved, in terms of water, is Siparia, and that is simply untrue. Since I was elected in 1991—and it did not matter which Government was in place, whether it was my Government or another Government—the constituency of Diego Martin North/East has been the most underserved constituency, in terms of water. The reason being, we are not served by the Caroni Water Treatment

Plant. We are at the end of the line. In fact, we are not even on the system. So that, Diego Martin North/East has to depend on water from the Maraval River and also, from wells, and we are also a very mountainous constituency. So, we have had no end of problems, and preceded me, no end of problems. We are the worst-served constituency, in terms of water supply.

Within the last couple years, under the IDB-funded water development programme, the former Minister of Public Utilities, recognizing that this is so, created a programme called the North West Water Supply Improvement Programme. You would have seen in the newspapers, the residents of La Seiva in Maraval, in my constituency, have not had water for a month under this UNC administration, but that is not the only area that this UNC administration is starving of water.

These projects here—

**Hon. Members:** *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** These projects under the North West Water Supply—

**Hon. Members:** *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** I think it settled down. Continue.

**Mr. Imbert:** I hope so. So, all over my constituency, as is commonplace in Paramin, in Maraval, in St. James, in Dundonald Hill, in La Seiva, everywhere, we have issues with water, where people do not get water for weeks, sometimes months.

The North West Water Supply Improvement Programme has within it some projects, such as the improvement and expansion of the Maraval waterworks, which must be, at this time, probably over 100 years old; a very tiny reservoir

system, and also, the restoration of the Dundonald Hill system, which is a pump system. I see now where my constituents were at last after—I have to say—over 40 years, see a relief coming, that now the North West Water Supply Improvement Programme allocation, which is on page 266, 003; B. Local Water Sources; 011, whereas there was an allocation in 2025 of \$15 million, and these are small projects, it is now zero. And this is not a project that, according to the Minister, had not yet started. These projects are all in full swing, have been under construction for months. Why have you reduced the allocation for the North West Water Supply Improvement Programme to zero when you have ongoing projects?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister.

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, it is incredulous that the Member for Diego Martin North/East will predicate his question by admitting, once more, that the PNM, having been in office for over several decades, continue to leave their constituencies in squalor.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, the data that informed my statement, as it relates to Siparia, was provided by WASA itself. The integrity of the information that is presented by my colleagues opposite regarding WASA is always under suspicion by myself, because we were also told that 56 per cent of this country received 24-7 supply of water, when WASA had to come out and say that only 17 per cent under the People's National Movement administration, during the period 2015 to April 2025; only 17 per cent of the country received a 24/7 supply of water. So, I do not know what improvement my colleagues speak about, because there was certainly none that was felt, seen, tasted, touched by the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the water sector.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** We give our commitment to review all the water programmes—

**Mr. Imbert:** You stopped the ongoing projects, that is what you are doing?

**Hon. Padarath:**—and therefore, Mr. Chairman, the Minister of Finance, on several projects, has given me the undertaking that we will have discussions to seek to harmonize these projects, and therefore, later on, we will provide some additional information as it relates to these particular line Items.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, I asked why there is a zero allocation for critical water supply improvement projects in my constituency? The Minister has gone all over the world but he will not say why he has cut the projects to zero.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, I have answered the question.

**Mr. Imbert:** Why are you victimizing my constituents?

**Hon. Padarath:** For decades, they have had their constituencies without water—

**Mr. Imbert:** Zero!

**Hon. Padarath:**—and in squalor and he should be ashamed.

**Mr. Imbert:** Ongoing projects.

**Hon. Padarath:** The Member should be ashamed.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. There is no need for this.

**Hon. Member:** Why are you shouting?

**Hon. Padarath:** The Member should be ashamed.

**Mr. Chairman:** Boys—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. I think—

**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Okay, stop that. Stop that, stop that. Yes, may I remind you all, there is the youth cohort, which we do not wish them to see this behaviour and attempt to emulate it on both sides. Neither side can look on with righteous indignation at the other.

**Mr. Imbert:** Indignation? They have cut my water supply projects to zero. That is not righteous indignation. That is a fact.

**Mr. Chairman:** We have moved on from that. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Speaker, this is political and geographical discrimination.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Are you going to ask the question?

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes, Mr. Chairman—

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I think my colleague from San Fernando East will disagree with the Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Diego Martin Central.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Thank you, Chairman. To the Minister: Minister, there is one critical project that is ongoing, which is the installation—under the North West Water Improvement Programme in the Diego Martin Central, which is the installation of a booster station in Upper Cocorite Terrace. That project, I believe, is at the installation phase. The contract to purchase the pump already has been awarded; the pump, to the best of my knowledge, already being here, I am asking, what will be done with regard to that programme?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly. Chairman, through you, I want to give the assurance to the Member for the Diego Martin Central, I want to give the assurance to the people of Diego Martin Central, and Diego Martin as a whole, that they will be

treated fairly. And therefore, if after speaking with WASA, it is a requirement as the Member is stating, we will look to speak with the Minister of Finance. Yes?

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot, I would expect your hand up in anticipation of actually asking a question this time. Thank you.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chair, I want to ask the Minister that there is an ongoing water improvement project funded under this line Item in Dundonald Hill, in the constituency of Diego Martin North/East. There is also the drilling of wells in the St. Ann's area to improve the supply of water to the people of Cascade and St. Ann's. Now that we have no allocation, what is your plan to continue with those water improvement projects?

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, what my colleague from Couva North—

**Hon. Padarath:** Member—

**Mr. Gonzales:** The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is coming up—

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, Member.

**1.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** [*Inaudible*]—to crosstalk.

**Hon. Padarath:** There is a process in which to treat with these things. Again, having been there, I know you know that there can be virements and so on. There will be a review of these projects. I will lend my assistance. I have no intention of doing like what you all did when you were in Government by ensuring that Siparia had no water for weeks and months.

**Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** We are very mindful that the people of Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin North/East, and Diego Martin West are citizens of this country, and

therefore, I give you the assurance that I will look into it. Yes?

**Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** But if you can do like the previous Minister of Public Utilities, who went into Siparia to deliver the people of Morne Diablo from a 20-year water trucking racket.

**Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** And that community is in the heart of Siparia. That is what a PNM Government—and that is how we conduct ourselves.

**Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** We went all over the country, including Siparia, to liberate 5,000 people from Morne Diablo.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Okay. I am going to move on.

**Hon. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, I took the comment made by my colleague for Arouca/Lopinot, but you went in there for a by-election to try to mamaguy the people of Morne Diablo—

**Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, let us—

**Hon. Padarath:**—and they voted resoundingly for the United National Congress.

**Hon Member:** That is why. That is why.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. We are going to move on to F. now: Other Water Projects. Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful, Mr. Chairman. Line Item F. 19: Refurbishment of Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant: I am seeing an increase from \$2 million in the last fiscal year to now \$12 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate what

types of work is going to be accomplished within this fiscal year, please?

**Mr. Chairman:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Marcelle:** Line Item F. 19, please, Mr. Chairman: Refurbishment of Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant.

**Mr. Chairman:** Line Item 019.

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Member. Member, this project, the Refurbishment of Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant, has an allocation of \$12 million. I am advised that the works—and this we spoke of earlier—will impact your constituency. The works on the influent pumping station—there was a purchase order issued on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 2024, and the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2025.

There will be the refurbishment of the Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant in phases. The phase 2, package 1; those bids closed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July 2025, and are currently in the evaluation stage. Based on what I have shared with you, coming out of November 2024 and March 2025, this is a continuation of the project that was started, seeing that there is a need for it, and you will agree, based on the challenges that you experienced in your own constituency, that this will be \$12 million well spent.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Chairman, line Item 018: Wastewater Projects in Trinidad and Tobago, I am seeing that in 2025, \$20 million was allocated. This year, no money whatsoever was allocated for the Wastewater Projects in Trinidad and Tobago. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the rationale behind the complete removal of allocations for the Wastewater Projects, please?

**Hon. Padarath:** Sure. Thank you again, Member. Member, several of these projects are ongoing projects. There is an attempt by the Ministry of Public Utilities in tandem with WASA to review our approach to wastewater. And

therefore, even though there have been no allocations here while the review is ongoing, there will be the possibility of virements. So that is the approach that we intend on taking in terms of prioritizing which areas will require wastewater improvement and therefore, those details will be shared with the national community as we go along.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Chairman, can the hon. Minister, indicate, under this said line Item, what is the quantum of ongoing works that we intend to vire funds in order to satisfy these commitments?

**Hon. Padarath:** Sure. Member, as I mentioned, there are some projects with respect to particular areas, some of which are interestingly in the constituency of Arouca/Lopinot, and also in the constituency of St. Augustine. I will be able to provide you with some details in writing on those matters.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I will be grateful for same, please, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, I am at Item 013: The National Water Stabilization and Improvement Programme (NWSIP). I observed that you have an allocation of \$15 million. Now, under this programme, a suite of different projects was designed for the drilling of wells, the refurbishment of water treatment plants, targeting rural communities, interestingly.

There are a number of wells that were intended to be drilled under this National Water Stabilization Improvement Programme (NWSIP). My understanding is in Carapal, Waddle, Palo Seco, Valencia, and Wallerfield. These were some of the wells—about 10 wells—to be drilled under this major programme, and there was a loan that was taken out for the sum of \$150 million.

My understanding is that the Government has taken that loan, and the loan

was to fund these projects. The Government has now taken that money to fund the recurrent expenditure. Now with this \$15 million allocation, this certainly will not be sufficient to fund all of these projects. My question to you, Minister, is: What are your plans for accessing additional funding to fund these ongoing projects?

**Hon. Padarath:** Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, first and foremost, the loan that the Member speaks about allows for it to be re-purposed. And therefore, the challenges that the Member speaks about in terms of investment in some these wells and these projects, and so on, a lot of what was done through those programmes were stopgap measures and was not approached in a holistic way in terms of long term solutions. And therefore, this Administration, we are looking at some of these long-term solutions.

We have already looked at the impact in some of these constituencies: Mayaro, Moruga/Tableland, and Cumuto/Manzanilla. There is an area in your constituency, interestingly, that we are getting a number of complaints about—the Windy Hill area and all of those areas. Also, in the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, there have been some challenges with it. So while these projects are on paper, we are looking to see how we can harmonize some investments in other areas that will supplement the work of what was initially envisioned.

I think you will agree with me that while some of it started by WASA, did not materialize in terms of the impact that one would have thought in terms of water production and water distribution. The review of that in terms of the new projects, big projects, mega projects, if we were to use that terminology, would allow us to put some more water on the grid in some of these areas, but also address the issues of distribution, which continues to be 50 per cent of the problem that we experience at WASA. So you asked me where the additional funding will

come from. I ask you to stay tuned, and we will share with the national community very soon.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you, Minister. Minister, I am seeing line Item 014: Second Individual Loan Operation for the National Water Sector Evolution Programme TT - L1077. I suspect that is the IDB loan operation. The Second Individual Loan Operation for the National Water Sector Evolution Programme TT - L1077, I am seeing in the marginal note:

“...New Project - Funded as follows...”—under the IDB.

Is this the second loan operation for the IDB?

**1.55 p.m.**

**Hon. Padarath:** Yes, hon. Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Has the negotiation for that loan agreement been completed?

**Hon. Padarath:** We are at the final stages of it. Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And how, sorry.

**Hon. Padarath:** I was just going to say that there are ongoing discussions with the IDB. We have met with them a few times since articulating to the national community this national evolution programme, and therefore, we are comforted and comfortable with the discussions that we are having with the IDB.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, can you indicate, for the benefit of the national community, the size of that loan that you are negotiating currently with the IDB for the second loan operation?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly. Member, when we conclude those arrangements, we will share that information with you.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, can you also provide the Opposition with a list of the projects that you propose to fund under the second loan operation of WASA with the IDB?

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly, but Member, I am reminded that some of these projects are yet to be finalized.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Finalized.

**Hon. Padarath:** While some of it has been sent to the IDB—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yeah.

**Hon. Padarath:**—some are still in the finalization stage. So, I would ask that we share that with you as we go along. So yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Well, I know normally the Minister in these negotiations—

**Hon. Padarath:** Um-hmm.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—you provide a concept of the projects that you proposed to fund.

**Hon. Padarath:** Certainly.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So can you at least provide that information for us?

**Hon. Padarath:** I do not see why not.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** So we go now to I. Water and Sewerage, then we go to Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. F. Public Buildings. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Member, I noted in your earlier comment your passion to improve the working conditions of the staff of the Met Office. For that, I commend you for that because I can tell you, as Minister of Public Utilities, I did my best in terms of the resources made available. So I am very happy to hear that you and your colleagues are committed to improving the working conditions of the staff of the Met Office.

Having said that Minister, I am asking under this line Item 001, the construction of the new building to house the entire Meteorological Services Division, because that was the intention. Having regard to the deplorable conditions that you alluded to earlier, that the previous PNM Government intended to construct a new building for the Met Services so that they can be housed at Piarco. I am seeing that there is no allocation for it. My question to you is, whether or not you have a plan for alternative funding for this particular project? Because having regard to what you said, I am sure you are very much committed to improving the working conditions with the staff.

**Hon. Padarath:** Oh, most certainly and again, I want to thank the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, the Pal. Sec., for taking on that responsibility to meet—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:**—with the Met. Member, I remember sitting on those Benches opposite when you made this announcement in a previous incarnation, to construct the headquarters for Met—

**Mr. Gonzales:** What is the plan?

**Hon. Padarath:** That was the plan for about five years, and it never materialized. So this really was a project that you promised and never delivered on. When I spoke passionately about the challenges faced by Met employees, it did not necessarily mean that we were going to construct a new facility in this financial year.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Um-hmm.

**Hon. Padarath:** It means providing adequate accommodation for them, and it is something that the PS and I are actively discussing and looking at. We have already been able to address some, not all, some of the challenges. A lot more

needs to be addressed. But yes, you see, quite rightly, there is no allocation there, so we have no intention of mamaguying Met employees to tell them that construction is going to start at a time when there are challenges that we have inherited across all Ministries. But the commitment is there to have them operate out of a better working space and better conditions than which they are currently occupying.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the Minister, Minister, are you saying that the Government is committed towards building a new headquarters for the Met Services?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, what I said is that the Government is committed to ensuring that the employees of Met and the operations of Met are done in satisfactory accommodation and conditions. That is what I have said.

**Mr. Chairman:** So we go now to G. Sanitary Services. Right. So I will now put the question.

**Mr. Gonzales:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Well you at least could have raised your hand whilst putting on your glasses.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Final question to the Minister. Minister under this line Item, my understanding is that the concept for the construction of an engineered landfill for SWMCOL, or at the Forres Park facility, required the completion of an environmental impact assessment study. My question is, how far is that study to be completed by SWMCOL to commence the design phase for this project?

**Hon. Padarath:** [*Pause*] Member, I am just checking with the acting CEO of SWMCOL. Member, I am advised that they are far advanced in terms of the process, however, there is a last set of consultations that are to be scheduled before the completion of the environmental impact assessment for that process to be completed.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Is it that the current Government is committed towards the construction of an engineered landfill in the Forres Park facility for SWMCOL?

**Hon. Padarath:** Member, what I have been engaged with actively, inclusive of SWMCOL, is meeting several of these state enterprises that were, as I said earlier, rudderless in terms of direction. You asked about this particular project, and this particular project did meet mixed reactions, inclusive of persons from within the community in which the landfill currently operates out of and therefore, we are committed to finding a middle ground with those stakeholders before this project is advanced.

So, therefore, it has my interest as the line Minister and that of the Minister in the Ministry, the Pal. Sec., and the Ministry, but the hon. Prime Minister has always said that we will listen and then lead. Therefore, the consultations will go on to ensure that we find middle ground to comfort the concerns, both from a scientific point of view in terms of these engineered landfills, as well as, and I want to signal as of now, there must also be a commitment to the organization who operates these landfills. And therefore, they too have had institutional challenges in terms of not being able to provide them with the legislative support and the legislative teeth that are needed to make them proactive in enforcing some of which we want to see happen.

So, I will speak more about this hon. Member, but as I said earlier, there will be extensive consultations that will continue before we make a public pronouncement in terms of the way forward.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** Chairman, before we go forward, I would just really want to thank the technocrats, and the Permanent Secretary, and I have representatives from all state enterprises under the purview of the Ministry of Public Utilities.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yeah, I know.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Padarath:** I know you will extend your own thanks, but I wanted to simply say thank you.

*Head 39 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I, too, would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all the public servants who have attended and—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:**—especially to those who waited all day yesterday. So, we now take the break for lunch. We will return at five minutes past three. Thank you all. The Committee is suspended for one hour. Thank you all very much.

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

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

[MR. SINGH *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Chairman:** We move now to Head 64 Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

*Head 64:* The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service \$2,612,301,000.

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Homeland Security to make a brief opening statement to a maximum of five minutes.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Chairman, hon. Members of this Standing Finance Committee, good afternoon. As the Minister of Homeland Security, I am honoured to appear before this committee to present an account for the proposed expenditure for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for the fiscal year 2026. The police service has been allocated a total of \$2,612,301,000 distributed as follows. Recurrent Expenditure and Development Programme, this substantial investment underscores the Government's continued commitment to public safety and national security.

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service remains at the forefront of our crime prevention and law enforcement efforts. This allocation is designed to support the service in enhancing its operational effectiveness, strengthening community engagements and modernizing its infrastructure and resources. Key areas of focus for fiscal 2026 include: expanding the use of intelligence led policing and modernizing investigative tools; strengthening community policing programmes to focus greater trust between police and the public; investing in the rehabilitation and construction of police facilities and the procurement of established essential assets; enhancing training and professional development to ensure a well prepared and motivated police service.

Mr. Chairman, hon. Members, we remain committed to ensuring that every dollar spent is guided towards safety and a more safe, Trinidad and Tobago. I look forward to discussion of the proposed allocation in greater detail, and addressing any questions or concerns the Committee might have.

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

**Mr. Chairman:** The sum of \$2,612,301,000 for Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*.

We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head: 01 Personnel Expenditure, this is to be found at page 349 for the benefit of Members. Member for Arouca/Lopinot. His hand was up first.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the hon. Minister, at Sub-Item: 01 Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, I observed that there is significant decrease by \$96 million, can you account for that decrease in the allocation?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the Minister of Finance indicated that in their budget he intended to fill existing public service vacancies via the Service Commissions Department, upcoming fiscal 2026. The reason for the decline in the services, however, the police service intends to move away from a lot of those acting posts and bring regular police officers to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. So they would be employing regular police officers and that in itself would reduce a number of the Items mentioned.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chair, before—this Item, Minister, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances, can you say whether that—Sub-Item, sorry, is going to impact police officers and civilian employees or police officers only?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the police service would have paid a lot of arrears last year and as a result of that, the deduction which is mentioned here, would have covered the previous year of the set of arrears that they had, so the money that is

presently there, now, would be able to treat with all situations that exist in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service at this time.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So the first question, or the first answer that you gave is not accurate?

**Hon. Alexander:** “Yuh think so?”

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am asking you, Sir.

**Hon. Alexander:** No, it is accurate, I gave you a holistic view of what we are speaking about.

**Mr. Gonzales:** No, but you said that the reason for the decrease is because the police are going on a drive to ensure that persons are employed substantively—

**Hon. Alexander:** Right.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—within the TTPS, but you are now saying that this Item, the reason for the decrease, it is because—

**Hon. Alexander:** It really was an addition to my answer, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—of arrears that—no, can you allow me to—

**Hon. Alexander:** Sure.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes. So you are saying the reason for the decrease here is because of arrears that you would have paid in the last fiscal that you no longer have to settle in this fiscal.

**Hon. Alexander:** That is part of my answer.

**Mr. Gonzales:** But that is significantly different from the first answer that you provided.

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, you did not wait for me to inculcate the rest.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. Minister, let us start with the first part of the answer that you gave to my colleague. You said that they are going on a drive to take persons out of acting positions and to appoint them to substantive positions. Correct? Do you accept that historically every single occasion where attempts are made to do that, those attempts are frustrated—not every single occasion, let me rephrase that, 95 per cent of the occasions when that is attempted, there are court injunctions that prevent the appointment of persons to substantive posts. That is the first part of my question. Yeah.

**Hon. Alexander:** While that may be so, if it is done strategically and with the right format, I cannot see there being an issue.

**3.15 p.m.**

**Mr. Young SC:** Okay good.

**Hon. Alexander:** It is about making the officers comfortable to make that transition.

**Mr. Young SC:** Good. But then, do you accept that by moving persons into substantive posts, it means that you are now paying them more—because they have been promoted, and now with attrition to promotion, you are now bringing new people underneath, so therefore, the wage bill actually goes up. So how, by reducing it by \$96 million, can it be that the response is by moving people into substantive posts?

**Hon. Alexander:** So, Member, if you understand the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, you will realize that there are a lot of persons who are acting in the capacity two ranks up. And if you are acting in two ranks up, it takes a different amount of remunerations to keep you covered. If we remove that from what is presently existing, then we should not have that problem here.

**Mr. Young SC:** All right, if you say so. But then, the second part of your answer to this same line Item 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, was by saying in the last fiscal, arrears were paid, but when you look at the Actual for 2024, it was \$1.28 billion, compared to a Revised of \$1.236 billion—Revised for 2025. So therefore, in 2024, the Actual amount spent under this was \$1.284 billion and now you are providing \$1.1 billion, which is a huge shortfall over \$100 million from that prior fiscal that was not covered by the arrears.

**Hon. Alexander:** As the police service continues to pay the arrears left behind, the more arrears that would be covered.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, you are saying there were arrears in 2024, covered, paid to?

**Hon. Alexander:** There were arrears, and when you cover those arrears, you could now spend the money that you have within the organization itself, and not just arrears based on things that would have acquired over the years.

**Mr. Young SC:** All right, which is what “arrears” are.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, is it now that you are saying that the police service, which according to section 123A of the Constitution, the Commissioner—and Acting Commissioner, good afternoon—is in charge of the financial and administrative arrangements of the police service, is it that now, going into the new fiscal, all arrears to all police officers have finally been paid, and that is why you are reducing it by \$96 million? Is that what you will have us believe?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, not all.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, there are still arrears but you are reducing?

**Hon. Alexander:** A significant amount of arrears has been paid.

**Mr. Young SC:** And you are still reducing?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, do you have sufficient—does the police service, because it is not you—does the police service have sufficient, now in this reduction by \$96 million, to cover arrears, and to cover all the promotions and attritions, et cetera?

**Hon. Alexander:** Receiving an advice, if the police, during the year—they could return later in the year if there is an issue.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, you cannot say that it will cover all arrears, all attritions. So, if there is a shortfall, the police service can come back?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Young SC:** Like everybody else—

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Young SC:**—where we are going to already have a shortfall on revenue by oil predictions. Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, hon. Minister, from the answer given to the hon. Member for Arouca/Lopinot, have you any documentation you can give to the population to show that you did a cost analysis—“Well, this is the money we will save if we appoint persons acting two posts up,” that is your explanation. Have you any such documentation that you can—

**Hon. Alexander:** This does not arise.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** You have said—how does it not arise? You said to us—

**Hon. Alexander:** No.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Hold on. You have said to us—

**Hon. Alexander:** It does not arise, Sir.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** You have said to us, Sir—

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, it does not arise.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** You can say that for a million times. Mr. Chairman, may I?

**Hon. Alexander:** Should I? [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Ask your question and the Minister will respond.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Right.

**Mr. Chairman:** Whether we—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes, Mr. Chairman, I intend to abide today.

**Mr. Chairman:** Well, ask your question.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** You have said to us that this decrease, you have taken into account the fact that some persons in the police service are acting two ranks upwards. So, if you appoint them, that money that is being spent would be saved, correct?

**Hon. Alexander:** That is part of the answer.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Right. Have you any documentation to support how many officers you are referring to, in this regard, who are acting two ranks up? Do you have any such documentation?

**Hon. Alexander:** That did not arise.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So, then how did you come to the decision that the amount of persons were acting two ranks up if it does not arise?

**Hon. Alexander:** Because you took into consideration one of my answers. I also spoke about arrears being paid in previous years.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I understand that. So, I give you the arrears. So I say, subtract how much from the \$96 million of the arrears, how much then—okay, how much of this \$96 million goes to arrears, as opposed to persons acting two ranks up?

**Mr. Chairman:** So, are you able to answer that now?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, Sir, that still does not arise, but I hope you understand.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, you have given him—if he is able to—are you able to answer that now? That is what the Chair asked you.

**Hon. Alexander:** It does not arise, so I do not need to answer it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Laventille West has been waiting for a while, unless he cedes to you first.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I would cede, Sir.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. Line Item 03, there is a reduction of Overtime- Monthly Paid Officers of \$11 million. At a point in time where we are in the second State of Emergency for the year, I would hope it is all hands on deck. We know how easy it is, especially with certain branches of the police service—as the Minister is more than aware, he was in charge of some of those branches at specific times—where sometimes you cannot get a shift change, et cetera, and it goes into overtime.

If my memory serves me correctly, for example, Guard and Emergency Branch is one, and very often, it could happened right here at the Parliament where we run a little beyond where we had expected to and persons have to get overtime. How is it, in the current state, we are looking—not “we”, the Government is reducing the police service's overtime by \$11 million, which is almost \$1 million a month for the next fiscal? What is that about?

**Hon. Alexander:** Again, Mr. Chairman, when you fill vacancies, understand that the officer who has to stay on can now go home, because there is a number of persons there that is required. He can now leave and proceed on his leave, instead of staying on and on and on, and not to stop.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, it is persons who are on-post, for example, performing guard duties, they have been stuck in posts for years and cannot be relieved because they

are acting, and it is when you fill a vacancy, they could leave post?

**Hon. Alexander:** No—

**Mr. Young SC:** This is overtime, Minister. Minister, maybe they are not showing you the right line item. This is 03: Overtime- Monthly Paid Officers.

**Hon. Alexander:** Minister, I am quite aware of what you are speaking about, you know. But then, again, if you have no strategy, then you will encounter these things time and time again. And if you see that the police service, on a whole, is making an effort to treat with the overtime situation, it is because they are putting measures in place so that we would not have these things recurring, recurring, recurring, over and over.

**Mr. Young SC:** Understood. And I wish the police service all the best of luck, but we all know that very often, unforeseen circumstances come up; very, very often and that is why there is an overtime provision. And maybe the country should know the overtime provision is usually over \$400 million a year, and we see the expenditure. The Actual expenditure in 2024 was \$418 million; 2025, they are hoping to get it down to \$411 million, and now we are saying that, “Okay, let us try for \$400 million in 2026,” so \$11 million is gone. But looking at the historic of it, it is very unlikely that that will happen because unforeseen circumstances do arise. Is it that the Government would allow virements, if needed, for the overtime?

**Mr. Tancoo:** If I may, Member, the Minister indicated one of the measures that is being taken to reduce the abuse and the extent of overtime.

**Mr. Young SC:** Oh, so it is being abused?

**3.25 p.m.**

**Mr. Tancoo:** Allow me, please. However, there is another issue. And this

\$11,104,000, that was based on a provision that was made in fiscal 2025, for the settlement of outstanding overtime due to officers as a result of the same state of emergency. So, this reduction that you are seeing here is because we already paid. That is why the figure went up. We are back to the \$400,000 that was initially estimated for—

**Mr. Young SC:** The 11,000,000?

**Mr. Tancoo:** Yes.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much for that, Minister of Finance. But the Minister of Finance, who is in charge of the budgetary exercise, has now introduced what I would like to explore, a concept that we are hearing from the Government. Is it that the Government's reduction of overtime is because the Government believes that the police service, in a state of emergency, is abusing the overtime? Because that is a very, very serious allegation by the Government.

**Mr. Tancoo:** There has been an improvement in the efficiency and the monitoring of attendance, et cetera, et cetera, in the planning and execution of staffing arrangements—

**Mr. Young SC:** But in the Minister's—

**Mr. Tancoo:**—which would cause a reduction.

**Mr. Young SC:**—Sorry. In the Minister of Finance's interjection at the start, he said this is to deal with the abuse of overtime by the police service. Where was the suggestion of abuse?

**Mr. Tancoo:** There has been an improvement in the planning of shift arrangements, et cetera, to ensure that overtime is constrained.

**Mr. Tancoo:** So the abuse was a slip of the tongue?

**Mr. Tancoo:** Possibly, yes.

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2025.10.22

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Can the hon. Minister indicate what quantum of arrears were paid in the last fiscal out of the \$1.2 billion, please?

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Chairman, can we provide the Member with that in writing through the application of the Parliament?

**Mr. Marcelle:** I have no issue with that, please, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I am not finished yet. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many officers are currently paid under this Head, 01?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, Mr. Chairman, 6,545 officers are at this time.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Chairman, can the hon. Minister indicate what is the quantum to pay the 6,545 police officers?

**Hon. Alexander:** We can provide that in writing on the request of the Member.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Chairman. Thank you very kindly.

**Mr. Chairman:** St. Ann's East wanted to go before you, Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** She has graciously given way, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, under Item 01/001/06: Remuneration to Board Members, now that your Ministry has been bifurcated, could you tell us what are the boards that fall under your purview?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Examination Board.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** What about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board?

**Hon. Alexander:** I thought you were just dealing with the police service. I did not

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realize that you were asking—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I am wondering if that has fallen under that—it is no longer under the police service, is it?

**Hon. Alexander:** We have the—all they have is the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service compensation board.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Alexander:** Sorry, Examination Board.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Examination board.

**Mr. Chairman:** St. Ann's East.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I would like to return to line Item 001/01. The Member stated that the 2026 Estimates include an estimate for arrears to be paid, as well as the 2025 Estimates included arrears that were paid. I would like to ask the Member, do you have a figure for the arrears paid in 2025, and a projection for arrears to be paid in 2026?

**Hon. Alexander:** I would have—

**Mr. Chairman:** There was an agreement already to put that in writing.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. To provide it in writing.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. Did that agreement also apply to how many persons are acting?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** That has been agreed, that that would be supplied in writing? I did not get that at all.

**Mr. Chairman:** Well, I think the gist of both questions are somewhat slightly different. I think the Member for Port of Spain South asked how many persons are acting two ranks above their current rank. The question you were asking, how

many people are acting, would apply across the board, from Deputy Commissioner, all the way down to constable.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Anybody that is paid by this.

**Hon. Alexander:** You can get it in writing.

**Mr. Chairman:** So, perhaps, you might want to narrow it down within the ranks, or unless you want the entirety of the gamut of the acting appointments in the TTPS. The choice is yours, as you can see.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No. What I am asking is, based on line Item 001/01, how many persons are acting in the positions? Because, from what the Minister said, that it is the removal of that acting that will allow the very large reduction in 96,000,000, as well as the removal of the arrears that are to be paid. So, I am asking, how many persons are acting under that line Item?

**Hon. Alexander:** That can be provided in writing—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Alexander:**—on request of the Parliament.

**Mr. Chairman:** So we go now to Item 001 at page 349—Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: Police Service (Trinidad). Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the Minister, I am referring now to Sub-Item 09: Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment. Minister, can you state what type of vehicles are being rented or leased with this allocation?

**Hon. Alexander:** The make and model or type, for the purpose you mean?

**Mr. Gonzales:** The type of the vehicles that are being rented by the TTPS.

**Hon. Alexander:** That varies, Member, SUVs depending on the nature of the work required.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. Can you also state, Minister, the company that is being

engaged for the rental of those vehicles?

**Hon. Alexander:** I am advised that 18 companies form part of the fleet supply to the TTPS.

**Mr. Gonzales:** How many vehicles are being rented under this allocation, Minister?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, 189, I am advised.

**Mr. Gonzales:** 189 vehicles?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And the 189 vehicles that you are referring to under this line Item, how many suppliers of the vehicles that you have engaged?

**Hon. Alexander:** We just told you 18, Member. Eighteen, one eight.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, can you provide the list of the 18 service providers to us in writing?

**Hon. Alexander:** Can I provide the—Member?

**Mr. Gonzales:** Can you provide the list of the 18 service providers to the Opposition in writing?

**Hon. Alexander:** This is a very sensitive matter of national security interest, and the Member should know that. He was just there for a month. So, you should know that that is not possible. We are not here to compromise anybody's safety and security.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** Chairman, I specifically asked for the information to be provided in writing and that—

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright. Okay.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, the Minister's response—

**Mr. Chairman:** In the interest of moving along, as Chairman, can I suggest this course in the interest of moving along? You have asked for the information in writing, the public disclosure; if it is provided in writing, it may or may not be made. But can I suggest that the Minister undertakes to take legal advice from his legal unit, subject to that legal advice, then to provide it in writing? I think we are all familiar with that process.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Padarath:** No. No. No. No. No. No. If the Minister has given the answer that it is a matter of national security, we cannot impose for the Minister to go to seek legal advice. No. We are not agreeing to that. We are not agreeing to that.

**3.35 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** I am also aware of the severe time constraints we are on.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Chairman. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** I would really like to move forward.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Chairman, could I just say for one minute that these are matters that have been in the documents for several years and decades and so on? Many of us have participated in this process on both sides of the aisle and the Member ought to know, and other Members as well, that these matters are extremely sensitive matters of national security and ought not to be exposed in that way. It can compromise officers.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right, so.

**Dr. Moonilal:** It can compromise investigations and, of course, it is a huge security risk that I think Members opposite are all aware of. So that information cannot be forthcoming in the manner that you are asking for it.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Taking up on what was said, there is also the option of the FOIA, which you will have the ability for a court—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask a question.

**Mr. Chairman:**—to decide the invocation of the national security aspect of it.

**Mr. Imbert:** I would like to ask a question, please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, go ahead.

**Mr. Imbert:** On that same Item. I am assuming, or at least the impression being given, which cannot be correct, is that under 02/09, every single vehicle that is rented or leased here is a covert vehicle. This cannot be possible. There would be vehicles that we used for routine operations and that is not a matter of national security. It is only covert vehicles that are a matter of national security. So can the Minister give an undertaking that the suppliers of vehicles used for routine operations, the ones we see all outside on the street, the suppliers could be provided to us?

**Hon. Alexander:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Imbert:** No? No?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Alexander:** I cannot.

**Mr. Imbert:** Really?

**Hon. Alexander:** I cannot. I am not willing to compromise national security.

**Mr. Imbert:** Compromise?

**Hon. Alexander:** For no one's personal gain.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Alexander:** I am not doing it.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Alexander:** I am not doing that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, so when I am driving down the road and I see a Mazda SUV, or a Nissan, or a Ford, I, by my knowledge of that is a Mazda and that is a Ford and that is a Nissan in police colours, that is a matter of national security? You could not be serious. I am asking for the suppliers of vehicles for routine police operations, not covert. And you are saying—so are you going to adopt this approach for everything? To every single thing here?

**Mr. Chairman:** The baseline.

**Mr. Imbert:** What is the point of examining this Ministry then?

**Mr. Chairman:** The baseline assumption of that request is that there is a separate supplier for covert vehicles, there is separate supplier—

**Mr. Imbert:** There is.

**Mr. Chairman:**—for non-covert.

**Mr. Imbert:** There is.

**Mr. Chairman:** Listen. We are going to move on. There is an avenue to get this information.

**Mr. Imbert:** An avenue?

**Mr. Chairman:** That you are fully aware of.

**Mr. Imbert:** 27(1) in the Standing Orders? 27(1), where the Minister will not answer because it is not in the public interest?

**Mr. Chairman:** There is a separate avenue which all the Members are fully aware of.

**Mr. Imbert:** Which separate avenue?

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain North. Let us move on.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. Minister, 02/01; line Item 13: Maintenance of Vehicles. Perennially, the maintenance of police vehicles is an issue because, of course, they are subject to a lot more wear and tear than the normal use of a vehicle. The Government in its wisdom has taken a decision to reduce the maintenance of police vehicles to the tune of approximately \$15 million in the next fiscal, which is over \$1 million a month in reduction where we know they have struggled to maintain vehicles. How do you expect this to affect the efficient running of the police service by a reduction of over \$1 million a month in its maintenance programme?

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Young SC:** You all are wrong with that, eh. When you look at the Act, the Government is exempt from the Motor Vehicles Insurance (Third Party Risks) Act. While the Minister is taking it, Mr. Chair, based on the prompting of my friends, just to let the population know, the Government is exempt from insurance for vehicles.

**Mr. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, we are on a line Item. The Member cannot be using—

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. All right.

**Mr. Padarath:**—cannot be using his time to ask questions.

**Mr. Young SC:** It is Couva South that is prompting questions.

**Mr. Padarath:**—on things that are irrelevant.

**Mr. Young SC:** I am waiting on an answer from the Minister.

**Mr. Padarath:** We are on a line Item. Please respect the Chair and the process.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us ask the Minister if he is ready to respond.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes. Mr. Chairman, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service presently, on advice, has over \$27 million in arrears as it relates to those vehicles.

**Mr. Young SC:** \$27 million in arrears, Minister? I did not hear. So \$27 million in arrears of maintenance, and the Government sees it fit to reduce their Recurrent Expenditure by \$15 million? Is the Government trying to create a crisis with police vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago? Is that the Government's strategy?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** You are in arrears for maintenance, so reduce it more? Understood.

**Hon. Alexander:** You see, Member. Member, I tried to explain national security to you and I will help you. Let me try to help you.

**Mr. Young SC:** Not to me "inno". Explain it to the population, Minister.

**Hon. Alexander:** Let me help you. Let me explain to the population too.

**Mr. Young SC:** You just told us of arrears of \$27 million.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, allow the Minister. Port of Spain North, allow the Minister to answer. You have had your say.

**Hon. Alexander:** The past Government, without strategy, did not understand what was required. Without strategy, did not know or how to operate, so we will help them.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Help them. Help them.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Minister.

**Hon. Alexander:** This Government intends to.

**Mr. Young SC:** Minister.

**Hon. Alexander:** This Government intends to lease vehicles.

**Mr. Young SC:** To lease vehicles?

**Hon. Alexander:** To avoid the cost implemented, you see.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** All right. But Minister, you have reduced the leasing amount as well.

**Hon. Alexander:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Young SC:** You have reduced the amount for leasing as well. So if they intend not to maintain Government purchased vehicles—

**Hon. Alexander:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Young SC:**—by \$15 million and then you are saying you leased more vehicles.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, you see—

**Mr. Young SC:** You reduced the leasing—

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Mr. Young SC:**—is it that the strategy is, boots on the ground and walk back on the beat?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, you are sounding like you are in Energy and not in national security.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** I am in neither right now.

**Hon. Alexander:** Understand what I am saying. What we are saying is that the strategy would be to lease the vehicles, removing the need to have those vehicles repaired at the cost that we are seeing now.

**Hon. Alexander:** Thank you very much, Minister.

**Hon. Alexander:** So what will happen is as soon as a vehicle goes down, it will be replaced. You see?

**Mr. Young SC:** Understood. Understood. So the leesor will have the responsibility of ensuring that there are roadworthy vehicles at all times. And, that is why now the population sees how important it is to know who are going to be leasing, because what you have now told us is no longer covert vehicles. You are now telling us it is regular police vehicles are going to be leased. So now it becomes increasingly important and we will take the advice—

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, take the advice.

**Mr. Young SC:**—of the Chair, as we monitor this and put in the right, not questions, because we know what will happen with that but the right freedom of information requests.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Alexander:** You see, that is not a question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, under the same line Item, which is 02/ 001/13, the Maintenance of Vehicles, could the hon. Minister tell us the number of vehicles that are to be maintained with this allocation?

**Hon. Alexander:** We will provide that in writing, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And could you tell the current size of the Trinidad and Tobago police fleet of vehicles?

**Hon. Alexander:** Can we tell you the—?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Pardon me?

**Hon. Alexander:** Can we tell you?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Can you tell us the current size of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service fleet of vehicles? How many vehicles “yuh hav”?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:** While I know your enquiry seems to be—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** “Sir, ah just ask yuh how much yuh hav.” I am really trying to stay away from the narrative. So please just give me an answer.

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, go with the narrative. Whatever narrative you want.

**3.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, you have given me an admonition. I am trying to take it. There is so much “ah” could take. So much tablets “ah” could take. Alright? “Ah beg yuh.”

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, I can only provide you—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon. Alexander:**—with information that is pertinent to the questions you are asking. However, there is a national security perspective that I must look at before I answer you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay. Having looked. Hold on. Sir, my question to you is—

**Hon. Alexander:** “Tell meh.”

**Mr. Scotland SC:**—what is the current size of the fleet of vehicles attributed, owned by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Force? How many vehicles do you own?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, are you able to answer that?

**Hon. Alexander:** What we can do, you will put it in writing and I will try to provide you with whatever information that I can.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Alexander:** And underline the word “try”.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** 02/001/13: Maintenance of Vehicles. Mr. Minister of Homeland Security, I will repeat it. 02/001/13: Maintenance of Vehicles. I see an allocation here of \$25 million. Notwithstanding the fact that the allocation has been reduced by \$15 million, I would like to know, is this maintenance work going to be done in-house by a state enterprise or by private garages? A national security secret, I guess.

**Ms. Beckles:** It is a national security issue.

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Chairman, mostly in-house with some assistance from state enterprises.

**Mr. Imbert:** This cost here is cost to be incurred by the police service on materials and labour and equipment? You said “in-house” so it would have to be by the police on labour, materials and equipment. So this \$25 million will be mostly spent on that?

**Hon. Alexander:** Listen, Member, I want you to understand something very simple.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am trying.

**Hon. Alexander:** I am trying to make you understand simplicity.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am trying.

**Hon. Alexander:** Alright. So, Member, you know, your strategy seems good, eh.

**Mr. Imbert:** Strategy?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. Your strategy with your financing.

**Mr. Imbert:** What strategy? What is going on here?

**Hon. Alexander:**—you are trying to manoeuvre all over “de” place.

**Mr. Imbert:** I just asked a question.

**Hon. Alexander:** What I can tell you is this.

**Mr. Imbert:** I got an answer.

**Hon. Alexander:** I will try to provide you with that information in writing.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. So let me just recap. You are telling me or telling us, the nation, that the maintenance of vehicles will be done mostly in-house by the police. That is what you said, eh? Are you confirming what you said?

**Hon. Alexander:** And state enterprises.

**Mr. Imbert:** You said mostly in-house.

**Hon. Alexander:** And state enterprises.

**Mr. Imbert:** That does not attach itself.

**Hon. Alexander:** Mostly could be half of the most, you know.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Alright. Mr. Chairman, wait. Wait.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, no. Come.

**Mr. Imbert:** Now that I got this thing about “mostly in-house” and an undertaking that the Minister—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

**Mr. Imbert:** “Oh, gosh. Allyuh stop, nah. Allyuh stop.”

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, control the Parliament for “meh”, please, both sides. Both sides. Alright. Anyway, so we are recapping.

**Hon. Alexander:** Something in writing.

**Mr. Imbert:** Wait. I am trying to find out what you are going to provide me with.

**Mr. Chairman:** But I think the document was—

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**Mr. Imbert:** What type of information.

**Hon. Alexander:** I will try to provide you.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Chairman—

**Ms. Beckles:** With half of the most.

**Hon. Alexander:** With mostly of the answer.

**Mr. Imbert:** Of what? Of what? What are you providing me with? What type of information?

**Hon. Alexander:** Mostly of what you are asking for.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** To get my question on the record.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. Most of what you are asking for, we will try to provide you.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am trying to get the information on the record. So, you will provide us with confirmation that you intend to use labour, equipment and materials within the police service for most of the maintenance of vehicles. You are going to try to provide me with that information, because that was my question.

**Hon. Alexander:** Once I see your request, I will try to provide as much—

**Mr. Imbert:** Once you see my request?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** You have not heard it?

**Hon. Alexander:** I want to see your request too.

**Mr. Imbert:** “Ah hata” write you?

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Alexander:** So after you ask me 100 questions, Member, you want me to remember that?

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Okay. Alright. Alright. Okay. This is becoming somewhat farcical now. Let us move on. Let us move on. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, 02/001: Police Service (Trinidad) page 350. I am looking at line Item 21: Repair and Maintenance - Buildings where the allocation is \$20 million. We were all very concerned during the course of year where we saw a number of electrical issues at the Police Administration headquarters. The substantive commissioner informed the population that there were long outstanding issues that needed addressing, and he looked forward to being able to address them in the next fiscal. Does the police, through you to the Acting Commissioner, is the police service satisfied that this \$20 million in the next fiscal can be utilized to solve all of the immediate outstanding issues at the Police Administration Building? The next page, 350.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, I understand from advice that—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I am getting the Chair's attention, Sir.

**Mr. Young SC:** Go on, Minister.

**Hon. Alexander:** Okay. I thought it was a double question. We understand that this project was a major project undertaken by the PSIP, and as a result of that this \$20 million might be enough.

**Mr. Young SC:** Might be.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** Okay. Then we go down, and this one is of particular concern, line Item 40 which is a few lines down, Food at Institutions, and I am seeing this

throughout. So the Government is reducing the police services' food, the amount of money allocated to food by \$2 and a half million and leaving the police service with an estimation of \$12.5 million for this fiscal which is just over \$1 million a month where we have, I think, it is over 7,000 police officers. Why the reduction on this Item of Food at Institutions by \$2.5 million? "Yuh" putting them on a diet?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, from my advice, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is owing moneys on this particular line Item, and as a result of that they are working with the present allocation to insure that they can sustain and they might have to come back later on.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much for the candid answer, Minister. But what you have confirmed is what I suspected. The police service is running, unfortunately, arrears where it comes to the payment of caterers, those who cater food for the police service which is essential to keep our men and women in the service at full strength. You are saying that knowing that, that you are in an arrears situation to start, you have taken a decision to further reduce the sum of money. So not only you are not providing with sufficient for the fiscal, you are not providing—you have taken a decision to reduce it knowing that they are already at a disadvantage because they are already in an arrears situation. So this is the Government's position with feeding the men and women in the police service. Minister, I know you will do your best to have conversations with the Minister of Finance to ensure that the men and women in the police service are properly fed.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes. Member, and let me just share this with you also, this includes meals for prisoners.

**Mr. Young SC:** Who are in the stations of the police service.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. Who are in the stations.

**Mr. Young SC:** Not in the prison service.

**Hon. Alexander:** Right. Only—

**Mr. Young SC:** You expect to have less prisoners?

**Hon. Alexander:**—weekend you saw 164, so you could imagine what is happening here.

**3.55 p.m.**

**Mr. Young SC:** But, Minister, you are making my point. I am very, very, very grateful.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** You are actually telling the country the potential crisis that we are in. You are saying in one weekend, in the Prison Services, under a state of emergency, where the police service has the legal responsibility to pay for food, you had 164 prisoners. The Government takes a decision to tie the police's hands to reduce the amount of money they have to pay for food by \$2.5 million. God help our police service. Yes, Minister of Finance, thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think it is a well-established fact that an allocation is made. And it is a well-established fact that my colleagues opposite would be very familiar with, having done it before, that should there be additional requirements, we would come back in the mid-year term and treat with it. Just to be very, very, very pellucid; just to be pellucid, the allocation made in fiscal 2025 was \$12 million by that organization. We are now allocating \$12.5 million for the current fiscal. The reduction by \$2.5 million was because funding was provided in fiscal 2025, that was the last year. We have increased the funding to meet expenditure as a result of increased patrols that came out as a result of the

State of Emergency and general elections.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Should there be additional requirements for moneys under this line Item, or any of the other line Items under the TTPS, we will be able to come back—they will work it out with the Ministry of Finance, and we will be able to come back, and ask the Parliament for additional support.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Tancoo:** You are welcome.

**Mr. Young SC:** Minister of Finance, the concern is that whilst you are right, the 2025 Estimate was \$12 million. Having then gone through two states of emergency, we saw that now the Revised Estimate for 2025 is actually \$15 million—over \$15 million. We have just heard from the police service, through the Minister of Homeland Security, that they are running serious arrears.

Having managed it before, as you will learn, if you are running in arrears for caterers for food, and they stop the provision of food, it is going to lead to serious problems. So, Minister of Finance, I am glad that we have now highlighted this and that your eyes are on it. Please, keep a close eye on the provision of food for our police service, and as we are now being told, the prisoners who are in the police stations. Thank you.

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Chairman, let me also inform the Member that this arrears is more than two years old.

**Mr. Young SC:** And you have not been to clear it, so that is the concern.

**Hon. Alexander:** You supposed to clear it, Member, because you were there.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right, let us move on. I am going to call on Laventille West now.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 02/001/09, can the hon. Minister indicate whether what procurement process would be used to procure these vehicles?

**Mr. Chairman:** Can I invite you to repeat the question? I think the Minister was distracted to his left.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Line Item 02/001/09, can the hon. Minister indicate what procurement process would be used to procure the lease or rental of the said vehicles, please? Mr. Chairman, I await the answer.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, are you able to answer that, the procurement process?

**Hon. Alexander:** We will go with the existing arrangement at this time.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I am not certain, what is the existing? Is it sole select, is it competitive, is it public, what?

**Hon. Alexander:** We will go with the existing arrangement.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Which is what, hon. Minister?

**Hon. Alexander:** That you all would have created.

**Hon. Member:** Which is what?

**Mr. Marcelle:** Which is what, hon. Minister?

**Hon. Alexander:** Huh?

**Mr. Marcelle:** Which is what, hon. Minister?

**Hon. Alexander:** The one that is presently there.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Mr. Chairman, most respectfully, it is not to be rude, it is not to be obnoxious, I am just simply asking—

**Hon. Alexander:** No, it is not to be rude. It is the present one that is existing.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I do not know what is the present arrangement. I am asking whether it is sole select, whether it is competitive.

**Hon. Alexander:** There is an arrangement that existed over the years that we will continue to use at this time.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Marcelle:** Mr. Chairman, what is the existing arrangement, to the hon. Minister, please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, are you able to answer that?

**Hon. Alexander:** My information is that we will provide that in writing from the TTPS.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you very kindly. Mr. Chairman, I will accept it in writing, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I am going to another line Item, please. Line Item 02/001/23, page 350, Fees. I am seeing that a Revised Estimate of \$80 million was allocated in fiscal 2025. Can the hon. Minister indicate what those Fees were attributed to?

**Mr. Chairman:** Is the question pertaining to 2025 or 2026?

**Mr. Marcelle:** I am seeing 2025, \$80 million, I am seeing it reduced to \$30 million.

**Mr. Chairman:** \$30 million, okay.

**Mr. Marcelle:** So, there would have been some sort of significant thing that happened in 2025, I am asking what—

**Mr. Chairman:** What prompted the reduction in the Fees?

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yes.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. Member, that is used to pay the licensing fees, the legal fees for the wrecking service and for GPS on vehicles.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Can the hon. Minister indicate what quantum of the \$80 million

was used to pay legal fees?

**Hon. Alexander:** We will provide that in writing.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you. Can the hon. Minister indicate—on the same line item, fiscal 2026, there is an allocation of \$30 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate what projected quantum of this \$30 million would be allocated to legal fees, if any?

**Hon. Alexander:** That would be a difficult thing to ascertain.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, that will be difficult. You being an attorney, you know that.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Line Item 02/001/16: Contract Employment. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many contract employees are there in the TTPS?

**Hon. Alexander:** The number of contracted employees in the TTPS at this time, 999.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Can the hon. Minister indicate how many vacancies are there under this Contract Employment? How many vacancies?

**Hon. Alexander:** All right, you did not let me finish.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Oh, sorry, my apologies.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. We have contracted posts of 999, but only 579 posts filled at this time.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. In light of the 579—

**Hon. Alexander:** We have vacant posts for 420.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Vacant posts for 420.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yeah. Can the hon. Minister indicate whether in this fiscal, there is

an intention to fill those 420 vacancies within the fiscal year?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Can the hon. Minister indicate what process would be used for the recruitment of bodies into these vacant post, please?

**Hon. Alexander:** EmployTT advertised on a different media.

**Mr. Marcelle:** So, is the hon. Minister indicating that jobs that are being advertised now through the government services, that is who is going to procure staff to work in the TTPS? No internal—

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no, no. What you are talking about?

**Mr. Marcelle:** No. So, I am asking, the HR—so, you have—the TTPS, of course, will have their internal recruitment process. I am asking whether the internal—what would be the internal recruitment process to treat with these the processing of the recruitment for the 420 vacant posts?

**Hon. Alexander:** You mean, what you are presently—what the Government is presently doing?

**4.05 p.m.**

**Mr. Marcelle:** But the TTPS, in particular, how are they going to treat with filling these 420 vacancies?

**Hon. Alexander:** We just mentioned there, it is an advertisement, it is contracted workers.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I will move on from this line Item, please. Line Item 02/001/22: Short-term Employment. Can the hon. Minister indicate, again, the quantum of existing vacancies under the short term?

**Hon. Alexander:** We will have to provide that in writing for you, Member.

**Mr. Marcelle:** One other question on this line Item. There is an increase of

\$450,000 relative to short-term employment. Can the hon. Minister indicate what this increase is for, what post?

**Hon. Alexander:** Short-term employment for the facilities available.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** 02/001/37: Janitorial Services. I have two questions. Does the police service intend to employ different providers for janitorial services in fiscal 2026 or new providers?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, no new provider. We still have the MTS.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. What impact would the reduction of \$12 million in the allocation for janitorial services have on the police service in 2026?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the planned strategy by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is to bring a number of units under one roof. As a result of that, there will be no one team down here and one team up here and persons in terms of janitorial sharing it, that responsibility. We are putting them under one roof.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. If I try to interpret what you are saying, you are saying the need for janitorial services are going to be reduced in 2026, because you are evacuating certain premises? Is that what you are saying? You are saying that you are bringing everybody under one roof. So you have to be evacuating certain buildings. Is that what is happening?

**Hon. Alexander:** I do not like the word, “evacuating”

**Mr. Imbert:** Well, you are saying that you are bringing everybody under one roof. So who was there—

**Mr. Chairman:** I think the Minister of Finance wants to interject.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, wait, wait, wait, Sir. I am asking questions.

**Hon. Alexander:** No, I want the Minister to answer.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, no, no.

**Hon. Alexander:** The Minister of Finance could answer.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Imbert:** “Eh-eh.” This is—I am not even asking you, Sir, I am asking through you to the police service. And you, Sir, have said that you are bringing everybody under one roof and therefore, you would have less requirement for janitorial. I am just asking in the context of what you said, you intend to evacuate certain buildings now occupied that require cleaning. Is that what you are saying?

**Hon. Alexander:** I do not like the word, “evacuate”.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay, “empty out”. How about that?

**Hon. Alexander:** That sounds worse. But, Member, what is happening is that they are trying to reduce the rental of these buildings by putting them in one particular location so you could better sustain them, yeah?

**Mr. Imbert:** I get the point. So you are going to stop renting certain buildings, causing more people to be in other buildings, causing a reduction in janitorial. That is what you are hoping—“oh”, sorry, through you, that is what the police service hopes to achieve. Okay.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, you look upset.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, I am on line Item, under Goods and Services, 02/001 and I am going back to 21: Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings. Could you share with the population which companies have been selected to assist with the repairs and maintenance of these buildings at that \$20 million cost?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the procurement process is only just getting started.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And are you doing it in consonance with the procurement regulations?

**Hon. Alexander:** We always do, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And could you tell us what assessment was conducted to determine which buildings needed maintenance?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:**—my advice is that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service would have done an assessment—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon. Alexander:**—that would have assisted them in making that decision.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Malabar/Mausica.

**Mr. Romain:** Thank you, Chair. Just quickly under line Item 40: Food at Institutions. Minister, is this to cover any arrears for meals that may have been provided previously, in particular, for Carnival events, for on-duty officers?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, could you ask your question again?

**Mr. Romain:** Under line Item 40: Food at Institutions. I am asking if any part of this is to cover arrears that may be owing to external vendors who would have provided meals for officers, who were on duty for Carnival events.

**Hon. Alexander:** For Carnival events?

**Mr. Romain:** Yes. It is my understanding that there are vendors who are still owed by the TTPS for having provided such services.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member, some of the money will be used for that purpose.

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**Mr. Romain:** Thank you.

**Hon. Alexander:** “Yuh kno somebody”?

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, we go now to Item 002: Police Service (Tobago).  
Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. I saw the Leader of the Opposition so I will give—go ahead? Okay, thank you. 002: Tobago; line Item 40: Food at Institutions. So here once again now dealing with Tobago where I believe having followed it closely that the police service have put on additional resources in Tobago and having more boots on the ground and in particular some special operation forces in Tobago. I am very concerned to see, because by definition that means that they will be away from home, in Tobago, that there is a reduction of \$1.1 million on Food at Institutions in Tobago. Why has this been done?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, funding was provided in the fiscal 2025 to meet expenditure, as a result of the increase in patrols and operations during the State of Emergency and general elections.

**Mr. Young:** But, okay, correct. So again you are making the point for me. So that means that there has been an increase in expenditure in food because it was not only the State of Emergency as the Minister would be aware, including from his time there, additional strength was sent to Tobago because of what was taking place in Tobago. And as a result of that, we had more boots on the ground in Tobago. So therefore more consumption of food. So having just admitted what the Member has admitted, why is it then that the Government takes a decision to reduce the amount of money being provided for Tobago for food, for police officers, as well as prisoners in police stations by \$1.1 million?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, this Government understands strategies to the extent.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. So if you have officers who are in fact Tobagonians, would that not cut cost to have those officers work on those particular types of duty.

**Mr. Young SC:** But Minister you would know even as a police officer residing in Trinidad, once you are out there on duty and performing in particular special duties, and some of these officers were sent across to Tobago from GEB, for example, you are not packing up and putting down your firearm, lodging it and going home to eat and then come back. You are out on the street and food is provided for you. So why is the Government reducing that provision by \$1.1 million?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the allocation was sufficient and if the need be we will come back.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. We are going now to Sub Head—

**Ms. Beckles:** Yeah.

**Mr. Chairman:** I am sorry. Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms. Beckles:** Just 03/02. I am sorry, 03/01 which is Vehicles.

**Mr. Chairman:** I was just about to go there.

**Ms. Beckles:** “Oh”, my apologies.

**Mr. Imbert:** I have a question on 02: Tobago.

**4.15 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** Could the Minister, on behalf of the police, indicate whether any of the Items under 002: Police Service Tobago, Electricity, Water, Materials, Food—  
Minister, Minister, what happen? What happen? “You could hear?”

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. “I could hear from here.”

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**Mr. Imbert:** But before that you said you had to see what I was saying. Now you could hear me?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, listen. I could hear.

**Mr. Imbert:** All right. No problem.

**Hon. Alexander:** “Tell meh.”

**Mr. Imbert:** The Items here under 002: Travelling and Subsistence, Electricity, Telephones, Water, Food, in Tobago, are any of those for safe houses in Tobago?

**Hon. Alexander:** No.

**Mr. Imbert:** No?

**Hon. Alexander:** No they are not.

**Mr. Imbert:** So no safe houses in the Tobago?

**Mr. Chairman:** I think I will interject there. Safe houses—national security.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am asking a question.

**Hon. Alexander:** No Member.

**Mr. Chairman:** National Security. National Security. There are safe houses.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, you cannot interject like that.

**Mr. Chairman:** Of course, I can.

**Mr. Imbert:** No you cannot.

**Mr. Chairman:** Of course, I can.

**Mr. Imbert:** We are examining the Government’s Estimates. You cannot do that, Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Hosein:** Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Member:** No.

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**Mr. Chairman:** Matters of national security—

**Mr. Imbert:** The Minister can tell me no.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, but we are elected here.

**Mr. Chairman:** No. No. No.

**Mr. Imbert:** You cannot tell me no. You cannot interject like that.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** And we have to ask.

**Mr. Chairman:** I am the arbitrator of the fairness of these proceedings.

**Mr. Imbert:** No. No. No. Not in Finance Committee. Not in Finance Committee.

**Mr. Chairman:** I am the arbitrator of the fairness of the proceedings.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am sorry, I disagree.

**Mr. Chairman:** A simple thing like the existence of a safe house—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, that is not your prerogative.

**Mr. Hosein:** No. No. No. You cannot be speaking to him like that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Not in Finance Committee. In the debate yes. I will shut up with you in a debate.

**Mr. Chairman:** The mere existence of it sometimes and Members know that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, that is not your prerogative.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us move on. Let us move on. We now go to Head 003: Minor Equipment Purchases. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Ms. Beckles:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hon. Minister, 03/01. I see a decrease of \$8,390,200. Can I enquire, is it the same as you suggested earlier on for the reduction, for the decrease in vehicles for Tobago? Okay let me just see. Okay, 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, yes? And for Tobago there is a decrease of \$8.3

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million.

**Mr. Chairman:** 351.

**Ms. Beckles:** Same way, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Chairman:** 3-5-1?

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Ms. Beckles:** Mr. Speaker, sorry. Mr. Chair, you saw it?

**Mr. Chairman:** We are under 03. I am seeing Police Service (Trinidad).

**Ms. Beckles:** No, Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Gonzales:** No. He is right.

**Ms. Beckles:** Or. that is general? Okay.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes that is general.

**Ms. Beckles:** Okay. Okay. But it is the same one he is dealing with right? It is Trinidad yes. Yes, please.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes Member. In fiscal 2025, the purchase of 73 vehicles to replace the derelict vehicles to assist with the existing fleet. So, you have the purchase of 73 vehicles.

**Ms. Beckles:** Okay, so you are saying that you have the quantum that is needed, so that you do not—I am trying to understand what you are indicating.

**Hon. Alexander:** In fiscal 2025 the provision facilitated the purchase of 73 vehicles.

**Ms. Beckles:** Yes. Understood.

**4.20 p.m.**

**Ms. Beckles:** Understood. So you are saying as it relates to—you do not need any more vehicles at this time.

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, I know you were not at the time when we were having the

conversation.

**Ms. Beckles:** No, no, but I heard you, I heard you loud and clear about the lease.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Ms. Beckles:** Right, so I heard you. I was present. So all I am asking is that in terms of this reduction, what is the—so I did hear your lease analysis.

**Hon. Alexander:** It is sufficient until we might need to come back if we need to. But it is sufficient at this time.

**Ms. Beckles:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Minister, through you, I heard you say that 73 vehicles were purchased in 2025. Is that correct? So how many will be purchased in 2026?

**Hon. Alexander:** How much?

**Mr. Imbert:** How many will be purchased in 2026?

**Hon. Alexander:** The police service at this time is trying to acquire 300 vehicles.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay, so if 73 vehicles cost 23 million, that is \$200,000 each. You are now seeking to acquire 300. That would be far more than \$15 million.

**Hon. Alexander:** Again, strategy.

**Mr. Imbert:** What?

**Hon. Alexander:** It would be required over a period of time.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Listen, listen, my difficulty with that—

**Hon. Alexander:** It would be required over a period of time.

**Mr. Imbert:** Fine, fine, my difficulty with that kind of answer is that this is an exercise looking at an appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year, 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 2025 to 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 2026. It is for a 12-month

period and the allocation in this particular line Item 03/001/01 Vehicles, is \$15 million. If you want to purchase 300 vehicles, you are going to need \$60 million. So there is no phasing over a period of time here. Your entire allocation for the 12-month period is \$15 million. So, could you explain if the police service wants to buy 300, why do you have an allocation for this amount? This is far less. This is only 25 per cent of what is required.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, I already answered you. Strategy over a period of time.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Imbert:** What? What period of time? Again, I am hearing that, but it absolutely makes no sense because we are appropriating for a fiscal year.

**Hon. Alexander:** Question asked and answered.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is the period of time. The period of time is the fiscal year.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Alexander:** Question asked and answered then.

**Mr. Imbert:** You did not answer me. I asked and you did not answer.

**Hon. Alexander:** I answered you four times.

**Mr. Imbert:** You did not.

**Hon. Alexander:** Strategically.

**Mr. Imbert:** A non-answer is not an answer.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms. Beckles:** Hon. Minister, so, you were saying to me earlier that I might not have been here when you explained the policy of lease. You are indicating now—and you said at that time that you were leasing in order to deal with issues of maintenance and not buying, yes? But you are now saying that you would be

buying 300 vehicles.

**Mr. Imbert:** “All of ah sudden he buying.”

**Hon. Alexander:** I will say again—

**Ms. Beckles:** Strategy.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and Laughing*]

**Hon. Alexander:** Strategy.

**Ms. Beckles:** Strategy.

**Hon. Alexander:** Strategy.

**Ms. Beckles:** Strategy.

**Hon. Alexander:** Strategy.

**Mr. Imbert:** Oh, my goodness.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, I think—

**Hon. Alexander:** “You getting it.”

**Ms. Beckles:** You are getting it because I am hearing you loud and clear.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Imbert:** I will have to ask for—

**Mr. Chairman:** After Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So Minister, just following up on the question by the Leader of the Opposition. We want to understand the strategy. You have indicated a short while ago that the Government’s plan or the TTPS’s plan is to move away from vehicle ownership, so that you can reduce your expenditure on maintenance and therefore you would be proposing to lease more vehicles than you own. Now that you are saying that your strategy is to now purchase 300 vehicles, 70-something that you have already acquired. So what is the strategy? Are you looking to purchase

vehicles for the TTPS or are you looking to lease or rent more vehicles for the TTPS so that your cost and your expenditure for maintenance will be lowered?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** “Doh come with dat. Doh come with dat.”

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, what the TTPS is looking at is some vehicles built for purposes. If you understand built for purpose, that is some of the vehicles that they must get. So they will have to purchase some and lease some. It is simple. Strategy, strategy.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Alexander:** You buy some built for purpose and you lease some.

**Mr. Gonzales:** After acquiring the 300, how many more are you looking to lease and/or rent?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, as much as is required to keep you all safe and secure in this good nation.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, we move now to Item 002: Police Service (Tobago). We go now to Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. San Fernando—I am sorry, I think I need to go back. Member for Laventille East/Morvant really did have his hand up and I moved on without calling on him. So Laventille East/Morvant.

**Mr. Birchwood:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Under line Item 03/001/04, I am seeing a very sharp increase of \$16.5 million. Could the Minister explain what Other Minor Equipment entails and why the sharp increase?

**Hon. Alexander:** Other Minor Equipment. For the purpose of national security, I

will answer part of the question, which is bulletproof vests, police hospital equipment and breathalyzers. I have deliberately left out some for national security reasons, good.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, so we are going now to Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. San Fernando East.

**Mr. Manning:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, 04/005/01, I see here Police Youth Clubs. I have to say, in San Fernando East, the police youth club has been doing fantastic work with the young people of the constituency. I would like to give them a full national commendation.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Manning:** Which is why I am extremely surprised why the subvention here is only 1.3 million with an increase of \$172 from last year. Can I ask why it is that the police youth clubs are not receiving more resources?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, money does not always steer the outcome. All right?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Alexander:** We have a number of young men and women who are learning as we go along and this sum is sufficient.

**Mr. Manning:** Minister, unfortunately, I have interacted with the police youth club within my constituency because we have done quite a few programmes together, youth basketball, youth sports, all kinds of programmes and their number one complaint has been a lack of financial resources. So I am just trying to share that with you and I am wondering why the allocation at this point and why it cannot be more. Maybe the Minister of Finance can review and add some more to it by the mid-year.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

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**Mr. Chairman:** Let us move on. I am to going to call the Items now in this Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Sorry.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sorry.

**Mr. Young SC:** Sorry, Mr. Chair, I thought you had moved past that because I saw under 005: Non-profit Institutions we dealt with Police Youth Clubs.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, I was there but San Fernando East had jumped ahead of me—

**Mr. Young SC:** Okay, sorry. My apologies.

**4.30 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:**—which I graciously allowed him to.

**Mr. Young SC:** On his behalf, thank you for your graciousness.

**Mr. Chairman:** 004: International Bodies; 005: Non-profit Institutions. 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. Minister, on page 353, 009: Other Transfers; first line Item 02: Trinidad and Tobago Police Academy. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Academy, as I am sure you yourself would recognize and know, maybe from first-hand experience, is extremely important to the success and the strategic success of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and they have expanded their services over the years to offer more up-to-date and more technology-driven courses, et cetera. May I ask why has the Government decreased the amount of money for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Academy by \$2 million, where the announcement from the Government is to go on an increased drive for recruitment of police officers? It seems counter-strategic.

**UNREVISED**

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, I like the idea that I am putting you in the mood, “so go with meh”.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Young SC:** Minister, let me put very quickly on the record, there is nothing you could do that would put me in the mood.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

**Hon. Alexander:** Going forward, all you do—

**Mr. Young SC:** But please, answer the question.

**Hon. Alexander:** Going forward, Member, all you do is think strategy, strategy, strategy. When you leave here this evening, you will be thinking strategy still.

**Mr. Young SC:** Why the reduction of \$2 million, which is counter-strategic?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, in 2025, would have catered for a large number of persons entering the Academy. With the absorption of the special reserve police, whose training might not be so intense because they are already part of the system, obviously, there will be a reduction in the amount of activities that take place there.

**Mr. Young SC:** But, Minister, as you have just admitted to the population, the SRP requirements are a lot less stringent, including training-wise, to get into the police service. And now with the Government’s decision to absorb them, should it not be part of good strategy to provide the SRPs with access to certain courses put on by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Academy that they would not have been previously provided with?

**Hon. Alexander:** And that is what I said, you know, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** Oh, okay.

**Hon. Alexander:** What I am saying with the absorption of the SRPs, they would

not be staying in like the normal police officers, they will be coming and—

**Hon. Member:** The normal recruits.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, the normal recruits—they will be training and going home, training and going home, which would obviously cut the cost involved at the Police Academy.

**Mr. Young SC:** But they were not there before.

**Hon. Alexander:** They were not?

**Mr. Young SC:** They were not there before because the absorption has now taken place. So, how is it that there has been a reduction with respect to the Academy? You are saying, by absorbing them, they now have less provision of services to them at the Academy?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. And not just the special reserve police alone, the absorption. The amount of police officers that the Academy could take at this time has also been reduced.

**Mr. Young SC:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund; Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 157 to 158; B. Police Service; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services.

Infrastructure Development Fund; Item 004: Social Infrastructure; B. Police Service. No questions having been put, hon. Members—

**Mr. Young SC:** Sorry, sorry.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** At page 157.

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**Mr. Chairman:** So, you are going back?

**Mr. Young SC:** Yeah, well, Sir, before we could even open the book, we were back.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain South, 157?

**Mr. Young SC:** Port of Spain North.

**Mr. Chairman:** North, sorry.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you. I am seeing at line Item 82 on page 158, Establishment of a Special Anti-Crime Operation Unit. Would the Minister kindly provide us with some detail with respect to this unit, and now you are providing \$2.5 million versus the \$425,000 before? What unit is this?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, what I can share with you at this time is that this unit is one that will be very strategic—used the word again, “strategic”—technically sound and prepared in every way, in terms of training to protect our people.

**Mr. Young SC:** Is this like what the SORT was before? Is that the vision?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, no, no, I do not want to associate the SORT with—

**Mr. Young SC:** No, but meaning that type of outfit?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, no, no, it is not like that.

**Mr. Young SC:** No?

**Hon. Alexander:** It is not like that.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, what type of outfit is it?

**Hon. Alexander:** It is a more operative—

**Mr. Young SC:** So, it is an operations unit?

**Hon. Alexander:** Covert—you want to put those words? And stuff like that.

**Mr. Young SC:** Special operations unit?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, we do not want to discuss that too much until further

notice.

**Mr. Young SC:** Understood. And then in the next line Item 083: Establishment of Special Operations/Counter Home and Business Invasion Task Force—

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:**—and a significant increase of about \$1 million being provided. Has this now been established? Because I see it was provided for in the 2025 Estimates. Has it now been established and this is the financing of it for this fiscal?

**Hon. Alexander:** As we speak, Member, this unit is, at this time, being put together by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and it will also assist greatly with the home invasions—

**Mr. Young SC:** A response-type team.

**Hon. Alexander:**—and a response to the home invasions—

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Hon. Alexander:**—as it presently exist.

**Mr. Young SC:** And at 089, a new project, can you explain to us what this project, Rehabilitation of Hot Point Bunkers?

**Hon. Alexander:** 849?

**Mr. Young SC:** 089, just a few Items down. If you look on the explanation, it is: “New Projects”.

**Hon. Alexander:** All right, Member, for the purpose of this exercise, I would like to leave that as a national security interest, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much. Chair, I am referring the Minister back to Item 082: Establishment of a Special Anti-Crime Operation Unit. Minister, can

you confirm whether or not that unit was authorized by the Cabinet? Was it authorized by the Cabinet, the formation of that unit?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, what we intend to do is to leave the present situation that existed.

**Mr. Gonzales:** What situation?

**Hon. Alexander:** That you all created.

**Mr. Gonzales:** What are you talking about? I am asking specifically about—

**Hon. Alexander:** That is what I am saying.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am asking specifically about—

**Hon. Alexander:** In case the Member does not know, there is a section called the NOTF, National Operations Task Force. That came through here.

**Mr. Gonzales:** That was what?

**Hon. Alexander:** That came through the Cabinet. It was authorized.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Right, right.

**Hon. Alexander:** Right. What we will do, we are just going to sit on its back and expand it.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, it is the NOTF?

**Hon. Alexander:** I just gave you a name in which we will sit on it and expand it, but we will see how we develop it over as the time goes by.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So it is not a new unit?

**Hon. Alexander:** Not really.

**Mr. Gonzales:** It is just a renaming of an existing unit?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no, no, it is a new unit with—a new unit with a purpose. However, it comes from within the organ of the NOTF.

**4.40 p.m.**

**Mr. Gonzales:** How many officers are attached to that unit?

**Hon. Alexander:** That is not for me to say. Come on, come on, come on, Minister of National Security for a month. “Doh do meh dat. Doh do meh dat.”

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, Minister this—

**Hon. Alexander:** That is unfair, “doh do meh dat.”

**Mr. Gonzales:** No, no, no, it is not—

**Hon. Alexander:** You know, we could discuss certain things, and we cannot. There are certain things that we can discuss and certain things that we cannot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, I am asking questions so that the public can understand allocations that have been made in this fiscal year.

**Hon. Alexander:** I cannot discuss that.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Note that my line of questioning is not expose any issue or matter of national security. First thing, is this a new unit? You said, “It is not a new unit.” It is, I guess, the reformatting of an existing unit. Is that what you are saying?

**Hon. Alexander:** Expansion, use those words.

**Mr. Gonzales:** It is an expansion.

**Hon. Alexander:** A strategic expansion.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Or, it is an expansion of an existing unit that you decide, or rather, the TTPS has renamed. Is that what you are saying?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, I did not say all of that, but let us just—I would prefer, Mr. Chairman, that we go forward. We move on from this present conversation because if I give you numbers—

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, Minister—

**Hon. Alexander:** If I give you numbers—

**Mr. Gonzales:** That is okay—

**Hon. Alexander:**—it will compromise.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Note—and that is fine. That is no problem. The \$2.5 million in this allocation, what do you propose to do with this allocation?

**Mr. Tancoo:** [*Inaudible*] cannot answer that.

**Mr. Gonzales:** No, well, if it is to purchase vehicles, if it is to purchase materials and supplies, what is the national security issue with respect to this? There is an allocation of \$2.5 million, Minister of Finance, and I am simply asking what this allocation is all about.

**Hon. Alexander:** The Member does not understand the parameters of national security. So he continues to ask the question.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, \$2.5 million in this allocation. The simple question is, what do you propose to do with this allocation?

**Hon. Alexander:** Use it as part of the team. I use it within the unit to get success and to provide safety and security for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chair, I give up.

**Hon. Alexander:** You give up?

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, let us move on to Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, I am on Item 080: The Upgrade of Air Support/Drone Unit. Hon. Minister, could you tell us and provide a breakdown of how the allocation for this line Item for fiscal 2026 will be spent, please?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:**—it will be used to buy technical items.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** It will be used by technical items?

**Hon. Alexander:** No. It will be used to purchase technical items—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Alright.

**Hon. Alexander:**—for the police service.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Could you tell us, relative to these technical items, without going into the details of what the items are, what criteria were used to select the specific types and models of the six industrial/commercial-grade mapping drones that are to be acquired? I found out about the six commercial drones from the speech in the PSIP. I read it first, and I am asking you the question now. Could you tell us? So it is already there. It is not a national security issue. What criteria will be used?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, are you giving away national security information?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Sir, it is in the public—Chairman, you see. It is in the public domain under the extract from the PSIP 2026, *Public Sector Investment Programme* page 249, accessed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2025. And it reads:

“The TTPS currently manages over 123 stations, posts...”—No, Chairman, this one, sorry. This is the technology:

“Technology continues to play a transformative role in modern policing worldwide. In alignment with this global shift and to strengthen its technological capabilities, the TTPS will be provided with the sum of \$2.0 million for the acquisition of six (6) industrial/commercial-grade mapping drones for its Air Support Unit. These advanced aerial systems will significantly enhance the TTPS ability to:

- Conduct high-resolution mapping surveillance;
- gather real-time intelligence in complex environments;

- support tactical operations and crime scene analysis; and
- improve situational awareness and response coordination.”

This is already in the public domain. So, my strategy is to ask you a question based on this. What criteria were used to select the specific types and models of the six industrial/commercial-grade mapping drones to be acquired?

**Hon. Alexander:** My advice, Member, it was done with the assessment of the TTPS’ needs and wants.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Will these new drones be deployed in all divisions, or will they be reserved for specific divisions?

**Hon. Alexander:** I cannot answer that Member, and you know that. You were national security, too.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Chairman, I am abiding. In the PSIP document—

**Hon. Alexander:** [*Confers with technocrat*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Let me finish whilst you take your counsel. Finished? In the PSIP document, some—what I just read to you and other things were said. May I just ask you this last question on this line Item before I move on? Where will you get the personnel with the specialized training to operate and maintain this new drone system?

**Hon. Alexander:** The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is well-equipped with personnel who have been trained in various aspects of technology. So that should not be an issue.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Chairman, I would like, respectfully, to move on to Item 082: the Establishment of a Special Anti-Crime Operation Unit. I will not ask the question about the comparator, and in what way it will differ. How will these funds allocated to this project be utilized during the 2026 fiscal, Sir?

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**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon. Alexander:** On the purchase of items, equipment, for the successful deployment of those persons.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay. I think I understand, so let me—I am not talking about the drones anymore. I have moved on to Item—and you know what, the fault may lie with me. Maybe I did not say it correctly, and I want to say it correctly. I am on Item 082, and 082 is: the Establishment of a Special Anti-Operation Unit. So I am no longer on the drones, yes?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So my question to you, and there is an allocation there, and my question on that allocation is, how will these funds for this unit be allocated for this project during 2026? If I was unfair to you, I apologize.

**Hon. Alexander:** My answer remains the same, Member, and you can add resources.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** What is the anticipated timeline for the operationalization of this unit?

**Hon. Alexander:** You should see it rolling out in this fiscal year, rolling out.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Pardon, rolling out when?

**Hon. Alexander:** In this fiscal year.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I know, but what is the anticipated timeline?

**Hon. Alexander:** This fiscal year—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** March, the first quarter? The second quarter?—

**Hon. Alexander:** This fiscal year—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** The third trimester? This fiscal year? Alright. How many

officers are expected to make up the staff complement of this unit?

**Mr. Chairman:** I think that question was asked, and already, the Minister gave an answer on national security on that. So just jump ahead.

**Hon. Alexander:** Many, many.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay, may I just ask this other question? Let me ask an HR question. Do I have your undivided attention, Sir? Or is the—

**Hon. Alexander:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Right. From which departments will these officers be sourced?

**Hon. Alexander:** Various—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And do not be an echo for anyone, eh. Be your own man.

**4.50 p.m.**

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, put down your finger.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Go ahead. Put it up or put it down?

**Hon. Alexander:** Down, down.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Alright.

**Hon. Alexander:** Listen, they will be coming from a variety of areas within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It might even include civilians.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** In the unit? And what specialized training will be provided to these officers?

**Hon. Alexander:** Every aspect of policing, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, I am line Item 83, which is the Establishment of the Special Operations/Counter Home and Business Invasion Task Force. Could you tell us when this will be operationalized?

**Hon. Alexander:** They are currently being put together because they are anticipating in the police service the passage of the home invasion law.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And, relative, Mr. Chairman, I am on Item 087: Establishment of the Seismic Fusion Centre. Have you produced or could you tell us, firstly, without breaching any of your protocols, what technologies or infrastructure will be acquired or developed with this \$1 million that was allocated for it?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes?

**Hon. Alexander:** Are you asking the question as to what type of training they will get? What was the question?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No, what technologies? I never said training—

**Hon. Alexander:** Or technologies.

**Mr. Scotland SC:**—systems or infrastructure will be acquired or developed with this \$1 million allocation?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is trying to bring the unit into first-world status, and that requires a lot of new technology and equipment in this fight against crime.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And have you, for the country's sake, produced a mandate for this unit? Do you have a mandate for this unit, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Could you provide it to us, please?

**Hon. Alexander:** I will try, but you will have to—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I will have to?

**Hon. Alexander:** I will try to provide it.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay, and finally, Sir, with respect to the—Chairman, in the interest of time, I rest my questions for now.

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** Page 157, 09/046. Now, when with Minister was speaking earlier and you told us that the police service is moving away from the purchase of vehicles towards leasing in order to reduce maintenance costs, I see here another \$10 million for the purchase of vehicles. I was also told by the Minister when I asked about that that the identities or the names of the suppliers of leased vehicles were a national security secret, even though we all know Southern Sales and Services Company Ltd, et cetera. Is it also a national security secret that the suppliers under this line Item cannot be named? Are these local or foreign suppliers?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Mr. Imbert:** My question is: Are the suppliers of these vehicles for which \$10 million is being allocated on page 157 at 09/004/046, the suppliers of these vehicles, since the leasing is a national security secret, you cannot tell us who you are renting vehicles from, can you tell us who you are buying the vehicles from?

**Hon. Alexander:** The police are using the OPR to buy the vehicles.

**Mr. Imbert:** Using the OPR to buy vehicles? I am a little lost there. The OPR is not a procurement agency.

**Hon. Alexander:** [*Inaudible*] open tenders.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. So you are going to tender out for vehicles, competitively by open tender, alright. Well, the police, through you. In the context of the statement that the maintenance of vehicles will now be mostly in-house, could I go to page 158, please? At line Item 086, since, as the Minister said, the maintenance of police vehicles will now be mostly in-house, why is there a zero allocation for the Mausica Vehicle Maintenance Garage, which is an in-house facility? Why is the allocation zero? In the context of what the Minister said, that maintenance would

be mostly in-house, the allocation for 26 is zero for the Mausica Vehicle Maintenance Garage, which is an in-house facility of the police service. Could you explain that?

**Hon. Alexander:** My information is that the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is moving all the vehicles to one location.

**Mr. Imbert:** To another house?

**Hon. Alexander:** To another area—

**Mr. Imbert:** Would they be safe?

**Hon. Alexander:**—where there will be mechanics, et cetera.

**Mr. Imbert:** So they are moving it to another house that will be safe?

**Hon. Alexander:** I did not say house, I said mechanic.

**Mr. Imbert:** So, are you going to decommission the Mausica Vehicle Maintenance Garage?

**Hon. Alexander:** It was never any—

**Mr. Imbert:** It was never functional? Never?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no.

**Mr. Imbert:** I see.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Mr. Chair, if I may just provide some clarity to the Member. The Member, when he was in Government, assigned \$4.5 million for the Mausica Vehicle Maintenance Garage in 2025. Not a cent was spent, and therefore, that Mausica Vehicle Maintenance Garage was never in fact put in place.

**Mr. Imbert:** Stop casting aspersions on the police, please.

**Mr. Tancoo:** This is not us casting aspersions on the police.

**Mr. Imbert:** Saying the police did not spend the—

**Mr. Tancoo:** This is us providing our support.

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Police Service (cont'd)

**Mr. Imbert:**—money allocated for the Mausica Garage.

**Mr. Tancoo:** You provided nothing for them.

**Mr. Imbert:** Please do not cast aspersions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us move to the next. I had reached Social Infrastructure when I was asked to turn back. I do not propose to turn back anymore. Social Infrastructure, Police Service. I now propose to put the question.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 64 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** And can I take this opportunity to thank the Agt. Commissioner of Police and his hardworking staff for attending here first of all, and also making extraordinary efforts to keep all the citizens of this country safe and sound. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** We now have the Ministry of Homeland Security. I think we now have to wait for the hon. Minister's staff.

*Head 83: Ministry of Homeland Security, \$1,930,050,600.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I now invite the Minister of Homeland Security to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Alexander:** Thank you once again, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to appear before this Committee, this time, to present the proposed expenditure of the Ministry of Homeland Security for the fiscal year 2026.

**5.00 p.m.**

The allocation under consideration supports the Ministry, boards, and a

critical mandate which encompasses immigration services, the fire service, the prison service, disaster preparedness and the overall coordination of the homeland efforts across the country.

Mr. Chairman, this budget represents a strategic—should I say that again? Mr. Chairman, this budget represents a strategic investment in safety, reliance and security of our nation. It reflects our ongoing commitment to protecting our people, strengthening national readiness and enhancing the capabilities of our security institutions.

I look forward to engaging with the Committee and addressing your questions as we work together to ensure a secure and stable future for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you.

*Question proposed:* That Head 83 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** The sum of \$1,930,050,600 for Head 83: Ministry of Homeland Security, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. This is to be found at pages 490 and 491. Sub-Head 01. Member for Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, given the recent realignment of the Ministry of National Security into the two new Ministries, including the Ministry of Homeland Security, what is the current staffing structure and total number of positions to be funded under this allocation?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, Chairman, there is a total number of established staff of 146; number of positions filled, 55; number of posts vacant, 91; vacant with bodies, 59; vacant without bodies, 32.

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Homeland Security (cont'd)

**Mr. Scotland SC:** What process and criteria were employed to manage the transition of the employees from the Ministry of National Security to the newly established Ministry of Homeland Security?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the procedure that was used was a very simple one. As sections and departments were moved from one Ministry to another, or from one Ministry separated by other Ministries. So immigration and other agencies, the fire service, the prison service, came under the umbrella of Homeland Security. So it was a simple but effective move.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Do you have an organizational structure for the Ministry of Homeland Security as we speak?

**Hon. Alexander:** We can provide that for you in writing, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No, I understand, but do you have one as we speak?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, sir, we do.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And you will provide it in writing?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I will give way.

**Mr. Chairman:** The Minister of Finance wants to—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I will give way.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Member for Port of Spain South, if I may guide you to the—there is a book that was also supplied with the budget documents called the *Estimates of Expenditure*, and that breaks down the exact query that you have raised, the organizational structure. It includes the staffing, the number of staff present, their levels, et cetera, et cetera.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Organizational chart?

**Mr. Tancoo:** Well, there is no organizational chart, but there is a structure as

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listed there. I could direct you to it, sir.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Tancoo:** I wish to direct you to that book, which will provide some of the answers that you are looking for.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I will await the one in writing. Chairman, I am finished for now.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Personnel Expenditure, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Personnel Expenditure, let us take the whole 01: \$1,231,893,700. Has there been a reduction in the amount of money required to pay salaries and wages and allowances and overtime and all of the other Items under 01: Personnel Expenditure, in the Ministry of Homeland Security when one takes into account the split of national security into the two Ministries and what has been transferred to Homeland Security? Has there been a reduction in the amount of money for Personnel Expenditure?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, no.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. There has been a reduction of \$94 million when you look at the allocation for National Security in 2025 and you add the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Homeland Security, the figure, the aggregate in 2026, is \$94 million less. Any of that \$94 million has come from your Ministry or has it all come from the Ministry of Defence?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, this is a new Ministry, as you are aware. Ministry of Homeland Security, we have no figures to compare it to.

**Mr. Imbert:** I have told you that when you take the Ministry of National Security for 2025 and you add the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of National

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Security for 2026, the difference in the allocation for Personnel Expenditure is \$94 million. So I am asking you if any of that \$94 million is associated with the Ministry of Homeland Security or has it all been taken from the Ministry of Defence?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, let me adjust your statement also.

**Mr. Imbert:** Adjust my statement?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, let me adjust your statement, strategically.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Alexander:** The Ministry of National Security is now divided into three, the Homeland Security, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice.

**Mr. Imbert:** Could you answer my question, please?

**Hon. Alexander:** I just answered your question.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, you did not. I have asked you if there has been any reduction in all the divisions, units, departments and other elements that have been transferred to your Ministry between the allocation for 2025 and 2026?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Imbert:** Has there been a reduction?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, asked and answered.

**Mr. Imbert:** You said yes or no?

**Hon. Alexander:** Strategically, I answered it.

**Mr. Imbert:** What was the answer?

**Hon. Alexander:** I said this is a new Ministry. This is a new Ministry, Member.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am talking about the divisions that make up your new Ministry. When you compare that to the divisions that made up the old Ministry, has there been a reduction? Yes or no?

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**Hon. Alexander:** I answered the question, Member.

**Mr. Imbert:** You did not.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Hon. Alexander:** You are comparing one to three. How do you do that?

**Mr. Imbert:** You did not.

**Mr. Chairman:** I do not think it is—

**Hon. Alexander:** You cannot compare one to three.

**Mr. Chairman:** I do not think it makes any sense to continue. So, shall we go now to 002: Fire Service? Member for Port of Spain North?

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. Minister, under this new Ministry of Homeland Security, the fire services are your responsibility and I am seeing here an allocation of \$300 million for the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance for the fire service. How many vacancies are there on the fire service establishment right now?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, 222.

**Mr. Young SC:** How many positions are filled?

**Hon. Alexander:** 103 bodies at this time.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, you have 103 fire officers on the establishment.

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no, no. You have 2,491 officers.

**Mr. Young SC:** All right. I just asked. Let me ask the question again. Out of this \$300 million allocated for the fire services, how many fire officers, and I am not talking about in rank, how many fire personnel are there currently?

**Hon. Alexander:** 2,491.

**Mr. Young SC:** 2,491, and there are currently 202 vacancies.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, 222.

**Mr. Young SC:** 222 vacancies. And these vacancies are to be filled by the Public Service Commission.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes.

**5.10 p.m.**

**Mr. Young SC:** How much—because I see here the note for this \$300 million is that it:

“Includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents”.

How many vacancies are included in this \$300 million, or is this to cover the 2,491 bodies currently in post?

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Young SC:** That is not a trick question.

**Hon. Alexander:** Could you just repeat the question for me again?

**Mr. Young SC:** The \$300 million, is that just covering the 2,491 persons currently in post?

**Hon. Alexander:** Is it covering the existing officers at this time?

**Mr. Young SC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, it does, and it includes recruitment.

**Mr. Young SC:** Recruitment for the 222?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** Let us go to line Item 10: Remuneration to Auxiliary Fire Unit. Has there been an absorption of the auxiliary fire officers into the fire service?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** There has been?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** So, if there has been an absorption, why is there now a \$10

million allocation for Remuneration to Auxiliary Fire Unit? Is it that all have not been absorbed?

**Hon. Alexander:** All have not been absorbed. However, they still have to fill the posts of 272.

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chairman, 222?

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Chairman, 272. Sorry, 272 was filled. They want 556, which remains vacant.

**Mr. Young SC:** Additional auxiliary fire officers?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, remains vacant. Sorry about that.

**Mr. Young SC:** And how much will that cost?

**Hon. Alexander:** We have to calculate that, Member. We have an allocation there but—

**Mr. Young SC:** I am seeing here at 04: Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers, \$116 million. Can you give us an idea as to the categories of the breakdown for Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers that would come up to \$116 million? Because that is over half of the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance figure.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, this facilitates the overtime payment to fire officers who worked more than the stipulated hours, and operational fire officers.

**Mr. Young SC:** All right. So, there has not been a reduction of overtime for the fire officers, only for the police officers?

**Hon. Alexander:** Let me also address this. Member, you are asking about the allowances?

**Mr. Young SC:** About?

**Hon. Alexander:** The allowances or the overtime?

**Mr. Young SC:** Yes, the Allowances, 04.

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**Hon. Alexander:** All right, 04.

**Mr. Young SC:** Yes, 04, \$116 million.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, it caters for the payment of allowances, duty calls, laundry, protective suits, maintenance, meals and housing. Yeah?

**Mr. Young SC:** Okay. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** 003: Prison Service. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Minister, the Prison Service. The Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance allocated for this fiscal is \$424 million. How many prison officer personnel are there currently in post?

**Hon. Alexander:** We have, at this time, Member, 3,202.

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chairman, 3,202? And how many vacancies exist?

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Chairman, 1,016.

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chairman, 1,016.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** On this same Item 003: Prison Service, the actual Revised Estimate for Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance was \$435 million. Since the Minister does not want to do the math, I will do the math for him. In the prison service for 2026, it is \$424 million, a reduction of \$9 million. Why has the allowance for personnel expenditure for the prison service been reduced by \$9 million, because it is a fact that \$94 million came out. So, this is part of that \$94 million. Why the allowance for the prison service has been reduced? It is \$424 million in '26, and \$435 million in '25. I have it.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, for your—

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**Mr. Imbert:** A strategy?

**Hon. Alexander:** Not yet. Not yet. I have not covered the strategy yet, Member.

**Mr. Imbert:** *[Laughter]*

**Hon. Alexander:** But what I can tell you is this. The Prison Service was left with an almost skeleton staff.

**Mr. Imbert:** So, you are filling vacancies? Because how could you fill vacancies if you are reducing the allocation?

**Hon. Alexander:** Almost a skeleton staff.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. I got that. So you are talking about a reduction.

**Hon. Alexander:** You see, Member, we are not in the habit of giving away money freely.

**Mr. Imbert:** What? What are you talking about?

**Hon. Alexander:** If there is a skeleton staff, obviously, there will be a reduction.

**Mr. Imbert:** No. It is a reduction from last year. This year's allocation is less than last year. What are you talking about?

**Hon. Alexander:** You do not understand the strategy.

**Mr. Imbert:** What? To reduce the amount of people in the prison service? That is your strategy?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** The allocation is less, it is not more.

**Hon. Alexander:** All right. And that is what I am saying, you left them with a skeleton staff.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. So, if it was not enough, then you have to increase it. So, the allocation should be more, not less.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, check your figures.

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**Mr. Imbert:** I am right here, on page 4.

**Hon. Alexander:** Because I know you “is ah” manipulator of figures. So, check your figures.

**Mr. Imbert:** Stop that. I am on page 491, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, \$424 million, and then when I go to page 127, Salaries and Cost of Living, \$435 million.

**Hon. Alexander:** How much money was returned?

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, \$435 million spent in '25,—

**Hon. Alexander:** Right.

**Mr. Imbert:**—\$424 million allocated in '26. What do you mean, “check my figures”? It is right there.

**Hon. Alexander:** \$435 million was the Revised Estimate.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes. And your allocations for 2026 is \$424 million.

**Hon. Alexander:** Right.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is less.

**Mr. Sturge:** You want me to help you?

**Hon. Alexander:** Go ahead, “nah”.

**Mr. Imbert:** What is going on here?

**Mr. Sturge:** If you go by the Actual—this is an Estimate. If we go by the Actual, the Actual was actually \$422 million in 2025. So that—

**Mr. Imbert:** What? I am talking about 2025, not 2024.

**Mr. Sturge:** I am not talking about 2024. What I have here, Actual 2025 is \$422 million.

**Mr. Imbert:** So, the figure in the book is wrong?

**Mr. Sturge:** Hold on, I am answering.

**Mr. Imbert:** The figure in the book is wrong?

**Mr. Sturge:** I am answering. What we have here, the Actual is \$422 million for 2025.

**Mr. Imbert:** How can you have that when the book says \$425 million?

**Mr. Sturge:** This is closer, \$422 million—if I can be permitted to answer.

**Mr. Imbert:** What are you reading from? I am reading from Estimates. What are you reading from? That is not Estimates. “Is I reading from ah book”.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Look, look, look—

**Mr. Sturge:** We are reading from Actuals. So, we are giving you—

**Mr. Imbert:** You should understand this colour. This colour should be familiar to you.

**Mr. Sturge:** Right, listen—

**Mr. Imbert:** Look, look, watch this book. “Is your colour”.

**Mr. Sturge:** Yes. We see the Actual, we see what the Estimate was, and what the Actual was.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am reading from the book.

**Mr. Sturge:** Right. And we are reading what the Estimate was, and what the Actual was.

**Mr. Imbert:** No. You cannot have actuals until the accounts are—

**Mr. Sturge:** And the Actual was less than the Estimate.

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Sturge:** The Actual was less than the Estimate and the current Estimate is closer to the Actual.

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**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Chairman, it is impossible to have actual figures until the accounts are closed in January of 2026. That cannot be actual figures.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Imbert:** I have to use what is in front of me. What is going on? They have different numbers, they are reading from a different book.

**5.20 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** I just wanted to know why you have allocated less to the prison service in 2026 than in 2025. That is all.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think we have exhausted that answer.

**Mr. Imbert:** But there was no answer. There was no answer.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Any other question on 003?

**Mr. Imbert:** I am afraid.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, so we move to 004: Immigration. We go now to Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Pages 492 to 493, 001: General Administration; 002—

**Mr. Imbert:** The books are all split up. You will have to give us a little time. I mean, it is three different Ministries, as the Minister said. You have to give us time.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** On page 492, Item 02/001/36 in particular. Page 492, Mr. Chairman, 10 lines counting from the bottom, 36.

**Mr. Chairman:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes, please. Hon. Minister, could you tell us—are you ready or you are just taking a sidebar all the time?

**Hon. Alexander:** I was planning the strategy.

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**Mr. Scotland SC:** You have 50 million allocated under Extraordinary Expenditure, and nothing, no narrative relative to what that is. Could you tell us what comprises Extraordinary Expenditure for \$50 million? That is extraordinary.

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, Member, you would know in the prison service there are specialized departments that also conduct covert operations. Yeah?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes, Sir.

**Hon. Alexander:** I know you are aware. With that, I would not want to go further into it at this stage.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Who will be accounting and who is accountable for this so-called Extraordinary Expenditure?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, what we can do, we will put it in writing for you, Member. So you will have a better understanding of it.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** You will put it in writing for me. I would be grateful, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** Chairman, as I indicated, the aggregate expenditure for 2026 of the Ministries that comprise the Ministry of National Security, there was a shortfall of 94 million. And I am now on page 491, 004: Immigration.

**Mr. Chairman:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Imbert:** No, you said Immigration. Did not you say Immigration?

**Mr. Chairman:**—[*Inaudible*] Port of Spain South asked a question on General Administration—

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:**—so that is why I came back. So we are going to go forward now.

**Mr. Imbert:** No problem. I will wait.

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**Hon. Alexander:** What number are you on, Member?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no. We are now getting to Item 002, Fire Service; 003: Prison Service; and 004: Immigration. Diego Martin North/East.

**Mr. Imbert:** I would ask the Minister a question on that. So now I will ask a question on Immigration. Now, I assume the entire Immigration Division has been transferred to your new Ministry, Sir? That is question one. The whole Immigration Division has been transferred to your new Ministry, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Imbert:** Strategically.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** And could you explain, therefore, why the revised estimate of expenditure for the Immigration Division, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances was \$59 million, and yet you have only allocated \$52 million in 2026, a \$7 million reduction, more than a 10 per cent reduction?

**Ms. Ameen:** “Make sure yuh check de—[*Inaudible*]”

**Mr. Imbert:** Now listen. Let me repeat—

**Hon. Alexander:** “Yeah, take yuh time”.

**Mr. Imbert:**—the allocation for 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances for the Immigration Division, Revised Estimate 2025 was 59 million. The allocation for 2026 is 52 million, a reduction of 7 million. Why have you cut the allocation for Salaries and Cost of Living?

**Mr. Chairman:** I think we have gone beyond Personnel. Are you not?

**Mr. Imbert:** I am on Personnel.

**Mr. Chairman:** We are on Goods and Services now.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, I had my hand up. I had my hand up. I had my hand up, Mr.

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Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, we are on Sub-Head 02.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, but I had my hand up before you went to 02.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, but we passed Personnel Expenditure.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, but you passed it, but I had my hand up.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, no, no.

**Mr. Imbert:** So what do you want me to do next? Just wave? Mr. Chairman, you have been consistently not recognizing my hand.

**Mr. Chairman:** That is, I will use the Churchillian formulation to describe that. It is a terminological inexactitude.

**Mr. Imbert:** Well, this is my impression. Are you saying I cannot ask this question?

**Mr. Chairman:** Well, we have gone past there half an hour ago.

**Mr. Imbert:** Half an hour ago?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** The argument I had with the Minister about the Prison Service was not half an hour ago?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** That was not half an hour ago.

**Mr. Chairman:** It was, quite frankly. So we are now on Goods and Services: 004.

**Mr. Imbert:** So we will not get an answer to that question why Immigration has been cut by 7 million? Okay. No problem.

**Mr. Chairman:** 005: Fire Service Tobago; 006: Prison Service Tobago; 007: Immigration Tobago; 008: Immigration Detention Center. Sub-Head 03: Minor

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Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Fire Service;  
Item 003: Prison Service.

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** Are you on page 494?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, I am on 499, Minor Equipment Purchases.

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Can I just hold it up so that you will see?

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Young SC:** But Mr. Chair—

**Mr. Chairman:** I did. Nobody put their hand up.

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chair, you are just going, calling the numbers, and then by  
the time you are looking through the pages—

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright.

**Mr. Young SC:**—to identify where you are.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. For the avoidance of doubt would the Members like me to  
call the page numbers now?

**Mr. Young SC:** Well, yes. But, Mr. Chair, I would ask that you give  
consideration to us asking questions on 008: Immigration Detention Center,  
because this is the only place it is listed on page 498.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Because it is a small item, and because we moved ahead, I  
am going to allow you to ask questions.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** And it is because of the importance of it.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much.

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**Mr. Chairman:** So ask your questions on the IBC.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you. Page 49—what?

**Ms. Benjamin:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** 498.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no, no, no.

**Mr. Young SC:** Page 498.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us give them a chance to ask the question.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Young SC:** 498, page 498, 008: Immigration Detention Center—  
[*Inaudible*]—would have never under—

**Ms. Benjamin:** Chair. Chair, Chair, Chair, if you would allow me. Chair, I have sat in this House, and this exercise is being done unfairly. I could remember that you cannot go back.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Chairman, there is no Standing Order. There is nothing that allows—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Young SC:** You are trying to overrule the Chair?

**Ms. Benjamin:** Raising your voice would not change the—

**Mr. Imbert:** What Standing Order is it?

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** Out of place!

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** No, no. “We not gettin into dat”.

**Mr. Chairman:** You know, it astonishes me—

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr.—

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on. It astonishes me that you all complain when you get the same treatment on this side. That is—

**Hon. Member:**—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Chairman:**—the same treatment you just engaged in.

**Mr. Imbert:** Trying to stop them from talking?

**Hon. Member:** The Member is interrupting—[*Inaudible*] We are not going to be disrespected by this Member.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright. So do not—I have made a decision. I am going to allow a short question on Item 008. I do not think it is a big item and we will move forward. We have been going forward very quickly.

**Hon. Member:** I appreciate that. She—[*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chair, as you—

**Mr. Chairman:** And the Member is not “she”. You refer to the Member in a respectful manner, Member for Moruga/Tableland.

**5.30. p.m.**

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Just as the Member for St. Ann’s East admonished someone for referring to her as Ma’am, you refer to the Member by the constituency’s name. Look, we have just eaten up 5 minutes which we could have finished this. Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, just get into it, please.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you, Mr.Chair. Mr. Chair, if you recognize, the Immigration Detention Centre, whilst a small allocation in the scheme of things, just under \$8 million, performs a very important duty in pursuance of the fulfilment of obligations under the Immigration Act. My question to the Minister is, when you look at line Item 16: Contract Employment, under that \$4.8 million

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has been allocated. How many persons, how many bodies in posts does this cover?  
That is the first question.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the answer to your question, the detention centre has 131 officers.

**Mr. Young SC:** That is positions. One hundred and thirty-one positions, or is it posts? In posts?

**Hon. Alexander:** Posts filled. Yeah, that.

**Mr. Young SC:** Those are currently in posts?

**Hon. Alexander:** No. Posts filled, 63, and vacant, 68.

**Mr. Young SC:** Vacant, how much? Sorry.

**Hon. Alexander:** Sixty-eight.

**Mr. Young SC:** Alright. So, more than half of the posts are vacant.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** Correct? Because these positions are not appointed. These persons—the fulfilling of those positions is not done by the Public Service Commission; they are contract positions.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you. What are the Government's plans for the fulfilling of these 68 vacancies, especially in a time like we are currently in, where, as you know, it is being fully utilized?

**Hon. Alexander:** As we speak, both the immigration department and the detention centre, with their contracted employees, we are looking the fill the vacancies in order to provide more manpower at those locations to sustain what is happening presently in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you. Where are the advertisements for these vacant

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positions going to be?

**Hon. Alexander:** It should be done on EmployTT.

**Mr. Young SC:** The EmployTT portal that was released?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** And, when I look at line Item 40: Food at Institutions, \$1.1 million, which is less than \$100,000 per month. This cannot be sufficient, especially in the current circumstances where you are utilizing the full capacity of your detention centres for the next fiscal. How many arrears are there currently for Food at Institutions at the Immigration Detention Centre?

**Hon. Alexander:** We can supply that figure for you, Member, in writing.

**Mr. Young SC:** And is it that they will be asking and provided with a further supplement in this line Item if required?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Chairman:** I propose now to move—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, are you on page 499 yet?

**Mr. Chairman:** Not quite yet.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay. “Ah just making sure. Ah just making sure.”

**Mr. Chairman:** So, I am confined to the IDC, Immigration Detention Centre.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, my hand is up.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right.

**Mr. Imbert:** The Minister, you said you are going to fill vacancies in the 008: Immigration Detention Centre. You just said that?

**Hon. Alexander:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Imbert:** If you are going to fill vacancies, your expenditure on Contract

Employment would be more in '26 than in '25, not so?

**Hon. Alexander:** Right, but Member, it does not speak to filling all the vacancies.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, that is not my question.

**Hon. Alexander:** Oh, okay.

**Mr. Imbert:** My question is that if you are filling vacancies, then you are going to spend more on Contract Employment in 2026 than in 2025. Because, as my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has pointed out, these people who run this place are employed on contract. So, if you are going to be filling vacancies in 2026, then why is the allocation for Contract Employment exactly the same as it was in 2025? How are you going to fill vacancies if you have no additional funds?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, I told you this already. If persons would have left—if you started off with 50 and now it has 10, would that money be sufficient to fill back the vacancies?

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. I am trying to follow your argument. It is very hard. So, how many contract positions are there in total? Filled and unfilled?

**Hon. Alexander:** “We just answer that yuh know.”

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, but in the context of what you just said.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member. Member, 131 posts.

**Mr. Imbert:** And how many filled?

**Hon. Alexander:** Sixty-three are filled—

**Mr. Imbert:** Right.

**Hon. Alexander:**—and 68 are vacant.

**Mr. Imbert:** Right. So, assuming that you are going to fill some or all of the 68 vacant positions, how can you do that if the allocation has not increased?

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**Mr. Chairman:** I think the Minister has answered that sufficiently. Whether you are satisfied with it might be a different issue, but I think he has answered it to the best—

**Mr. Imbert:** He did not answer it.

**Hon. Alexander:** I did.

**Mr. Chairman:** That is a matter for opinion.

**Mr. Imbert:** What was the answer?

**Mr. Chairman:** Asked and answered. Come on. Next question.

**Mr. Imbert:** “Buh this is a kangaroo court in here. Ah kangaroo court.”

**Mr. Chairman:** I think Member for Arima had her hand up first.

**Ms. Beckles:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, as it relates to those 68 vacant posts that you are going to fill, can you provide in writing the number of those positions available, please? Thank you.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Ms. Beckles:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Chairman, you are on page499. Correct?

**Mr. Chairman:** I am.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Good.

**Hon. Alexander:** “This man miserable eh Lord.”

**Mr. Chairman:** Page 498, for that matter.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay. I just want to know when you reach page499, Chair. That is all.

**Mr. Chairman:** So you—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

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**Mr. Scotland SC:** Sorry. No. “Ah doh wanna miss”.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. So we are going now for your benefit to Sub-Head 03—  
and listen carefully—499 to 500.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Minor—

**Mr. Chairman:** Hold on. Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General  
Administration.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Right.

**Mr. Chairman:** Page 499, Item 002: Fire Service. Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Right. Mr. Chairman, I see that under this Item 002/01, there  
is a provision for vehicles of \$11,200,000. May I respectfully ask through you,  
Minister, what types and what quantities of vehicles are planned for the  
procurement with this \$11.2 million for the Fire Services?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon. Alexander:** We have two 25-seater buses, seven utility pick-up trucks, we  
have a fire tender—

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, yes. Ah fire tender—[*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** That excites you, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:**—and a water tender.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And could you tell us which stations will be receiving these  
vehicles?

**Mr. Young SC:** Must be Point Fortin.

**Hon. Alexander:** Woodbrook Fire Station.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** All?

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**Hon. Alexander:** Woodbrook. Woodbrook.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Wait, hold on, all? All?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no, no. Not all. Just the fire tender for Woodbrook Fire Station and Belmont.

**Hon. Member:** “Post of Spain South boy, you getting ah fire tender.”

**Mr. Scotland SC:** “We get through.” So hold on—

**Hon. Alexander:** “Yeah, yeah, yuh get through.”

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Alexander:** “De strategy.”

**Mr. Scotland SC:** But could you tell us Sir—

**Hon. Member:** “De” strategy.

**Hon. Alexander:** Eh? Which station—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Which stations would be receiving these vehicles? And, remember you are talking to a chairman of a committee of Parliament.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, go on.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So you said Woodbrook, and we took note.

**Hon. Alexander:** “Member yuh trying tuh frighten meh?”

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No, no, no. No, Sir—

**Hon. Alexander:** “Ah was just checking.”

**Mr. Scotland SC:** “Sir, you does testify in court yuh kno.” You know the repercussions, so go on. Let us go.

**Hon. Alexander:** “Ah thought yuh was frightening meh.”

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** He does. Which stations would benefit?

**Mr. Alexander:** Well, as I said, Woodbrook—

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**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon Alexander:**—for the fire tender. We are also looking at another station in the Port of Spain area.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Where?

**Hon. Alexander:** Belmont.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay, Belmont. Go on, Sir.

**Hon. Alexander:** The other vehicles will be distributed where it is so required.

**5.40 p.m.**

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And when will these vehicles be available for deployment?

**Hon. Alexander:** Within 14 to 24 months.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Within a what?

**Hon. Alexander:** A 14 to 24 months.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** That is how much in years?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, that is just the water tender.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And that is how much in years?

**Hon. Alexander:** Pardon me.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** How much is that in years?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, listen.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us move on. Let us move on. Next question.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Other Minor Equipment there is an—on 03/02/04, there is an allocation of \$8 million. What specific type of equipment is included under this Other Minor Equipment, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon. Alexander:** “Breathing” apparatus, cylinders, yeah—

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**Mr. Scotland SC:** Wait.

**Hon. Alexander:**—compressors—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Sir, breeding or breathing?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, it depends on how your tongue is.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No, it actually depends on if it is E-E-D or, E-A-T-H. Is it breeding or breathing?

**Hon. Alexander:** I-N-G. I-N-G. “Eh, eh watch.” [*Minister inhales and exhales*]

**Hon. Member:** What is that he breathing into now?

**Hon. Alexander:** “Like dat.” [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, come on let us move on.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Under Item 03/003/04, which equipment is now Other Minor Equipment for the \$1 million allocation. Which ones are these?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, where are you?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** “Hmm?”

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, where are you?

**Mr. Chairman:** We have not gotten there is yet.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** We are getting there, next one.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Right.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. I propose to move to Item 003: Prison Service.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Chairman, the question under 003/04, which Items are Other Minor Equipment, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:** Say that again, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Under Item 0—

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**Mr. Chairman:** At page 499, 003—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Item 04.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sub-Item 04.

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, Member, from looking at this angle, I would prefer to provide this for you in writing, you know.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** In writing?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay.

**Hon. Alexander:** It is long and tedious.

**Mr. Young SC:** Which page?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Page 499. Thank you, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, I will propose now to 004: Immigration; 005: Fire Service Tobago. Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Sub-Head 005/01: Vehicles. There is an allocation there, Chairman, for \$45 million. Could you—\$4,500,000, sorry Chairman. Could you tell us as we speak, how many fire service vehicles are currently operational in Tobago?

**Hon. Alexander:** In Tobago? How many fire vehicles—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** How many fire service vehicles are currently operational in Tobago?

**Hon. Alexander:** Operational in Tobago? What I will do, good Member—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Pardon, you do not know?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no, no, I will send it to you.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** In writing?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, possibly.

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**Mr. Scotland SC:** This figure here, could you tell us what type of vehicles is this figure going to provide and to what stations in Tobago?

**Hon. Alexander:** Alright. Member—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** If you can do it in writing, I will be satisfied. But if you know it tell us.

**Hon. Alexander:** “Well, ah cudda tell yuh, if yuh want.”

**Mr. Scotland SC:** “Well, yuh cudda tell meh or yuh doh want to tell meh?”

**Hon. Alexander:** A water tender, one panel van—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon. Alexander:**—two utility pickups, trucks.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** When will these be operationalized? When will they be available for Tobago?

**Hon. Alexander:** There was a down payment that was made on the vehicle in 2024. Now, Member, you have to remember this, those vehicles are not—you could just go and pick it up.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Understood, that is why the PNM Government made the down payment in 2024.

**Hon. Alexander:** They have to be built with purpose.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Understood. That is why this Opposition whilst in government, invested in those vehicles in 2024. My question to you, Sir—

**Hon. Alexander:** But Member, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:**—is when would these vehicles be available for Tobago?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes, Sir.

**Hon. Alexander:** After the down payment was made—

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**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon. Alexander:**—nothing else happened.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** On the part of whom, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:** “Eh?”

**Mr. Scotland SC:** On the part of the supplier. Not the part of the then regime.

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no, no, no. Not the supplier, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No, no, no, no, no.

**Hon. Alexander:** Not the supplier Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No, no, no, no, no.

**Hon. Alexander:** Not the supplier Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Hon. Minister, you will not do that now.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, let us not engage in a minor quarrel.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So—

**Mr. Chairman:** Allow the Minister to answer the question.

**Hon. Alexander:** Not the supplier, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:**—when will they be available? That is the question, Mr. Chairman, that is on the Floor.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright.

**Hon. Alexander:** They will be available, they will be available—

**Hon. Member:** Very soon.

**Hon. Alexander:** Very soon.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright. So I propose now to move to Item 008: Immigration Detention Centre. Then I now propose to move to Sub-Head 04: Current

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Transfers and Subsidies; 001: Regional Bodies; 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, at page 501.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, 02: Vision on a Mission. This allocation of \$7.2 million, does it take into account—well, first of all, I would like to thank the Government for continuing to make an allocation. This is, as you would know, an extremely important body. Would the Government consider increasing the allocation? Because, as we know, the clientele being serviced has increased—the number of persons that they are servicing has increased with the increased deportations from the United States. Would the Minister consider an increase in allocation to the Vision on a Mission?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, we will consider it after 2027 because there is a three-year contract that binds the amount at this time to the institution.

**Mr. Young SC:** Correct, but I mean, a contract that binds them—I am sure, if you are considering and you would propose to them an increase—

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:**—they would willingly accept it. So please give it some consideration.

**Hon. Alexander:** We will give it some consideration.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Hon. Alexander:** I will whisper into the ear of my Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Just for the correction of the public record, I am advised that the clerks did not hear Item 004: International Bodies. Right. So I propose now to move to Item 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers; 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

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**Hon. Member:** Item 009—[*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, it is.

**Mr. Young SC:** Item 009, on page 502.

**Mr. Chairman:** Page 502.

**Mr. Young SC:** Line Item 02: Strategic Services Agency. Minister, I see an allocation here of \$270 million for the SSA, that remains under Homeland Security's remit?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** According to the *Gazette*, two Items were moved from the Ministry of Homeland Security to the Office of the Attorney General, Intelligence and Strategy. Would you please explain to us under this line Item, which is the line Item for SSA, why that was moved?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, I will try to answer that question for you as strategically as I can. The both Homeland Security and the Attorney General's Office holds a particular remit as it relates to the SSA.

**Mr. Young SC:** Now under the gazetted responsibilities, correct.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. One operational and one administration.

**Mr. Young SC:** So operational—the operations of the SSA have been moved from Homeland Security?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no, no. The operation part belongs to Homeland Security.

**Mr. Young SC:** But Intelligence and Strategy have been moved from Homeland Security?

**Hon. Alexander:** No.

**Mr. Young SC:** But that is what the *Gazette* says.

**Hon. Alexander:** No, that is not what it is.

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**Mr. Young SC:** That is not so.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Young SC:** Because, of course, under the Interception of Communications Act, IOCA, the only person to whom intercepts can be reported to is a Minister in charge of national security. You are putting up your finger, so that remains you.

**5.50 p.m.**

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** And any breach of that will immediately become a criminal offence.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** And there are only three persons who can give instructions for the—it is under the Strategic Services Agency.

**Mr. Chairman:** I—

**Mr. Young SC:** Line Item 02, and the operations of the SSA—

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain North/St. Ann's, let us concentrate on the expenditure. The Act, I think, we—

**Mr. Young SC:** It is not a policy thing. I am using—

**Mr. Chairman:** The Act, I think everyone can read, so—

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr. Chair, please let us not allow the Member for Barataria/San Juan's nervousness to interrupt my five minutes. Because I am allowed five uninterrupted minutes.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Young SC:** He would do well to listen to a bit of law. So, under the Interception of Communications Act, there are only three persons who can order intercepts, Commissioner of police, the Chief of Defence Staff or the Director of

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the Strategic Services Agency, but the remit remains—and I am seeking confirmation, the remit remains legally under Homeland Security and under you, as the Minister of Homeland Security. Correct?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. The Minister, Sub-Item: 07 Office of Law Enforcement Policy. Minister, can you state whether or not that OLEP, or the Office of Law Enforcement Policy, is still in operation at this point in time?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Still in operation?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And how many persons are employed within the OLEP at this point?

**Hon. Alexander:** We are looking at contracted positions, 30. That is the positions. That is the overall—those are the posts. Contracted positions filled, nine; contracted posts vacant, 21; short-term Employment, five. That is basically it.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. The \$400,000 allocation for this fiscal year, is that to pay for contracted officers within OLEP, or what is that allocation for?

**Hon. Alexander:** That includes the transit police. It includes the research, training and development, information system, minor equipment, accommodations and other operating costs for both the OLEP and transit police.

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**Mr. Gonzales:** But is it also to pay employees within the organization or department?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chairman, \$400,000 to pay all of these—

**Hon. Alexander:** What number do they have? What number do you have? Check your numbers.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Sorry, \$850,000.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And that is to pay employees and perform, rather, all of these other operational stuff?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, I am also asking about Sub-Item 08: The Morvant/Laventille Initiative.

**Hon. Alexander:** Zero?

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am seeing an allocation of \$400,000. Can you tell us what are the plans for this expenditure?

**Hon. Alexander:** Well, Member, let me get my colleague from Laventille, yeah, and my colleague from Port of Spain South. This has been an ongoing project by Governments.

**Mr. Gonzales:** How long?

**Hon. Alexander:** As far as I could remember.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay.

**Hon. Alexander:** It is really providing funding for line Item—

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, I am seeing an allocation for \$400,000. So the question is: What are the plans for this expenditure?

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**Hon. Alexander:** Well, joint community service, presidential awards programmes, community projects, funding projects for East Port of Spain, crime prevention, medical clinics, and a number items that they put together. I was part of that in my past life as a police officer, so I understand what is required in Laventille to make the communities a better place.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And is the TTPS involved in this programme?

**Hon. Alexander:** Is the TTPS—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes, I am asking if the TTPS is involved in this programme.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, they provide support in one way or another.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And do you have a programme manager?

**Hon. Alexander:** A programme manager? I cannot recall at this time. I know that they work in tandem with the Inter-Agency Task Force, Hearts and Minds project, and it is from there, this whole situation here arose and it is being fed over the years, getting the best out of the people from Laventille.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Alexander:** You are welcome.

**Mr. Chairman:** Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

**Mr. Birchwood:** Thanks, Chair. I believe my colleague from Arouca/Lopinot would have asked the question that I was curious about and well, just to add a little more, maybe the Minister could advise on how one can apply for this programme.

**Hon. Alexander:** There are a number of persons in the Laventille area—NGOs, that persons normally go to because they have like the Carnival-sponsored mas for the kids and all of that, and that is through how they can go. Normally, they even go to the Hearts and Minds of the Inter-Agency Task Force, and they often ask how they could enlist and they are guided through the police officers.

**Mr. Birchwood:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move on the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, pages 214 to 216; Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 214 to 215.

Hon. Members, Item 004 spans two pages, therefore, I will announce the project groups; C. Prison Service, page 214; Fire Service, pages 214 to 215. Item: 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 216. Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much. Minister, under 005/06/A. 008: Upgrade of cyber Security in the Ministry of Homeland Security. Is the cyber unit resident with the Ministry of Homeland Security?

**Hon. Alexander:** The cyber—yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** Is this going to be sufficient in the day and age for dealing with the many cyber events and issues that we have?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, what we are doing, we have formed a lot of partnerships with agencies on the outside. So, if the need be—if ever the need be, we can always go and ask for anything further. But as it stands right now, the partners are willing to support us along those lines.

**Mr. Young SC:** Correct. Because we participated in that and ensuring that at least you can get the training, the assessment of our systems, et cetera. But what it requires is a unit that could do the preventative work because, of course, going to them is always after the incident. So I would like to suggest, respectfully, that this is an area that we need to boost and bolster, so we can do our own preventative work. Is that going to fall under your Ministry?

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**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member, and we are looking to even boost the idea that persons should be able to have access to the TTPS cybercrime unit, whenever the need arises.

**Mr. Young SC:** Okay. And just before my colleagues ask other questions under this, 010: Modernization of the E999 Emergency Communication Infrastructure. Is this the unit that your former—well, I was about to say comrade, but your former fellow officer, Sir Abraham, is in charge of?

**6.00 p.m.**

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Abraham has some level of oversight as it relates to the Command Centre.

**Mr. Young SC:** So it is the Command Centre?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, it is the Command Centre—the police Command Centre at this time.

**Mr. Young SC:** It is not the NOFC or the NOC at Knowsley House?

**Hon. Alexander:** Not yet.

**Mr. Young SC:** Not yet?

**Hon. Alexander:** When I say, “not yet”, well, not yet, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** When is the Modernization of E999 Emergency Communication Infrastructure plan to come on stream, Sir?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, I do not want to sound like a broken record, however the E999 system has been left to rot to such an extent—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, my discrete question was when—

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**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, well I am answering you discretely, you see —

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman—

**Hon. Alexander:**—that is why I am choosing my words.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, for the economy of time, I asked a discrete question—

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah, “he cyah take de answer”.

**Mr. Scotland SC:**—without the broken record.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, alright. The Member is giving the answer but I am sure he is not going to take long—

**Hon. Alexander:** No.

**Mr. Chairman:**—because it is six o’clock, I plan to take a short break after the completion of this Head.

**Hon. Alexander:** Mr. Chairman, the E999 was left to rot to such an extent that within recent times lack communications between different agencies, lack communication between from one station to another, lack of communication from on the roadways in terms of beats and patrol, and all of these things, lack of systems, radios and stuff, and I will go no further. So now it is about turning the soil to almost having to rebuild the system, Member.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Chairman, with all that diatribe he has not given me an answer. When will it come on stream?

**Mr. Chairman:** Perhaps we could ask. Minister, are you able to say when it would come on stream?

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, the work is in progress as we speak—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay.

**Hon. Alexander:**—but as I told you before, it is like turning the soil.

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**Mr. Scotland SC:** Okay. When?

**Hon. Alexander:** I have already turned the soil that is why Mr. Abraham is there.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** You turned the soil with Abraham?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** In the night?

**Hon. Alexander:** In the day.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, let us drop the facetiousness.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, but sometimes you must admonish them too, you know. You always—

**Mr. Chairman:** I do.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No, no, no, Chairman, you always reserve your admonishing for this side.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I asked a discrete question and, Chairman, you reserved your admonishing for this side. And sometimes, Chairman, you mask it by saying, “Let us all behave”, when we are behaving and they are misbehaving. I asked a discrete question, I got a long diatribe. Up to now, I have not gotten the answer, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us move on.

**Hon. Alexander:** I have answered the Member [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Administrative Services. Infrastructure Development Fund; 004: Social Infrastructure.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, Item 004 spans two pages, therefore I will also announce the project groups, C. Prison Service, page 316. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** We are on page 316, right?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Young SC:** Mr.Chair, thank you. Mr. Chair, miraculously, or maybe not surprisingly, suddenly resurfacing here now, 10 years later, after \$80 million was spent on a fence that encloses nothing. This Construction of a Perimeter Fence and Infrastructural Works at the Maximum Security Prison for \$3million, this is actually around the existing prison, right, Minister? It is actual around MSP?

**Hon. Alexander:** Yes, Member.

**Mr. Young SC:** So the \$80 million that was spent that is around absolutely nothing but bush, it can now be done, and this would have been done under the last administration for \$3 million? Is that what this is? Will this complete the construction of the fence?

**Hon. Alexander:** 001 you are talking about?

**Mr. Young SC:** Yes, 001, the perimeter fence at MSP.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, you build the fence.

**Mr. Young SC:** That is what I am saying, so you got a fence that actually surrounds the MSP for \$3 million, versus the fence that was built in the period pre-2015 on the verge of an election for \$80 million surrounding nothing. So I am asking for confirmation. Is this the completion now of the fence that actually surrounds the prison?

**Hon. Alexander:** Just invoices to be paid now. And if you pass, Member, you will realize the prisons have been cleaning up their act so the drones can no longer

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land and take off.

**Mr. Young SC:** The fence blocking the drones?

**Hon. Alexander:** No.

**Mr. Young SC:** Okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, not the fence.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Minister.

**Hon. Alexander:** Strategically, I will assist you again in purchasing the right things. Yeah?

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Shut up.

**Hon. Alexander:** “What you say there, Milady?”

**Mr. Hosein:** What she said?

**Hon. Alexander:** What you say? You are telling me to shut up?

**Mr. Chairman:** St. Ann’s East, I heard you.

**Hon. Alexander:** Careful. Careful. Careful.

**Mr. Chairman:** I heard you. I heard you.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** You heard me say what?

**Mr. Chairman:** I heard you say, “shut up”.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Whether you were speaking to him or not.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. I will hold my tongue on that one. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, I am seeing the various allocations here for the prisons. I will not go into details, I assume that you are seeing them. The question is, given the Government’s announcement that it

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plans to decommission the Port of Spain prison, where in the allocations here that you plan to commence this particular project?

**Hon. Alexander:** Check under the Development Programme, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** What is that?

**Hon. Alexander:** Under the Development Programme.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Where?

**Hon. Alexander:** No, no, no, we did not do that as yet.

**Mr. Gonzales:** No, I am asking.

**Hon. Alexander:** Under the Development Programme.

**Hon Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am asking—

**Mr. Chairman:** I think we have gone past there.

**Hon. Alexander:** Under the Development Programme.

**Mr. Gonzales:** But we are in the Development Programme.

**Mr. Chairman:** We are on Prison Service, and perhaps—

**Mr. Gonzales:** This is the Development Programme.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, well—

**Mr. Gonzales:** He said it is under the Development Programme, Mr. Chair—

**Hon. Alexander:** Check 011.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—and that is the question I am asking him, where?

**Mr. Chairman:** Can you check 011?

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am not seeing it, Mr. Chair. I am asking the Minister, where in the list of projects here in the Development Programme is the Government planning to get the appropriate resources for the decommissioning of the Port of Spain prison?

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**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, are you able to answer that question, in the interest of saving time and moving on?

**Mr. Gonzales:** And that is the reason why I asked it in this particular way. We have to move on.

**Hon. Alexander:** Member, let me help you. Page 214, 011, line Item.

**Hon. Member:** You real nice, boy.

**Hon. Alexander:** Yeah. “Yuh hadda talk slow, yuh know.”

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Member:** Moving on.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Page 317, E. Immigration; 317, F. Fire Service. I propose to put the question now.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 83 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I propose now to move to Ministry of Justice, but before I do so, we have been going for three hours, I propose to take a 20-minute break so I propose to suspend the sitting and return at 6.30, Members. Thank you. This sitting is suspended, we will resume at 6.30.

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

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

*Head 58: Ministry of Justice, \$230,696,500.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I now invite the Minister of Justice and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and colleagues, for giving

## Head 58: Ministry of Justice (cont'd)

me this opportunity. As Minister of Justice, I am pleased to provide brief remarks on the work of the Ministry and the funds to be appropriated to it. As you are aware, the Ministry of Justice was re-established by the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette No. 81 Vol. 64*, dated May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, and by *Gazette No. 146 Vol. 64* dated October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The responsibility and departments of government were expanded to include the Electronic Monitoring Unit and additional statutory boards, other bodies and indirect organizations. In essence, functions under the business and administrations of government previously assigned to the former Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Ministry of National Security were assigned to the Ministry of Justice. Overall, the Ministry of Justice comprises the following 11 committees, statutory boards, other bodies and indirect organizations: The Advisory Committee on the Power of Pardon (Mercy Committee), the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority, the Sentencing Commission, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, the Environmental Commission, which we dealt with earlier today, the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Equal Opportunity Tribunal, the Council of Legal Education, the Hugh Wooding Law School, the Police Complaints Authority, and the Tax Appeal Board.

Head 58 of the *Draft Estimates of Expenditure* covers funding for the general administration of the Ministry of Justice and other support units, the finance and accounts and internal audit units, the human resource management division, the procurement unit, the Trinidad and Tobago Forensic Science Centre, and the Probation Services Division. Head 58 also covers funding for the support of the Advisory Committee on the Power of Pardon (Mercy Committee), some statutory boards and other bodies such as the Legal Aid and Advisory Authorities, Sentencing Commission, Equal Opportunity Commission, Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, as well as funding for the Police Complaints Authority. The

other statutory boards and other bodies are covered under other Heads of Expenditure to be addressed later.

The critical aspect of the work of the Ministry of Justice is the responsibility for construction and refurbishment of court facilities for the Judiciary. This aspect is addressed in the funding provided by the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* expenditure. It is recognized that this is an initial funding, and as we roll out the projects, the Ministry intends to seek additional funding to complete them. The *Development Programme* also includes upgrades to the Trinidad and Tobago Forensic Science Centre, the National Forensic DNA Databank Custodian Unit, the Probation Services Division, the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority. The Ministry of Justice holds a crucial position in safeguarding the rule of law and ensuring access to justice for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Its existence signals this Government's stated priority to serve the needs of the people. I stand ready, along with the team of officers, to answer questions on the *Draft Estimates*. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

*Question proposed:* That Head 58 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** The sum of \$230,696,500 for Head 58: Ministry of Justice is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We will now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. These are to be found between pages 334 and 335. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I am deeply grateful. Mr. Chairman, to the hon. Minister, line Item 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there is an allocation of \$9

million. Could the hon. Minister indicate how many public servants from this allocation were transferred from the Ministry of National Security to the Ministry of Justice please? Or positions, rather.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Thank you for that question, Member. I will have to get back to you in writing, if you do not mind, on the exact number that has been transferred from the MNS.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you very kindly. Hon. Minister, I will accept that in writing. Can I also ask to be added to that, if it could be separated by the number of posts, and the bodies in posts and vacant posts, please? The vacant posts.

**Hon. Maharaj:** I can answer that question.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yeah?

**Hon. Maharaj:** The total positions number 57. The number of permanent officers filled in that position is 13. The number of vacant positions, 44. The number of vacant positions with bodies, number 33. And, the number of vacant positions without bodies number 11.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Does that answer the question?

**6.40 p.m.**

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yes. Thank you very kindly, hon. Minister. Line Item 01/001/06. Can the hon. Minister indicate which boards now fall under, in terms of the 800,000 that is allocated, which boards are these to pay?

**Hon. Maharaj:** For that Item 06, Member, that would be the Mercy Committee and the Sentencing Commission for that line Item.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Hon. Minister, are these boards currently, have they been appointed?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Both boards are in existence. The Mercy Committee has been appointed various members over the period of time. The Sentencing Commission

was appointed, but does not seem to be functional for a few years now. The intention is to get it up and running.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Line Item 01/001/14, can the hon. Minister indicate what are the Cabinet-Appointed Committees under this line Item, please?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes. So there are two committees, one to review the construction and refurbishment of court buildings, and the other one is to review the question of virtual hearings, including virtual hearings in police stations.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Can the hon. Minister indicate, are members appointed already?

**Hon. Maharaj:** They have been.

**Mr. Marcelle:** They have been. On the very same line Item, please, in this fiscal, are these two committees intended to finish their duties within this fiscal year, or is it—?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Indeed, yes. And, yes. The answer is yes.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. That is all.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Much obliged.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yeah. Thank you very kindly.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 002: Probation Service. Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 002/01 under the Probation Service, can the hon. Minister indicate how many employees under the Probation Service have been transferred from the Ministry of National Security?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes. All have been transferred, and the number 96 persons; the number of permanent officers filled positions, 45; number of vacant positions, 51; number of vacant positions with bodies, 13; number of vacant positions without bodies, 38.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Item 003: Forensic Science Centre, Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the Minister, Sub-Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, in that line Item, do you propose to pay all salaries and wages for the staff at the Forensic Science Centre?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes. Yes, Member.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And that would include staff on the establishment and contract officers?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Just the establishment.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Just the establishment?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Does that include forensic pathologists?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Are they on the establishment?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Sorry?

**Mr. Gonzales:** The forensic pathologists?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Are they?

**Mr. Gonzales:** On the establishment, sorry, or are they contracted officers?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Can you give me one second?

**Mr. Gonzales:** Sure.

**Hon. Maharaj:** The positions on the establishment are the pathologists.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Pathologists?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Okay. Can you say if all of the positions are filled at this point in time?

**Hon. Maharaj:** No.

**Mr. Gonzales:** How many?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Sorry. Two pathologists and the positions are filled.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Two pathologists?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Do you have contract positions for pathologists?

**Hon. Maharaj:** On another line Item, the answer will be yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** That is another line Item.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** How many pathologists do you have performing duties at the Forensic Science Centre at this point in time?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Two, under this Item.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Under this Item?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I am just asking generally, how many pathologists are employed with the Forensic Science Centre?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Two.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Two pathologists?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** To service the whole of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. Maharaj:** If I may?

**Mr. Gonzales:** Sure.

**Hon. Maharaj:** There are attempts to expand that complement—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Sure.

**Hon. Maharaj:**—to take it to at least four, but there have been problems in recruiting that particular quality of individual with the salary that we are offering.

**Mr. Gonzales:** How is that impacting the administration of justice?

**Hon. Maharaj:** It has impacted, there has been a backlog.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Backlog, yeah.

**Hon. Maharaj:** But we have recruited four doctors on a short-term basis to assist the pathologists in helping to prepare reports and assisting in complementary work to what they do, which has eased up the backlog considerably, whilst we are presently looking to recruit more pathologists to the staff.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Most welcome.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 004: Equal Opportunity Commission; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 02/001/16. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many positions are intended to use the \$4 million allocated in this fiscal please?

**Hon. Maharaj:** That is Contract Employment?

**Mr. Marcelle:** Contract Employment, yeah.

**Hon. Maharaj:** And the question is, Sir?

**Mr. Marcelle:** Out of the \$4 million, how many contract employees do you intend to serve with this?

**Hon. Maharaj:** The answer to that question will be 94.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Are all positions filled?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Twenty-seven filled, 67 vacant.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Can the hon. Minister indicate whether in this fiscal there will be attempts to fill these 67 positions?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes. Yes.

**Mr. Marcelle:** What will be the process, hon. Minister?

**Hon. Maharaj:** The current recruitment drive that is underway, EmployTT, and

failing that, we will have internal recruitment.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Line Item 02/001/22: Short-term Employment. Can the hon. Minister indicate similarly, how many short-term employees do you intend to service with this 470,000.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Nine positions, please, Member.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Are all positions filled at this moment?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes, they have been filled.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Hon. Minister, line Item 02/001/43. Can the hon. Minister indicate which buildings the Security Services are serviced by this 800,000, please?

**Hon. Maharaj:** The building would be ABMA Building, which would house the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, having moved from the Hyatt towers. The Ministry itself would be relocated to the Nicholas Tower. Arrangements are still being put in place being a new Ministry, to occupy those towers.

**6.50 p.m.**

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Mr. Chairman, line Item 02/001/65: Expenses for Cabinet Cabinet-Appointed Bodies. I am seeing an allocation \$500 only in this fiscal. In light of the indication that the two Cabinet-appointed committees are already functional, can the hon. Minister indicate whether the allocation of \$500 would be sufficient for the committees to carry out their job within this fiscal?

**Hon. Maharaj:** That would Item 65 and the expenses at \$500?

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yes.

**Hon. Maharaj:** No. It would be insufficient and we would have to go back to the Ministry of Finance for this.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the projected amount that is needed for members to carry out their mandate?

**Hon. Maharaj:** I can provide that in writing to you, Member, if that is fine.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Thank you.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** I propose to go to Item 002 now, Probation Service; Item 003: Forensic Science Centre; 004: Equal Opportunity Commission. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 340 to 341; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Probation Service; Item 003: Forensic Science Centre; Item 004: Equal Opportunity Commission. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households. Member for Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 04/007/01: Criminal Injuries Compensation. Can hon. Minister indicate whether this \$2 million would be sufficient, based on pending claims, to satisfy this fiscal?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes, it would be.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Can the hon. Minister indicate, in light of the fact that there is an allocation of \$2.5 million to actually run the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, if the Government is truly getting value for money where they are spending more than \$2.5 million in the operational expenses, only to pay out \$2 million?

**Hon. Maharaj:** The \$2.5 million, Member, would be for the payouts to the victims of crime, not for the operation.

**Mr. Marcelle:** So, the line Item 01: Criminal Injuries Compensation, that is for the operations, or is it for—

**Hon. Maharaj:** That is for the operations.

**Mr. Marcelle:** For the operations. And the \$2.5 million is for the—

**Hon. Maharaj:** It is for the payouts.

**Mr. Marcelle:**—for the payouts. The question stands, even if it is in the reverse:

Is the Government truly getting value for money where you have \$2 million to run the institution for the fiscal year, to only give out \$2.5 million?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Well, the Board has been around for some time, has been functioning efficiently and well. So, the answer to that question would be, yes.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful, Chairman.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful, please, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 009/04: Police Complaints Authority (Direct Charges), an allocation of \$1.5 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate whether this \$1.5 million for the fiscal year would be sufficient to pay all the expenditure under the Police Complaints Authority?

**Hon. Maharaj:** The Director of the Police Complaints Authority indicated that they would be needing more funds, so we intend to approach the Ministry of Finance to address any stopgap that would arise.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful, please. Line Item 009/06: Council of Legal Education. Can the hon. Minister indicate the purpose, in terms of the—rather, the quantum of intended beneficiaries of the \$20.7 million in fiscal 2026, please?

**Hon. Maharaj:** That would be something I would have to respond to you in writing, Member.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Thank you.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other

Services; A. Administration Services starts at page 149. Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, to the Minister Sub-Item 016: Establishment of Virtual Courtroom at Police Stations. Minister, can you indicate how many police stations are earmarked for the establishment of those virtual courtrooms?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Member, we have started the process of visiting different police stations. It has to be done, however, in conjunction with the approval of the Judiciary. We have tentatively identified one area, but there are seven areas in Trinidad in which these virtual police stations, the hearings are ongoing. We are currently engaging the Judiciary. So, I cannot give you a final answer as to that yet. So, the answer to that is, the process has started, but it is not yet completed.

**Mr. Gonzales:** But this is supposed to be an ongoing process, because you already have—

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—designated police stations—

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:**—that are used as virtual courtrooms.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Minister, I also recall sometime over the last two months, some concerns were being expressed in the public dominion by one of your senior colleagues with respect to virtual courtrooms at police stations.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Is it that the Government has decided to continue with this programme, or is looking at its position on virtual courtrooms at police stations?

**Hon. Maharaj:** The current position is that the Trinidad and Tobago Police

Service wants back their police stations—

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes.

**Hon. Maharaj:**—because some rooms are being used for virtual courtrooms and therefore, our intention, as the Government, is to engage the Judiciary, which really has jurisdiction over courtrooms, to ask them to move it out, kindly, into a place where would be efficient.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Not in police stations?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Hopefully not, because the police want back their space.

**Mr. Gonzales:** But your line Item here is saying that—016, the same Item—you have an allocation of \$3 million for the Establishment of Virtual Courtrooms at Police Stations.

**Hon. Maharaj:** That is misnomer. It is not for the virtual courtrooms in police stations, but it is the alternative to the virtual courtrooms in police stations.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, it is not at police stations?

**Hon. Maharaj:** No.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, the answer that you gave a short while ago, with respect to inspection and ensuring that the appropriate infrastructure is in place and approved by the court, is not to—

**Hon. Maharaj:** To move it out of the police stations. Sorry, if I misconveyed what it was, but to move it out of the police stations.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So this line Item, you are saying, is to facilitate the new arrangement to remove virtual courtrooms out of police stations?

**Hon. Maharaj:** That is correct, Sir.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, the Government's position is that it will be removing all virtual courtrooms out of police stations?

**Hon. Maharaj:** With the consent of the Judiciary.

**Mr. Gonzales:** And where are you removing them to?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Back to courtrooms, which are established in the areas that are close to those police stations.

**Mr. Gonzales:** So, the intention is to have that programme of courtrooms—virtual courtrooms at police stations room discontinued?

**Hon. Maharaj:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Most welcome.

**Mr. Chairman:** Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Two quick questions, please, Mr. Chairman. Line Item F. 009: Rehabilitation of the Hall of Justice Trinidad. Can the hon. Minister indicate—well, I see in the last fiscal, there was an allocation, a Revised Estimate of \$16.1 million. Could the hon. Minister indicate, in this new fiscal, what are the intended works for the \$6 million allocated, please?

**7.00 p.m.**

**Hon. Maharaj:** That is the Hall of Justice Rehabilitation. I just wanted to get the Item.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yes, I am saying in last fiscal because it is the refurbishment of the Hall of Justice is an ongoing process.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Right.

**Mr. Marcelle:** It is an ongoing process. The last fiscal there was \$16.1 million allocated and spent relative to works done there.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Right.

**Mr. Marcelle:** I am asking for this \$6 million allocated now, a significant decrease of \$10 million, what works do you intend to accomplish within this fiscal with this \$6 million?

**Hon. Maharaj:** So it forms part of a larger unit in which the Ministry is trying to establish of all the judiciary projects how much moneys is needed to complete all the projects, and in the first instance to liquidate existing contracts and moneys due and owing. The amount for the Hall Justice is significantly more than that but, we have allocated this sum to pay off existing contractors for the Hall of Justice. And when we found out in a holistic and comprehensive manner, the moneys for each Item we intend to approach the Ministry of Finance in a quick way to see if we can allocate funds to complete to those projects.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, Member for Laventille West, you jumped ahead and asked on Public Buildings. So I am going to take it—I will just make the announcement for the public record, Public Buildings, and proceed as though that has been dealt with. So, I now go to C. Welfare Services. Hon. Members, we will now move to the Infrastructure Development Fund. Infrastructure Development Fund, Item 005: Multi-Sectorial and Other Services, F. Public Buildings, 285. Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister line Item F: 001. There is an allocation of \$1 million for the Construction of a new Facility for Forensic Laboratory and Pathology Services, can the hon. Minister indicate, what is this new facility?

**Hon. Maharaj:** I am just trying to locate that Item, Member, just one second, please. What page is it?

**Mr. Marcelle:** 285, Infrastructure Development Fund.

**Hon. Maharaj:** 285, okay.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yeah, page 285 in the Development project.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Sorry.

**Mr. Marcelle:** It is only one Item here.

**Hon. Maharaj:** 285—that Item is the provision to commence the new forensic centre, which is to be built as a new forensic centre that the Chinese Government has decided to fund for us. It started some time in 2018. The contracts, I think, were signed off somewhere in 21/22. So this is to restart that project to get it going to completion.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful, please.

**Hon. Maharaj:** Thank you very much.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 58 supplemented by the sum of \$230,696,500.*

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** I want to thank the Minister and most importantly, his hard working staff. We apologize for delay, we know we have kept you all here all day, but it was unavoidable. Thank you all very much.

**Mr. Chairman:** Head 84: Ministry of Defence—yeah, so I will ask Members to bear a little patience until the Minister's staff is able to accompany him and advise him accordingly.

*Head 84: Ministry of Defence, \$440,738,670.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I now invite the Minister of Defence and Minister in the Office of the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. For the correctness of the public record Minister is that a correct description of your portfolio or—?

**Hon. Sturge:** It is Minister of Defence and Minister in the Ministry of Homeland Security.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. I—

**Hon. Sturge:** Misspoke.

**Mr. Chairman:** So, if we can correct it. I now invite the Minister of Defence and Minister in the Ministry of Homeland Security to make the brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Sturge:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Ministry of Defence is responsible for counterterrorism, global security issues, regional security coordination, and border security, which includes air space and the territorial waters of Trinidad and Tobago.

Under the remit of the Ministry of Defence, be the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force, lifeguard services, and youth programmes such as the Military-Led Academic Training Programme, MiLAT; Civilian Conservation Corps, CCC and the Military-Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training, MYPART.

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal 2025, the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment conducted 19,110 land operations in conjunction with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. The Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard conducted 1,938 maritime operations, and the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard conducted 185 air operations. Further, Mr. Chairman, the Air Guard conducted 723 joint mobile patrols in fiscal 2025. These operations resulted in large and significant seizures of marijuana, cocaine, guns, ammunition, and the arrest and detention of the detainees.

I look forward to the questions from the other side, as we discuss the budget Estimates under Head 84 for fiscal 2026. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

*Question proposed:* That Head 84 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$440,738,670 for Head 84: Ministry of Defence is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following

Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

**7.10 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head details. These details are to be found between pages 505 and 508. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, what are the current staffing arrangements and structure and total number of positions to be funded under this allocation?

**Hon. Sturge:** Mr. Chairman, through you, the total number of established staff would be 107, with 28 positions filled, 79 vacant posts, 57 vacant posts with bodies and 22 without bodies.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And of the 79 that are not filled, vacant still, when, in the Ministry as important as this one, is it that it is expected that those will be filled?

**Hon. Sturge:** We intend to fill these posts in this fiscal.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And have the posts been advertised, and if so, where?

**Hon. Sturge:** I am sorry.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Have these posts been advertised, and if so, where?

**Hon. Sturge:** They have not yet been advertised. They will be advertised in the coming weeks.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And where will they be advertised?

**Hon. Sturge:** I understand these are public service posts and they would go through the Service Commission.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And you expect them to be filled within the coming—going through the Public Service Commission you realistically expect them hon. Minister

to be filled within the next two weeks?

**Hon. Sturge:** I do. We intend to send them out for advertisement. What I said about being filled is that expect them to be filled within the next fiscal.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Under the same Heading, I see that—and, Chairman, through you, I am on Item 01/001/03. I see you have Overtime for Monthly Paid Officers. Who are these monthly paid officers? What posts are filled by these monthly paid officers that you have allocated this figure for, Sir?

**Hon. Sturge:** As I understand it we intend to run a very tight shift so that it would be limited to three messengers and one driver.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And under this same rubric, I see that 01/001/25: Remuneration to Members - Direct Charges. What does that relate to?

**Hon. Sturge:** That is related to committees which have not yet been appointed, but which we anticipate would be appointed in the near future.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So these committees do not have a name as yet?

**Hon. Sturge:** Because there is an ongoing evaluation exercise we have not yet determined which committees are going to be set up, and therefore we have not yet ascribed the remuneration to be associated with it.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So therefore the dash that precedes “Direct Charges” means no committee but you just set that money there without a committee?

**Hon. Sturge:** Well, the money is an Estimate put there in anticipation of appointing the committees.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** All right, I move on from there. The Government’s Contribution, 01/001/31: Government’s Contribution to N.I.S - Direct Charges. I see you have a figure here. How many officers does this figure relate to?

**Hon. Sturge:** I am advised that we, in short order, would be appointing a State Council III and that contribution would be specific to that person.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So it is one State Council III and the \$4,500 that will be for that State Council for the year? Will it be?

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And does that take into account the rise in the NIS contribution that was announced in the budget for employers and employees, this figure?

**Hon. Sturge:** When the Estimates were done, I understand that at that point that was not taken into account but the increase would be de minimis and can be accounted for.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** The increase will be de minimis, 45 per cent?

**Hon. Sturge:** It is not 45 per cent.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** How much per cent is it, Sir?

**Hon. Sturge:** It is not 45.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** How much per cent is it, Sir?

**Hon. Sturge:** You heard the explanation already.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No, no, no. I want the explanation from you. I have heard nothing.

**Mr. Chairman:** Let us not allow that to happen. Let us move on.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So, Chairman, through you, he said de minimis. What in your mind is de minimis? How much is it?

**Hon. Sturge:** A few hundred dollars Member for Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And that is de minimis. Mr. Chairman, I am complete with this rubric.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. So can we move now assuming that there are no other questions from any other Members entitled to ask questions? Can we move to 002: Regiment? 003: Coast Guard. Member for Laventille West.

**Mr. Marcelle:** My apologies, please, Mr. Chairman. I did not realize that you

were moving to Regiment. I thought you were just asking—I have a question under regiment, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Quick question. Line Item 01/002/24: Allowances - Direct Charges. Can the hon. Minister indicate—in 2024 we are seeing an Actual spent of \$204 million, there about, and 2025, 185. This year the allowances is \$172 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate what would have accounted for these?

**Hon. Sturge:** Can you start over? I am confused by your question already.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Can the hon. Minister indicate under line Item 01/002/24, the decrease from 2024, then you have Revised Estimate of \$185 million for allowances in fiscal 2025. In fiscal 2026 there is a reduction to \$172 million in allowances for the regiment. Could the hon. Minister indicate what is the rationale for the decrease in the allocations for the allowances for our soldiers, please?

**Hon. Sturge:** I am being advised that the figure under discussion is under direct charges and is not under the review of the Parliament. But if you wish an answer we will provide it in writing. But the 2025 Estimates are identical to the 2026 Estimates.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Most respectfully, Mr. Chairman. I am on line Item 01/002, the Allowances, the allocation for which is \$172,770,000.

**Hon. Sturge:** Yeah. It says direct charges and I just answered you.

**Mr. Marcelle:** You told me that I am not on the right line. So I am telling you what—

**Hon. Sturge:** No, no, no. What I told you is that the 2025 Estimates are identical to the 2026 Estimates.

**7.20 p.m.**

**Mr. Marcelle:** Hon. Minister, if you check under the last Ministry of National

Security, the prior allocation, you will see that there is an allocation of \$185 million.

**Hon. Sturge:** Those were the 2025, Revised Estimates. The 2025 Estimates we have would have been, \$172,770 and the 2026 Estimates would be \$172, 770 which is identical.

**Mr. Marcelle:** The Revised Estimate I refer to, Minister.

**Hon. Sturge:** Okay.

**Mr. Marcelle:** All right, so you will provide it in writing. Same question for line Item: 23. We are seeing a reduction, the Revised 2025 Estimates of almost \$400 million, and we are seeing a reduction of almost \$30 million in this fiscal under Salaries - Direct Charges. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the rationale for the decrease in the amount of money allocated for Salaries?

**Hon. Sturge:** The answer is the same as before, it would be provided in writing.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful.

**Mr. Chairman:** Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the Minister, Sub-Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment for the Coast Guard. Minister—

**Hon. Sturge:** We moved on from Regiment, Mr. Chairman?

**Mr. Gonzales:**—that question was—

**Mr. Chairman:** No. We are at Regiment still.

**Mr. Gonzales:** We moved on from Coast Guard?

**Hon. Sturge:** We did not get to Coast Guard yet.

**Mr. Chairman:** We did not get to Coast Guard yet.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Oh, I see.

**Mr. Chairman:** Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** 01/002 Item 31, and there is a \$37 million figure. Hon.

Minister, is that \$37 million, does it take into consideration the increase in the NIS Contribution that the employers now—

**Hon. Sturge:** As stated before—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes.

**Hon. Sturge:**—when these Estimates were calculated, it did not take that into account and we would have to make the necessary adjustments.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** But you would agree with me, through you, Mr. Chairman, that of the \$37 million now, a few hundred dollars into \$37 million, that will not be *de minimis* would it?

**Hon. Sturge:** I did not suggest it would be.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Item—if there are no more questions on that Item, I propose to go to Item 003: Coast Guard. Arouca/Lopinot.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, I realize I was a little bit forward. I know it is this time of the evening but on Sub-Item 15 to the Minister, Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment for the Coast Guard. I see you have an allocation of \$150,000, Minister. I was just wondering given what is taking place right now in our country—what is that?

**Hon. Sturge:** Mr. Chairman, have we moved pass Personnel Expenditure?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, we are still at Coast Guard, Personnel Expenditure. We are still on Sub-Head 01: Coast Guard, Item 003. We are at 506 in the Draft Estimates.

**Mr. Gonzales:** No. 510.

**Mr. Chairman:** You are at 510?

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** So, we have not gotten there yet. All right. I suppose I can move

on to a new Item? Item 004: Air Guard; Item 007: Cadet Force; Item 008: Life Guard Service. I go now to Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Item 02/001/21: Repairs—so, Item 02/001/21: Repairs and Maintenance – Buildings, and there is an allocation of \$3,171,800, allocation.

**7.25 p.m.**

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Can the Minister provide us with a specific list of the buildings scheduled to receive these repairs and maintenance under this allocation for fiscal 2026?

**Hon. Sturge:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Pardon me?

**Hon. Sturge:** Temple Court 1 will be the building and you are asking for exactly what is in need of repair?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No. And which—so, in other words, this figure is allocated for the repair of Temple Court 1?

**Hon. Sturge:** Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings is the—

**Hon. Sturge:** And is this figure for Temple Court 1?

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Alone?

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes, according to the document, yes.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Which company has been selected to conduct these repairs and maintenance work?

**Hon. Sturge:** We have not changed the companies that you hired.

**Hon. Sturge:** Which company is it, Sir? Which company is registered as “companies that you hired”?

**Hon. Sturge:** We will provide the companies. We do not have it at hand. We will provide it in writing.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** In writing. Thank you.

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And under 02/001/08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, and there is a figure there of \$7,631,800. Could you tell us what is the breakdown of the allocation between the office accommodation and the storage facilities for this Ministry?

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes. Your question is, sorry?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Could you tell us what is the breakdown of the \$7,631,800 allocation between office accommodation and storage facility?

**Hon. Sturge:** We have not disaggregated. We can provide that in writing.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** And how were decisions made under this line Item regarding the continuation, termination or renegotiating of the existing property leases and the contracts inherited from the now defunct Ministry? Could you tell us?

**Hon. Sturge:** Member for Port of Spain South, I am being advised that what you are referring to, \$763,000 is the figure, not what you stated.

**Hon. Sturge:** Okay, sorry. Well, give me the answer then, please, the \$763,000. Thanks a million.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** The answer is, we have not renegotiated any new leases, so they would be the existing leases for accommodation and storage, the existing landlords.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, I am on 02/001/36. There is an allocation there and it is called Extraordinary Expenditure. Could you tell us what items can be classified under Extraordinary Expenditure?

**Hon. Sturge:** That is primarily a down payment for the national coastal radar

system. It is to complete payment.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Of the?

**Hon. Sturge:** For the national coastal radar system.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So then, why did your list it, or why was it listed under Extraordinary Expenditure, and not expenditure for the payment for the costal radar payment—

**Hon. Sturge:** Because it is an extraordinary expenditure.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Pardon me?

**Hon. Sturge:** Because it is an extraordinary expenditure. It is not something that happens regularly, and it is a very large expenditure, and it deals with something that is highly sensitive and relates to national security. So, there is not much I can add without compromising national security.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Could you tell us what was the procurement process used for this extraordinary expenditure?

**Hon. Sturge:** Well, it was acquired under your stewardship, from what I—was it?

*[Minister confers with technocrat]*

Yes, I understand it was procured under the last administration. So I think so have to ask someone in the last administration that question.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So, having—okay, let me interrogate that, hon. Minister. So having come in, met the expenditure and put it as under one of your Heads, you did not see it prudent to enquire what process was used, hon. Minister?

**Hon. Members:** *[Desk thumping]*

**Hon. Sturge:** It is a bit late.

**Mr. Chairman:** Well, I—

**Hon. Members:** *[Desk thumping]*

**Hon. Sturge:** Hold on. It is a bit late to enquire after what you did.

**Mr. Chairman:** That is an attractive-sounding question but I do not see it is a relevant one for this Head. So, let us move on. It is an attractive-sounding question, but whether or not the Minister would go and investigate the process used to procure something other than—to put it—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** [*Inaudible*]—is understood but I asked the question. If it is not relevant, I will go under the ruling of not relevant.

**Mr. Chairman:** At this stage of these considerations, I do not think it is relevant to these proceedings. Let us move on.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My questions are under this heading, before we move to Regiment.

**Mr. Chairman:** If there no other questions anyone wishes to ask under this Head, I propose to go 002: Regiment. Member for Port of Spain South.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Regiment?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes.

**Hon. Sturge:** Thank you. Under Regiment, 02/002/13: Maintenance of Vehicles, I see that there is a figure set—an allocation of \$1 million for the Maintenance of Vehicles for fiscal 2026. Can the hon Minister provide us with the number of vehicles to be maintained with this allocation?

**Hon. Sturge:** Although I am tempted to, I would rather not for obvious reasons.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Well, could you tell us then, Sir, which—so, you cannot tell us for—this is the regiment, eh.

**Hon. Sturge:** I can, but I will not.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Under what pretence will you not do that, Sir?

**Hon. Sturge:** Pretense?

**Mr. Scotland SC:** That is my word.

**Hon. Sturge:** Well, it is not a pretence.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Therefore, under what—

**Hon. Sturge:** To give you the figures—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Under what rationale—

**Hon. Sturge:** Well, I am answering you—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Yes—

**Hon. Sturge:**—if you would wait. The rationale is to give you the quantum of these numbers as disaggregated would, in essence, be telegraphing to the criminal enterprise the extent of our fleet.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** For the regiment?

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Is the regiment responsible—I am just asking. I thought the police were primarily responsible for the criminal element. Are you saying—I just thought. It is a thought. But tell me—

**Hon. Sturge:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, I am asking my questions through you, respectfully, and I do not wish to enter the banter. Could you tell us then which aspect—I understand that there are joint exercises, but any exercise taken on by a member of the regiment must be in company with a police officer.

**Hon. Sturge:** Obviously.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So, I could understand—

**Hon. Sturge:** Right.

**Mr. Scotland SC:**—the objection as it relates—Sir, is there going to be an echo throughout?

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes, yes.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I can understand the objection as it relates to the police.

**Hon. Sturge:** Well, you have answered your question. It is—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Under what national security consideration—

**Hon. Sturge:** It is the exact consideration—

**Mr. Scotland SC:**—could this objection be under the regiment?

**Hon. Sturge:** It is the exact consideration as with the police because they perform joint operations, and you must know that.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Hon. Minister, could you tell us which agencies have been identified to provide the maintenance for these vehicles?

**Hon. Sturge:** That also, as well, I will not divulge.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Could you tell the public the total number of vehicles which are currently non-serviceable?

**Hon. Sturge:** No, I will not.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Could you tell the public what is the current size of the fleet of the regiment's vehicles?

**Hon. Sturge:** Are you really asking me that? I will not answer that for obvious reasons.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** The reasons are not obvious to me. I am a simple man. So, could you explain, through the Chair—Chair, is it—what is the reason that you will not tell the public what is the current size of the regiment's fleet of vehicles?

**Hon. Sturge:** Well, one has to be quite obtuse—

**Mr. Scotland SC:** What are the numbers? Just the numbers.

**Hon. Sturge:** One has to be quite obtuse not to know that it is national security.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**7.35 p.m.**

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I very well may be. I very well may be or is it, Minister, that you do not know?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Sturge:** I do know.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think that is an unfair—come on. I think we have had enough banter on this issue. I think the substance of the exchange in this has now exhausted itself.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Mr. Chairman, I am ready and I am going on, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Gonzales:** [*Inaudible*] this particular line Item.

**Mr. Chairman:** But you can ask questions. Is it that you want to put a proposition forward?

**Mr. Gonzales:** Yes. I just want to address his concern with respect to divulging information that he believes should not be divulged for national security consideration. That is one of the reasons why we ask for some Items to be disclosed in writing. Because I know the Minister is not saying that the Member is not entitled to the information but there is some information that is requested during these proceedings, Mr. Chair, that you asked the Member, in light of national security consideration, that the information be provided in writing so that it can be protected.

**Mr. Chairman:** First of all, let me say this. The information can only be protected if there is a mutual undertaking not to disclose by the person to whom it is disclosed. First of all, right, so that is the first hurdle we have to cross. The difficulty with that hurdle is that I am not entirely sure how such an undertaking given to the Parliament can be enforced. I know it can be enforced in a court of law but in the Parliament, I envisage serious difficulties with the enforcement of such an undertaking.

So that putting that aside for the moment, the Minister has come and has said and has asserted what he essentially is the public interest immunity aspect. As I have said before, when an assertion of public interest immunity is made by a

Minister, there is very little the Parliament can do to go behind that assertion. It is a very different scenario unfolding in a court of law as Port of Spain South would know from his extensive practice. That when an assertion of public interest immunity is made, a judge acting as the arbiter of the fairness of the trial, then takes the material, looks at it and determines whether it ought to be disclosed. If the judge determines that it is discloseable, then it is disclosed and the person seeking to withhold the disclosure then has a simple choice to make: either you collapse your case or you disclose. We are not in a court of law here. I do not have any such power, the Parliament does not have any such power.

There, however, is another avenue by which this information can be gleaned, can be obtained and the very statutory provision which allows you to do so does contain a public interest immunity exception which can be tested and which has been tested. Up to last week, a judgment was delivered on it where the same immunity was claimed.

**Mr. Hosein:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** I hear you on that Barataria/San Juan but I guess it is just in my nature not to leave people remedy-less so that is the answer. So I do not propose to go behind the Minister's assertion of public interest immunity nor do I have the power to do so.

**Mr. Gonzales:** Mr. Chair, just to close on the point, all I am saying, Mr. Chair, is that the Minister could be asked whether he is prepared to put the response in writing having regard to the concerns that he raised and if he is not prepared to put it in writing, well then albeit, but he just cannot say for national security consideration I am not providing the response. So at least the Minister could be asked, Minister, okay, having regard to the national security consideration, are you prepared to divulge the information in writing.

**Mr. Chairman:** Well that is the point I took pains to explain to you why I think such a position might be an untenable one because if the Minister is claiming national security issue and the information is disclosed to a person in writing, the problem is going to be an enforcement of an undertaking. In the absence of an undertaking even if there is an undertaking and there is a breach of the undertaking, how do enforce that in a Parliament? There are patent, palpable and plain difficulties in doing so. If you breach an undertaking to a court, it is an entirely different matter. But to give such an undertaking to a Parliament, the enforcement of which then becomes potentially problematic, so that is where we are.

However, as I have explained to you, you are not left remedy-less. There are several other options you can use and I think we have taken a lot of time to explain what essentially is a non-issue. Now the Minister has asserted national security concerns, let us just move on. Thank you.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, well I was accommodating the propositional enquiry from Arouca/Lopinot. Thank you. So can I just—I propose to move to 003: Coast Guard; 004: Air Guard; 005: Defence Force Headquarters; 006: Volunteer Defence Force (Reserves).

**Mr. Scotland SC:** No—go ahead, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. 007: Cadet Force. 008: Life Guard Service. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 515 to 518. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Regiment; 003: Coast Guard; Item 004: Air Guard; Item 005: Defence Force Headquarters; Item 006: Volunteer Defence Force Reserves; Item 007: Cadet Force; Item 008: Life Guard. Okay.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Chairman, under Cadet Force—

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Scotland SC:**—where, I am just asking, the Civilian Conservation Corps will fall under?

**Mr. Chairman:** I would imagine you should be able to tell me that.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** I had it there, Mr. Chairman, I just want to ask a question. What was the rationale behind the transfer of this to the Ministry?

**Mr. Chairman:** I think you will have to get a line Item to put it under.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Hold, on, hold on. Hold on, Mr. Chairman. 04/007/03 and 007/04, Civilian Conversation Corps, \$39,200,000 allocation.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think we are on Minor Equipment Purchases.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** So we have not reached there, okay, I am good.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, we have not gotten there as yet.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Thank you. I just have one more question there and that is it.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Item 008: Life Guard. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 007: Households.

**Mr. Scotland SC:** Chairman, I will reserve my question and do it in another forum.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09. Pages 218 to 220. Consolidated Fund, Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 218 to 219. Hon. Members, Item 004 spans two pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. A. Coast Guard at page 218. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

**Mr. Young SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Under line Item 004, under large A. Integrated Support Services for the Naval Assets, these are for the Cape-

class vessels?

**Hon. Sturge:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Young SC:** Sorry?

**Hon. Sturge:** Damen.

**Mr. Young SC:** These are for the Damen vessels.

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes.

**Mr. Young SC:** Where is the provision for the Cape-class vessels?

**Hon. Sturge:** I am advised it is under Administrative Services.

**Mr. Young SC:** Under Administrative Services in the Recurrent?

**Hon. Sturge:** Development Programme.

**Mr. Young SC:** In the Development Programme, okay. And out of this—you said these are for the Damen vessels. How many of the Damen vessels are currently operational?

**Hon. Sturge:** At this time, more particularly, I ought not to disclose.

**Mr. Young SC:** You ought not to disclose?

**Hon. Sturge:** Yes.

**Mr. Young SC:** How many of the Damen vessels are operational?

**Hon. Sturge:** Well if I disclose it, then the whole world would know. So do you think this is the time for making such a disclosure?

**7.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Young SC:** Alright. I think you all are really not being very sophisticated at all, you know. You all are playing pitch in the kindergarten yard, in a big schoolyard.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, come on, let us—we have 15 more minutes.

**Mr. Hosein:** Mr. Chair, I just want to intervene. Mr. Chair, do you know, I sat

here for five years, and the last administration, every single time we asked a question on this line Item, they would give us the same response.

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:** Is there some kind of Standing Order that is being made—

**Mr. Hosein:** So the level of hypocrisy that we are seeing now, Mr. Chair—

**Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:**—or a Motion that is being made—

**Hon. S. Hosein:**—it is glaring and totally unbelievable, Mr. Chairman, totally unbelievable.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, let us—

**Mr. Young SC:** The last person to talk about hypocrisy is the Member for Barataria/San Juan, the last people to—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. We have 14 minutes again.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, let us move on. I propose now to move to Air Guard. Defence Force Headquarters; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services. Infrastructure Development Fund; Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 319 to 320. A. Coast Guard—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Pages 319 to 320, Social Infrastructure. A. Coast Guard; B. Regiment; C. Air Guard; D. Youth Development. Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$440 million—

**Mr. Marcelle:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Sorry, Laventille West which, which—Youth Development, I take it?

**Mr. Marcelle:** Youth Development, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** I did not see you. I am sorry.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Yes, deeply grateful to you. Mr. Chairman, under Item 14/09/001, can the hon. Minister, indicate what the \$600,000 is projected for under the CCC?

**Hon. Sturge:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Marcelle:** Your mike is off.

**Hon. Sturge:** Construction projects.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Which construction projects, please, hon. Minister?

**Hon. Sturge:** I see listed here one at VMCOTT, one at Chaguanas, one at Tobago, one north, and one south.

**Mr. Marcelle:** Deeply grateful.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 84 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, I thank you, and I thank your public servants, and I apologize to your staff for having met here all day. The delay was regrettable and unavoidable. Thank you all very much. We have 10 more minutes. I understand that there is an agreement for us to do the three remaining small ones in the next 10 minutes. So, I propose to run through this very quickly with the concurrence of the Members. Head 17: Personnel Department—

**Mr. Padarath:** Mr. Chairman, just for clarification. In the next 10 minutes we are seeking to do these three smaller ones?

**Mr. Chairman:** Three smaller ones, yes.

**Mr. Padarath:** We are not exceeding the 10 minutes?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, we are not. We are stopping at 8.00 p.m.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

*Head 17: Personnel Department, \$44,204,600*

**Mr. Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Public Administration and

Artificial Intelligence—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Chairman:** Alright, let us stop that so we can get ahead—to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes, but if we do so—[*Confers with Clerk*] I understand that there is an agreement for the opening statement to be dispensed with. I will propose the question, hon. Members.

*Question proposed:* That Head 17 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** The said sum which I just repeated for Head 17, Personnel Department is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head details, page number 80. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund, page 57; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 17 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** If we could move quickly to—I think, I am told Registration, Recognition and Certification Board is here. I want to thank the Personnel Department. If we could get the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board. I apologize for having kept you all day. Thank you all very much.

**7.55 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** We move now to Head 11, Registration, Recognition and Certification Board.

*Head 11:* Registration, Recognition and Certification Board, \$5,203,200.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister, whilst it is normal that we would invite an opening statement, because of the time, and we are trying to save time, and I am wasting some of it. Can I invite you, please, to dispense with that opening statement so that we may finish this Head tonight?

**Hon. Baptiste:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, sure.

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

*Question proposed:* That Head 11 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** The sum of \$5,203,200 for Head 11 Registration, Recognition and Certification Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head details, page 49, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007: Households.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 11 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you all very much, and my apologies. Whilst we have four minutes, I propose to do Elections and Boundaries Commission.

*Head 08:* Elections and Boundaries Commission, \$92,450,200.

**Mr. Chairman:** Minister of Finance, as has been the practice in this part, I invite you to dispense on the record with the opening statement.

**Hon. Tancoo:** Sure.

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

*Question proposed:* That Head 08 stand part of the Schedule.

**Mr. Chairman:** The sum of \$92,450,200 for Head 08 Elections and Boundaries Commission is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

Sub-Head 01, page 40, Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Election Expenses. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Election Expenses. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007: Households. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund, page 15, Sub-Head 09. Item 004: Social Infrastructure; J. Research and Development. Page 15, Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services, page 16. Infrastructure Development Fund, Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 240, F. Public Buildings.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 08 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Mr. Chairman:** And this brings us through the cusp of the close of today's proceedings, it is 7.59.22. I propose to suspend the Sitting of this Committee until tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock, where we will continue straight until 8 o'clock again.

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