HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 20, 2026

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2027) BILL, 2026

[Fourth 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: Good morning, everyone. This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will now resume. The documents referred, hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 81(2) and (8), the Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements along with the Appropriation Bill, have been referred to this committee for consideration. The documents before the committee therefore, include the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*, and the Appropriation (Financial Year 2027) Bill, 2026.

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

Insofar as the proposed work schedule is concerned, hon. Members, you are reminded, the committee agreed to meet as follows. That is today, Tuesday, October 20, 2026, at 10.00 a.m., Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, from 20th to 24th October inclusive. Hon. Members are also reminded that the committee

must consider a minimum of nine Heads of Expenditure from today, 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., in order to complete its work programme in the five days allotted.

The procedure for each Head. You are reminded that the procedure for each Head of Expenditure shall be as follows:

1. The Head and the amount to be appropriated will be announced by me, in my capacity as Chairman.
2. The Minister will then be given the option to make a brief, and I stress the word "brief," opening statement.
3. The Chairman will then propose the question that the sum proposed stand part of the Schedule.
4. For each Head of Expenditure, the Chairman will call the Sub-Head followed by the Item.

I will not call the Sub-Items. Discussions can ensue on the Item called or the relevant Sub-Item and clarifications sought. Once the committee moves to another Sub-Head, questions from a previous Sub-Head will not be entertained.

5. I will then repeat the procedure for the *Development Programme*.
6. Once this is concluded, I will then put the question that the sum stand part of the Schedule.
7. The identical procedure will be repeated for each Head of Expenditure.

We have invited accounting officers and technocrats who will arrive at specific times during the day. Therefore, let us try our best as we possibly can to adhere to the agreed schedule. All right. And before we start, I had made an inquiry, Chief Whip, about the accommodation for the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes. Mr. Chair, can I ask that we confirm that by lunchtime?

Mr. Chairman: I would be very grateful. Thank you very much. Because, as

you well know—

Mr. Gonzales: We did it last year. So—

Mr. Chairman: We did it last year and travel arrangements have to be made. So that is the immediate challenge. And that is why, you know, without appearing to be somewhat impolite, we are pressing you for it. Right. Thank you very much. So shall we move ahead, pressing on the best possible way that we can to achieve this our stated goal.

Head 78: Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services, $5,174,683,500.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes. Thank you very much.

Hon. Mohit: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, hon. Members of the committee. I welcome the opportunity to present to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, an account of the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services' work and the strategic priorities informing the Ministry's Estimates of Expenditure for fiscal 2027.

The mandate of the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services encompasses poverty reduction, child protection, disability inclusion, family support and human development. Our responsibilities are to sustain essential assistance while strengthening the systems through which public resources reach those most in need. During fiscal 2026, our core social assistance programmes continued to provide essential support. The Senior Citizens' Pension supported over 118,000 older persons. The Public Assistance Grant assisted over 18,000 beneficiaries whilst the Disability Assistance Grant supported over 27,000 persons, including 4,724 minors. Over 13,000 households also received long-term

food support while 20,910 received additional temporary and seasonal food support.

Beyond maintaining these programmes, the Ministry advanced significant reforms. The Revised Standard Means Test was implemented in June 2026, increasing the eligibility threshold by 42.1 per cent and introducing improved assessment arrangements supported by a digital calculator to strengthen consistency and accuracy. The Ministry also recruited 30 Social Service Delivery Officers, enhanced staff training and strengthened senior leadership, including within the Social Welfare Division.

The Ministry also made progress in modernizing benefit payments. By September 2026, approximately 77 per cent of recipients across three principal cash grants were receiving payments through direct deposit with safeguards for persons facing barriers to banking. At the community level, the NSDP programme and related interventions provided individual and household assistance, benefiting over 4,100 persons. Significant support was provided to NGOs, youth organisations and bodies delivering specialized services, including services for persons with disabilities. The Ministry also provided financial support to 28 children homes to sustain residential care and protection for vulnerable children.

The National Enrichment Centre provided clinical services to 936 beneficiaries. Financial stewardship remained a priority. During fiscal 2026, a significant supplementary provision was approved to address longstanding financial obligations affecting the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. Looking ahead to fiscal 2027, the announced $250 increases in core social assistance grants effective January 01, 2027 will provide additional support to

vulnerable households. The $250 monthly increase announced by the Minister of Finance and effective January 01, 2027 is expected to benefit all eligible existing and new beneficiaries of the Senior Citizens' Pension, Public Assistance Grant and Disability Assistance Grants across all payment tiers.

Looking ahead to fiscal 2027, Mr. Chairman, the Ministry will also advance the National Child Well-being and Poverty Reduction Strategy, as well as the National Shock-Responsive Social Protection Policy. Further priorities include disability legislation and accessible transport, the reform of social displacement services and realignment of general assistance grant administration and the integration of the National Commission for Self Help Limited within the Ministry's wider mandate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the committee's consideration of the Ministry's Estimates of Expenditure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed: Head 78 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $5,174,683,500 for Head 78: Ministry of the People and Social Development and Family Services is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in one, *the Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*; two, the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly;* and three, the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme.*

10.10 a.m.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent*

Expenditure. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, those Item are to be found in the relevant pages, between pages 411 to 413, inclusive of the relevant volume. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, through you, to the Minister: Minister, at 001/01, I am seeing an increase of the $22.6 million for Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Madam Minister, how many new officers—so, maybe I should start this way, how many officers do you have in posts now, or how many vacant posts do you have with incumbents?

Hon. Mohit: Member, the answer to that, filled offices, 54.

Mr. de Nobriga: I am sorry—Minister, sorry?

Hon. Mohit: Fifty-four.

Mr. de Nobriga: You have 54 vacant posts with incumbents?

Hon. Mohit: You asked me filled, right? Filled first?

Mr. de Nobriga: Sorry, yes.

Hon. Mohit: Yes, so that is 54.

Mr. de Nobriga: All right. How many vacant posts do you have with incumbents in it?

Hon. Mohit: Vacant posts with—that is 54, right; 54, and vacant post without bodies, 60.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Minister. Minister, that increase of $22.6 million, I am assuming, based on that increase, you are expecting to fill positions this fiscal?

Hon. Mohit: Member, the liaison continues with the Service Commissions to fill posts within the Ministry under this particular line Item.

Mr. de Nobriga: I understand that, Minister. But obviously, with—you have

moved from $12 million to $35 million, so that is why I am asking, is it that you have been given some sort of indication that you will have posts filled this fiscal?

Hon. Mohit: I can share with you that the Ministry continues to liaise with the Service Commissions, so this is in anticipation of.

Mr. de Nobriga: All right.

Mr. Young SC: To follow up on my friend from Diego Martin Central, the Ministry continues to liaise with the Public Service Commission, we understand that. However, the Minister of Finance, in a recession, has taken a decision to put $22.6 million additional dollars under this line Item for salaries and wages. Is that on the basis of a liaising, or has there been some level of assurance by the Public Service Commissions, or is this just to put a slush fund to move around money after all?

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

Mr. Young SC: That is a legitimate question.

Mr. Chairman: No, it is illegitimate. Well, first of all, it is interlaced with a lot of editorial comments.

Mr. Young SC: As I am entitled to do.

Mr. Chairman: No, you are not entitled to do that.

Mr. Young SC: I am, I have a five-minute run up.

Mr. Chairman: I understand that but we are going to waste the time, right?

Mr. Young SC: No, we are not, only with intervention shall we.

Mr. Chairman: No, and I wish you would just—

Mr. Young SC: You want me to re phrase it, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, in the form of a very succinct question, which I know you

are quite capable of formulating.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, a decision has been taken by the Minister of Finance to add an additional $22.6 million for permanent posts that are not filled. You have told us about a liaison, which we all understand, between your Ministry and the Public Service Commission, because these are permanent posts and it is up to the Public Service Commission to fill the posts. Have they given any level of assurance that would have then prompted the Ministry of Finance to put in this additional $22.6 million?

Hon. Mohit: Member—

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may? This Sub-Head contains two components, one of which is some level of hope and aspiration that they will find favour with the Service Commissions to add personnel in there, but it also contains an element of consideration for the payment of arrears to the public servants.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, this does contain some level of back pay for the public servants?

Mr. Tancoo: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: But we heard it is only 54 posts that are currently filled under this. So, will this cover the full back pay for the 54, or is it the 40 per cent?

Mr. Tancoo: This concerns the 40 per cent.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item—St. Ann's East, I am sorry, I did not see you.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, through you, Chairman, how many persons are currently employed right now? Fifty-four?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, that was asked and answered.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, the budget is almost tripling in this line Item and the persons you want to hire would be 60 more, which would be a little over what you have now?

Hon. Mohit: Member, the budget is not just to employ the persons where we have vacant positions, it is also going to be utilized for the payments of revised salaries and COLA to existing staff, increments, arrears of increments and acting allowances, because there are several persons acting—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I understand that. I understand that, but I am just saying that the budget is almost tripling and the number of persons that you anticipate or hope, as the Minister of Finance said, is a doubling almost, right? Sixty vacant posts, not so? And 54 now, yeah?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, respectfully, I have given a breakdown of what the— [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I think the Minister is saying asked and answered, and I suppose—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Very well, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: So, shall we move to Diego Martin Central now?

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, if I can move on to 003: Social Welfare?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, once we understand that once we move, we are not going back. 003: Social Welfare, page 411.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you, Mr. Chairman, Minister, I am seeing, however, at 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance,

there is reduction of $3.3 million. Can you account for this reduction?

Hon. Mohit: Just a second, Member.

Mr. de Nobriga: Sure.

Hon. Mohit: Member, based on what I have in front of me and based on the advice received, this allocation will be sufficient.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, the 2026 Revised Estimate was $29.361 million, you have reduced that by $3.361 million. How many people do you have employed in this division?

Hon. Mohit: Member, at this point, as at 30th September, we had 133 filled posts, 37 vacant posts with incumbents, 46 vacant posts without incumbents. But, Member, just to add, so you understand, you would have had some staff changes reflected: Appointments, promotions, reversions, retirements and resignations. So the allocation, based on what we have, will be sufficient.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Minister. I think you have pre-empted the next question. How many persons have you had through attrition leaving this fiscal? No, I have asked how many workers? I have asked how many workers?

Hon. Mohit: How many? Just a second. So, Member, nine would have retired during the fiscal.

Mr. de Nobriga: And you would have listed, Minister, a number of reasons why you would have had persons leaving, promotions, whatnot. Is—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Minister, I heard. But the Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services did list off a number of reasons as to why persons would have left. My question is—thank you Minister, my question is, are

those nine persons having retired account for that $3.3 million reduction, or is there any other reason for that?

10.20 a.m.

Hon. Mohit: Member, what would have happened is—remember, some partial arrears would have been paid in December, so hence you would see that being reflected there as a decrease because that would have been covered already.

Mr. de Nobriga: Alright. Minister, just as a further question, the $26 million that the Minister of Finance has allocated—that will also account for the 40 per cent in this figure as well?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Member, I am advised yes.

Mr. S. de Nobriga: Alright, I do not know if any of my colleagues have any other questions.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. Mr Chairman. May I ask the Minister if this—

Mr. Chairman: Can you identify the line Item?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah. I am 003: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and now on—

Hon. Mohit: Is that the same line Item?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The same line Item that we were just discussing. May I go ahead?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. I wanted to find out if, under this line Item, issues of payment of the gratuity would fall under this line Item?

Hon. Mohit: Member, not under this line Item.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Alright, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: So, we go now to Item 005, Child Development Centre—

Mr. de Nobriga: There is one more that—I did not know if anyone has any questions under 001. There is 08 where I have one question under that Sub-Head.

Mr. Chairman: I was proposing to move to 005.

Mr. de Nobriga: Or I thought you were moving to a new heading.

Mr. Chairman: No, no. I am going through them *seriatim*.

Mr. de Nobriga: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, under 003: Social Welfare, 08, which I was going to—

Mr. Chairman: No, I am going to go to 005, and then we will get there.

Mr. de Nobriga: No, Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Oh, you are not finished?

Mr. de Nobriga: No, no. I asked if anyone had any questions under 01, Mr. Chairman; that was me.

Mr. Chairman: Alright, I will permit it this once. Just go ahead.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, 08: Vacant Post Salaries and COLA without incumbents. I see an increase of $1 million. Can you give us an account for what that $1 million will encompass?

Mr. Chairman: No. Diego Martin Central, hang on a second; we are now on 003.

Mr. de Nobriga: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Is this related to 001?

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, 003/08.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, no, no, I think the—okay, I think the Clerk got it a bit mixed up. Okay, go ahead.

Hon. Mohit: Member, this increase is due to the anticipated filling of vacancies in the Social Welfare Division.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, can you give me an idea of how many bodies you expect to increase this division by?

Hon. Mohit: Well, my expectations are high, but it is based on the work done by the Service Commission. You have 46 civil service vacant posts without bodies.

Mr. de Nobriga: So, Minister, based on the reduction at 01 and now the increase at 08, you anticipate that you will end the fiscal year still with less people than you started it with?

Hon. Mohit: Member, as I said before, the work continues with the Commission to fill these critical vacancies in the Social Welfare Division.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, we live in hope.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Can I ask another question, please?

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. Minister, can you indicate whether an assessment has been undertaken with regard to the reduction in the numbers that you have in these posts, in terms of fulfilling the mandate of the Social Welfare Division?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Member, and hence the reason we would have brought on, because of the lack of persons there, we would have brought on 30 Social Service Delivery Officers on a short-term basis.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: When you say short-term, how short is short-term?

Hon. Mohit: Six months.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: When you say you brought on these people on short-term, how have they been brought into the Ministry, and under what process?

Hon. Mohit: HR would have engaged in that process.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, and what is the process that was used?

Hon. Mohit: The usual recruitment process of advertising, having an assessment, and then you do the shortlisting and the merit list.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Where were these advertisements placed, please?

Hon. Mohit: The advertisements were placed in Employtt.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Were any of these advertisements placed in the daily newspapers?

Hon. Mohit: Member, can I check on that and get back to you?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I would be very grateful for that information.

Hon. Mohit: Because there were quite a few placed in the newspaper, so I would like to check that and get back to you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I will be grateful for the information. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair, 003, line Item 08. Minister, do you anticipate if the 46 posts are filled, this $1 million will be sufficient to cover the salaries?

Hon. Mohit: Member, at this time, I have said before that the allocation is sufficient. We have a good work relationship with the Ministry of Finance of there are any changes work with Ministry of Finance as per the usual process.

Mr. Romain: Mid-year review?

Hon. Mohit: As per the usual process.

Mr. Romain: Alright, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, would you be able to say who from the panel interviewed the persons who were engaged on short-term?

Hon. Mohit: Member, from my understanding, based on what I am advised here, an assessment was done. I believe an exam was done and a written assessment was done. So, I can get some more information on that for you and present it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: A written assessment was—alright.

Hon. Mohit: Because of the urgency of the matter.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, is it possible to say how many people applied, and how the assessment was done? Maybe you may not have that information now, but you will be able to give us that information—

Hon. Mohit: I can certainly attempt to do so.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—because we want to ensure that there was fairness in terms of the persons who were employed. So, you will give us that information in writing.

Hon. Mohit: Sure, I can certainly attempt to do that for you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You will attempt to do it, or—?

Hon. Mohit: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Could you ask one of your public servants if they would be able to ensure?

Hon. Mohit: That is the answer I am being given. I will attempt to do it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That they will attempt to do it?

Hon. Mohit: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, they are not aware of how it was done.

Hon. Mohit: They are well aware. I think I explained it.

Mr. Chairman: I do not think that—well first off Minister, hang on. I do not think that is a fair inference that you can draw from the answer which is being given.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Why not, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: I think the Minister has given the answer, and as I have said repeatedly—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, we go with that.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, I am asking if we just go with that because if a system was put in place, and public servants were involved or whoever was involved, I am sure they can tell us how it was.

Mr. Chairman: If perhaps you will give me an opportunity to explain what I am saying.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Most definitely.

Mr. Chairman: Right, I will be very grateful. Thank you very much for your kind indulgence.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are most welcome.

Mr. Chairman: Right, so I think the Minister has answered the question, and insofar as the undertaking given to her by her public servants is concerned, I think that for these present purposes it is sufficient, and also might I remind you of the

other options you have under these Standing Orders, particularly for questions in writing that you may ask.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But, Mr. Chairman, just to also indicate that during the Standing Finance Committee we can also ask for the information to be given to us in writing also.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, yeah, I am fully aware of that. Yeah, I am fully aware of that and where undertakings are given, it usually comes. But I think that undertaking that you are seeking to extract has been given in a sufficiently broad parameter. So, my own view is that we have what it is. So perhaps you can move—I propose now—to Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you again, 003, line Item 27. Minister, there is an anticipation of new hires, but I note that your allocation for contributions to the group health insurance remains the same? Would these new hires be entitled to participate in this group health insurance?

Hon. Mohit: Member, all employees are invited to participate in group health packages.

Mr. D. Romain: Right, but I note that your allocation is the same as last year, so I am saying, if you have new hires, where is the money going to come from to pay for their contribution?

10.30 a.m.

Hon. Mohit: Due process will follow.

Mr. Romain: Would you like to enlighten us on that process?

Hon. Mohit: I just explained it to you in terms of due process with the Ministry of Finance when you require funds.

Mr. Romain: Mid-year?

Hon. Mohit: I am not sure what you are trying to get out of me.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. Item 005: Child Development Centre, page 412. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, under 005—

Hon. Mohit: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Child Development Centre. I see the salaries here are quite a small amount, $600,000 for the year. How many members of staff are in this Centre, this Unit?

Hon. Mohit: Member, I do not know if you recall. This Centre would have been closed, and these persons were reassigned to the General Administration Department of the Ministry quite some time now. So, they are paid—

Mr. Young SC: From this—

Hon. Mohit: It is really just for salaries. Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: So, the Child Development Centre was closed?

Hon. Mohit: For some years now.

Mr. Young SC: And all the members of staff have been—

Hon. Mohit: Reassigned.

Mr. Young SC: Reassigned? So, if it has been closed, why are they continued to be paid from under this as opposed to where they now presently are reassigned to?

Hon. Mohit: This is where their positions were initially. So that is why they were continued to be paid under—

Mr. Young SC: So, is it that there needs to be a reclassification by the Public Service Commission or something like that? No. That is what I thought. Is it a

ministerial decision or a Cabinet decision?

Hon. Mohit: I am advised this can only occur if you review the entire establishment.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. So therefore, there was, from what I am hearing, a decision to close down the Centre?

Hon. Mohit: Member, this Centre has been closed for some years now. I believe it is over six years. There are some discussions surrounding the staffing and where they are assigned right now, in terms of them being assigned to the General Administration. What you are asking me, we are indeed discussing those matters.

Mr. Young SC: And it is closed. This task, whatever it is they used to do under the Child Development Centre, where have those services been allocated? Does it now fall under, for example, Children's Authority or something?

Hon. Mohit: No. That is what I just explained. General Administration.

Mr. Young SC: I know. But if it was closed—before, it would have existed for a reason.

Hon. Mohit: The Ministry.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Item 006: National Family Services, page 412. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, following on the question of my colleague from Port of Spain North, National Family Services, can you tell us how many persons are employed under this Division?

Hon. Mohit: Yes. Member, so it is four persons. Vacant post with bodies, one, vacant post without bodies, 70.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Minister, can you tell us whether—you said it was one person?

Hon. Mohit: No.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Four persons.

Hon. Mohit: Correct. Sorry.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Are these four persons supposed to service the entire country?

Mr. Chairman: Member, can I just—

Hon. Mohit: Member—

Mr. Chairman: Minister, just hang on a second, would you. Can I just ask you to, under 05, can I just ask you to identify the specific line Item which falls under that Sub Head?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We are on—

Mr. Chairman: 06, sorry.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: 006, Chairman, and we are under—

Mr. Chairman: So, is it 01?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And then 01. Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Okay, great.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And I am asking a follow-up question based on what the Minister said about employing four persons under the National Family Services Division. I am asking, how are these four persons servicing the entire country?

Hon. Mohit: Member, the Division is supposed to service the entire country.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Four persons. Can you tell me—

Hon. Mohit: If you would give me an opportunity to, I would certainly.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, go right ahead.

Hon. Mohit: There are some challenges in this particular Division in terms of the classification of positions. So, the Ministry is currently working out that. In the meantime, I understand that there are some other provisions being made which can be discussed at another line Item.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Could I also—

Mr. de Nobriga: Sorry, follow-up questions.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Just a follow-up. I understand that there might be 70 vacant posts in this Division. Could I ask if any attempt is being made to fill these posts?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I think I just answered that. There are some issues with the classification—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am so sorry, I did not hear what you said. Could you repeat?

Hon. Mohit: There are some issues with the classification in terms of approved job descriptions. The Ministry is currently working out that, and in the meantime, other provisions are being made which can be discussed under another line Item.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. So, you will discuss those other provisions when we get that line Item.

Hon. Mohit: If you ask the question.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Only if I ask the question?

Mr. Chairman: All right. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, can you—these four persons employed and the one vacant with a body in post, what activities are those people engaged in right now?

Hon. Mohit: Just a second. Member they are involved in several activities, including the Active Listener Programme, the operations of that, other social intervention programmes, et cetera. They are currently putting together a suicide prevention programme as well, which will go through the necessary stages shortly. They are involved in the National Parenting Workshop as well, with the Ministry of Homeland Security.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, if you would forgive me. That seems like a lot for five people to be doing, for them to be doing and doing adequately for the entire country.

Hon. Mohit: Member, this Government recognizes that, hence the reason we are engaging in a process to try to fill the vacancies that exist within the department.

Mr. de Nobriga: That we will discuss in another line Item.

Hon. Mohit: Other provisions are being made at this point in time. We are attempting to staff the Unit so that we can get the job done that is required for the population of Trinidad and Tobago. Good?

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, would you be able to say what are the positions that these four people occupy?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Member. Just give me a second, please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sure.

Hon. Mohit: The Director of the Division, the Administrative Officer IV and two

Clerk Typist I.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, these four go out to communities or they just sit in the office?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, our Director is out all the time with other members of her Unit in several outreach programmes, the National Parenting Workshop, other events which require them.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So apart from the four there are members of—she has a Unit?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, she has members in her Unit.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "Oh", okay, I did not get that impression.

Hon. Mohit: Well, we are under a particular line Item here.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair, 006, line Item 05: Government's Contribution to NIS. Minister, can you indicate how many persons that allocation would cover?

10.40 a.m.

Hon. Mohit: Which line Item, Member? I cannot hear you.

Mr. Chairman: 05—

Mr. Romain: 05. Government's Contribution to N.I.S.

Hon. Mohit: Okay. Just a second. Member, this will cover 24 officers.

Mr. Romain: Yes. And does this increase of $8,900 anticipate the increase in N.I.S rates come January?

Hon. Mohit: Yes. This covers that as well.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay Item 008: Gender Affairs, page 413. Port of Spain North—?

Mr. Young SC : Diego Martin Central.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, under 008/01, can you give us an idea of the amount of employees you have in this Division, the amount vacant with posts—vacant without, sorry, vacant with bodies, vacant without bodies?

Hon. Mohit: Yes. Member, this particular Division, or under this line Item, it caters for the 10 civil service employees. In terms of posts filled, we have one post filled; vacant posts with bodies, zero; vacant posts without bodies, nine.

Mr. de Nobriga: And Minister, the $81,000 is in anticipation that you are liaising with—the Public Service, will give you those nine?

Hon. Mohit: Member, the same issue of classification, job descriptions, we have that issue existing here as well. The Ministry is currently working on that. This sum here will be sufficient for now.

Mr. de Nobriga: And you think that reclassification will be done within this fiscal?

Hon. Mohit: We are trying our best. The Ministry staff, they have been working extremely hard to deal with these matters.

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I move now to Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 413 to 417 inclusive. Diego Martin West, you are giving way to Diego Martin Central? Thank you.

Mr. de Nobriga: I appreciate that. Thank you, Chairman. Minister, I would like

to go to 02/001/16: Contract Employment. I see that there is an increase of $1.8 million for this fiscal year. Can you give me an idea of the number of contract workers that you have now and how many does the Ministry expect to hire for this fiscal year?

Hon. Mohit: Member, just a second. Contract Employment, you would like to know how much we intend to hire? That is the question?

Mr. de Nobriga: I would like to know how many you have now and how many you intend to hire, and then we will move on from there.

Hon. Mohit: Right. Member, right now, this provision really caters for 349 contract positions. However, 75 are filled right now and 274 are vacant.

Mr. de Nobriga: Chairman, through you again to the Minister. Minister, your Revised Estimate for 2026 was $16,180,000. However, the original Estimate was $24 million. Did you lose contract workers during the last fiscal year?

Hon. Mohit: Member, I would have to check on that for you. I will have to check on that for you and get back to you on that.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, can I ask if you will get back to me in writing on it?

Hon. Mohit: I will attempt to do so, once I get the information.

Mr. de Nobriga: And—well, as the Chairman has pointed out, of course, with no direct assurance or timeline—I am at a loss on this side. So, I am hoping that I can, using the Chairman's words, extract from you a definite assurance and a timeline for that.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I already indicated, I will attempt to do so.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I think we have exhausted this as far as we can go in terms of—

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: But you know you have the alternative method of doing so.

Mr. de Nobriga: Well, you see, Mr. Chairman, with all due respect to both you and the line Minister, the exercise—

Mr. Chairman: I understand the exercise.

Mr. de Nobriga:—that we are conducting in requires some sort of—

Hon. Member: Accountability.

Mr. de Nobriga:—accountability, thank you. Accountability.

Mr. Chairman: Well, let us not use such a strong word. I think what the Minister is saying, quite frankly, is, look, I will get it, I will attempt to get it to you, right? I suppose that attempt must be complied with in a reasonable time. If the reasonable time period is not complied with, you know you have recourse to these Standing Orders, and I do not—you are far more experienced in this than I am, so I do not need to point you to the specific Standing Order for which you can make your enquiry.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: So—

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, it is that additional experience that I have that is directing me to ask for an assurance and a timeline.

Mr. Chairman: As I said before, there are quite alternative methods of doing things, right? And the timelines—sometimes that timeline might be a quicker timeline than the one you are seeking to extract, as you are aware. So, can we just move on now?

Mr. de Nobriga: No. Not as yet, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: So just identify which line Item.

Mr. de Nobriga: I am still on 16 Mr. Chairman. Minister, the $1.8million increase you are hoping to increase your contract employment cohort by how many workers?

Hon. Mohit: The projected figure, Member, is that of 78.

Mr. de Nobriga: And can I ask what these workers will be engaged in doing?

Hon. Mohit: I certainly cannot list 78 right now for you.

Mr. de Nobriga: No but you can give me—

Hon. Mohit: I will attempt.

Mr. de Nobriga:—you can give me a brief idea of what they will be doing, Minister.

Hon. Mohit: I will attempt to do so as I have indicated before.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. de Nobriga: I do not know if—

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chair, for acknowledging me. 002: Goods and Services, 001: General Administration, 01: Travelling and Subsistence. In 2025, the Actual was 1.1. The 2026 Estimate was 1.3. The Revised Estimate was 2.35, and now we are at $2 million. So, whilst there may be an appearance of a reduction of $350,000, technically there is a jump of $1 million in Travelling and Subsistence from 2025 to 2027. I would like to ask the Minister, what is the reason for this jump of $1 million for Travelling and Subsistence?

Hon. Mohit: You are asking me about the Revised Estimate, why there was a jump of $1 million?

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes. From 2025 to 2027, there was technically a jump of approximately $1 million. What was the reason for that jump?

Hon. Mohit: Member, I am advised that that would have been persons who were awaiting payments in terms of their Acting, et cetera. So, that would have been paid during the last fiscal.

Mr. Des Vignes: How many employees does that account for, the Travelling and Subsistence?

Hon. Mohit: I would have to get that one for you.

Mr. Des Vignes: In writing?

Hon. Mohit: Well, I certainly cannot call you on the phone and give it to you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Des Vignes: I would not appreciate that.

Mr. Chairman: All right, Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 002/001/16: Contract Employment. In the year of 2025, there was a spend of $20.8 million in 2025. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many persons were employed under this line Item in 2025?

Hon. Mohit: How many persons were employed?

Mr. Marcelle: Employed.

Hon. Mohit: In 2025?

Mr. Marcelle: Yeah. The actual—

Hon. Mohit: I think, Mr. Chairman, that was asked already. I would have to get that for them. I did indicate I will attempt to get that.

Mr. Chairman: Perhaps Laventille West might have missed it, but I

think the hon. Minister did answer that, and she did undertake to attempt to do her best to get it, to get the information.

Mr. Marcelle: Mr. Chairman, that was in relation to the 349 employees or posts, that was in 2026.

10.40 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: I think the question asked by your learned colleagues was an all-encompassing question. Perhaps you might want to reconsider it and go back. But I think the question of the hon. Minister has been asked and answered. Unless you have another question on that Item, perhaps you can move on.

Mr. Marcelle: No problem, Mr. Chair. Line Item 02/001/22: Short-term Employment. Can the hon. Minister indicate—I am seeing an increase in this fiscal of $863,000. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many additional short-term employees would be onboarded in this fiscal?

Hon. Mohit: Member, the funds under this particular line Item, it will be used to engage persons on a short-term basis. just to ensure the continuity of the business of the Ministry. Really and truly, it would be really to serve to bridge gaps while the Ministry recruits for other positions.

Mr. Marcelle: In relation to the process—I know that you indicated the continuity, Minister. Is there any intention to bring, under the short-term, new employees under short-term contracts in this fiscal?

Hon. Mohit: Member, you are asking me to intervene and give answers on HR matters. This Minister does not intervene in HR matters.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Marcelle: Can the hon. Minister indicate what the process or policy used by

her Ministry to engage the short-term employees?

Hon. Mohit: We can certainly get that for you. We will attempt to provide that for you.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. I think Laventille East/Morvant was first.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 02/001/21: Repairs and Maintenance – Buildings. Can the Minister entail—what does that entail?

Hon. Mohit: Please forgive me, Member. Which line Item is that, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: 21.

Hon. Mohit: 21.

Mr. Chairman: Am I correct?

Mr. Birchwood: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, 21: Repairs and Maintenance – Buildings.

Hon. Mohit: Member, can you repeat the question?

Mr. Birchwood: What does that entail? Repairs and Maintenance. Can you get—provide some specifics?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I really cannot hear the Member, respectfully.

Mr. Birchwood: Can you provide some specifics?

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I am—Laventille East/Morvant, I myself am having some difficulty.

Mr. Birchwood: Can you provide some specifics with respect to what the repairs and the maintenance entail?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Member, some of them would include the tenant-responsible repairs, maintenance and upgrades at Ministry offices.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. How are those contracts or the contractors selected to execute those repairs and maintenance?

Hon. Mohit: Well, those contracts were issued under your Government. So, it is just a continuation for the payments.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. 02/001/08: Rent/Lease – Office Accommodation and Storage. Minister, can you indicate, would that allocation be for your head office premises?

Hon. Mohit: If it would be sufficient, that is what you are asking?

Mr. Romain: No, no, I am asking, is that figure for your head office premises?

Hon. Mohit: No, Member.

Mr. Romain: Could you indicate what that covers?

Hon. Mohit: This is Recurrent Expenditure.

Mr. Romain: I know, but is it rent? Is it lease?

Hon. Mohit: You are asking me if we are going to rent a head office?

Mr. Romain: No, no, I am asking, is that—

Hon. Mohit: Minister, perhaps I can be of some assistance. I think the Member is trying to ascertain whether that Item is for rent or for a lease or—

Mr. Romain: For your current—

Mr. Chairman: Well, I suppose.

Hon. Mohit: Well, it is clear. Rent or lease.

Mr. Romain: Yes, but for what premises?

Hon. Mohit: You want to know the premises?

Mr. Romain: Yes.

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, that would be head office CL Financial Building; AMBA Building; Rio Claro social services; Tradezone, El Socorro warehouse; St. George Central Local Board; Chaguanas social services centre; St. Andrews/St. David Local Board; San Fernando social services centre; NAHOUS Building; Princes Town Local Board; La Brea/Cedros Local Board; St. George East Local Board; Port of Spain social services centre; and in anticipation, Arima Social Services Local Board.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Minister. Can you indicate the status of the building at the corner of Tragarete Road and—

Hon. Mohit: That is not not under this line Item, Mr.Chair.

Mr. Chairman: I was wondering how that arose here.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, we propose now to move to Item 002: Division of Ageing, page 414. All right, no questions? I move to 00—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: All right, go ahead, Port of Spain North.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, Mr. Chair. 02: Goods and Services; 001/37: Janitorial Services.

Hon. Mohit: Line Item 37?

Mr. Young SC: Line Item 37, are you seeing it? Janitorial Services. The 2026 Revised Estimate was $2.144million.

Hon. Mohit: Right.

Mr. Young SC: So that would have been the amount because initially, it was $1

million. The Revised Estimate went up by $1.144 million for 2026. Now, you are being given, in 2027, back to the same $1 million. So, therefore, it is safe to assume you will, unfortunately, be in another shortfall position because you have come here and told us that it cost you, for 2026, $2.144 million. Is this going to affect the cleanliness, et cetera? What is going to happen here under Janitorial Services?

Hon. Mohit: Member, the Janitorial Services continue, and as far as I understand, and based on my discussion with Ministry's staffing, this should be sufficient for us.

Mr. Young SC: This should be—okay. So therefore, why was it not sufficient in the last fiscal? Because you started off with $1 million when we were here last year, you are now at $2.144 million and you are back to $1 million.

Hon. Mohit: Yeah. Member, we would have paid arrears in the sum of $1.1million. So that is why you would see the 1.1—

Mr. Young SC: So that, the $1.1 million was for the payment of arrears?

Hon. Mohit: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: To whom?

Hon. Mohit: I can get that for you just a second. Janitorial—

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: I am not interested in which same contractor when. I asked who.

Hon. Mohit: I am giving you it.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Young SC: I am not speaking to you, Minister. I am speaking to—

Mr. Chairman: Let us just take the answer.

Mr. Young SC:—my friend from Couva South.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, calm down. Let us just take the answer.

Hon. Mohit: So, Mr. Chair, I have been engaged in paying a lot of arrears in this Ministry, and this arrears were for that of Janitorial Services.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Mohit: MTS, $1.1 million.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. So, it is MTS.

Hon. Mohit: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: All right, let us move on now, shall we? Item 003: Social Welfare, page 415.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman: I am sorry?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—we did not get to ask any more questions on 002.

Mr. Chairman: No. The practice is I do not ask any more questions. I look up.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, no, no.

Mr. Chairman: If no hands are raised, then I move on.

Mr. Young SC: She had her hand up.

Mr. Chairman: I did not see your hand.

Mr. Young SC: My head was blocking—[*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Well, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, I was just about to say. I know your head is big, but it is not that big, trust me.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Very. I will give that concession.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: All right, so let us move to 003: Social Welfare, page 415. Diego Martin Central.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister 003/16. Contract Employment. I am seeing an increase of $155,000, taking your estimates this fiscal to $1.3 million. Can you give us the number of persons that the Ministry, in this Division, currently employs and if you have any vacant positions?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, I can do that. So, this particular line Item services both Social Welfare and Food Support. Just to be clear, there are 33 positions, 17 filled, and 16 vacant. Social Welfare has 14 positions, seven filled. Food Support Trinidad has 10 positions, five filled. Food Support Tobago has nine positions, with five filled. That is it, Mr. Chair.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you. Minister, the increase of 155 is to account for new employees, or have you all increased the salaries of those contract workers?

Hon. Mohit: Member, some NIS and some to fill positions.

Mr. de Nobriga: Can I ask how many positions you expect to fill this year?

Hon. Mohit: The HR unit is currently engaged in a process, so I will have to get that for you.

Mr. de Nobriga: So, Chairman, through you, can I ask the Minister—I

understand what she has said—but I am formally asking if I can get that information in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I will attempt to do so, as I said before.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Under Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. Would the Minister be able to indicate whether there will now be an engagement of communities in various social welfare activities, including community parenting programmes and the like?

Hon. Mohit: Member, this is Social Welfare Division.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I know.

Hon. Mohit: In terms of outreaches, we have never stopped. I think the Ministry would have engaged in over 100 outreach programmes coming from various entities within the country. So, of course, the Ministry will continue and cater to such provisions.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I understand that there has been a reduction in the usual number of engagements with communities. So, I am just asking whether this will return?

Hon. Mohit: Member, from my information, and what I was presented with when the outreach came before us, there has been an increase, actually, and any request that comes to the Ministry, whether which area, it is approved for the Welfare Services, the National Family Services, other units, Gender Affairs, et cetera, to go on out into the communities and support the citizens.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson Regis: I have other information, but I would not challenge you at this time.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, if I could move to 22: Short-term Employment. I am seeing a decrease here of $100,000. Minister, could we start with the number of short-term workers?

Hon. Mohit: Right, Short-term Employment, Member, this would be covering 30—so, Member, this would cover our 30 SSDOs, and in addition to that, some office attendants and cleaners for the Social Welfare Division, good? Are you okay with that?

Mr. de Nobriga: So far, yes.

Hon. Mohit: Good.

Mr. de Nobriga: So, in this sense, Minister, does this Vote also cover Social Welfare and Food Support? Or is this Vote only specific to Social Welfare?

Hon. Mohit: Food Support Officers are in Social Welfare offices.

Mr. de Nobriga: Fair enough. I am asking because you broke out a previous allocation to me. So, I am asking if this is also broken out in that way?

Hon. Mohit: So, it is under the same line Item, Member.

Mr. de Nobriga: Fair enough. Minister, SSDOs, if you could just clarify that for me, please.

Hon. Mohit: Social Service Delivery Officers. They are treating with the backlog that we currently have at the offices in place of those persons who are supposed to be there based on the Service Commission positions.

Mr. de Nobriga: Alright. And the backlog in this sense, would be a backlog of what?

Hon. Mohit: When I first came to this House, it was over 6,500. From my understanding now, based on the figures that were presented to me recently, that would be about 4,000 still in backlog.

Mr. de Nobriga: And these would be grants and pensions, and that sort of thing?

Hon. Mohit: Correct, core grants, legislated grants, that fall under the Ministry.

Mr. de Nobriga: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, I just wanted some clarification. Is there a Food Support Unit?

Hon. Mohit: Correct, yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: There is?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Alright, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Item 003/57: Postage. Minister, there is an increase of some $600,000 for postage. Can you speak to that?

Hon. Mohit: Member, this is particularly for those recipients who benefit from the Ministry via cheques, life certificate notices, bulk mail, and office correspondence.

Mr. Romain: So, you anticipate that there would be an increase in cheques, Minister, perhaps? Because I know there is an effort to do ACH direct to bank accounts and so on. So—

Hon. Mohit: Correct. So, there is now the mandatory direct deposit effective August1st. However, you have 38, or so, persons still on the cheque-based system. They have to be transitioned.

Mr. Romain: Member, 38?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, about the 38,000 persons—

Mr. Romain: Or, thousand—

Hon. Mohit:—who were there before, pre-August1st. So, they have to be transitioned into the direct deposit system. So, you still have to print cheques for some time.

Mr. Romain: But given the fact that last year it was $800, 000, Minister, are these new recipients for the last—?

Hon. Mohit: Whether they are new recipients—

Mr. Romain: No, because I am saying if last year the figure was $800, 000, which would have been sufficient for the posting of cheques, and so on, so the increase of $600,000, is it that this is to cater for new cheques—

Hon. Mohit: Member, remember I just said it is not just cheques. It is life certificates, bulk mail, and other office correspondence. So, it is not just cheques.

Mr. Romain: No, but I would you imagine all of this—this is recurrent expenditure, so you would have had these—is it there is an increase in the number of persons that you have to send these documentations to?

Hon. Mohit: Well, we are treating with a backlog. So, it is not just what comes in the fiscal year. It is a backlog from various years before. So, obviously, you will have to expend [*Inaudible*]—

Mr. Romain: And that is the 38,000?

Hon. Mohit: Correct.

Mr. Chairman: Shall we move on? Diego Martin West, or should we go?

Mr. Des Vignes: I just want confirmation from the Minister with regard to the question asked by my colleague: Is this a backlog in terms of packages or payments for postage?

Mr. Chairman: Can you identify the line Item?

Mr. Des Vignes: It is the same line Item, Postage; 57, that my colleague was speaking to.

Mr. Chairman: Right. And can you ask your question now?

Mr. Des Vignes: Oh, ask it again? Okay, Chair. I was asking if the backlog that the Minister was speaking of, if the backlog is payments for postage or payments in terms of the actual packages and documents, or is it a combination because we have, obviously, the big increase that my colleague highlighted?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, there is a process by which you get items out to recipients. In terms of the increase, as well, there would need to be quite a few outreach programmes, in terms of the direct deposit system. As I said before, the transition of persons who are currently on the cheque-based system, so, this increase is also to cater for that, because it will cost the Ministry some funds to have those persons transition, in terms of the outreach events and whatnot, because we definitely have to go—so, in terms of the mails, et cetera, going to those persons who would need to transition from the cheque-based system to the direct deposit system, this is part of the increase. This is what it will cater for as well.

11.10 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Malabar/Mausica, I saw your hand was up.

Mr. Romain: Yeah, just on the same line Item, Chair. So, Minister, is all of this being done in-house, or is there any outsourcing taking place?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, I think we are all well aware that TTPost will send the mail of the Ministry.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, would you be able to indicate whether persons have been getting the reminders about the completion of their life certificates via mail?

Hon. Mohit: You asked e-mail, right?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is posted by the mail.

Hon. Mohit: You asked email or mail?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, mail.

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Member, I can confirm that. In addition to that, I believe they are called that as well.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, the persons who are employed under line Items 16 and 22, are these persons employed in the local authorities or are they at head office?

Hon. Mohit: That is under Social Welfare?

Mr. de Nobriga: Under Social Welfare, yes.

Hon. Mohit: Contract and short-term, you are asking me about?

Mr. de Nobriga: Yes, yes.

Hon. Mohit: Well, we do not have local authorities, but we have local boards.

Mr. de Nobriga: Sorry.

Hon. Mohit: Yes.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you for the clarification; under the local boards.

Hon. Mohit: Member, across the board.

Mr. de Nobriga: Across the board. So, Chairman, can I request in writing from the Minister a breakdown of the number of persons who are employed in the local boards and the number of vacant posts in the local boards? Can I also ask that the backlog that the Minister spoke about, how that is distributed across the local boards as well?

Mr. Chairman: All right. Can I make this suggestion that, in order for clarity, that you could perhaps reduce your request into writing asking specific questions.

Mr. de Nobriga: No, Mr. Chairman, there is a *Hansard* and that request is on the *Hansard*.

Mr. Chairman: No, I am just saying, out of clarity, and I am merely making a suggestion for efficiency. That is all I am suggesting. If you want a clear answer for efficiency and clarity, you perhaps may want to consider asking specific things in writing. But that is a matter entirely for you. All right.

Let us move on. 007: Disability Affairs Unit, page 416. 008: Gender Affairs Division, page 417. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, I am seeing a decrease in a decrease in contract employment. So 008, line Item 16. Minister, what accounts for this $1.6 million decrease? **Hon. Mohit:** Member, some steps are being taken to fill some vacant positions in this particular division. The decrease, I believe,

what would have transpired—just a second, let me just confirm this before I say it.

Mr. de Nobriga: Sure.

Hon. Mohit: Right. So, Member, what would have transpired is the one person in this particular unit would have transferred from contract employment to a service commission appointment, an established position, which is the current director.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Minister. Minister, you are saying there was one person that was employed there, but your revised estimate for 2026 was $2.6 million. Is it that you had more persons employed in that division in the last fiscal? More than just that one?

Hon. Mohit: Member, there are eight filled contract positions as well. Yes? So, apart from that person transitioning, there are eight filled positions.

Mr. de Nobriga: So, the one person who left—

Hon. Mohit: No, she did not leave.

Mr. de Nobriga: The one person who left the division, or sorry, transitioned to permanent. But you are also hoping to bring on new persons as well via contract?

Hon. Mohit: There is hope to do that. As I said, there is a current HR process occurring at the Ministry. In addition to that, they have some short-term arrangements there in that particular division.

Mr. de Nobriga: All right. So, Minister, just so I am clear on it. You have one person in a division who is permanently employed now and you have eight contract workers. Correct? And those nine persons in total, you expect—well, sorry, for the eight persons that million that you have assigned to them will cover them for the year?

Hon. Mohit: Correct. Right, so we are covering them as well as their statutory

obligations. Good?

Mr. Chairman: St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On this same line Item, 16, I am just trying to be clear. The one person that has transitioned has caused the reduction of $1,600,000?

Hon. Mohit: No, I did say that.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am trying to clarify.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I answered this already.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is a decrease of $1,600,000. And I am trying to clarify. You said there was one person that transitioned, and I am asking—

Mr. Chairman: I think the Minister gave an answer to that. It was one person amongst other persons who were transferred. So, perhaps the clarity may come from a rereading of the *Hansard* in that regard. Trincity/Maloney.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, but—sorry, sorry. Mr. Chairman, I am sorry. But I have—

Mr. Chairman: I have moved on to Trincity/Maloney St. Ann's East. I will come back to you shortly.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chairman, you moving on is—but I am asking a question. You cannot just move on in the middle of the question I am asking, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: The answer was asked and answered, Trincity/Maloney.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chairman, I have been listening and following the answer, you know. And I am saying that I—

Mr. Chairman: Well, what I am telling you—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—I am not clear what the Minister said.

Mr. Chairman: St. Ann's East, can you allow me to speak, please?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, Mr. Chairman, can I be allowed to ask my question and to clarify?

Mr. Chairman: Well, you may. And you have been permitted to ask your question, but simply, the Minister has answered. I have answered that already, so I suppose the short answer to that question you are asking is asked and answered. I am moving to Trincity/Maloney.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr.—

Mr. Chairman: St. Ann's East, please, allow me to speak. I am moving to Trincity/Maloney. Should you have another question, you are free to raise your hand. I will come back to you. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I will give way to my colleague.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. St. Ann's East, you can ask.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I am asking simply. The Minister said that the head of the division had transitioned into the public service, right? So, I am asking—and the Minister did not identify that—the $1,600,000 decrease which she identified was because of the Director moving, is it simply that? Are there other persons that have moved out? Because you started off saying you want to fill positions here.

Hon. Mohit: I did not start off saying that. That was asked to me.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, Minister. The question was asked about the decrease, and you said you wanted to fill positions, and you were clarifying with your public servants, and then you came back, and you said that the director had moved to the

public service.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, the Member asked me how many positions I have filled other than that position. Mr. Chairman, what I will share, we met a skeletal unit here. All right, in the Gender Affairs Division. We are working to fill some of the vacancies.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And that is why I am asking. If you are working to fill some of the vacancies, how could you have a decrease? That is all I am asking. You have a decrease in the allocation. And that is what I told you. You said in the first place.

Hon. Mohit: So, what is your question? Why the decrease?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: My question is, if the director has moved on, you have a decrease of $1,600,000, why exactly is that decrease so large? Because the salary could not just be of the director, so what else accounts for the decrease?

Hon. Mohit: I will have to check on that for you.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, you did not answer the question in the first place then? And that is what I am saying, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, the Member—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—when I asked first you said—

Hon. Mohit:—for Diego Martin Central—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—asked and answered, Mr. Chairman. And if I did not go further, it would have been left at that.

Mr. Chairman: St. Ann's East, I am not inviting an editorial comment, okay?

Hon. Mohit: I do not think St. Ann's East listened.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yeah, but you have to at least allow people to answer the

questions. I am asking the Minister—

Hon. Mohit: But I answered the question.

Mr. Chairman: St. Ann's East, can I just tell you I am not inviting an editorial comment. We are here to ask questions, elicit answers. If the answers are unsatisfactory to you, you may press for an answer. In circumstances where the Minister says, "I will provide the answer", you may seek to hold the Minister to the undertaking or the suggestion that the Minister will provide the answers. But it is quite frankly counterproductive for us to engage in this constant back and forth, alright?

11.20 a.m.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chairman, I am respectfully—

Mr. Chairman: St. Ann's East, perhaps you are belabouring under the mistaken impression that I am inviting a response, so I am—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am elected here to speak, and I am elected to ask questions.

Mr. Chairman: I am not inviting a response from you.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And when I am asking questions, it is wrong for you, Mr. Chairman, to say, "Asked and answered"—

Mr. Chairman: Do not suggest to me that it is wrong.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—when the questions were not answered.

Mr. Chairman: I am running these proceedings, and I am bearing the timeline in mind.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: You—[*Inaudible*]—asked and answered.

Mr. Chairman: Because the Minister said, "Asked and answered." I am not—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: St. Ann's East, I am warning you. Please do not engage in a disputatious exchange with me, all right?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]—ask questions.

Mr. Chairman: I fully understand that, but you are here to ask proper questions.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well then, you cannot say, "Asked and answered"—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: All right, I propose to move forward now.

Mr. Des. Vignes: Mr. Chair, we have questions on this side.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, yes, I forgot.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. Minister under 01: Travelling and Subsistence, I notice a decrease. Can you say if this means that there will be less outreach through the Gender Affairs Division? And there is a—

Hon. Mohit: Chairman, this line Item, Member, does not deal with outreach programmes. This is specifically for public officers.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I know that it is for public officers.

Hon. Mohit: But you are asking me about outreach.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No. The public officers who do the travelling are usually the ones who do the outreach, so I am asking if there is a decrease, if there will be less outreach.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, the answer to that is no. There will be no decrease in outreach efforts from this Ministry.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But the travelling has—could you say then, why travelling and subsistence have decreased? Is it because there are less people?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, there is only one scheduled travelling officer in this

Division.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And so, given the decrease, they will be doing less outreach.

Ms. Mohit: So you see, Mr. Chair, why I am saying, "Asked and answered"?

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I think—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But you did not say, "Asked and answered" to this question.

Ms. Mohit: You asked me if there will be less outreach. I am saying to you, no. What do you want more?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I want a true answer. I want a true answer.

Hon. Mohit: Why are you telling me to give you—[*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is what I want more: a true answer.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no. Trincity/Maloney, no. Hang on. The question—

Ms. Mohit: I am not Trincity/Maloney. I give correct answers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: What you are trying to draw is an inference on that. I am not so sure that this is the right forum to draw those types of inferences. It really is to ask questions. Whatever inference you may wish to draw from the answers which you have elicited might be for another forum. So can we just stick to the question asking rather than editorializing with inferences which you may wish to draw? And Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West will explain to you that where there are two inferences of equal weight to be drawn, the one more favourable to the person answering should be drawn.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Given the fact that I am also an attorney at law, Mr. Chairman, I am well aware.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: I beg your pardon. I seem to have forgotten that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You have. Mr. Chairman, also, I noticed a decrease in fuel, which also allowed me to draw a similar inference—that is, 96: Fuel and Lubricants. There is a decrease; hence, less travel; hence, less outreach.

Mr. Chairman: Can you—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is the inference that I drew.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, well, I have—and that is the point that I am making. You can ask a question. The use of inferential evidence might perhaps be for another forum—not in the form of a question that you may wish to ask. Minister.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure if Trincity/Maloney would want this answer, but we are monitoring the usage of vehicles within this Ministry. Nobody will be picking up any Minister's friend to take them to parties anymore in this Ministry.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, Mr. Chairman, people will now just be picking up Ministers' friends and family to go to the groceries and other such places.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, not this Minister.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Hon. Mohit: This Minister only goes to clients of the Ministry to present grants.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah, not groceries.

Mr. Chairman: I think we have—all right—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I am sorry if I drew an inference there—

Hon. Mohit: Correct.

Mr. Chairman: This is going nowhere.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—but that is from an understanding on my part.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Item 22: Short-term Employment. In 2026, the original budgeted figure was 200,000. However, 900,000 was spent on short-term employment. So the first part of my question is: What was the reason for this big jump? And 800,000 for 2027: What does this short-term employment seek to cover? What particular issues does it seek to resolve?

Hon. Mohit: Member, Item 22: Short-term Employment—based on what you are asking me, there are eight short-term employees currently under this particular line Item. The funds, based on what I have in front of me, will be sufficient to carry through the fiscal year.

Mr. Des. Vignes: Okay. Minister, I want to understand. The original budget in 2026 was 200,000. Why then was 900,000 spent on it? We have to understand Minister, that that is more than four times the amount was actually spent than what was budgeted. So that is the first part of my question—why in 2026 was four times the amount spent? And going forward, what particular activities are these short-term employees going to be involved in that we had to keep the figure at such a high figure of 800,000 into 2027?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, what would have transpired here, if I may share that with you: We had some arrears for a particular hotline in terms of domestic violence. We paid those arrears. And under this particular line Item, what we worked to do is to consolidate all of the phone banks into one venue. So when we worked on that particular project in terms of the consolidation, we are now only paying two hotline listeners under this particular line Item, so hence the reason for the decrease.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, originally, you said eight employees, and now we are talking about two employees?

Hon. Mohit: Yes. Two out of the eight are listeners for that particular hotline.

Mr. Des. Vignes: No further questions, Chair. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 417 to 419. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Division of Ageing; Item 003: Social Welfare; Item 006: National Family Services; Item 007: Disability Affairs Unit; Item 008: Gender Affairs Division. We move now to Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, pages 419-421. Item 004: International Bodies. Member for Arima.

Ms. Beckles: I had a question on 004—005, 04: St. Mary's Children's Home. There is a decrease of $2.3 million.

Hon. Mohit: 004—we are on—

Mr. Chairman: No.

Ms. Beckles: You are not on 419?

Hon. Mohit: No, not yet.

Mr. Chairman: No, we are on 004: International Bodies, Member.

Ms. Beckles: Okay, sorry. My apologies.

Mr. Chairman: Since there are no other questions on that, we move to 005: Non-Profit Institutions, and this, I think, is where perhaps your question arises.

11.30 a.m.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Hon. Minister, did you see it?

Hon. Mohit: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: It is line Item—under that Sub Head, it is line Item 04. Am I correct?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I was just enquiring the reason for that decrease of $2.3 million.

Hon. Mohit: Member, just a second, please.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sure, no problem.

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, what would have happened in the—closer to the end of the fiscal, there were some arrears which we needed to assist the St Mary's Children's Home with—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah.

Hon. Mohit:—over $1 million, from my understanding. So, hence the reason now you will see a decrease reflected because those arrears would have been paid.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, so that figure is to address the arrears.

Hon. Mohit: It addressed the arrears, so you will see it reflecting here as a reduced amount now.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: And can I then ask a similar question for St. Jude's.

Hon. Mohit: St. Jude's?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: The same—

Hon. Mohit: Yes. St. Jude's would be line Item—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah, 10—

Hon. Mohit:—10.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: And it is $1.2 million—just over $1.2 million.

Hon. Mohit: So, for St Jude's, Member, a similar circumstance there. You would see that decrease being reflected there because in terms of arrears, St Jude's would have received, closer to the end of the fiscal, $1.6 million. So, hence, you will see it reflected there now because those arrears were cleared.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Item 07: Households. Trincity Maloney?

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chairman—[*Inaudible*]—but I am still on 005, the last line Item, line Item 31.

Mr. Chairman: Contribution to Non-Profit Institutions.

Mr. Young SC: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Young SC: You there, Minister? 005/31.

Hon. Mohit: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: The last one, Contribution to Non-Profit Institutions.

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Member, I am there now. Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So, there has been a small reduction, but you would accept that with these bodies, every cent of assistance counts—

Hon. Mohit: Sure.

Mr. Young SC:—of $200,800. But when we look to the "Explanation", we see this is for the:

"…Red Cross Society

- Goodwill Industries…
- Family Planning…
- Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of Disabled People's…
- Rape Crisis…
- National Centre for Persons with Disabilities
- The Salvation Army…
- The Shelter Home for Women and Children
- Court Shamrock

And:

"- The Halfway House 2016".

All of these bodies have received reductions in government assistance, the subvention to them? Do you know?

Hon. Mohit: No, Member, it is no reductions. What is happening here, there is a sort of work-in-progress issue with the Rape Crisis Society and the Red Cross Society. The NGO Unit, they are currently working with them.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, now, I can tell you, and I am sure that most—

Hon. Mohit: Before you go on, their subventions remain pending though.

Mr. Young SC: Oh, there are pending, so it is some audit or something going on, or something.

Hon. Mohit: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. Mohit: We are working with them to try to—

Mr. Young SC: Get them out of that.

Hon. Mohit: Correct—compliance, and so on, to have them reach up to a level so they can get their subvention.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. I see—

Hon. Mohit: There is continuously liaison taking place every month. We get some form of reporting from our NGO Unit.

Mr. Young SC: I see the Minister of Finance is alert to this particular Item, so maybe, through you, to the Minister of Finance as well, having regard—and 41 of us in here know how difficult it is for some outside there right now, and how important these NGO bodies and the assistance that they give to them in particular, are, especially at this time. So, you see, the ones in particular that are dealing—the Halfway House, Shelter Home for Women and Children, Court Shamrock, et cetera, these bodies in particular, would you all give consideration, active consideration to an increase in the subventions to some of these bodies to provide some increased level of assistance?

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you for the question, hon. Member. If you would have checked, even the Actual for 2025, and for periods before, you would have seen that during our time in office, under this Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services, that we have in fact already increased the allocations—

Mr. Young SC: I saw that.

Hon. Tancoo:—to these entities, and consideration will continue to be given to continue to increase if and when so desired.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. And the Minister is quite right, and I was happy to see the increase, but that is quite understandable, because during the previous period, you had tens of thousands more people employed and now there is that lack of employment.

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

Mr. Young SC: What?

Mr. Chairman: Are you going to ask a question?

Mr. Young SC: I am having a conversation—

Mr. Chairman: Well, ask—

Mr. Young SC:—and yes, I will ask a question.

Mr. Chairman: Well, can we get to the question?

Mr. Young SC: As I am ready, yes. So, Minister of Finance, thank you for the explanation, and I ask that you continue to actively look at it, and I hope that you will continue to add to it.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, can I ask the Minister at line Item 38: Young Men's Christian Association, why there is no allocation for this year?

Hon. Mohit: Member, based on what I have with me here, there was no allocation requested by this particular entity for fiscal 2027, because there is a little issue with non-compliance of financial reporting, just like other entities I mentioned before. But the NGO Unit, they continue to work with these persons to ensure that they comply.

Mr. de Nobriga: Can I also ask—

Hon. Mohit: Let me just inform you that the non-compliance is since 2017. So, in some instances, you will find the Ministry is still trying to work with the entities, but at a certain point, you must stop and try to work with them to get up to par.

Mr. de Nobriga: Fair enough, Minister. Can I also ask, there is a reduction of $200,000 in terms of Support for Non-Profit – NGO—

Hon. Mohit: Which line Item?

Mr. de Nobriga: 45.

Hon. Mohit: 45.

Mr. Chairman: No, I do not think we have gotten there yet.

Hon. Mohit: Yeah, it is still the same line Item.

Mr. de Nobriga: We are on page 420, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I got it.

Mr. de Nobriga: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North—did the answer—sorry.

Mr. de Nobriga: No, I am still waiting on the answer. And do not move off of me after that, eh. I just have one more after that.

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, what happened here is we funded quite a few NGOs in this fiscal year, and some would have come over. Fourteen NGOs would have benefitted from grant support in this fiscal year. Now, you would have an allocation, but you have to ensure compliance, and so, on before you give the grant allocation. We would have paid off some as well from previously in terms of requests, so, hence you would see that being reflected there.

Mr. de Nobriga: Okay. So, Minister, just so I could clarify for my own self. The reduction is as a result of—

Hon. Mohit: Previous—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. de Nobriga: You no longer have to pay previous grants to—

Hon. Mohit: Those that were approved in the previous fiscal year—

Mr. de Nobriga: "Mm-hmm".

Hon. Mohit:—which was 2024/'25, yes, they would have been paid.

Mr. de Nobriga: All right. And you also have others, based on what you are saying, that for non-compliance will not be receiving support.

Hon. Mohit: No, these are one-off grants.

Mr. de Nobriga: Oh, so these are one-off grants?

Hon. Mohit: Correct. You work with organizations before you give a one-off grant to ensure that they comply. So, quite a few received in this—well, this fiscal, as at September 30th, you had SEWA TT; Bridges to the Heart, Down Syndrome Family Network; SWAY, Serving Women and Youth; Girls of Impact TT; Nurturing Development and Empowerment Organization; Coalition Against Domestic Violence; the Rose Foundation; San Fernando Centre for Displaced Persons; Caribbean Centre for Human Rights; Loveuntil Foundation; Ryu Dan Dojo Foundation; Touch of Joy Foundation; Churches in Action. The intention was to increase the number of one-off grants, and we were able to do that in the last discussion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

11.40 a.m.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you. Glad to see your colleagues getting behind you.

Mr. Chairman: Shall we get a question now in?

Mr. de Nobriga: In my five minutes, Mr. Chair, we can—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Arima?

Mr. de Nobriga: No, Chairman, I told you I had one more question.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, you have one more. I see.

Mr. de Nobriga: Can I ask—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I was just going to say, it is a follow-up on that.

Mr. de Nobriga: Sorry, my apologies Leader, I did not hear you.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, thank you very much for the list that you gave. So just in the interest of time, if you would provide the list and the amounts distributed. I know you probably have it, but—

Hon. Mohit: Sure. It is out in the public domain as well, but I will provide the list.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, kindly. That is it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Member.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chair. Minister, line Item 47: National Enrichment Centre, if you can just give us an idea as to why there is a decrease of $1 million to them.

Hon. Mohit: Member, under this particular line Item, this is to really cater for services at the NEC. The reduction, in particular, there is a little bit of a delay in terms of the therapeutic service arrangements. The expressions of interest, I believe that went out, and we are awaiting some feedback in terms of that. There were some procurement challenges, but once that gets up and running, we will be able to, hopefully, do that during the fiscal year. The reduction as it stands right now, based on when this allocation was given in the previous fiscal year, it was in

anticipation of, based on the work done by the Ministry thus far, the $3 million should be sufficient.

Mr. de Nobriga: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Item 007: Households. Trincity/Maloney, page 420.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, given the decrease of—

Mr. Chairman: Can you identify a line Item, please?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry. Senior Citizens Grant at this time.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Given the decrease that has been shown here, would the Minister be able to say what specific factors account for this decrease, and how is the reduced sum going to meet the increase in the grant, as stated by the Minister of Finance? Is there also going to be a change to the means test? Could I also ask, what measures will the Ministry implement to ensure that the reduction does not adversely affect those persons who are now receiving the grant, and those persons who will be coming on to receive their grant, and the consistency of the senior citizens payment?

Hon. Mohit: Sure. Mr. Chair, through you, Member, let me just state that no recipient will be affected. In addition to that, there are some challenges faced by the Ministry with the Social Welfare Division, and the data, which I shared recently, in terms of inaccurate information causing some wastage within the Division, millions of dollars in wastage, we are cleaning up that, in simple terms. As I indicated before, we are trying to also clear the backlog. However, if there are any challenges, one thing I am sure about is we will ensure that recipients are paid

on time every month. And if there are any challenges, as we have done in the last fiscal year, we will work hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Finance, who has been very cooperative with us, to ensure that all our grants are paid.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: With regard to the payment on time, we have had reports that there has been some delay in those payments, so are you going to work on improving that situation, especially as it relates to the senior citizens?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, from my information, there is one system utilized at the NIB for payment of grants, and what I can assure the national public of, and the Member, there has been no late payment of grants from the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I just want an explanation with regard to the fact that the amount is going up, but there is a major reduction. I still do not have clarity as it relates to that.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I was very clear on that, no recipient will be affected. All recipients will receive their grant payments. I do not think it is the work of any government not to pay social assistance grants.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Mohit: It is never the work of any government.

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

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, how many recipients are there of this grant under this line Item right now?

Hon. Mohit: You are asking about the Senior Citizens Grant?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry. Same 02, yeah, same line Item.

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, there are 118,121.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. The Ministry is intending to continue paying all of these persons, I mean, give or take a few when deaths, and so on, right, and all of that is going into the next year. Is there any projection in terms of a year-on-year increase on the pensions in this line Item or is it usually the same?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, I cannot answer that. Year-on-year increase, what are you trying to ask me, if there will be an increase in the amount we are paying?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, the number. The number of people, not the amount of—the number of people.

Hon. Mohit: Oh, the number of persons.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Hon. Mohit: Well, if you are clearing a backlog, Member, I anticipate there will be an increase. But however, you know in this system there are persons who may come on and off due to death, et cetera, so I cannot really give you an exact number.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: But you are generally catering for the same amount going into the next year, give or take, right? Well we are saying the same thing, Minister. Thank you.

Hon. Mohit: When you say "same amount", you mean 118,000 or in addition to that?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, we are saying the same thing. You are saying that there might some—there is a backlog, but some persons might come off, so, it is fine.

Hon. Mohit: Of course, we expect new persons to come onto the system.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, just one question. Minister, we had had a

previous figure of 124,000 senior citizens recipients, so is it 118,000 or 124,000?

Hon. Mohit: No, 118,000 current, but it is anticipated about 124,000.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Oh, that it could go up?

Hon. Mohit: Correct.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Alright.

Hon. Mohit: Keeping in mind the backlog.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And yet this reduced figure you say will cover.

Hon. Mohit: I said it about three times already.

Mr. Chairman: Alright.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I want to hear it a fourth time. Yes?

Mr. Chairman: Oh, come on. So let us—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, it will?

Hon. Mohit: No, you would not bully me, Member.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I, bully you?

Hon. Mohit: You would not tell me what you want to hear, the Chair will tell me that.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. Let us get on with it, shall we? Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 21: Transitional Housing, there is a reduction of $1 million, can the Minister speak to that?

Hon. Mohit: Which line Item, Member?

Mr. Romain: Item 21: Transitional Housing.

Hon. Mohit: You have to forgive me, Member, it is a lot of pages, alright, so just give me a few seconds, please. Item 21: Transitional Housing. So, Member, what has been happening is there has been a review of the facilities, and we are

attempting to operationalize some. The reduction, in particular—just give me one second, let me just clarify something.

[Minister c*onfers with techcocrat*]

So, Member, when I state Transitional Housing and it is being reviewed, the particular place of Hernandez Place, that particular facility is the one that is being reviewed, so, hence, you will see that reduction. It is not our intention to put anyone there at this point because of the conditions of it and the location of it.

11.50 a.m.

Mr. Romain: So, this $1million was attributed to that facility prior? Just that facility?

Hon. Mohit: Well, remember it is an estimate. So, yes.

Mr. Romain: How long would that review period be, Madam Minister?

Hon. Mohit: Well, it is currently taking place, Member. Based on what we meet there and when I have the reports before me, we will determine further.

Mr. Romain: Is the transition home at Carapo currently functional?

Hon. Mohit: Carapo?

Mr. Romain: Yes.

Hon. Mohit: Just a second, Member. [*Consults with technocrats*] Member, we anticipate very soon that facility will be operationalized. There was a ceremonial opening of the facility, but it was not ready at the point in time.

Mr. Romain: How long ago was that? I believe I attended that while I was still a candidate.

Hon. Mohit: Right. So, you would know how long ago if you attended.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Romain: Well, I would have toured the facility, and as far as I was aware, it appeared to be ready for intake.

Hon. Mohit: Yeah. A lot of things appear to be ready for you all.

Mr. Romain: All right. Well, it appeared to me to be ready for intake. So, can you tell me the challenges with that particular facility which is in the constituency of Malabar/Mausica?

Hon. Mohit: There is a process by which you would operationalize the facility. As I explained before, that process is currently taking place. That is why I said to you we anticipate it to open soon. I never said we are not opening it or operationalizing it.

Mr. Romain: No. I asked the question, Madam Minister, because I have persons who are in need of that particular service in my constituency. So, I am just trying to get an idea as to how long again they would have to wait because they are in need of those services.

Mr. Chairman: I think the answer has been forthcoming about three times.

Mr. Romain: Follow-up, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, can you indicate how many operational transitional facilities you currently have?

Hon. Mohit: Member, under this particular line Item, because under other divisions you would have those existing as well. Under this particular line Item, to be very clear, it always just catered for those two: Carapo and Hernandez Place.

Mr. Romain: Right. So, I am saying, if there is a reduction of $1 million, Minister, it means there is an allocation of $1 million. Where will that $1 million be going to since neither of these two facilities is currently operational?

Hon. Mohit: Well, it is the fiscal year of 2027. So, I just explained to you that we

anticipate to operationalize the facility. When you operationalize the facility, that is where the allocation will go towards.

Mr. Romain: Yeah. But there was an allocation previously, and it was not spent.

Hon. Mohit: Yeah. Well, I just explained to you, Member, that we could not operationalize it at the time. There was a review of the facility. Mr. Chair, I asked, and I answered this at length.

Mr. Chairman: I think, yeah. I propose to go to Arima first, Laventille West and then come to you.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 23: Children's Authority.

Hon. Mohit: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah. There is a decrease of $23 million. Could you indicate the reason for that substantial decrease?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, just I explained with St. Jude's, St. Dominic's and St. Mary's—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Mohit:—previously, what we would have done is we have worked with the Minister of Finance based on an ageing summary, meaning old bills, provided to us in the Ministry. An audit process was conducted. It is ongoing. As we receive reports on the audits, we are working with the Ministry of Finance to pay those bills. So, we would have covered, as at September 30th, $81 million in those payments. So that is why you would have seen a Revised Estimate of $173 million, but the approved allocation is 150. Since we paid all of those arrears and old bills, the allocation is now back to its normal. So, hence, you will see that reduction

being reflected there.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Hon. Mohit: It is not purposely done. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, just a follow-on from that conversation. Under the Children's Authority. So, is it that all arrears have now been cleared?

Hon. Mohit: No. I just said the audit process—

Mr. Young SC: Is continuing.

Hon. Mohit:—it is ongoing. As we receive, we are working with the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Young SC: All right. Good. Now, so with respect to this reduction of $24 million; $23.8 million, it is not that this is going to affect any of the staff at the Children's Authority, correct?

Hon. Mohit: Member, I just explained clearly—

Mr. Young SC: Arrears would not be arrears of staff, Minister.

Hon. Mohit: No.

Mr. Young SC: That is why I am getting at.

Hon. Mohit: The reduction that you are referring to is due to us paying off—

Mr. Young SC: Paying arrears.

Hon. Mohit:—arrears.

Mr. Young SC: I understood that.

Hon. Mohit: The $150million approved by the Cabinet is for the staff and operations of the Authority. Good?

Mr. Young SC: Which is what I would understand and assume.

Hon. Mohit: So, the allocation there presented in the yellow books, that is for the staffing and the operations of the Authority.

Mr. Young SC: I understand that, Minister. Let me break it down for you. So, the $150million is for staff and operations, correct?

Hon. Mohit: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: But you just told us there continues to be an audit process with respect to payment of arrears and all arrears have not been cleared, correct?

Hon. Mohit: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: So, therefore, that means there will still be, assuming after the completion of the audit process, that there still are some payments to be made. Those payments are not covered in the $150 million because you have made it very clear that this 150 is for the operations and for the staff. So, what would happen in that instance?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, I also made it very clear that we will continue to work with the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Young SC: Right. Okay. That is where I was getting. So, you will continue to get support from Finance. If you need more money, you will come back for more.

Hon. Mohit: We, therefore, work with the guidance of the Ministry of Finance, as well. Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

At this point in time, because the Children's Authority, in law, as the Chair would know, is the body that is now tasked with the mandatory responsibility from the Children Court that if certain children are deemed to be, you know, out of

control, et cetera, to use the layman's terms, they are sent to these bodies and these homes that are approved by the Children's Authority. They are the body that has the responsibility to make sure the children are looked after there. They are the body that pays some of these homes because it is outsourced, as you would know. Are you aware, at this stage, how many children you have under the State's care as a result of these types of court orders, please? Because, of course, that may fluctuate. Thank you.

Hon. Mohit: Member, you will have to give me a few seconds on that—

Mr. Young SC: No problem.

Hon. Mohit:—because it is various homes—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Mohit:—both private and public. [*Confers with technocrats*]

Mr. Chairman: For the economy of time, I think this might be more—

Hon. Mohit: Can I provide that—

Mr. Young SC: In writing?

Mr. Chairman:—in writing

Mr. Young SC: No problem. Would you identify the—well, we would not want the homes as public information. Yeah. So, can you just give the number that are currently under the State and what is expected?

Hon. Mohit: I can give you that number.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Hon. Mohit: I can give you an approximate, but I would prefer to get the accurate number.

Mr. Young SC: Understood.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: Thanks.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Laventille West, I see you vigorously raising your hand.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Not that I was ignoring you. I was just going in order of your seniority.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 007/08: Disability Grant. In fiscal 2026, a sum of $621 million was allocated in terms of the Revised Estimate. Can the hon. Minister indicate, firstly, how many beneficiaries would have benefited in 2026 from that disability grant allocation?

Hon. Mohit: Right. Disability Grant, Member?

Mr. Marcelle: Yes.

Hon. Mohit: So, the number of active clients that we have—are you asking adult or minor?

Mr. Marcelle: You could give me the aggregate and the—

Hon. Mohit: The one for both.

Mr. Marcelle:—and the one for both.

Hon. Mohit: So, that would be, disability grant, adults, 20,971, and minors, 4,039.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful. Now the hon. Minister of Finance would have announced an increase of $250 to the disability grants in this fiscal. Might I ask, firstly, whether all recipients under the disability grant beneficiaries would receive an increase of the $250 in this fiscal?

12.00 noon

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, just to be very clear, so we save some time as well. The core grants of the Ministry, that being, the Senior Citizens' Pension, Disability Assistance Grant, adult and minor, and Public Assistance Grant. In my opening statement as well, I did state that all of these recipients will receive their $250 increase.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Marcelle: Yes, deeply grateful, Minister. Now, you have indicated that all of these recipients, both the 20,000 adults and the 4,500 children, would receive their increase of the $250 per month in this fiscal. There is a decrease allocated in this fiscal by $73 million. It has reduced from $621 million to an average of $547 million. How do you account one, for the decrease in this fiscal in light of the indication that all recipients, their monthly grants would be increased by $250, which would mean that there would need to have more moneys available to spend. And further to which, how will it affect the distribution of the grants within this fiscal?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, the same answer I would have provided to the Member for Trincity/Maloney in terms of the SCP; that answer stands.

Mr. Marcelle: This is specific to the disability grant. However, you would have indicated—

Hon. Mohit: Well, it is core grants, the legislated grants.

Mr. Marcelle: Most respectfully, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Minister would have indicated, in relation to the Senior Citizens' Pension, that there are some discrepancies; there is some wastage in terms of some millions and so on. Is it that in the disability grant, that there is the same issue of wastage under the disability

grant and therefore you reduced the amount by $73 million. Is it that you underbudgeted and would then therefore have to come in the mid-year to increase same?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, I think I was very clear before in terms of the legislated grants. The SCP, the disability and the public assistance, I did indicate that there are some challenges when the Member for Trincity/Maloney would have asked the question and we are trying to work and fix that based on the reports that we have in front of us. Yes, you would see a decrease being reflected there. You have some wastage happening, well, in the sum of millions of dollars under these legislated grants.

You asked me about mid-year review as well. I did indicate before and it would stand for all legislated grants. The Member for St. Ann's East would have asked me as well about, you know, persons coming on and off the system, you are also faced with those challenges. The work will continue with the Ministry of Finance because it is never any intention not to pay recipients their funds at the end of the month or at the beginning of the month, rather.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Just one question, can the Minister give us an idea as to what the average processing time is for these grants?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, we all know the average processing time for all of these grants should be within 90 days. But when you froze a system and did not fill vacancies, you do not expect the process to be within 90 days.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Mohit: What we will expect when you do something like that—

Mr. de Nobriga: That was not the question.

Hon. Mohit:—is growing backlogs and now unfortunately, but fortunately, I have to treat with that, but this Government will get it done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, in 2025, the average processing time was more than 90 days, it was closer to six months. I am asking the Minister what the average processing time is. I understand the need for the response, but it is a simple question. If the Minister understands—

Hon. Mohit: And I gave you a simple answer.

Mr. de Nobriga: No, but you have not given me an answer, Minister. There is a—

Hon. Mohit: I did.

Mr. de Nobriga: You have said what it should be. I acknowledge the fact that it is not what it should be—

Hon. Mohit: Well, if you had employed people—

Mr. de Nobriga:—I am simply—

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Hon. Mohit:—and put them in social welfare, we would not have been faced with a backlog.

Mr. de Nobriga: Chairman. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Mohit: And the processing time would have been very—

Mr. Chairman: All right. Let us not descend into this. I suppose the short answer we can glean from that, there is no stated processing time—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. de Nobriga: The Minister does not know!

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no. That is not fair.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, I will not appreciate that.

Mr. Chairman: That is not a fair assessment of the answer.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, I have asked a very, very simple question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, and the Minister has tried her best to answer.

Mr. de Nobriga: She did not, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, I will let you know and I did tell you before, the usual, time for processing should be within 90 days. I did say that.

Mr. de Nobriga: That is not what the Minister—Minister, that is not what you said.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, am I going to be allowed to answer or is he—

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Member for Diego Martin Central.

Hon. Mohit:—going to be allowed to get on like a—

Mr. de Nobriga: Well, then be truthful in your answer.

Mr. Chairman: If you are—

Mr. de Nobriga: That is not what you said.

Mr. Chairman: Listen, if you are asking an open-ended question, you are inviting an answer—

Mr. de Nobriga: I did not ask an open-ended question. I asked a very simple question, Chairman.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, Member for Diego Martin Central, can I just tell you. I am not raising my voice at you and there is absolutely no need for you to raise your voice at me. I am just a few metres away from you, and I can hear you. I can assure you the acoustics of this room are second to none. I can assure you that I am hearing you perfectly well. And might I add that the decibel level of your exhortations to me does not add any incremental intellectual value to them. So do not feel the need to shout at me, please. Okay? The short answer to what I was telling you is that the Minister gave an answer. If you want to distil a response to that, that is fine. But do not engage in an argument with the Minister. You asked a question, to me, in my interpretation, it was an open-ended question. You may not like the answer you are getting, but the Minister is giving an answer as best as she can. And I—

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hang on a second. I did not interrupt you. It is mildly impolite for you to disturb the Minister while she is answering. So if you want to let her give her answer, you may then seek to follow up with a question, once it is permissible. Minister, go ahead.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, if the previous Government left a backlog, do you expect the processing time to be within 90 days? Obviously, not. So, Mr. Chairman, if I have to clean up all the mess that they left—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Mohit:—I certainly cannot assure 90 days.

Mr. Chairman: All right. So, can I for economy of time and I wish to move on from this.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, I am asking—

Mr. Chairman: Hang on, Member for Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: I am asking a question.

Mr. Chairman: Hang on. Hang on. Can I just, for economy of time, seek to distil a one-sentence answer from you that at this point in time, it is impossible to have a consistent time frame?

Hon. Mohit: But I said that.

Mr. Chairman: Right, okay.

Mr. de Nobriga: I am not finished, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, there are a few things that I just want to clarify with you, Sir. The first one is that you have said that I asked an open-ended question.

Mr. Chairman: That is any interpretation.

Mr. de Nobriga: I—well, Mr. Chairman, I asked, what was the average processing time?

Mr. Chairman: Well, you want me to answer you as to why?

Mr. de Nobriga: No, no, Mr. Chairman, I do not need to—I am stating something. If you want to afterwards say what you want to say, my five minutes, my five minutes will—

Mr. Chairman: No, you want me to tell you why I said it is open-ended?

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, you asked me not to interrupt you and you are doing that, Sir. So, if you will allow me to speak.

Mr. Chairman: No, wait, I can handle myself.

Mr. de Nobriga: All right.

Mr. Chairman: I do not seek or require the assistance of anyone in here with this.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I asked a question about the average processing time, an answer—

Hon. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. de Nobriga: No, Minister, you did not. An answer was given about what we know it should be, which I acknowledge. We know what it should be. We also know that in 2025, it was six months, that is what it was, in six months, when the PNM was in government. So we acknowledge that, Mr. Chairman. I have asked and the Minister has not answered other than to talk about what happened. It is a simple question, does the Minister know what the average processing time is for these grants, whether in total as an average for all of the grants or per grant? Does she have an idea of what the processing time is? And Mr. Chairman, I will add to that, it is because as elected Members of this House—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. de Nobriga:—we have constituents who come to us and ask us that question, that is what this process is also about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: And can I remind you, for economy of time, that there are other alternatives, quicker processes which ensure a far degree of greater clarity, contained in these Standing Orders and there is a small, tiny piece of legislation,

which you may or may not know about, okay, called the Freedom of Information Act, by which you are guaranteed—

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman:—hang on—by which you are guaranteed an answer in 30 days.

12.10 p.m.

So, if you do not get the answer which you seek here in a satisfactory enough manner, or with a sufficient detail of clarity and detail, there are other alternatives. All I am say to you, is given the will vagaries of administrative reasoning—which is not binary in nature, as you well know, you were a former Minister. Ministerial decision-making is not binary in nature, rather it is polycentric in nature. All right? So, many factors—the short answer in plain English, what I am telling you, is that many factors inform that decision-making, and many factors inform what goes into setting a timeline. And that is all the Minister—and that is why if you were listening to me, I said, "Minister, can I distill your answer to saying that having regard to the vagaries of factors involved, you cannot consistently say that it is consistently applied?" And she said, "Yes, I have answered that."

Mr. de Nobriga: No, she did not, but—

Mr. Chairman: Let us agree to disagree without being disagreeable to each other, shall we? All right, let us move on. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, with regard to the Transitional Housing—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Transitional Housing—

Mr. Chairman: 21. Am I to take it, it is 21?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We are still under 21, which is 007/21: Transitional Housing. Could I ask, with regard to the homes in Couva and Penal—the home in Couva was specifically for victims of human trafficking, and the one in Penal was for transitional housing for families and, of course, there is the assessment centre for the socially displaced. Are these also still closed or is it being opened? If they are still closed, could you say what is happening to the victims of human trafficking, and for persons who need family-type housing?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Member. The Penal Transitional Centre, formally known as the Penal Transitional Centre, is now the National Prosthetics Centre in Penal, so that has been transferred to the Ministry of Health.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Changed. Okay.

Hon. Mohit: The Couva Centre that you are referring to, for victims of human trafficking, there are further discussions happening on that particular project with the Ministry of Homeland Security. So, I cannot give you too much details on that right now. The assessment centre—are you referring to the assessment centre in Port of Spain?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The one on South Quay.

Hon. Mohit: That one will not fall under this line Item.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. So, with regard to persons who need transitional housing for families, what happens with these people?

Hon. Mohit: So, our NGO Unit, they have liaisons with all of those entities that fall under the Ministry and who have registered with the Ministry. In addition to that, I believe gender affairs also work with entities who provide support. They make contact and we have not had any issues where we are unable to place anyone

in homes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And the victims of human trafficking?

Hon. Mohit: The victims of human trafficking, at this point—those facilities were not ready, when I received them, to house anyone—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, I know that, so I am saying that—

Hon. Mohit:—but terms of victims—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—they were working on that and that was specifically for that purpose.

Hon. Mohit:—the Ministry of Homeland Security they are currently treating with those matters through their registered entities.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille East/Morvant.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. To the Minister, under line Item 007/03: Social Assistance, would it be possible for the Minister to provide a list of recipients—

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I am not hearing that Member for some reason.

Mr. Birchwood: Sorry, yes, 007/03, would it be possible for the Minister to provide a list of recipients with a geographical breakdown of recipients?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I cannot give people's private information on social support. I do not apologize.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I think we will—

Mr. Birchwood: A geographical breakdown of recipients?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, can you give that now, or would you—

Hon. Mohit: What do you mean by geographical breakdown? We do not work

like that; we work by local boards. If you are asking me for a breakdown of recipients according to local boards, you can get that.

Mr. Birchwood: We will take that, no problem.

Hon. Mohit: But you cannot get a list of recipients.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: All right, St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman—

Hon. Mohit: Member, we will have to attempt to get those figures for you, okay?

Mr. Chairman: St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chairman, with regard to line Item 03, under this same Households, but it refers to the others where there are large reductions as well, like 02, so the Senior Citizens Grant, the Disability Grant, the Transitional Housing—not the Transitional Housing so much, but the grants. So, the Disability Grant, the Senior Citizens Grant and the Social Assistance. The Minister spoke to clearing up the list and dealing with discrepancies. Is there going to be any change in the criteria for the qualification for these grants going forward?

Hon. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]—grants, Member.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I know.

Hon. Mohit: If there are to be any changes, that means changes to the legislation.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That is what I am asking.

Hon. Mohit: So, at this point—no, if you can give me a chance. Why are you always so aggressive?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, I am not aggressive at all.

Hon. Mohit: I am answering you.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Please. Please answer me.

Hon. Mohit: So, these matters—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Hon. Mohit:—the Legal Unit is working with the Office of the Attorney General right now. But in terms of what you are asking, criteria, I know of none of those at this point.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, when you said, the Legal Unit is working with the Attorney General right now, in terms of changing the legislation?

Hon. Mohit: No, they are reviewing all legislation before the Ministry.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am speaking specifically with regard to these legislative grants that you mentioned. So, there is review going on—legal review going with regard to these grants?

Hon. Mohit: All legislative—

Mr. Chairman: I think the fair—

Hon. Mohit: All legislation, should I say rather, that are before the Ministry, the Legal Unit is working with the Office of the Attorney General. In terms of criteria SCP, Social Assistance, Disability Grant, there are no recommended changes before us in terms of criteria.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, there are no recommended changes but the legislation is being reviewed?

Hon. Mohit: All legislation.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, kindly.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So, Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, both of them at page 421. There being no questions, hon.

Members, before proceeding—

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: On 011?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, National Commission for Self Help Limited, page 421.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: 01: National Commission for Self Help Limited.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, I observe that you have in increase allocation of $21 million. Can you indicate how many persons, organizations, that would have received benefits under this line Item in this fiscal year?

Hon. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, National Commission for Self Help Limited.

Hon. Mohit: You want to know how many recipients?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, this recently came across to the Ministry based on the realignment.

Mr. Gonzales: Right.

Hon. Mohit: So, I can certainly—there is review there right now. Of course, there are some discussions that need to be held, and I can attempt to provide that at a later date.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, yes.

12.20 p.m.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, the National Commission for Self-Help deals with a variety of request that vary in size in composition and as a result that number of

persons affected would vary as well. The Minister would provide as much information as she can in due course.

Mr. Gonzales: So, the Minister would provide more detailed information in writing? Minister?

Mr. Tancoo: As best as possible. It is based on requests.

Mr. Gonzales: Well, the information will be there.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Shall we move on? Thank you. Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Bodies and Similar Bodies, Item 004: Statutory Bodies appears on page 421 of the *Draft Estimate of Development Programme*. However, the detailed examination of these allocations is contained in *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*.

We will now move to *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, page 555. We go to Sub-Head 01: The Lady Hochoy Centres of Trinidad and Tobago. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 555. Item 001: The Lady Hochoy Home North. Item 002: The Lady Hochoy Home South. 003: Penal Day Care and Training Centre. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: Lady Hochoy Home. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you. Minister at the 02/001/22 Short-term Employment. I am seeing an increase of $79,500. Are you all expecting to bring on more short-term employees at Lady Hochoy Home North?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, it is not us bringing on these persons.

Mr. de Nobriga: Agreed, Minister.

Hon. Mohit: So, this will be Lady Hochoy. The increase in allocation will be to provide a measure of support for projected short-term costs for 2027, including the engagement of personnel to meet operational needs. Seven projected positions: Two physiotherapists, one project coordinator, one human resource officer, one accountant, one human resource assistant, and one garment designer. What is happening is to facilitate the transformation to support services. The NGO unit has been working with Lady Hochoy for the last year, okay?

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Item 003: Penal Day Care and Training Centre. Okay, Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, could I ask, with regard to this Item, is there an intention to increase the amount of activity at this centre cause I notice there are a series of increases in telephones, office stationery and supplies, materials and supplies, repairs and maintenance.

Hon. Mohit: Member, yes, there is an intention to increase. As I said, the NGO unit would have been working with the Lady Hochoy Home.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, not Lady Hochoy Home.

Mr. Chairman: This is Penal Day Care and Training Centre.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We are on Penal Day Care and Training Centre.

Hon. Mohit: Oh, you moved to Penal.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, this is 003, Minister.

Hon. Mohit: Yes, from my information from our NGO unit—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Keep up, keep up, Minister. Keep up.

Hon. Mohit: It is just right above, Member. The Head is there. So, the Penal Day Care and Training Centre—yes, but the NGO unit continues to work with the entity.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would you be able to give us an idea of what is intended?

Hon. Mohit: In terms of whether we intend to increase?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, what is intended to be done?

Hon. Mohit: I am told normal classroom activities, for the support of normal classroom activities.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, but you expect an increase in persons attending the day care centre?

Hon. Mohit: For activities, not the number of persons. So, the activities will increase.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Oh, you will increase the amount of activities that the centre offers?

Hon. Mohit: Correct.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Alright, thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Alright.

Mr. Hosein: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Sub-Head 003: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: Lady Hochoy Home - North; Item 002: Lady Hochoy Home - South. Item 003: Penal Day Care and Training Centre; Sub-Head 004: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households. Item 009: Other

Transfers.

41: Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired, page 563. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Services. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households. Item 009: Other Transfers.

42: Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association. 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.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimate of Development Programme*, page 189. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme Consolidated Fund. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. C. Welfare Services page 189. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful, please. Line Item 09/004/14 C. 096 National Enrichment Centre. In the Revised Estimate in 2026, it was $6million, and we are seeing an estimate of $1.4 million in 2027. Could the hon. Minister indicate what would be the estimated scope of works that will be executed in fiscal 2027 on this centre?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member there were some procurement challenges in the previous fiscal year, so the works that were planned in the last fiscal it is our intention to get those works carried out. So, there would be some ceiling, lighting,

flooring, and internal upgrade building works. There would also be the installation of the two-stop wheelchair 13-passenger elevator lift. The supply and installation of some air conditioning units, the upgrade of the water treatment system, and some computers and smart monitors.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful. Line Item 130: Construction of Houses for Persons with Disabilities. I note hon. Minister that in fiscal 2026, $3.5 million was allocated at the start of fiscal 2026. However, the Revised Estimates indicate only $1.5 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate the reason for less than $2 million being spent in fiscal 2026 on this project?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, what would have transpired in fiscal 2026—in terms of the project development with the Ministry of Housing, that took some time. There would have been some review because we are trying to get the best possible way forward. So, in this fiscal year we will cater for five units.

Mr. Marcelle: Have the respective areas already been allocated—the sites allocated for the specific five units?

Hon. Mohit: Member, they are in the process of doing so.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful. Is it the intention in terms of the estimated time for the project to be completed within this fiscal?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Member, all attempts will be made to get this project done.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful, please.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Trincity/Maloney

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, under Item 130: Construction of Houses for Persons with Disabilities. The PSIP document states that there would be 60

houses constructed. Would the Minister be able to give us a list of the intended locations for these houses?

Hon. Mohit: Yes. Member, I believe the 60 that you saw in the PSIP—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Hon. Mohit:—that would have been over a period of time. Once we get that, because we are working with the Ministry of Housing, once we get the locations, of course that can be provided.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But the document itself says that the 60 houses would comprise phase one, which would be a design, construction and the design and construction of these houses. That is what the PSIP document says. So, is it a contradiction here?

Hon. Mohit: Member, there is no contradiction. A design is a design. And once you have a design it works for the number that you will be projecting. So, what you have here before us is the projection for the fiscal year.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Right, I understand that. So, I am asking, if you can give us a list of where these 60 houses will be constructed.

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I would have answered earlier. I said once we receive the information from the Ministry of Housing, I will share that. We are working with the Ministry of Housing.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: In writing?

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Mr. Chair, once we receive it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Is there an intention to have all the houses—has the Ministry given to the Ministry of Housing an indication of where they would prefer to have these houses located?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, no, we have not given to the Ministry where we would prefer. It is all about inclusivity, so we are working with the Ministry of Housing to give persons that option and that level of comfort.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 135. Minister, there is a $300,000 allocation called an Entrepreneurial Facility at the Carapo House Transitional—

Mr. Chairman: No, Malabar/Mausica, I am afraid we have moved on.

Mr. Romain: My hand was up, Chair. My hand was up. Before Trincity was called, I put my hand up.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I am afraid we have moved on. As I announced once I move on, I am not going back. So—

Mr. Romain: But, Chair, I put my hand up before Trincity/Maloney spoke. Before you acknowledged Trincity/Maloney, my hand went up.

Mr. Chairman: I did not see you, right? Look, my ever-efficient Clerk writes it down and she puts it to my attention. We have moved on. 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 190. A. Administration Services. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Sir. 036: Digitization and Migration - Social Service Management Information System. I see we have moved from $100,000 to $1 million. What was the reason for this jump in that particular figure, Minister?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, this will be for four production scanners which commenced in 2006, and it is still ongoing because of some procurement challenges.

Mr. Des Vignes: Some procurement challenges? So is it that the Min—

Hon. Mohit: Member, this particular machine, if I may just explain quickly, the NIB—this is to support— [*Confers with Technocrats*] For production scanners. The second item, which would support this particular sum of money, is that of the machine which prints cheques at NIB, the cost for it. Because there was an instance last year where the machine broke down and we had to locate the part overseas. So, in this fiscal we would have received some reports as per the outdated system and this particular increase is to treat with that to ensure that we have an updated system.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much Minister. One could appreciate that these types of machines, very high tech, very specific in terms of the suppliers that you would have to acquire them from. Was a company identified to supply these machines?

Hon. Mohit: No.

Mr. Des Vignes: No. So, this figure of, this additional $900,000 the Estimates were based on what exactly?

Hon. Mohit: Member, you would understand that the Estimates would be based on market rate. And there is a process by which you award a contract. So, I cannot give you information on a supplier right now.

Mr. Des Vignes: No problem. Thank you, Minister,

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Chairman F. 003: Outfitting of Buildings.

Mr. Chairman: Oh. So, we have moved on now to F. Public Buildings, right?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Well, I did not see, I do not know if—

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, yeah, let us take it we move to Public Buildings.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Before the Chairman, moves on, any of my colleagues have—

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: No, no, we have moved on. You raised your hand and asked the question. So impliedly, you moved the process along.

Hon. Member: You are welcome, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: You impliedly and unilaterally moved the process along, so we will take it at that, with the tacit support of the Chair.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is the kind of power I have in the PNM.

Hon. Members: Ahhh.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, she is well aware. Mr. Chairman, as I was going on to Outfitting of Buildings. Mr. Chairman, would the Minister be able to provide us with a list of divisions that will be located in these buildings?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, according to the line Item it is for outfitting. So, if the Member is asking me that now, I will have to attempt to provide that to her at a later date.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah, that is what I said, a list. So, you would provide it to us in writing, please. And also, the locations of these buildings.

Hon. Mohit: Yes. Member, I can give you that now.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, can we, for the economy of time, I think the Member is offering to get the locations in writing as well.

Hon. Mohit: Is she?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Mr. Chairman, you have unilaterally indicated that that is what I want.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, I thought that that—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—I will go with that.

Mr. Chairman: I thought you were compendiously going to take the—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. Chairman:—locations and divisions in writing.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It makes sense.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, let us do that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much for that concession, Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are most welcome, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

So, I propose now to move to the IDF, Infrastructure Development Fund; Item 004: Social Infrastructure; A. Community Development, page 294, for the avoidance of doubt; C. Welfare Services. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 295, F. Public Buildings. All right, I see two hands up. I am going in order of seniority. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, F. Public Buildings, 001: Construction of a Head Office for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. I see that there is no allocation for this year. Minister, has the project been formally abandoned or deferred?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, the yellow books would reflect where this particular line Item has moved to. So, it is clearly not abandoned.

Mr. de Nobriga: I am sorry, Mr. Chair. Minister, I did not hear the end of what you said.

Hon. Mohit: It is clearly not abandoned because the yellow books would reflect where the project has been moved to.

Mr. de Nobriga: The building has been moved?

Hon. Mohit: The project—

Mr. de Nobriga: I am asking—

Hon. Mohit: Are you hard of hearing?

Mr. de Nobriga: Oh, no, no, no. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, can I ask for your intervention?

Mr. Chairman: Do not get so, Minister—

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman: No, no, hang on. Respectfully, please—

Hon. Member: Jesus.

Mr. Chairman: Let us treat each other with some decorum and respect.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, we do not expect that from that side.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, why are you pouring gasoline on that smouldering flame? Why are you pouring gasoline on a smouldering flame?

12.40 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Why are you pouring gasoline on a smouldering flame?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I cannot help.

Mr. Chairman: I realize you cannot help. That much is patently obvious. All

right, come, Minister, can I just ask you to please apologize to the Member for that off-the-cuff statement?

Hon. Mohit: I am sorry. I am sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Right so. Come on.

Mr. de Nobriga: I feel better, I feel better, thank you, Minister. I feel better.

Hon. Members: You heard it?

Mr. de Nobriga: Loud and clear.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Unlike Trincity/Maloney, I know you can help yourself.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Mohit: Yes, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, are you able to answer the question?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair this project continues to be under active review of the Cabinet.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Gonzales: Under review?

Mr. Chairman: Under act active review of the Cabinet, that is the answer.

Mr. Gonzales: Could I ask a question? Has construction—

Mr. de Nobriga: No, Marvin.

Mr. Gonzales: Can I ask a question?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, can you say whether construction work is ongoing or has been halted, and if so, how long?

Hon. Mohit: Just a second please, Member.

Mr. Gonzales: Sure.

Hon. Mohit: Member, from my understanding, or based on what I am advised, construction work is not ongoing at this point.

Mr. Gonzales: And how long has that been the case?

Hon. Mohit: I cannot give you that right now. I can check, and I can report back to the committee.

Mr. Gonzales: Can you say how long you intend to have this review or assessment?

Hon. Mohit: It is not me; it is the Cabinet.

Mr. Gonzales: Is the matter before Cabinet now?

Hon. Mohit: I just said, Mr. Chair, the matter is under active review by the Cabinet.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Marcelle: Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, can you—same line item, 005/06/F004, can you indicate what value of works have been completed in the last fiscal or to date on that project?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chairman, I can check on that for him and provide an answer later on. I can attempt to do so.

Mr. Chairman: All right, Diego Martin Central.

Mr. Marcelle: Supplemental. Another question, Mr. Speaker. I am not finished, please, Mr. Chairman, please. One more question. In relation to the site not having

active works ongoing, can the hon. Minister indicate whether there are any security services in terms of protecting whatever has been done or completed thus far?

Hon. Mohit: The project is being undertaken by UDeCOTT, Mr. Chair, so I can certainly check on that and report back.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful, please.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chair. Mr. Chair, can I ask the Minister whether, if the contractor on the project continues to be engaged?

Hon. Mohit: Mr. Chair, I think I have answered that before.

Hon. Members: No.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You did not answer that.

Hon. Mohit: Well, then I will certainly recommend a good ear doctor for you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "A-a."

Hon. Members: Wow, wow, wow.

Mr. Chairman: Do not do that.

Hon. Mohit: He told me he is hard of hearing, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, we are almost at the end. We are on the home stretch. Let us not be distracted.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Minister is tired.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: She has been sitting there since 10.00.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, are you able to answer that?

Hon. Mohit: I answered that before, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Great. Trincity/Maloney?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No. No. Sorry.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, 004, the $30 million that has been allocated for the completion and outfitting of the new head office building for the Ministry of the People, Social Development and Family Services, Minister, what is expected to be done with this $30 million in this fiscal?

Hon. Mohit: So, Member, they still have to engage in conducting a site visit and preparing a user brief, so that will have to be provided to you at a later date.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. All right. That concludes that, and I propose to put the question.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 78 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you all very much, and might I, on behalf of all the Members of the committee, express our profound gratitude to the public servants who would have worked very hard to attend before us today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: And unlike last year, we did not inconvenience you or discommode you too much this year. So, thank you all very much.

You see how we can get along finely when we put our minds to it. We completed what was a six-hour exercise last year in two and half hours this year.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: So, I proposed to do Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and then we will take the lunch break. All right. I anticipate, Members, that the time which we allocated here, we will make it up in the last—

looking at the list, the last three, I think we will make up this time.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: And that is why I offered the concession that I was able to shift time.

Mr. Young SC: You must not anticipate you know, Mr. Chair, that is in breach of the Standing Orders.

Mr. Chairman: Technically, that is not in breach. The anticipation is on a Bill. Minister, you are ready?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Thank you. Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government—

Mr. Scotland SC: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South, can you allow me the indulgence so I could read, please? Thank you very much.

Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, $2,928,249,300.

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

Hon. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, I want to thank the Permanent Secretary and the staff of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government for the last year of commitment. Based on our work, we have several achievements, including the employment of 50 new municipal officers, and an additional 267 officers

trained and ready to join our cadre.

We have increased and expanded the local sargassum management capacity of our Ministry, funded by the Government of Japan and delivered through the UNDP. We have had improvements made to office accommodations, staffing allowances and secretaries for all municipal corporation councillors. We have had the review of the corporations' boundaries and the subsequent legislation being brought to Parliament, where we now have three new municipalities, and we continue to prepare for them in the upcoming fiscal.

12.50 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: We have had recommendations for amendments to the public health by-laws for the City of Port of Spain accepted by Cabinet. We have had the approval for the process by which the food badges are approved, renewed and modernized. We have had grant assistance for the acquisition of ultra-low volume—ULV—machines for mosquito control provided by the Government of India. We have had Cabinet approval for the establishment of our Procurement Unit of the Ministry and for municipal corporations. We have digital transformation in line with our Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and Public Administration being expanded, with support to go from the Ministry to all municipal corporations. We have had the design, development and implementation of an enterprise geographic information system for enhanced regional development planning, and that will be continued, and it will be particularly useful as we go into the newly established municipalities.

Our disaster preparedness and resilience was strengthened tremendously through targeted initiatives, such as our flood mitigation programme, which saw

results throughout the country with less flooded reported, and our Community Emergency Response Team, where over 6,000 persons were trained with simulation exercises, equipment upgrades and public awareness campaigns. The maintenance of our public spaces through the Upkeep of Public Spaces Programme has successfully rolled out, and we will continue in the new year with expanded numbers. We have established and operationalized the Local Economic Development unit, which is a significant tool to foster local economic development as the country looks at the economic recovery of Trinidad and Tobago.

The responsibility for insect vector control has now been transferred from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. To this, I say welcome to the Insect Vector Control Division, and I want to give the assurance that following meetings with the Permanent Secretary, the Minister of Health and other senior officers of the Insect Vector Control Division, we warmly welcome them. We look forward to improving their accommodation, their vehicles and equipment, and I want to give the assurance that no worker, no employee—daily-paid or monthly-paid—of the Insect Vector Control Division will be terminated. They are all now under the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and we welcome them.

Mr. Chairman, as we prepare for today's committee meeting, I want to express my willingness to share as much information as I can at this stage.

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the said sum for the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft*

Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Board and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*.

We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head details: Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, at page 262, for the avoidance of doubt. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, under 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there is an increase of $44,406,300. How many vacancies or vacant positions do you have under the permanent staff assigned to this Ministry?

Hon. Ameen: This increase is largely credited to the fact that the—

Mr. Young SC: "We eh reached the increase yet". I am asking, how many vacant staff you have—positions?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. Well, I am going to tell you. You mentioned there is an increase, so I am going to share with you why the increase and how those—so, I am going to answer all your questions, okay?

Mr. Young SC: All right, so let us start with how many vacancies you have.

Hon. Ameen: So, within the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, there are several monthly-paid positions where, based on negotiations, they have increased salaries, and this Vote caters for the increased salary, but also for the arrears. There are a number of positions outstanding—well, to be filled. There are 247 contract positions to be filled, and in the public service, there are 688 positions to be filled. We will continue to work with the respective

Service Commissions with the filling of those vacancies.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. So, 688 is the answer to my first question; 688 vacancies on the permanent establishment to be filled, right? And you jumped ahead, and you said that this $44 million is for a number of things, and you said arrears, correct?

Hon. Ameen: It is to facilitate the increased expenditure from the agreement—the agreement with revised salaries. So, remember, they will have new salaries, not only arrears. So, yes, arrears, but also for the new salaries.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. So, again, Minister, we will get along very fine and very well if you just listen to the question and not try to predict what I am coming to ask.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Ameen: No, no, no.

Mr. Young SC: It is the truth.

Hon. Ameen: I answered your question.

Mr. Young SC: You have not.

Hon. Ameen: I am also sharing a further explanation for your understanding.

Mr. Young SC: How much of the $44 million is for arrears?

Hon. Ameen: So, the audit is in the process of calculating the exact amount for arrears. As you are aware—

Mr. Young SC: I am not aware of anything.

Hon. Ameen:—before—

Mr. Young SC: I am not in that Ministry.

Hon. Ameen: Well, sorry, I presumed that having been in government, you may

have been aware, but what I could share for you and the public, before arrears are paid, they have to be audited. And when they are audited, the exact amount will then be determined. So, what is here is an estimate, and when the auditors provide the exact amount for each employee, that will be paid.

Mr. Young SC: Then it will be paid.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So, what is the Estimate?

Hon. Ameen: The Estimates provided here under this Head is a collaboration of the arrears, an estimate of, and the increment. Now, where you will see the exact figures is when the payments are made, and that will come in the Revised Estimates, when the exact payments—but I cannot disclose an exact figure because we are waiting for audits, right?

Mr. Young SC: Well, correct. That is why we would talk more about the Estimate.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: But you said you do not have the estimate for how much it will be, fine—on the arrears. Is this the arrears at 40 per cent cash?

Hon. Ameen: This is the arrears based on the agreements with the CPO. And the CPO will send a circular to our PS in terms of the details of whatever was negotiated.

Mr. Young SC: But the CPO—as we in the public understand it, and we are not privy to the information you may have—has not concluded an agreement for the payment of 40 per cent cash. So, I do not know what agreement you are talking to. I am asking if this Estimate is based on, whilst the audit is being done, the 40 per

cent payment in cash, or is it 100 per cent payment in cash?

Hon. Ameen: It is whatever the CPO instructs us to do. I cannot speak for the CPO. They will send the circular to our PS, and then we will action that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: All right.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Minister of Finance wants to help.

Mr. Young SC: The Minister of Finance is smarter than that. He is staying quiet.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Young SC: So, now, when you look down, you will see at 01/001/04: Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers. You are seeing that?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And there is a decrease of $2.2 million. You see that?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: But these allowances, was there an increase in this agreement with the CPO for an increase in allowances as well?

Hon. Ameen: An increase in the allowances does not necessarily mean there will be an increase in the expenses incurred, because it depends on the number of hours and so on.

Mr. Young SC: I know.

Hon. Ameen: This caters for meals, special duty and housing allowances. Not all of the expenses will be the exact amount. This is an area where it varies from year to year, and we usually have the Revised Estimate at mid-term, and then we project going forward.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Ameen: But this will cover what we need to cover—

Mr. Young SC: Up till the mid-term.

Hon. Ameen:—of what we project, especially for things like special duty and so on. It is not totally predictable at the beginning of the year.

1.00 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Maybe, Mr. Chairman, would help me here a little bit with the questioning, because my question—I have heard all that you have said, very useful information—but my question is, in the same agreement that you referred to with the CPO, was there an increase in Allowances?

Hon. Ameen: No, you are asking me with regard to this Vote.

Mr. Young SC: Correct, the Vote is Allowances.

Hon. Ameen: And I am saying that whether there is an increase in the Allowance or not, it does mean an increase in expenditure in this line Item.

Mr. Young SC: But I am not even there, Minister. I am asking a simple question. In this agreement that you have indicated to the population—

Mr. Chairman: I think there might be a slight issue with that in the sense that I think the question should be confined to the purpose of the Vote, right?

Mr. Young SC: But the Vote is the payment of allowances.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, I understand. But if you just give me two seconds.

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, I was following the Minister.

Mr. Chairman: I do not think the question is to whether the agreement covers an increase in allowance should come under this line Item. I think—

Mr. Young SC: Where else would it come from on the [*Inaudible*]?

Mr. Chairman: No, the problem with that is that if—perhaps, I could formulate

the questions for you if you would allow me to.

Mr. Young SC: You could try, and I will listen, yeah**.**

Mr. Chairman: Whether this allocation includes any increase, any perceived increase in an allowance agreed to. That might cover it in a succinct way.

Mr. Young SC: Well, let us break it down. Payment of allowances.

Mr. Chairman: You see, because I think the way you are asking the question—

Mr. Young SC: Okay, I will break it down.

Mr. Chairman:—is not clear enough.

Mr. Young SC: I understand. Payment of allowances by monthly paid officers, is that covered in an arrangement that is part of an agreement, a collective agreement, or otherwise negotiated by the CPO?

Hon. Ameen: I think that question the Member is asking is a general question for the CPO. I am here to answer specific to the Ministry. Under this line Item, I have advised what these payments are generally for, and how it is utilized. I do not know how much more information I can provide for the Member.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: This is clear. Alright, Minister, I will forgive you because I understand that you do not understand what these are.

Hon. Ameen: No, no, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, he needs to withdraw that, please.

Mr. Young SC: But it is clear. It is clear.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North, I do not think there is a need to try personally disparage the Minister. I think that is uncalled for. Let us resist the temptation to do so, please.

Mr. Young SC: I will try. Line Item 01/001/14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Under this, I see the Revised Estimate—well, first of all, in 2026, we, the Parliament, approved $50,000. It has gone up to a Revised Estimate of $140,000, and then back down to $50,000.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So, let us start with the Revised Estimate. Did this include—because it is for Cabinet-appointed committees—payments to the Municipal Corporation (Amdt.) Bill, that committee that was appointed by Cabinet to look at boundaries?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, that was called the Boundaries Committee—

Mr. Young SC: Right, thank you.

Hon. Ameen:—which was appointed by Cabinet. The increase in the last fiscal accommodated that. They have completed their work. So that is why the allocation would have gone down. From my understanding, they usually put $50,000there in case there is another Cabinet committee, but at this time, we do not have an active Cabinet-appointed committee under this Ministry.

Mr. Young SC: So, the 140 covers the whole cost of payment to that Boundaries Committee?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am still under

Personnel Expenditure. Would the Minister be able to indicate how many established positions are approved, how many are filled, and how many are vacant at this time?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. So yuh gone back tuh 01", right?

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Yes, we are still under 001.

Hon. Ameen: So, in the public service, we have a total number of 2, 060 positions on the establishment. At this time, 688 are filled, and we have 1,372 vacancies.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Thank you. Could the Minister indicate what was the staff turnover in the past fiscal?

Hon. Ameen: So, these are public positions. The staff turnover will really be based on—sometimes people are transferred from our Ministry to another Ministry, like within the public service, and if people retire, and so on, that is the turnover. Generally, there is no major turnover for these positions.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: There was not any major staff turnover?

Hon. Ameen: No, well, in fact, what we had was additional staff coming to us, because, for instance, there are public servants in the URP who have now been assigned to our Ministry, so that we actually had additional public servants joining us. Many of them are signed to municipal corporations, and so on. But there is no turnover in terms of staff leaving, because these are public officers. So, they really, mostly, leave by retirement.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: With regard to the increase, which is $44 million; just over $44 million, what portion of that increase is attributable to new positions, filling of existing vacancies, salary upgrades or reclassifications, collective agreements, and COLA adjustments?

Hon. Ameen: Well, as I indicated before, this Vote represents arrears for the public officers who are there, who, based on their increase in salaries, would have arrears to collect, but it also caters for the increase in salary, and this is across the board, and it is based on the implementation of the agreement for the revised salaries, revised COLA, and other terms of conditions that, as I indicated earlier, will come from the CPO, and so on. In addition, this facilitates the outstanding arrears, but also where you have acting allowances. So where have—and this would be from previous years. So, we have public servants on the cadre now who have been acting in positions, and acting allowance will roll over and repay them that out of this Vote.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Right, I understand that. So, what I am asking is if you could give us a breakdown, and if you wish, I can repeat, in terms of this amount, the 44.4 increase, or the 44.1 increase, new positions, filling existing vacancies, salary upgrades or reclassifications, collective agreements, and COLA adjustments.

Hon. Ameen: So, we have no new positions. There are no new positions. These are public servants from Clerk I go up to AO, and different positions.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: No, I understand what it is. I am just asking.

Hon. Ameen: These positions are existing. Where we have vacancies, we have a lot of people acting. There are a lot of acting positions. So, the figures that I would have given you cover all, in terms of the total number of positions being 2, 060, the number filled being 688, and the total number of vacant posts being 1, 372.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Right, so in terms of filling of vacancies, is this amount that you have here in anticipation of filling vacancies part of this?

Hon. Ameen: Well, across all Ministries, the Finance usually budgets, and this is regardless of who is in Government for filling of vacancies. You, yourself, would know some of the challenges with the Service Commission when it comes to filling some of those vacancies. So, while we will continue to work with them, I mean, all the vacancies may not be filled. And, of course, in some instances, contract employment covers some of those duties to supplement the existing public servants. So, all Ministries, they do cater for filling of existing vacancies, but we cannot predict which vacancies will absolutely be filled in this fiscal. It is really up to the Public Service Commission.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I do not know how else to ask the questions. The thing is that, normally, there is a certain staff complement, vacancies, and so on. This amount, which represents an increase, and a significant increase of $44 million, it is clear that there is going to be either an increase in the number of staff anticipated or an increase throughout the Ministry that will absorb this $44 million that is projected. So, I am asking.

Mr. Chairman: I think the answer to that was given earlier.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, Mr. Chairman, it was not.

Mr. Chairman: It was.

Hon. Ameen: Yes, I provided earlier, just in case, because your colleague also asked, and I did answer him, and I did reply to you as well. As I indicated, the bulk of it—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You mean the 600 and the 1000?

Mr. Chairman: No, the bulk of the forty—

Mrs. Robinson Regis: That question?

Mr. Chairman: The answer, if I could recall it—

Mrs. Robinson Regis: That answer?

1.10 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: No, the answer was, "The bulk of that increase was really for arrears".

Hon. Ameen: Yes, so we have the arrears and the new salaries.

Mr. Chairman: That was the answer as I recall it.

Hon. Ameen: That is the bulk of it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, I did not get that impression Mr. Chairman, but sorry I missed it.

Mr. Chairman: No, that is the answer. I recall it. I think it was asked very early on, the first question that was asked. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 01/001/14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees in relation to the local government boundary. Well, the document indicates that $140,000—in terms of the revised estimates for that committee. Can you provide a breakdown in terms of how this 140 was distributed amongst the members of the committee and over which period?

Hon. Ameen: Well, it would have been for the last fiscal, so it would have been from the date of appointment, which is in the public domain, it was announced, and so on. I also spoke about it in the budget debate. It would have covered the entirety of the last fiscal. The committee concluded their work in April, and therefore that is up to the period that they would have been paid.

Mr. Marcelle: Can you provide an aggregate? A breakdown in terms of how much money—

Hon. Ameen: That is reflected here. Now, because—

Mr. Marcelle: How much was paid to the committee members, please? I could take it in writing if you wish.

Hon. Ameen: I am not too sure about that. What I can tell you is that there was only one cabinet-appointed committee under our Ministry. So, what is provided here is only for that committee. There are no other committees provided.

Mr. Marcelle: Yes, I understand that, Minister. That is why I am asking, in terms of that specific committee, how much money was paid to the chairman of the committee, and how much money was paid for the other members?

Hon. Ameen: All right. So, from my understanding, the provisions made to any cabinet-appointed committee, there is a circular that governs it. So it is across the board. It is not per corporation. So, if you are unable to get it on your own, we could share it with you because that guides all cabinet-appointed committees in terms of what their remuneration would be. So, it is in keeping with that circular, and I could share that with you, yes.

Mr. Marcelle: All right. I can take that in writing, please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Item 002: Unemployment Relief Programme. Port of Spain North.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. When the Minister is ready.

Mr. Chairman: Minister?

Mr. Young SC: Minister—

Mr. Chairman: We are on Item 002, URP.

Mr. Young SC: 002: Unemployment Relief Programme. This is URP?

Hon. Ameen: 268, yes.

Mr. Young SC: This is URP?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, it is.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. And under the first line Item, under URP. 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, $6 ½ million being provided for 2027.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: How many employees does URP still have?

Hon. Ameen: Oh, this is not for contract employees, eh. This is for the public servants. So, the public servants who were assigned to the URP, they remain with the Ministry of Local Government. Many of them have been reassigned. So, for instance, we have people who are works supervisors, assigned to several corporations, especially those with technical knowledge.

So, while they are getting paid under this URP Head, they have been assigned to different technical sections with the Ministry of Local Government. All of these are public servants and while they are there, currently, it is sort of a temporary arrangement—as they are absorbed into different corporations and different parts of the Ministry, they will be removed from this URP Head because we do not intend to maintain this URP Head. Because, you know, the programme is being closed down. This is the public servants who are there, who are assigned to different places, but they still get paid under this Head.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, let us try again. So, this is for the permanent public servants—

Hon. Ameen: Yes, it is.

Mr. Young SC: —who were formerly assigned to the URP and now they have been or are in the process of being reassigned?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: How many of them are there?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. We have the aggregate here, just now. [*Pause*] We will provide that to you. That is no problem. Yeah?

Mr. Young SC: In writing?

Hon. Ameen: We will provide it in writing, no problem.

Mr. Young SC: So, you do not know how many there are?

Hon. Ameen: We have the aggregate here, but I will provide it for you.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I just want the total number. I do not want it in writing. Tell us now, please.

Hon. Ameen: I will provide it in writing.

Mr. Young SC: All right, well, avoid it.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. All right. Item 003: Insect Vector Control Division. Port of Spain North.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, I was intrigued by your opening statement when you were speaking about this Insect Vector Control Division that has been moved to your Ministry and how happy you are for that, et cetera. You made a statement about, I think, it is a ULV machine to deal with mosquitoes?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: What is that?

Hon. Ameen: Well, I am not sure which Head you are asking it under.

Mr. Young SC: Well, it is based on what you said at the—it is not a trick

question or anything. I was just intrigued, so what is ULV?

Hon. Ameen: Okay. So, ULV stands for Ultra-Low Volume. It is a machine that sprays the chemical for mosquitoes at an ultra-low volume.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, all right. So, it is still going to be the spray to get rid of the mosquitoes?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, it is. There are other methods they use as well, but this—

Mr. Young SC: Because I thought I heard ultra-low voltage and thought you were coming here to zap people, yes.

Hon. Ameen: No, it is ultra-low volume.

Mr. Young SC: [*Laughter*] All right, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Shall we get to a line Item, or shall I move on?

Mr. Young SC: No, no, that is fine. You could move on from me anyway. I do not know if—

Mr. Chairman: No one is up. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration, Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, under this Item, could I ask the Minister, please, with regard to the increase under Travelling and Subsistence, which categories of allowances account for the increase of 1 million?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, so, this is for travelling. The bulk of it is travelling allowance, and this is for the public servants who are assigned. We have a lot of project officers and so on who visit several corporations, and their travelling allowance in particular comes out of this Vote. And it treats across the Ministry for all the public servants.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Has there been an increase in the number of officers that you have which accounts for the $1 million increase?

Hon. Ameen: Oh, we also have some arrears to pay under eh.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: So yeah, some of them were audited, and we are paying in this fiscal. So, some of this is for arrears as well. The increase really is for the arrears, but the standard, it remains.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Are any officers receiving both travel allowances and have access to an official vehicle?

Hon. Ameen: Well, as you would be aware, the Government policy is that where they have use of a government vehicle, they are not entitled to travelling allowance. There are several officers who use their vehicles, and they are the ones who claim travel allowance. It is not automatically provided to every travelling officer. There are those who report to the Ministry, and then the Ministry's vehicle will take them where they have to do visits. But those who routinely visit the corporations and projects and so on, they generally use their own vehicles, and they make their claim.

And this is why some of the payments actually come over because we double-check those claims before we pay them.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, you have not had instances of persons who claim travelling allowance but use the official vehicles? As far as you are aware? Or as far as the Permanent Secretary might be aware.

Hon. Ameen: Not as far as we are aware, no.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, under line Item 16: Contract Employment. I am seeing a decrease of $10,600,000. If you could just give us some insight into that decrease?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, Mr. Chairman, when we took office, there were a number of persons who were employed on contract who were really specifically carrying out the mandate of the previous Government's policies. Some of those policies have been discontinued. We have compacted a number of those functions into new units, so, for instance, I mentioned the Procurement Unit, the Local Economic Development Unit. So, the overall need for contract employees has been reduced.

1.20 p.m.

We are streamlining a little more so that the corporations would be involved. And so—there is just a shift in terms of some of the units that we are creating. So, there is a decrease in the need here.

Mr. de Nobriga: Okay, thank you. Mr. Chairman Can I ask the Minister how many contract workers were affected by this realignment?

Hon. Ameen: Well, for me to give you a specific number—because here is what happened: There are those who were in units under the previous Government who have been retained in some of our new units. So, it is not that because the number decreased that all those people went home. Some of them have been absorbed into our unit. In terms of contracts for the entire Ministry, at present we have 477 contract positions; 247 of those are filled, and we have 230 vacant.

Mr. de Nobriga: Can I ask how many contract workers would have been discontinued? Their contracts either not renewed or discontinued over the course

of the past financial year?

Hon. Ameen: Well, the number varies. Because some of them, for instance, those who are on three-month contracts, some of them, they go for three months and they come back. Some of them are on a six-month contracts, and the same happens. So the number varies. It is not to say that there is a set number who we have shoved out.

Mr. de Nobriga: Sure, Minister. Can I ask it in a different way then? In 2026, Chairman, there was a revised allocation of $33,000,600. That would have been increased from $32million at the start of the financial year. That figure would have been assigned to a specific number of contract workers. The allocation this year is $23million, which would be assigned to a certain number of contract workers. What is the difference then, between the figure last year and the figure this year?

Hon. Ameen: Well, one of the things we are also treating with is that a number of positions that existed before, PMCD did not have the opportunity to examine them. Because we are streamlining, PMCD has asked to examine some of the existing contract positions so that we are not employing those persons until PMCD sends some directive.

Mr. de Nobriga: So, Mr. Chairman, again, I am asking, given—I understand the rationale; I am asking the number. I understand the rationale for what the Minister is saying, but I have asked for the number.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, I think that I would have explained it to you.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, there were 247 positions filled now and 230 vacant now. I am asking, between the start of last fiscal and the beginning of this fiscal, what is the difference in those numbers? That is all.

Hon. Ameen: I think I would have explained to the Member the situation then.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, are you saying that it has been explained?

Mr. Chairman: Well, I think the Minister is saying that—

Mr. de Nobriga: Fair enough.

Mr. Chairman:—is as far as she can answer.

Mr. de Nobriga: Fair enough, Mr. Chairman. Can I also ask then: The $23 million that has been assigned to those persons who are employed under contract, what departments or divisions are those workers working in? Is it in a—I will just leave it as what division or department are they working in?

Hon. Ameen: Contract employment in the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is across all departments—

Mr. de Nobriga: So all departments.

Hon. Ameen:—and it also includes the municipal corporations. So, for instance, there are some chief officers in those corporations who are absent, and we hire those persons on contract.

Mr. de Nobriga: So it is through you that those things—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Ameen: We have the Procurement Unit—procurement officers in the Ministry as well as in the corporations. We have the Local Economic Development Unit again, at the head office and at local government—the corporations. Our Disaster Management Unit—a lot of those are contract employees. So, we have a unit at the Ministry, but in every corporation, we have a unit as well. We have expanded the units at the corporation, and so all of that is taken into consideration. But even in administration, we have a number of positions there. And you will also appreciate that with a number of vacancies in the public service, some of those

duties have to be taken up by contract officers.

Mr. de Nobriga: Absolutely understand.

Hon. Ameen: So it is across the board in the Ministry, as well as in the various regional corporations.

Mr. de Nobriga: Okay. Mr. Chairman, if I can just ask then, the Minister would have spoken about a Project Management Unit—I think she just spoke about it. Is that Project Management Unit staffed by permanent workers, contract workers, or a combination?

Hon. Ameen: It is a combination, actually. Because for accountability purposes, we must have public officers. So some of it will be contract, but some of it will definitely be public officers.

Mr. de Nobriga: Can I ask the Minister if you can give me an idea of how many people are employed in that specific unit?

Hon. Ameen: We are waiting for the PMCD to send us the approval for the numbers. It might vary when it comes back from PMCD, but we always do it with PMCD's recommendation.

Mr. de Nobriga: And if you do not mind, Minister, the Project Management Unit is going to be engaged in doing exactly what?

Hon. Ameen: Managing projects.

Mr. de Nobriga: No, no. I am glad you said that.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. de Nobriga: Are you talking about managing projects that are under the PSIP?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, but we also have administrative projects. It is not only

concrete and steel projects. Projects within the Ministry could include where we have administrative units being set up, where we have, for instance, even the formalizing of the new municipalities. That is a project. So we have several areas and tracking those projects and ensuring that the department or corporation responsible has to have proper coordination. So the need for that project management unit is not only for the Ministry alone, but it will also give oversight to the municipalities as well.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, does the Ministry still have the Project Planning Unit?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, planning is different from project management. So the planning unit is there, yes.

Mr. de Nobriga: But the Project Planning Unit, if I remember correctly—did project management for the PSIP project specifically.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I—

Hon. Ameen: Right, so—

Mr. Chairman: Hang on. Member, I am just wondering whether—

Hon. Ameen: Which line Item are we on?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. That is what I am wondering whether a protracted discussion on this is really necessary at this stage—

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman:—or we can just move along a little bit.

Mr. de Nobriga: Fair enough, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, if you would permit me, I did indicate earlier when one of the Members asked, that I would provide some information. They were

asking for the number of public officers in the URP programme. There are 129 positions on paper, but 45 officers are currently being paid from the Vote that they are asking about. There are 84 vacant positions.

Mr. Young SC: It was me asking.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: So, 129 on paper.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, 129; 45 posts filled and 84 vacant. These are the public servants.

Mr. Young SC: Understood.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. So those 45 officers who are there have been reassigned to various places. I hope that provides.

Mr. Young SC: It does, but it leads to another question. May I go back? Well—

Mr. Chairman: No. The problem is we have moved along.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, but the Minister is now provided an answer going back there. Okay, no problem.

Mr. Chairman: You can send those in writing.

Hon. Ameen: No, well, I shared it with him so that I would not have to provide it in writing.

Mr. Chairman: No, no. Further questions. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 02/001/23: Fees—can the hon. Minister indicate that in 2027, there is an estimated increase of 134,000 for Fees. Can we get a breakdown in terms of what the intended fees are to be paid under this line Item?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, so this Vote treats with fees. And some of those fees are

associated with our ICT and software licence. We are aligning our Ministry to work with the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence to really expand our ICT capacity, not only for us at head office. In fact, we have a whole unit for that and are building out to give the corporations that support. So there are a lot of fees involved, and a lot of it is for software licences and that kind of thing. So as we build out, this is catering for that expanded capacity.

Mr. Marcelle: Is there any consideration in terms of the increase—the VAT added to the digital services that are announced by the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Ameen: Netflix and "thing"? Well, that does not apply here.

Mr. Marcelle: No, cloud services are also—

1.30 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: Yes, it does.

Mr. Marcelle: Well, all right. So, you started—

Hon. Ameen: No, not under—

Mr. Marcelle: You started to play—

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. Marcelle: All right. So, it does include it. It does take into consideration same.

Hon. Ameen: It takes into consideration all the fees associated with the software licence; all, all, all.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 02/001/22: Short-term Employment. In 2026, there was an allocation of $13.4 million at the start of fiscal 2026 for Short-term Employment. Thereafter, there was a Revised Estimate and it was reduced to $7.6 million—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle:—more than a $5 million decrease. Can the Minister indicate in terms of, at the start of 2026—so, my first question is, one: At the start of 2026, how many short-term employees were engaged based on the $13.4 million?

Hon. Ameen: Right. So, the short-term employees in our Ministry, many of them came in to fill positions where we were missing public officers, or we were waiting for the contract positions to be filled. They have to be advertised and so on. So, the number of short-term workers varies. So, I will give you an example. In our Disaster Management Unit, for instance, we had a number of positions where we were waiting for PMCD to approve the number and the qualifications, and so on, and while we were waiting for that, we had short-term employment on three months at a time. When we got the PMCD approval, we advertised, we interviewed, we shortlisted and those positions were filled under contract.

So, quite a number of these, because we now have public officers, or we now have the contract position established properly, we no longer need them on the short-term employment. But the short-term employment is where the PS, based on his administrative challenges, would determine where he wants to take people for three months at a time.

Mr. Marcelle: Chairman, the Minister said a lot, but I asked a very specific question, and I am asking for a number, a quantity. How many employees of the Ministry, as of 2026 September, were employed under the Short-term? In terms—do you have the amount? If you do not have it, I can get it in writing.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, as I indicated, it varies. I provided the Member with an explanation for him to understand why it varies. My answer could have just been it varies—

Mr. Chairman: All right. So, if you could—

Hon. Ameen:—but that is essentially what it is. It varies.

Mr. Chairman: I suppose, if you could extrapolate a short answer to the question, is you—

Hon. Ameen: My short answer to that is, it varies.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Marcelle: Now, there is a significant reduction from $13 million, at the start of last year, to now $6 million—

Hon. Ameen: On the same line Item? Line Item 22? On the same 22?

Mr. Marcelle: On the same 22, a reduce to $6 million this fiscal. Is there an intention to reduce the amount of short-term employees this fiscal?

Hon. Ameen: As I explained, there are a number of positions that PMCD has now given us approval to hire persons on contract. So, there is no need for the short-term because we have approvals and they have been filled. There are a number of positions on the establishment that the public service would have assigned officers to us, and I explained that earlier. I really do not know how to explain it again, but I hope it helps.

Mr. Chairman: 003: Insect Vector Control.

Hon. Member: 002.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, 002: Unemployment Relief Programme. My mistake, I skipped ahead.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Hon. Ameen: Just a moment.

Mr. Chairman: Page 265.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, we are at 002: URP, right—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—Unemployment Relief Programme. We are being flooded—I am looking at Travelling and Subsistence—

Hon. Ameen: "Mm-hmm".

Mr. Young SC:—with messages that there are and continue to be workers in the URP programme. So, right now, the contract workers are being used to do accounts, et cetera, for your NPUP and other programmes.

Hon. Ameen: No, this is not for the contract workers, eh, this is for the public servants.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, I have five minutes, I will come to my question.

Hon. Ameen: Okay, well, you could ask it, but I am just telling you that it is for public servants.

Mr. Young SC: So, I am asking about URP. You say this is for permanent public servants?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Take you at your word, and I am on 01: Travelling and Subsistence.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Right. The Estimate for this Travelling and Subsistence is $500,000. That would have been for specific for URP, right?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: You said that there are no URP workers. Everybody has been reassigned all over the place.

Hon. Ameen: No, no, I did not say there are no URP workers. All of the public servants who are assigned to URP, they moved from the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Many of these officers have been reassigned to different places.

Mr. Young SC: So, many, not all?

Hon. Ameen: The moneys here represent the public servants. We have some arrears for travelling. We have—these are moneys owed to the public servants, and the required audit would have been completed, so we are paying it in this fiscal. We have some acting. We have a number of acting positions, so we have to pay their acting allowance and those posts. But as I indicated—

Mr. Young SC: But this is not allowances, right? This Travelling and Subsistence.

Hon. Ameen: Right. When they are acting, there are some persons, because they are acting—

Mr. Young SC: They get a travel—

Hon. Ameen:—the is an associated travelling, and so on, with it—

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. So, there are some examples where you have like—WS is one of those positions where we assign them to different corporations. There are people whose work centre might be Port of Spain, but they are assigned to the Mayaro corporation.

Mr. Young SC: I understand how the travelling is, thanks. Just to stick a pin. Mr. Chair, as I have your attention, it is clear to me, I think the AC system has been shut off or something like that. Whilst it was too cold here this morning, it is becoming very muggy.

Mr. Chairman: I do not think it is shut off. I think they are trying to raise the temperature.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, well, I think they need to do—because yesterday, it had become very muggy and a lot of condensation, et cetera. So I just want to avoid that today. Thank you.

So, Minister, we have heard what you have said clearly about URP. We have heard clearly that you said this is all for permanent employees on the establishment, et cetera. How they have been reassigned, blah, blah blah. Let us look at 002/08: Rent/Lease – Office Accommodation and Storage, because that has nothing to do with permanent workers, right? This is the URP programme. Why are offices still being rented or leased for URP?

Hon. Ameen: So, the main office is at Autorama in El Socorro—

Mr. Young SC: Is at what?

Hon. Ameen: Autorama building—

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Ameen:—in El Socorro that houses the headquarters. Many of the regional offices for URP are old government buildings, so there is no rent cost associated there. We also have—in terms of storage, there was some space that they were using where they had material and—

Mr. Young SC: So, you are still renting the headquarters that you referred to?

Hon. Ameen: So, the headquarters is still there. One of the major—

Mr. Young SC: Who is in there?

Hon. Ameen: We do have the skeletal staff, and one of the major things that they are doing there is compiling the employment records. Because a lot of people who worked in URP over the years, they still come to URP for the employment records to go to NIS and to get old age pension. That records management is something that they are actively getting in order because in the upcoming fiscal, through our Recurrent Expenditure, we want to digitize those and have them in the possession of the Ministry, so that you will not need that URP staffing. But for now—

1.40 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: So, going forward, when persons come to say, "Look, I was employed in URP during this period", the Ministry would be able to provide them with the necessary records?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, you will be able to access their records, yes.

Mr. Young SC: So why is the building still being rented, to facilitate them?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. Well, that building has a lot of the assets of the URP, and we, in fact, had an asset audit done, and we are making a plan going forward. In fact, we have already drafted it in terms of how those assets will be distributed, including current regional offices. They have a lot of signs, tools, and so on, and I do not want them walking away. They are properly secured there.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: So you have a lot of tools, signage, stationery, a lot of printers, and those types of things. We will assign them to a regional corporation and other spaces, but for now they are securely stored there.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you. No further questions for me.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 002/08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, in relation to the headquarters at El Socorro, can you indicate, based on that URP head office, what is the monthly rental sum?

Hon. Ameen: **[***Confers with technocrats*] Mr. Chairman, when I came into office, I met a lease arrangement where the Government is paying $213,000 per month for that building. We have not broken that lease agreement, but, certainly, as we shut down the programme, we will no longer need to have that building, but that is the monthly rental of the Autorama building.

Mr. Marcelle: Alright. What is the existing contractual period of that lease agreement? When it expires?

Hon. Ameen: Well, it is on a month-to-month currently. In fact, under this we will have some savings "eh", because once, as I say, we do not need the building anymore, we would not be paying under that.

Mr. Marcelle: You indicated now that it is on month-to-month, when did the substantive lease agreement come to an end?

Hon. Ameen: I will get that. I met it like that "eh". I met it like that.

Mr. Marcelle: Alright. Now, in terms of the personnel assigned to that head office there, that work from there, what is the number of persons working at that URP head office now?

Hon. Ameen: Right. So when I indicated to you that we have 45 officers who are currently assigned to the URP, some of them are there at head office.

Mr. Marcelle: Yeah. I know that you indicated that some of them go on to

different corporations.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. Marcelle: They are spread out across the Ministries. So I am asking you specifically in relation to that building, how many persons on a day-to-day basis are actually stationed and assigned there?

Hon. Ameen: Well, it varies actually, because some of them, they are actively picking up duties at the Ministry, for instance. So some days they are at the Ministry, some days they are there, but they are paid under this Vote still, so it varies. The number of people there on a day-to-day basis varies. If we have a particular project that we want them to assist us in, let us say, at the Ministry, we have them with us for a couple of weeks, and then they go back. So, it fluctuates, but eventually, of course, all of them will filter out.

Mr. Marcelle: In the last fiscal, there was a reported fire at the URP head office.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, somebody tried to set a desk on fire. It was contained. It was a fire in dustbin, essentially.

Mr. Marcelle: If you would allow me to ask the question, please, Minister.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. Marcelle: There was a fire reported in the last fiscal in that said building—

Hon. Ameen: Which Vote are we on?

Mr. Marcelle: We are on line Item 002/08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, with specific reference to the URP head office in which we are paying the $213,000 per month in rent. So I am asking on that line Item, in terms of the fire that would have taken place within that office, whether any of the staff would have had to be displaced in the last fiscal?

Hon. Ameen: No.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Chairman: Item 003: Insect Vector Control Division. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Unemployment Relief Programme. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001: Regional Bodies. Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies. Item 007: Households. Item 009: Other Transfers. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 009/06: National Programme for the Upkeep of Public Spaces, there is an increase of $34 million in this fiscal to the said Head. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many persons the Ministry intends to employ through the upkeep programme in this fiscal from that $91 million?

Hon. Ameen: Because we are expanding the number of workers, we are also expanding the administrative staffing. So we will not be able to—and as well, Mr. Chairman, the number of workers to be employed under this will go for Cabinet approval. So when we get Cabinet approval, just as we did in the past occasions, we will publicize the number of persons that are going to be hired.

Mr. Marcelle: Right. Let me ask, in fiscal 2026, under the said line Item, there was $57 million allocated, can the hon. Minister indicate, from that $57 million, how many administrative staff were paid from that allocation, as well as how many workers on the field, going forward?

Hon. Ameen: Right. So the number we started off with, we started off with four, because on the pilot project, you remember we had about 212 workers. So what we started off with at the beginning of the fiscal—it was about November or somewhere there—it was much smaller. We added administrative persons to that

department and it multiplied. Instead of four, we had 12. And then for the Carnival period, you will recall, we had an expansion, and then later on, when we expanded the number of labourers, the number of people on the road to 1,680-something, the number of persons there increased.

So, as you go along, as you have more persons on the road to manage, the number of persons in the admin increased. We also had persons from the URP being assigned to work with us, periodically, for the management of this programme. So they were not assigned to the programme all the time, they were back and forth with us. So, in terms of a specific number, the number varies as we continue, because in the last fiscal, we went from the pilot to the Carnival, and then to a further expansion, so it increased.

Mr. Marcelle: Yeah. In the last fiscal, there were, at max, 12 administrative employees treating with, in terms of under this line Item, in addition to the periodic URP workers, and so on. Right? I want to ask from hon. Minister, of those 12 employees at max, can you provide an aggregate—a breakdown in terms of how many accountants, for example, that were processing payments? I can take it in writing if you—

Hon. Ameen: No. The accountants, and so on, were public officers. So, in our Ministry of Local Government, we have a general admin accountant, and they were processing the payments. A lot of those accounting functions for accountability purposes must be public officers. So some of them who were assigned to URP were reassigned to the Ministry, and they were playing a role in that. But our normal GA staff and HR, our Ministry HR people, played a key role in that. So what we had was basically what you call, clerical officers. You had

regional supervisors, so they would collect the pay sheets, for instance, make sure that there are no errors on them, but the accounting part, it has to go to public officers.

Mr. Marcelle: In the last fiscal, in terms of the payment to the NPUPS workers, there have been reports in terms of very late payments going out to these respective individuals in the NPUPS programme. In this fiscal, having an increase, what steps would be taken in order to reduce that backlog and that long wait period in terms of persons working and getting paid long thereafter?

1.50 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. So, the challenges were experienced toward the end of the last fiscal. We have engaged a service provider to provide a digital system to process the salaries for the last few fortnights in the last fiscal. That helped us to speed up the processing of the outstanding, as well as what was running. So, those have been addressed. With the use of that digital payroll system, I anticipate it will be much easier for the public officers to manage the payments.

Mr. Marcelle: One last question on this line Item. How soon do you estimate, in terms of under this line Item, would the recruitment start in the 2027 fiscal for the NPUPS cycle?

Hon. Ameen: As I indicated, this has to go for Cabinet approval. Whenever we have that, we will make a public announcement.

Mr. Marcelle: Deeply grateful.

Mr. Chairman: I think Port of Spain North's hand was up before yours, San Fernando East.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Mr. Chair, 007/09: Debit Card System for URP

Employees.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: You see that line Item?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: $1 million still being provided there.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Debit Card System for URP Employees would be particular for the functions of URP, correct?

Hon. Ameen: Well, it is for officers on the URP. Some of this is outstanding from previous years. We have had some audits, and so on. Based on that, we had asked the Ministry of Finance to increase the allocation there so we could settle those arrears.

Mr. Young SC: All right.

Hon. Ameen: But going forward, it will be far less than this.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Because the point I am getting to, or my question is—and as usual, Minister, you keep jumping ahead—the debit card system is for URP employees and the expenses that are associated in particular with the URP programme, correct?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. That is what this Head is for.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North, apparently, you went back. We are on Other Transfers now. I am told.

Mr. Young SC: Yes, at 007. You all were where, down at—

Mr. Chairman: No. We are down at 009.

Mr. Young SC:—009?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, 009.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I apologize.

Mr. Chairman: We are at 009. So, maybe those questions, you could forward to the Minister at the appropriate time.

Mr. Young SC: Well, the Minister and I were already having a conversation.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Well, I am afraid that—

Mr. Young SC: But if that is how you would prefer to do it. No problem.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Thank you. San Fernando East.

Mr. Manning: Thank you. Under the 009/06, can you say how many employees from San Fernando were under this NPUPS programme in the last fiscal year?

Hon. Ameen: Well, what I can tell you is that the employment is by region. The San Fernando City Corporation would have had—as all corporations—a number of workers proportional to the number of electoral districts. So, in every corporation, when we started off, they had roughly one per district, then we expanded it and so on. So, what applies to all will also apply to San Fernando, where they had the number of teams equivalent to the number of electoral districts in the San Fernando City.

Mr. Manning: Yeah. I do not think I got an answer. How many employees would that entail in that structure that you mentioned?

Hon. Ameen: The number of electoral districts within each municipality; they got a proportional number of employees, based on that. Each team has 12 persons.

Mr. Manning: So, it is what? Nine by 12?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I do not know how much he wants me to say again.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Is that the best you can do at this point in time?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. I am sure the Member could do the maths.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Great.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Hon. Ameen: That was the formula across all municipalities. Yeah.

Mr. Manning: Right, so nine by 12?

Mr. Chairman: Well, San Fernando East, I think we have gotten the answer to that. Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question was along similar lines as San Fernando East. It is a geographical breakdown of all those employed in the programme itself. I would like to get that in writing, please.

Hon. Ameen: Right. So, Mr. Chairman, the geographic is the region. So some—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Ameen: No. By region. By municipal corporation. The number of electoral districts in each corporation varies. So, for instance, where Tunapuna/Piarco has 17 districts, they would have had more teams than, let us say, Arima or Point Fortin, that have eight or six districts. So, across the board, the number of employees was proportional to the number of electoral districts. The persons were recruited from within the regions. Right. The Member would have—

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you for that, hon. Minister. It is just—if I could get that in writing, I would appreciate it, please—and get the actual numbers.

Hon. Ameen: Well, I am sure *Hansard* could help you. Because if something is not answered verbally here and we give a commitment to provide it in writing, we

would do that. But if we are providing the answers verbally, it is not really required in writing.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Birchwood: Well, quite frankly, my request—

Hon. Ameen: The in writing would be *Hansard*.

Mr. Birchwood: What *Hansard*? My request was specific to numbers. So, if it is you do not have the numbers at hand or if it is you cannot explain geographically—

Hon. Ameen: I would have indicated, and I would have given it already.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Birchwood: Thanks, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: So, let us move to Item 011—oh no—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*] fear has arrived.

Mr. Chairman: Right. I am not sure if you were really inviting an answer to that question. All right. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chair, 009/06, page 267, National Programme for the Upkeep of Public Spaces. I heard the Minister say that she is unable to give a figure for the number of workers to be employed on this programme in fiscal 2027 because it requires a Cabinet decision. Did I hear the Ministry correctly?

Hon. Ameen: The total number for the upcoming fiscal will be approved by Cabinet.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. On what basis, therefore, was the allocation of $91,228,000 made?

Hon. Ameen: We would have done projections, which we provided to the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, what number of workers did you project to get this figure? You said you did projections.

Hon. Ameen: Well, as you know, what we project—

Mr. Imbert: As I know?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. You were a Minister of Finance. What we project is not always what the Minister of Finance—So, the actual amount allocated here we would have—does not exactly reflect what we requested.

Mr. Imbert: Minister, are you saying you cannot say how many workers would be employed with this $91 million?

Hon. Ameen: For what?

Mr. Imbert: You cannot say how many workers?

Hon. Ameen: No. What I am saying is the amount requested is not necessarily the amount allocated. So, in working with what was allocated, we will then go to Cabinet to get the approval for the number, and then that will be publicized.

Mr. Imbert: So, having received the allocation of $91,221,000, you cannot tell this Standing Finance Committee how many workers that will employ?

Hon. Ameen: As I indicated—

Mr. Imbert: So, the answer is no. Okay.

Hon. Member: No. She was about to answer.

Mr. Imbert: But she is not answering.

Hon. Ameen:—we will provide that information when Cabinet. It would be—

Mr. Imbert: So, you are not answering?

Hon. Ameen:—premature for me to come here and give a figure—

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Ameen: That I intend to take—

Mr. Imbert: That is all right. Thank you.

Hon. Ameen:—to Cabinet—

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much.

Hon. Ameen: Because the number that will be employed—

Mr. Chairman: All right. I think—

Hon. Ameen:—will be based on the—

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Hon. Ameen:—Cabinet's approval.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: The Member knows that—

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen:—because he was a Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: You cannot tell us how many people you are going to employ.

Hon. Ameen: He knows that perfectly well.

Mr. Imbert: How could I know what [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Imbert: "I cah know dat".

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin/North East.

Mr. Imbert: I am answering her. "She say I know". I do not know.

Mr. Chairman: Well I am not—

Hon. Ameen: "How you doh know?"

Mr. Imbert: "How I go know what UNC doing?" I do not. That is why I am

asking questions.

Hon. Ameen: "Oh gosh yuh now reach".

Mr. Chairman: Look, it is close to lunchtime. Recess is at hand.

Mr. Imbert: "I cah move on. I just start".

Mr. Chairman: Well, I am afraid if we wait any longer, how much worse it is going to get.

Item 0011: Transfers to State Enterprises, pages 267 to 268. Arouca/Lopinot, I know you want to—it is now two o'clock. We have been here since 10.00. I propose to take the lunch break now, and then we will—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: All right. We will suspend. We resume back at 3.00.

1.58 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee Suspended.*

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

Mr. Chairman: Before we took the break, we were just about to move on to Current Transfers to Stat. Brds. and Similar Bodies, under Sub-Head 06. I think I had recognized Arouca/Lopinot, if I recall. Arouca/Lopinot

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: That is at 330 to 331.

Mr. Gonzales: No. We are at 267 from the—

Mr. Chairman: Sorry. Transfers to State Enterprises. Sorry, 267 to 268. Okay. My apologies.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, I am looking at 011; Sub-Item 03: Rural Development Company of T'dad & T'go (RDC). I have observed that you do not have an allocation for 2027. How many persons do you

have employed in that company?

Hon. Ameen: RDC does not usually get a subvention in that manner. In the last fiscal, because we were in that transition—they get their income from project management. So that was an unusual circumstance, where they were provided with some money to tide them over until they started back earning from project management. So, while that would have occurred last fiscal, that is not the norm. So, they usually do not get money allocated there. This was an exception. As they continue with their project management, they will have income to meet all their operating expenses.

Mr. Gonzales: For fiscal 2027, at the start, that RDC will be in a position to fund its operational expenses?

Hon. Ameen: Well, the expenditure from the last fiscal really was only for a few months when we first started. Since then, they have been funding their own operation. If there are shortfalls or anticipated shortfalls, they will request. But generally, no. They fund themselves.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Are there any projects that they are currently managing at this point in time?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. There are.

Mr. Gonzales: And you are saying without any allocation here, they will continue and will be in a position—

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. Because they earn their income from project management fees. So, the Ministry does not usually give them money for those things.

Mr. Gonzales: Who are the clients that would be giving them project management fees?

Hon. Ameen: Well, anybody who wants them to do project management for them. So, the Ministry is their main client—the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. But it could be anyone. They are a project management company. So, it could be any government Ministry. It could be a private entity. It could be a public-private partnership. That is what they get money from.

Mr. Gonzales: But their main client at this point in time is the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: So, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government will be paying them their project management fees so that they can fund their operations?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. That is the usual operation. Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. So, what—because I am trying to find out what is happening. That is my last question on that point. Under what other Head would you be remitting project management fees to RDC from your allocation at the Ministry of—

Hon. Ameen: Oh. No. This is not for project management fees, you know. This is like a subvention that we give to them, which, as I indicated, was a one-off last fiscal. But this here does not represent project management fees.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to and Stat. Brds. & Similar Bodies, Item 005: Local Government Bodies appears on 268 of the *Draft Estimates*. However, the detailed examination

of these allocations is contained in the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly.* 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*. For the avoidance of doubt, this is to be found at page 330 of the relevant volume.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chair, 327 and 326.

Mr. Chairman: [*Confers with Procedural Clerk*] No. As I said, we would move now to the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* at page 330 of the relevant volume.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, my document says 326.

Mr. Young SC: That is where it starts. But the expenditure starts on 330.

Mr. Chairman: [*Confers with Procedural Clerk*]—330.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. But what about 327?

Mr. Chairman: That is income.

Mr. Young SC: That is the Summary.

Mr. Chairman: So, we are going now to Port-of-Spain City Corporation. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Stat. Brds. & Similar Bodies; 23: Port-of-Spain City Corporation; Sub-Head 01 pages 330 to 331.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I am having a little difficulty. Page 327 gives the breakdown of Personnel Expenditure for the Port-of-Spain City Corporation for the years 2025, 2026 and 2027. They are Estimates.

Mr. Young SC: No. But that is the Summary. Then from 330 you get into the details.

Mr. Imbert: So, we are not allowed to examine the summary?

Mr. Chairman: The details start at 330 that is why—

Mr. Imbert: All right. If we cannot examine the summary, it is all right. All right.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: I have a question on the summary, you see. It is okay.

Mr. Chairman: I am advised that, in keeping with what the general practice is, we start here. Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration, Item 002—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman:—Public Health and Disposal.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker—[*Inaudible*] Page 330, 01: Personnel Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman: You know, I asked the question. I looked up and down twice. You did not raise your hand, as I moved on. But I am going to indulge you.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you moved on in less than a second. Page 330, 01. I see that Personnel Expenditure has gone up by $64,501,800. Could the Minister explain the basis for that increase of $64,501,800?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, the amount requested caters for new salary rates, as well as for arrears. So, as you have the increase for public servants, the arrears will be calculated. We also have to pay them COLA from 2014 to present. So, this figure caters for that, and then, of course, any shortfalls will come in mid-year.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, the increase of $64million in the allocation for the Port of Spain Corporation is for new salaries and arrears, wages and COLA, and arrears of salaries, wages and COLA. Yes?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, you have answered me. The increase for Port of Spain is all salaries, wages and COLA. Nothing else.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Public Health and Disposal, 003: Abattoirs, Markets and Dining Shed, 004: Transport and Cleansing, 005: Squares, Playgrounds and Trees, 006: Stores, Works and Repairs, 007: Cemeteries and Crematorium, 008: Woodbrook Estate. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, 002: Public Health and Disposal. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Mr. Chair, 02: Goods and Services, Public Health and Disposal, but on page 333. Let us start with line Item 13. This Public Health and Disposal is exactly as the name suggests, right? This is to keep the public health aspect of the Port of Spain City Corporation going, and then also whatever disposal exercises they may have to do. In order to be able to do that efficiently, they require vehicle maintenance. They have not acquired any new vehicles for a while. So, when we go to line Item 13, as the vehicles age, would the Minister—you see where I am? Line Item 13 with the Maintenance of Vehicles, an Estimate of $100,000 has been provided. My understanding is that it is not going to be sufficient for the whole year and the maintenance of the vehicles that fall under this particular department. So, Minister, if it is insufficient, as I have been told, and the corporation makes the necessary request, would assistance be given in the mid-year review?

Hon. Ameen: Well, as a matter of fact, you have made the case. There is an ageing fleet. In 2025, when you all were in office, they got $50,000 for maintenance of vehicles. We doubled that last year.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: And we doubled it this year again.

Mr. Young SC: You did not double it this year.

Hon. Ameen: So, we will work with them with their fleet—yeah,

Mr. Young SC: You kept it at the same $100, 000.

Hon. Ameen: At 2025, it was $50,000. We doubled it last year, 2026. You will see the Revised and the Actual last year was $100,000, and they are getting $100,000. But you are correct in that we will be working with them because they do have an ageing fleet. We will work with them. Across corporations, you see fleet management; it is a serious issue. But this corporation, since we came into office, has gotten double what their allocations were before. We have maintained that this year again.

Mr. Young SC: Let us go down to 22: Short-term Employment. As you would be aware, in particular, here under the Public Health and Disposal, the Short-term Employment has been a very important component in the corporation being able to service the city. I see there is a Decrease of $300,000. When you go to what we provided in 2025, it was $1.2 million. You all came in at $1.3 million. You kept the Revised at $1.3 million. Can you explain why it has now been reduced to $1 million?

Hon. Ameen: So, this Vote we actually had, given the expanding needs, the amount requested, this reflects the amount that was requested by the corporation. It really represents the support the corporation needs for additional—

Mr. Young SC: Short-term.

Hon. Ameen:—workers when you have health and public conveniences, and so on.

But this reflects what their requests would have been. Their requests would have been, like, let us say, towards the end of the fiscal, how many workers they had, they would have put in that to request continue at that same.

Mr. Young SC: At that stage. They had $1.3 million. You are saying they requested to drop $300,000. You see, under this Short-term Employment, this is very, very helpful and useful. It has been used for years, in particular, during the Carnival period when you have a lot of public health, et cetera, and the city—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—welcomes hundreds and hundreds of thousands more. So, I find it very surprising, and difficult to believe that they have requested a reduction here in this Short-term.

Hon. Ameen: What we also have, and this obtains for all corporations. You mentioned Carnival. The Carnival clean-up was managed by the NPUPS programme.

Mr. Young SC: Some of it. Yes.

Hon. Ameen: They worked throughout the country. They provided for all the streets as well as in the savannah in collaboration with the NCC. So, quite a lot of the public health work, in terms of manual labour, is taken by the NPUPS programme. So, it just means the expenses go somewhere else. But they can still have the number of workers.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. But you see —

Hon. Ameen: But with the allocation here, they could still employ—

Mr. Young SC:—they can—okay.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: But you see, as you bring up the NPUPS and NPUPS was used. I mean, prior to that, it was all CEPEP. CEPEP assisted greatly.

Hon. Ameen: No. Well, not under this Vote.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I know. But you are the one who brought up something not under this Vote. So, I am asking.

Hon. Ameen: No. You asked about Carnival, so I indicated. But if we are to stick to this Vote. This is the Short-term under the Public Health.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Ameen: I do not want the Chairman to chastise us for straying, right.

Mr. Young SC: But I am saying, you are saying that there was a request for reduction of $300,000. May I ask who that request was made by?

Hon. Ameen: No. I did not say there is a request for reduction.

Mr. Young SC: You just said that. You just said, "They asked for less".

Hon. Ameen: I am saying that the amount allocated is based on their request.

Mr. Young SC: The amount that was allocated previously was $1.3million. You are now asking the Parliament to allocate $1million, which is $300,000 short. We have had a long conversation about the usefulness of this. I am asking now why was it decreased by $300,000?

Hon. Ameen: I think I would have answered that already, right.

Mr. Young SC: You said based on their request. So I am then asking who at the Port of Spain Corporation made that request?

Hon. Ameen: Well, if you are familiar with the process in terms of how requests are made—

Mr. Young SC: It is not if I am familiar, you know.

Hon. Ameen:—no. There is a process.

Mr. Young SC: This is for all of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: No. No. No. You have to allow the Minister to answer the question, Member.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, the budget—

Mr. Young SC: Well, let me help her. I am not familiar. So, tell the country who made the request for $300,000 less.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I think the Minister was explaining the process.

Hon. Ameen: Well, Mr. Chairman, I do not want to assume responsibility to inform anyone of a process that they should familiarize themselves with as a parliamentarian in terms of what the budget process is.

Mr. Young SC: There, Trinidad and Tobago. You have heard the answer.

Hon. Ameen: But there is ongoing consultation with the Ministry of Finance, and every state entity, their financial officers, their CEOs, there are reporting mechanisms and deadlines, by which they are to submit certain things, including *Draft Estimates*. I do not think I have to go into the details. But there is a process. Based on that process, each corporation would have made requests.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. Well, I will wait until you come down because I am on 004.

Mr. Chairman: Item 003: Abattoirs, Markets and Dining Shed, Item 004: Transport and Cleansing. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. Minister, 004, Item 28: Other Contracted Services. There is a decrease of $2.8million. Can you indicate what would account for quite a substantial decrease?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. This caters for the scavenging services, where you have, like garbage collection. They have been doing some desilting. Although a lot of desilting is done with the recurrent workers on the establishment. They have been doing some desilting by contract, as well as maintenance of those communal garbage bins. So, based on the commitments they have for contracts in the upcoming fiscal, this was the sum requested to budgets.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. I heard and listened very carefully to the Minister once again say, "This is the amount that was requested by budgets". My information is the exact opposite. The Port of Spain City Corporation has had difficulty with respect to transport, cleaning and payment of contractors because they do not have a sufficient allocation. So, I am correcting the record, and putting on record that they did not request $18.5million.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Port of Spain North—

Mr. Young SC: I am coming to my—I have five minutes.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. I know you have five minutes.

Mr. Young SC: So, why am I being interrupted? This is the City of Port of Spain, and they demand answers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, no.

Mr. Young SC: Well, yes!

Hon. Ameen: Your question—

Mr. Chairman: No. Hold on. Hold on. Hold on. Allow me to finish.

Mr. Young SC: But you are not allowing me to finish my question.

Mr. Chairman: I will allow you to finish. But the issue of putting it on the public record and you repeating what was told to you by a nameless, faceless person is not a matter of putting it on the public record. That is why this exercise is conducted in the sterile environment of identifying the line Item and asking a question. I am not preventing you from asking anything. All I am preventing you from putting are the utterances of a nameless, faceless person on the *Hansard* as representing the accuracy of the public record. That is all I am doing. So, all I am inviting you to do is identify the line Item and ask a question. That is all.

Mr. Young SC: Line Item 004: Transport and Cleansing, 28. Following the Minister's precedent, where she said, "They requested", I did not hear any particulars of who the "they" was there. So, now on line Item 28, under Other Contracted Services, for the very important service to be provided in the City of Port of Spain, why has there been this reduction of $2.8million for the payment of contractors to collect garbage in the City of Port of Spain when there is always a shortage of allocation under this amount?

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Ameen: All right. For the information of Members and the listening public, "they" refers to the Port of Spain City Corporation as a legal entity. They, the corporation, would have, through the process in budgets, based on their

commitments for contracts for garbage collection, existing contracts for desilting drainage and other matters that fall under Public Health, this would have represented the commitments that they have going over into the new fiscal, and therefore, it is based on that. It is not based on what they would like to have. It is based on where the document supports that there are financial commitments, that there are ongoing contracts, and contracts anticipated to go through the end.

Now, if there is a need for additional, there is a process and they, the administration of the Port of Spain City Corporation, would be aware of how they should make a petition to increase in terms of that allocation. Yeah? So, this is based on the existing contractual arrangements.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Young SC: It is not based on the existing contractual arrangements. It is based on how much has been allocated by the Ministry of Finance for a period, and as you have said, if they require more, because they will require more, that request can be made.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Squares—

Mr. Imbert: My hand is up—[*Inaudible*] What is that? This is the second time you have done this.

Hon. Ameen: "Oh gosh."

Mr. Chairman: You know, sometimes—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, seriously. What do you want me to do? Ring a bell—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, you know, I would have made a suggestion to you, but —

Mr. Imbert: It is quite all right. May I—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, I do not think you would welcome the suggestion I will make to you, but go ahead and ask your question.

Mr. Imbert: May I speak on this question, please?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead and ask your question.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you said you would not allow the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's to put a statement from a nameless, faceless person. The Minister has said that "they", being the legal entity of the Port of Spain City Corporation, requested this. Well, I am saying that "they," meaning the Port of Spain City Corporation, did not request, and "they," meaning the Port of Spain City Corporation—

Mr. Chairman: All right. This—

Mr. Imbert:—have told us that I have to let the people know. The corporation—

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no. We are moving on. This is simply an exercise.

Mr. Imbert: The corporation is not—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: This is simply an exercise in futility. I am proposing to move on.

Mr. Imbert: It is not futile for us, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Squares, Playgrounds and Trees; Item 006: Stores, Works and Repairs; Item 007: Cemeteries and Crematorium; Item 008: Woodbrook Estate. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 335 to 336 inclusive; Item 001: General Administration; tem 002: Public Health; Item 003: Abattoirs, Markets and Dining Shed; Item 004: Transport and Cleansing. Member for Arima, page 336, if I could assist you.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah. Transport and Cleansing was actually before, but

it is all right, it passed already. I will leave it out for this time.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Arima, are you—

Ms. Beckles: No, I will leave it out because—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay, it was before? All right. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On 03, there are on various Sub-Items of 03. Every single part of 03, whether it is 003; 004; 005; 006, has been reduced. Why?

Mr. Chairman: All right, we are on 004. If you could confine your questions to 004, I would be very grateful.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, that is the question.

Mr. Chairman: Well, you can confine your answer on the—

Mr. Imbert: 004/02, reduced by $30,000, why?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: I guess so.

Hon. Ameen: All right. So, do you want me to answer or not?

Mr. Imbert: Of course.

Hon. Ameen: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So, under Transport and Cleansing, Office Equipment, which is 02, the Member is asking, the corporation would have requested to purchase specific items. They have asked for the purchase of three calculators, one heavy-duty printer and one of those all-in-one printers, as well as 40 lockers. These are the resources that they need in that department, the Transport and Cleansing Department, and that department houses several units. So,

in order to effectively perform their duties, these are the items they have asked to be in that unit, the calculators, the heavy-duty printer, the lockers. It is itemized and that is how they come up with this figure.

Mr. Imbert: So, based on an alleged request from the corporation, this has been reduced.

Hon. Ameen: No, no. Mr. Chairman, for a Member to say "alleged request"—

Mr. Imbert: I just said it, I will say it again.

Hon. Ameen:—it is suggesting something else.

Mr. Imbert: Does it?

Hon. Ameen: The Budget Division—and the former Minister of Finance knows this. The Budget Division relies on the requests and Draft Estimates from every government agency, including the corporations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: He knows this. I have read out, itemized because the allocation here is $20,000. It is less than what they would have gotten last year, because last year, the specific things they wanted to get, they got, and this year, I read out the items that they requested. They would have gotten Estimates and all their documentation to support this. So, it is part of the budget process in terms of how requests come to Ministry of Finance, and the Member know that.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. All right, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Imbert: No, no. I am still on this point. I am hearing what the Minister is saying and it is raising supplementary questions. So, the Minister said they got less last year, but they got $50,000 last year. Now, why is it every single one of these Sub-Items is $30,000 in every single department? Is that not that mysterious

that

every single reduction is $30,000?

Hon. Ameen: Well, it depends on what they requested.

Mr. Imbert: So, every single department, no matter who it is, no matter what they need, every one is a $30,000 reduction, and you expect me to believe that?

Mr. Chairman: No. Well—

Mr. Imbert: I do not.

Mr. Chairman: Listen, you can ask questions related to line Items. When you add the editorial—but anyway, you know better than that. So, Minister, are you able to answer?

Hon. Ameen: Answer what?

Mr. Chairman: Oh, okay.

Hon. Ameen: He asked already. I answered him already.

Mr. Chairman: I suppose we are moving on to Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, under 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; 002: Public Health; 04: Other Minor Equipment—

Hon. Ameen: Hold on.

Mr. Young SC:—there is a reduction of the $30,000. I am told by "they," the legal entity, body corporate, that is the Port of Spain City Corporation, that under this, the 002: Public Health; Other Minor Equipment, there is a need and a request was made for the same equipment you talked about in your introduction, these ultra-low volume machines, and the request was actually for $190,000 to get an ultra-low volume machine to spray for mosquitoes in the City of Port of Spain. In

light of that request that was made and the specifics, why has it not been provided and in fact reduced by $30,000 to $20,000?

Hon. Ameen: This is under Transport and Cleansing, you are asking this?

Mr. Young SC: No, no, no, 02: Public Health. We are still under Minor Equipment, 03.

Mr. Chairman: No.

Hon. Ameen: No. We moved on to 004.

Chairman: Member, apparently, we moved on already. We are now on 004. So, I think if you require an answer to that, you could use the Standing Orders to get that information. So, we are now on 004: Transport and Cleansing.

Mr. Young SC: Something else, yes.

Mr. Chairman: So we are on to 005: Squares, Playgrounds and Trees; 006: Stores, Works and Repairs; 007: Cemeteries and cremation?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, I am seeing "cremation" there. So, probably "Crematorium". I am corrected. Thank you very much, Member for Trincity/Maloney. It is very kind of you. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 337; Item 007: Households. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Gratuities – Non-pensionable, I see there is a decrease by $1 million.

Mr. Chairman: That is at 04/03?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: 04/007/03, right? Thank you.

Hon. Ameen: You want the 03? 03 applies to non-pensionable employees. They

cater for the payment of gratuity to non-pensionable daily-rated employees under this Head. So, the calculations are done in advance based on those you anticipate are going to retire.

3.30 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: And so, every year it varies, it fluctuates, so they would calculate based on the age limits of the existing ones.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Alright, so you are of the view that the $6 million would be enough, basically?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, it will be based on those who are reaching the age of retirement.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead? 24: San Fernando City Corporation, Sub Head 01, pages 349 to 350 inclusive. Alright, so Sub Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: City and Departments of Maintenance; 003: Institutions. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, surely you are not using your phone in the Chamber while the Committee is going on? 004: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries; 005: Transport. San Fernando East, my apologies, were you on 004?

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, sorry, I really did not see you.

Hon. Ameen: 004: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries?

Mr. Chairman: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries. That is at page 350.

Mr. Manning: Thank you. Looking at 30: Allowances, I see there was an increase here by $50,000. Can you tell me how many more workers that is

intended to employ?

Hon. Ameen: 01/004: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries.

Mr. Manning: 30: Allowances.

Hon. Ameen: Those are the standard allowances for daily-rated workers. There is an increase because the Government is honouring its commitment to increase the wages of daily paid workers and these workers in this corporation will also benefit. So, that is, this increases only for allowances for the existing daily rated workers.

Mr. Manning: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. Item 005: Transport; 006: Local Health Authority; Sub Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 350 to 353 inclusive. 001: General Administration. Yes, Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Goods and Services, a decrease of $4.4 million. That is the overall Head?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, 02: Goods and Services, is the overall Head. We are onto Item 001. Arima?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, okay, that explanation of the overall reduction, I was asking the Minister that there is an overall reduction of $4.4 million, if there is any explanation for the overall reduction?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. So, while that is the overall, the explanation for the total figure on the top there would be in the lower line. So, the Sub-Heads there, so as we go down each one will have an explanation.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Well, I would probably just ask for the largest of the Items, I think, is Short-term Employment, which is on the next side, which is 22. So, I will wait until Chairman goes across on the other side.

Hon. Ameen: No, this—okay.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: In case if anybody else wants to ask before we reach across on the next page.

Hon. Ameen: Well, the Chairman is on 001.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. So, it is on both sides of the page.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So, I am on 21—

Mr. Chairman: 22, I think. That is at page 35—

Hon. Ameen: 21 is Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, 22.

Hon. Ameen: 22 is Short-term Employment.

Mr. Chairman: That is at page 351.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I am asking is it based on a request for a reduction by the City Corporation, or is that based on some analysis that they sent to the—

Hon. Ameen: So, there are several key positions. Some of them are chief officers, some are senior positions, like Health and Safety Officer, Information and Communication Technology Officer. We have a Public Claims Officer, they have a Legal Assistant, they have senior persons in health. And because those positions were vacant, because we are waiting on public service to assign persons, they were hiring these persons on short term.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: As I indicated in my budget contribution, we are doing that

holistic administrative strengthening. So, several of those positions we have advertised, and we will be shortlisting and assigning officers to these corporations. So, the corporation no longer needs to pay them under that short-term provision, for Short -term Employment.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, so is there an expectation of a smooth transition? In other words, you are advertising the position, and the position is likely to be vacant, or is it that you are making sure that there is a body there?

Hon. Ameen: The short-term stays in place until the more permanent one comes in.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Manning: Thank you. I am under, what, 02: Goods and Services, 12: Materials and Supplies. I see a decrease here of $102,450. What exactly falls under Materials and Supplies in this case?

Hon. Ameen: "Ah doh know if ah have tuh explain to him, he doh know what materials and supplies are"?

Mr. Manning: To the national community, sure.

Mr. Chairman: Minister?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, "Materials and Supplies" represent materials purchased for the corporation to do work under, in this case, General Administration. And "Supplies" could be any one of these things, such as stationery, minor equipment, books. "Ah doh know why ah have to give him ah definition of it."

Mr. Manning: Why is there such a dramatic reduction of 102,000?

Hon. Ameen: Well, I think that is a more relevant question

because—

Mr. Manning: I did not realize you got to judge the relevance of my question.

Hon. Ameen: No, no, I am not here to explain the—

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chairman, what about editorializing?

Hon. Ameen:—dictionary meaning of Materials and Supplies. "Yuh know?"

Mr. Chairman: Minister, can we just.

Mr. Young SC: "Dais yuh wuk."

Mr. Manning: I am still waiting on an appropriate answer from this Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Ah, okay, okay. I am sure everybody is well sustained after a lovely lunch provided by the Parliament. So, let us just settle down and get on with it, shall we? Minister, just answer the question without—

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, Materials and Supplies under this particular Item, for the supply of the core function demands for daily running of the departments—

Mr. Manning: Yes, you already answered that. I am asking why there is such a dramatic reduction?

Hon. Ameen:—so, for instance, based on their requests, they have paper for preparation of reports from the Ministry. A number of our reports with the support of our ICT is being done digitally, so the huge volume of paper that was previously required is no longer required. Ledgers, journals, journal paper for recording source data, again, quite a lot of it is being done digitally. So, that has been reduced.

We also have, under this, you will also have diaries for traveling officers. They have to keep a record and that is how we determine like their travel allowance and so on. For councillors, aldermen and heads of sections,

for secretaries, first-line supervisors, this also covers our police officers, so, that is what. But generally—and we are trying to do it a little more, but will allow us to have a savings is where we will be, because we are doing a lot more digitally, we will have a reduced need for that volume of paper and books and journals, and a lot of the forms that were printed, because they print forms for them to submit, like their travel allowances and so on. So we are actually reducing that and it is an ongoing process.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Manning: Thank you so much, Minister. Greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Manning: Thank you so much, Minister. Greatly appreciated.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Alright, we go now to Item 002: City and Departments of Maintenance; 003: Institutions; 004: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries; 005: Transport; 006: Local Health Authority.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Chair?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: As it relates to Minor Equipment, I mean, why would that be a decrease?—because that is normally something that local corporations do not have. I am looking at Local Health Authority, 04.

Hon. Ameen: Local Health Authority, 04, is Electricity.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minor Equipment.

Mr. Chairman: We on to Sub-Head 03?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: You on 06, right?

Hon. Ameen: 006: Local Health Authority.

Mr. Chairman: Local Health Authority?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Ameen: On which Sub-Head?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minor Equipment.

Hon. Ameen: Which number?

Mr. Chairman: Is it 353, Minister?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. 006 is the Head, and which Sub-Head number?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Alright, so that would be on the other page. I am a little ahead of you.

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East.

Mr. Manning: Which Head are you on, sorry?

Mr. Chairman: We are on 006: Local Health Authority.

Mr. Manning: Sure. 006, what is this 28, is it? Other Contracted Services?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Manning: I see there is a decrease here just over $2.2million for Other Contracted Services.

Hon. Ameen: They have some proposals for some new contracts under the Local Health Authority. So, the allocation—

Mr. Manning: This is the corporation itself? When you say "they", do you mean San Fernando City Corporation?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, the corporation. Is the corporation we are talking about under this particular thing, right?

Mr. Manning: Thanks.

Hon. Ameen: Under their Local Health Authority, they have some proposals for new contracts in the upcoming fiscal year. So, this would be based on the commitments that they have. I am a little concerned about the work that they are doing and how effective it is in that region. So, while we will be working with them with their public health unit as a whole, certainly we might need to examine more closely how they are expending this money.

Mr. Manning: Right, but there is a reduction of 2.2. So, you are saying you do not trust how they are spending the money, so you reduced the budget?

Hon. Ameen: No, no, I did not say I do not trust them.

Mr. Manning: I am asking. I am asking.

Ms. Ameen: Well, I did not say that I do not trust. I did not say that.

Mr. Manning: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: What I am saying is—we have some concerns that we intend to work with them to improve their efficiency. The figure you see here is based on proposals for new contracts under public health in the new fiscal. That is what it is based on.

Mr. Manning: Okay, but why is there a reduction by such an amount, by $2.2million? So, you are hiring less people than you would have?

Hon. Ameen: No, this is not hiring people, you know. Other Contracted Services is not for hiring.

Mr. Manning: Would garbage collection fall under this line Item?

Hon. Ameen: Certain ones. So, there is in-house garbage collection, and there is Other Contracted Services where you hire. Other Contracted Services under Local Health Authority is not limited to the garbage truck contractors. There are other

things like desilting drains and other public health functions that fall under here. Where they decide to contract it out is where it will fall under this 28 Item. But there are other places—where you are talking about workers—that is another line.

Mr. Manning: Right.

Hon. Ameen: But this specific Item 28 is based on their proposals for new contracts in the upcoming fiscal year. So, this covers the new contracts.

Mr. Manning: So, San Fernando City Corporation asked for $2.2 million less under this line Item under Other Contracted Services, which would include types of garbage collection and drain cleaning, as you have said?

Ms. Ameen: Well, it is not limited to that you know. "Dey does clean dey markets."

Mr. Manning: Agreed. But they asked for $2.2 million less.

Hon. Ameen: "Dey do clean their market. Dey do a whole set of work."

Mr. Manning: And they asked for less?

Mr. Chairman: Alright.

Hon. Ameen: This is based—for the fifth time.—

Mr. Manning: They could do all of these things on this line Item, and they ask for $2.2 million less.

Hon. Ameen: This is based on what their project proposals are.

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East.

Mr. Manning: I am just asking for an answer Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I think—

Hon. Ameen: I will tell you something I told you twice already.

Mr. Chairman: It is as best as you can. You have asked the question five times.

The same answer has been forthcoming five times. Trincity/Maloney.

Mr. Manning: What has been the answer, Sir? Mr. Chairman, what has been the answer?

Mr. Chairman: The answer is what it is on *Hansard*. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Alright, well, let us move on. So, Sub-Head 03—Oh, I am reminded of Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 006/28 Other Contracted Services. Hon. Minister, in 2026 there was a revised figure of $3.7 million allocated to the San Fernando City Corporation. Can you indicate for me, out of that $13.7 million, how much money was allocated and paid in garbage collection service please?

Hon. Ameen: What was allocated was $12.7 million, and what was the Actual when we revised, in terms of the total that was given to them, it was actually more than what was allocated. So, the revised Estimate was $13.71million, $1 million more. So that is how it usually works.

Mr. Marcelle: Yes, I said that, Minister.

Hon. Ameen: We give them an allocation.

Mr. Marcelle: Minister. Minister.

Hon. Ameen: So, you asked what was given in the previous year.

Mr. Marcelle: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect—

Mr. Chairman: Minister I think the question is: Are you able to tell out of the money that was formed—the Revised Estimates of 2026 are you able to tell what portion of that went to payment of garbage collection?

Hon. Ameen: That is not how it is broken down.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, I see.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, is this Minister going to answer our questions or answer her own questions going forward?

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East, stop being facetious, will you?

Mr. Manning: I would like to know, please.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, alright, so having regard to that, I propose to move to the next Head.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 353 to 354, for Members, inclusive. Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. 002: City and Departments of Maintenance; 003: Institutions; 004: Parks, Playgrounds and Cemeteries; 005: Transport; 006: Local Health Authority. Sub-Head 04, page 354, Current Transfers and Subsidies Current. Item 007: Households. 25, Arima Borough Corporation, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, pages 365 to 366 inclusive. Item 001: General Administration; 002: Public Health; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004—

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Under 003?

Mr. Gonzales: Correct.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, go ahead.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, can you explain? Under Sub-Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance I am seeing a reduction by $11,000. Can you explain the reason for that reduction?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, so this is really based on the number of workers in the establishment. As you know, they have some new salary arrangements. So, the

workers who fall under Markets and Abattoirs will be paid within this Vote, and that includes temporary employees.

Mr. Gonzales: Yeah, but what caused the reduction? Because I observed—

Hon. Ameen: Yes, yes. Some of these are temporary employees. Some of these employees moved from markets and abattoirs to other departments. So sometimes it fluctuates, and this is based on what they project the number of workers here will be within this fiscal year.

Mr. Gonzales: That information would have been provided by the Arima Borough Council to the Ministry of—?

Hon. Ameen: The Arima Borough Corporation, their financial officer and so on, sitting with the officers from our Ministry and the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Under 004/02, there is an increase. Is that to cover the new arrangements and new salary?

3.50 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. Those are new salaries for the daily-paid workers. We have permanent, regular and casual workers on the daily-rated establishment. So, their increase to salaries and their COLA allowances as well, will come under that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: So, next Item 005: Works. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—reduction, $705,000.

Mr. Chairman: Page 366.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, 366.

Hon. Ameen: So, this Vote is allocated for short-term employment, really kind of revolving employment in the corporation to meet their shortages. As I explained when the question was raised for Port of Spain Corporation, Arima Borough too, had several officers, very senior officers who had specialized skills and specialized qualifications like legal services and so on. They were employed on short-term employment for quite some time. So, they would be on a three-month contract and be renewed and so on. As we fill these positions—in fact, some of the same persons who were there on short-term, they came for the interview and they qualified and they will be there, but they will be there on a longer contract. So, we are not paying them out of this Vote again.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Public Health.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I am on the same—

Mr. Chairman: You are on the same—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah, it would not be long. Minister 96, right, $250,000 in fuel. I mean, that is always a big challenge in terms of equipment as you know. Why would they reduce fuel?

Hon. Ameen: It is my understanding that they had some bills left over from—let me just confirm, 96. Yes. So, this Vote is where they purchase gasoline, diesel and lubricants for the corporation's fleet of vehicles. And usually when they do that, they have an arrangement with NP as well as other service providers for lubricants and so on, and not all the bills come in on a month-to-month basis. So, some of this represents some moneys that were outstanding, but the bulk of it is for

what they anticipate this year will cost them.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Okay. 002: Public Health. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Chairman, just quickly. Madam Minister, $300,000 reduction in materials and supplies is a lot.

Hon. Ameen: Which one are we on?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: 002: Public Health, 12.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. Oh, well, this allocation is where they purchased materials to produce food badges and for sanitizing working areas. You will appreciate that with the new system we have for the expiration date of food cards to be on the anniversary of the date it was issued as opposed to the end of each calendar year. There will be a reduction in the number of food badges to be produced. A lot of material under this Vote is for making of food badges. So that has been reduced.

Mr. Chairman: 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Parks and Recreation Grounds; 005: Works. Sub-Head, 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 368, 001: General Administration; 002: Public Health; 004; Parks and Recreation Grounds; 005: Works. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, 007: Households. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Page 369.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Minister just an enquiry there, 001: Pensions, $1.3 million. Are those payments already?

Hon. Ameen: This is for monthly paid retirees, and this is calculated based on the projection. Those that are anticipated to retire or who have retired and have put in

claims. So, this is calculated based on a projection on those persons who are monthly paid officers turning 60.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Right, 26 - Point Fortin Borough Corporation, page 376. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, 001: General Administration; 002: Local Health Authorities; 003: Public Places; 004: Transport and Roads. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, 004, 02: Overtime - Daily-Rated Workers. Could the Minister explain the decrease of $150,000?

Hon. Ameen: Well, based on the planned activities for this fiscal, this would be sufficient to pay, to facilitate payments for daily-rated workers for overtime.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, just to clarify. Based on the request from the borough corporation, this reduction will not affect any of their essential duties, in terms of their overtime? There are some persons whose overtime, whose essential duties would include overtime, Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. So that would have been of the planned activities, right. We do have officers who, for instance, do supervision at night and so on. So that is part of their planned activities. So based on the activities they have planned, the allocation meets those projected. And as always is done with workers when it comes to overtime, the CEOs have a responsibility to manage the overtime that would be considered non-essential within the allocation. But definitely, what is considered as essential is called "planned" and it is allocated for. Planned activities for the year.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, subsistence $496,000 decrease.

Hon. Ameen: That is 01?

Mr. Chairman: 001: General Administration. Am I correct?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, please, Chairman.

Hon. Ameen: Right. So, what we have allocated here is a projection, but the corporation, based on what they usually spend would probably require some additional funding to facilitate arrears of travelling and upkeep. Now, this is for public officers, eh. Because out of this we are also paying the arrears based on the new terms and conditions. So, there is a space within the system for the calculation, for the Ministry of Finance to attend to it later on.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. 002: Local Health Authority. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 002, 28: Other Contracted Services.

Hon. Ameen: This is Public Health?

Mr. Chairman: That is on page 378. Am I correct?

Mr. Marcelle: The next page.

Mr. Chairman: So, page 378.

4.00 p.m.

I am seeing in 2025, $3.9 million was spent under Other Contracted Services, which would include items, such as garbage collection and so on. And I am seeing a reduction first, in 2026, to $3.5 million, and in 2027, to $3.2 million. A reduction of $300,000 in this fiscal, but from 2025, it is actually a reduction of almost $700,000. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the rationale for the decrease in Other Contracted Services under the Point Fortin Borough Corporation, please?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. I think what we are doing with them is to look more closely at their bulk waste programme for seasonal bulk waste collection. So, when you think about periods, such as Christmas, and so on, where you have that bulk waste, we will be working with them with regard to their schedule so they will better reach those demands, and so we will work with them within the allocation. But if an increase is required, there is a provision for us to go to Ministry of Finance. But what we are examining with them is a revision of the seasonal.

So, this provision covers all their regular garbage collection; all. But the seasonal ones are the ones where we will be working with them to manage.

Mr. Marcelle: In relation to the seasonal aspect, in terms of working with them, is it the intention to assist in terms of even externally—to assist the corporation in terms of, for Christmas, for bulk cleaning, and so on, through collaborative efforts through your Ministry?

Hon. Ameen: We have done a lot of collaboration with Point Fortin, so that is not out of the question. For instance, when they have Borough Day, they have a lot of collaboration from other Ministries and support from the Ministry of Culture and Community Development, and so on. So that is also part of it, yes.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have another question when we move further down.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, I saw your hand was up. Is it that you—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It was the same line—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, I see. So, I can move ahead?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, please.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. So, we go now to 003: Public Places; 004: Transport

and Roads; 005: Corporation Properties. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; 001: General Administration; 002: Local Health Authority; 003: Public Places; 004: Transport and Roads; 005: Corporation Properties. Arima?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, just to enquire again, there is a decrease of gratuity staff of some $2.3 million—

Hon. Ameen: Hold on, which Item and line Item?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: As the Chairman mentioned, 004: Current Transfers and Subsidies . I am dealing with—

Hon. Ameen: 007/01?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, please.

Hon. Ameen: Right. So, under Households, Pensions, yes—oh, the pensions. Again, this is for monthly-paid officers, eh, so this is sort of calculated in advance based on the number of people reaching age 60, and that fluctuates, of course. So, based on those persons projected to reach that retirement age, this is the projected expenditure.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 009: Other Transfers. Okay, 27 - Chaguanas Borough Corporation; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration.

Hon. Ameen: Page—

Mr. Chairman: Page 387 to 388 inclusive. 002: Cemeteries. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I notice an increase of $24.5 million under Wages and C.O.L.A.; moved from $1.3 million to $25.8 million. Can I ask what this would cover, given that it was only $1 million last year?

Hon. K. Ameen: Oh, yes. Well, of course, this caters for daily-paid employees.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, could you repeat? I did not hear you.

Hon. Ameen: This caters for daily-rated employees, and based on the salary increase agreement with the CPO and the NUGFW, we have to pay for the 2017 to 2019 period, but we also have to pay for the 2014 to 2016 period. So, this covers the increased salary, but also the arrears for those periods. So that is why the sum is so high.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, is it Chaguanas alone that you are paying for the 2014—

Hon. Ameen: No.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—because I did not see such a high increase on any of the others.

Hon. Ameen: Well, in every corporation, it will be based on the number of employees there. So, the Ministry of Finance would have done a projected—a calculation based on the number of employees and the new rate, and that is what is allocated there.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. So, how many employees are there, and is there an intention to add?

Hon. Ameen: This caters for the existing employees—the existing employees on the daily-rated cadre.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, the $1 million from last year, which was Wages and C.O.L.A., that was the amount that you had for the employees in this corporation, and to pay the arrears, and so on, it is $25 million now?

Hon. Ameen: It is arrears as well as the new wages, yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I know. I know.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. It just seems awfully high.

Hon. Ameen: Well, it is awfully high in all the corporations. As a matter of fact—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I did not notice that with any of the other corporations.

Hon. Ameen: Well, yes. All the—it depends on the number of workers in each section.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Obviously.

Hon. Ameen: But this particular one is for the daily-paid employees—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Obviously. Obviously.

Hon. Ameen:—in the Cemeteries.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. I need to work in the cemetery.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority.

Hon. Ameen: Increased.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, that is 387. We have not gotten their yet, Arima. Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, this is page 388 to 390 inclusive; 002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs.

Hon. Ameen: Increased.

Mr. Chairman: 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority. Laventille West, which Item?

Mr. Marcelle: 005, please, Mr. Chairman .

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. In the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, Minister, in 2025, the Chaguanas Borough Corporation spent $2.7 million on their Other Contracted Services, which would include their drainage cleaning, their waste disposal and garbage collection, et cetera, right.

Hon. Ameen: Other Contracted Services—

Mr. Marcelle: In Other Contracted Services.

Hon. Ameen:—in 2025?

Mr. Marcelle: In 2025.

Hon. Ameen: No. I have—

Mr. Marcelle: $12.7million.

Hon. Ameen: It is 12 not 2. $12 million.

Mr. Marcelle: I said 12—yeah.

Hon. Ameen: All right.

Mr. Marcelle: $12.7 million. So, my apologies. $12.7 million. In 2026, they were increased almost by 100 per cent to $23.5 million.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: However, having their budget doubled, they only spent $15.8 million. Notwithstanding that they have spent $15.8 million out of their $23 million allocated in 2026, you have further increased their allocation to $19.2 million. What is the rationale for increasing the Chaguanas Borough Corporation almost 100 per cent from its regular allocation, and this year, continue to increase it to $19.2 million, notwithstanding that the other corporations, under this said line

Item, had requested more, but you have given them less in PNM corporations, but when it comes to UNC corporations, you have increased it significantly?

4.10 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with Chaguanas Borough Corporation here, and as we go to each corporation, the Member will have the opportunity to ask. In several corporations, there have actually been increases—

Mr. Marcelle: If you want to go and answer, okay.

Hon. Ameen:—in the local health authority and the question here if it is regards to Chaguanas Corporation—

Mr. Chairman: It is.

Hon. Ameen:—I could answer to indicate that the Vote here for Other Contracted Services, the $19.2 million, is to facilitate increases in scavenging services. in Chaguanas borough because of the rapid expansion in terms of increase population density and particularly increased numbers of a lot of commercial activities.

So, the corporation has had to increase the scavenging services for 13 areas within their borough, as well as to specifically cater for poultry waste. Because within the market, but even within the region, there is an issue with the management of waste from poultry depots. So that as well is something that they have had to treat with and this is also to provide for a number of schools but they also had some new housing developments and as well as, again, for the seasonal which we will be working on them with to strengthen their seasonal and extra services for like public and religious holidays and so on, and the disposal of it at the landfills.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Marcelle: So, Minister, you increased the amount of allocations for Chaguanas Borough Corporation to accommodate for seasonal activities, but in Point Fortin Borough Corporation you decreased the amount—

Hon. Ameen: No, no, no. That is it not what I said.

Mr. Marcelle:—and said that the Ministry would work it.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: That is not what I said.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Hon. Ameen: I said, just like the other corporations we are dealing with Chaguanas here, we will work with them on the seasonal. Just as the other corporations, we will work with them on the seasonal. This caters for their scavenging, and I indicated the increase in the areas, the 13 areas, the specific issue with the poultry waste, and to provide for some new housing developments within that region.

Mr. Marcelle: Minister, two questions. What new housing developments were included in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation that did not exist in the last fiscal?

Hon. Ameen: Well, it is not that they did not exist, it is that they were not catered for.

Mr. Marcelle: Which facility?

Hon. Ameen: So, what happens is that when a housing development is there and you have a few people living, the corporation would supply the services, kind of incorporate it into their existing schedule. And as more people come and it expands and provides that demand, they then say: "Listen we need to treat this as an area." So, with the increased population, as I say, sometimes you have a few

people, and they try to incorporate it, and then it gets too much. Then they decide, listen, we have to expand, and that is what they do.

Mr. Marcelle: Hon. Minister, you indicated that in this fiscal that the new local government boundaries and Chaguanas being elevated to a city, however in terms of the geographical area in that proposed Bill there is a significant reduction in terms of the—

Mr. Marcelle: No, this does not have anything to do with that.

Mr. Marcelle: Alright, if you may just allow me to finish my question.

Mr. Young SC: Please.

Mr. Marcelle: Please. In this Bill, in relation to the local government amendment and you indicated very early in your opening statement that in this fiscal that that would take effect and therefore I am asking, in light of your indication that in this fiscal, Chaguanas will be elevated to a city and therefore their geographic location would also be significantly reduced based on the new Bill, why is there a significant increase in UNC Chaguanas Borough Corporation and then soon-to-be city as opposed to a reduction based on the geographical area.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I was trying to save the Member from asking a question based on a false premise.

Hon Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Marcelle: Tell Khadijah.

Hon. Ameen: In the opening remarks, when I indicated that the Ministry will be setting up the staffing and so on for the new corporations to prepare them for when they are ready to take place. And I am saying that has nothing to do with this.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, alright. Let us move on, shall we?

Hon. Ameen: "Poor fella."

Mr. Marcelle: Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases—okay, Chaguanas East. I am hearing you.

Hon Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Ameen: "He fass eh"?

Mr. Chairman: Let us take it down a notch, shall we? Item 001: General Administration; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 04: Item 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers.

28 - Diego Martin Borough Corporation, page 396. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 02— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Which Item?

Mr. Imbert: The one you just called.

Mr. Chairman: Item 02?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: 001: General Administration, page 396, for the avoidance of doubt.

Mr. Imbert: 02/001/06, why has the allocation for water and sewerage rates for

the Diego Martin Corporation been cut by 83 per cent?

Hon. Ameen: Well, this—

Mr. Imbert: From $300,000 to $50,000 is it that—

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, so this is how they—

Mr. Imbert: "What happen? Yuh want dem to cut dey water"?

Hon. Ameen: No, no. This is what they will use to pay WASA bills—

Mr. Imbert: $50,000—

Hon. Ameen: Hold on, hold, on. Relax, relax, relax.

Mr. Imbert: Alright, I will wait for you to finish.

Mr. Chairman: Could you allow the answer?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Hon. Ameen: So, this is what usually happens, and this happened on numerous occasions when the Member who is asking the question was the Minister of Finance. We utilized the allocation. If the WASA bill exceeds their allocation, they send it to the Ministry, and they get supplementary funding. So there is no situation where the WASA bill will not be paid. This is a normal thing, and it has happened several times under your tenure.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. Mr. Chairman, I fail to see the relevance to what happened under my tenure. We are now in the UNC era. So, I am asking why have you cut allocation for water and sewerage rates from $300,000 to $50,000 and based on your supplementary answer—

Hon. Ameen: I should also—

Mr. Imbert: —where is the supplementary funding to come from?

Hon. Ameen: I should also tell you that last fiscal—

Mr. Imbert: I have not finished my question. Look—

Hon. Ameen: Well, I am trying to help you out.

Mr. Imbert:—Mr. Chairman, it is not right, you know.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, last fiscal—

Mr. Imbert: It is one rule for here and another rule for there?

Mr. Chairman: What?

Mr. Imbert: I am asking a question; she is interrupting me.

Hon. Ameen: No.

Mr. Imbert: I waited; I stopped.

Mr. Chairman: As you are apt to do so frequently.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chair, let us not start that.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no. Do not, do not. No, no, no, no.

Mr. Imbert: That is not relevant.

Mr. Chairman: It is quite relevant.

Mr. Imbert: It is not relevant.

Mr. Chairman: It is quite relevant.

Mr. Imbert: I would like to be able to ask the question.

Mr. Chairman: Well, if you would allow the Minister to answer—

Mr. Imbert:—to interrupt me? Allow her to interrupt me?

Mr. Chairman: If you would allow her to answer, you may not like the answer you are getting, but if you allow her to answer, then you can ask a follow-up question.

Hon Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: She is interrupting me.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no. What you are doing is, when you are getting an answer you do not like, you seek to preempt the answer from the Minister.

Mr. Imbert: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Can I—can you just hold on a second, please?

Mr. Imbert: Alright, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Alright, when you ask a question, the answer is being given, if you do get the answer you like or you want or you desire, you seek to preempt the Minister. What you can do is wait, get your answer and if you want to ask a different question, you are free to do so within the confines of the rules. But what you are not entitled to do is to seek to corral the answer and to mould it like Plasticine in which you desire. So, ask your question and let the Minister answer.

Hon. Ameen: If I may, Mr. Chairman.

4.20 pm

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, none of that happened just now. I was asking a question, and the Minister was interrupting me.

Hon. Ameen: Alright, so let me start afresh—

Mr. Imbert: No, I still have not finished asking my question.

Hon. Ameen: "Well, I eh finish answer yuh first question. Ah want tuh finsh."

Mr. Imbert: "But yuh cyah want tuh finish."

Mr. Chairman: Alright, we getting to an impasse here. Can I propose this solution? Minister, hang on a second, would you? Ask your question in a succinct form.

Mr. Imbert: Succinct form?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: I have five minutes. I have five minutes according to the rules.

Mr. Chairman: Ask your question.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Hon. Ameen: You just spent five minutes throwing a tantrum.

Mr. Imbert: I would like to know why the Diego Martin Borough Corporation allocation under this Sub-Item has been cut by 83 per cent, and where is the supplementary funding going to come from that the Minister referred to in response to my first question? Where is that coming? How is it coming? When is it coming?

Mr. Chairman: Alright. There are two questions—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Right? So, you could proceed to break up the answers as you see fit.

Hon. Ameen: First of all, in 2025, their actual WASA bills were $40,683. In previous years, their usual Estimate would be $50,000. In the last fiscal, their Revised Estimates were $300,000 because they had arrears. So, they had their Estimates with their allocation of $50,000. Then, in the Revised Estimates, they had $300,000 to cover the arrears. In the current fiscal, we are not treating with the arrears anymore. Therefore, the $50,000 allocated is in line with the 2025 Actual, which is $40,000, and the 2026 Estimate, which is $50,000. So, last year there was a spike to cover arrears. This year, there are no arrears outstanding and the $50,000 allocated covers what is normally their expense.

Mr. Imbert: I just would like the Minister to repeat what the Minister just said.: There are no arrears outstanding? None?

Hon. Ameen: We covered—

Mr. Imbert: You just said no arrears.

Mr. Chairman: You see?

Mr. Imbert: I asked a question.

Mr. Chairman: It is exactly what you are accusing the Minister of is what you are guilty of. You are seeking to pre-empt the answer.

Mr. Imbert: That is not so, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, it is.

Mr. Imbert: Well, that is your version.

Mr. Chairman: It is.

Mr. Imbert: That is your version.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, it is my version, and I am afraid the only one that matters quite frankly. Right? So, we move on. Port of Spain, Diego Martin—

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no, no. I did not get an answer to my question.

Mr. Chairman: No, you got the answer. I am ruling that as asked and answered—

Mr. Imbert: I did not get an answer.

Mr. Chairman: I am ruling, asked and answered.

Hon. Ameen: I answered the Member very succinctly—

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North—

Hon. Ameen:—I went into details. I went into 2025

Mr. Imbert: Really? Alright.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I have ruled.

Hon. Ameen: All right.

Mr. Chairman: Asked and answered. Port of Spain North. That is just a facetious observation.

Mr. Imbert: That is your opinion—

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North.

Mr. Imbert:—and those are insulting words.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; line Item 22: Short-term Employment.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: You cut have the Short-term Employment for the Diego Martin Borough Corporation by $454,000, and when you look at the 2025 Actual, because you have made a number of references to what happened under our time, it was $2.8million. It was then—

Hon. Member: 2.9

Mr. Young SC: 2.9, correct, if you round it up—then dropped to a million in 2026. But you had to take it up to $2million, and now you have dropped it down to $1.5 million. Short-term Employment is very important for the Diego Martin Borough. Why have you cut it so drastically, 25 per cent?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, so under General Admin—sorry, under this—

Mr. Young SC: Yes, Goods and Services is General Admin.

Hon. Ameen: This one is General Admin brought forward.

Mr. Young SC: Yeah.

Hon. Ameen: Goods and Services. So—

Mr. Young SC: So, this is the administration.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. So similar to what obtained in the Arima Borough, and I think

the Port of Spain Corporation, it was asked previously, a lot of short-term employment facilitated those senior positions within the corporations. We have sought to streamline those. We have advertised, and those persons will be given contracts for longer periods. So, in many cases, the officers who were holding these portfolios on short term from the corporation, those same people, did well in the interviews, and those same people are being hired now on a longer term, and they are being paid from somewhere else. So, the requirement under this Vote would have decreased because of that.

Mr. Chairman: When you go down now to Contracted Services—that is not what you are referring to, right? Line Item 28.

Hon. Ameen: No, that is not for staff.

Mr. Young SC: Right, okay, sorry. Contract Employment above, where you said that these long-term contracts would now be—no, the short-term would now turn to long-term. We just got the long explanation. So, when we go up to line Item 16 now, right? Because you have dropped it by 400—that is short-term—$454,000, but when you go up now to where you sent us the Contract Employment at line Item 16, you will see it is only $175,000—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Chairman:—estimated there. So how are you employing the people who are on short-term?

Hon. Ameen: No, they are employed by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, you know. So, for instance, our Procurement Unit—

Mr. Young SC: Hold on. Hold on. They are employed by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—but this is the Diego Martin Corporation where you have cut short-term.

Hon. Ameen: So, let me give you the breakdown. The same happens—for instance, our Procurement Unit, as well as our Local Economic Development Unit—

Mr. Young SC: At the Ministry?

Hon. Ameen: At the Ministry. It includes 14 officers for each of the municipal corporations and their support staff. So, they comprise part of the bigger unit—

Mr. Young SC: At the Ministry.

Hon. Ameen:—at the Ministry, and that unit also includes those officers.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Ameen: So, they are assigned to each corporation, but they are paid from the Head that supports that unit at head office. So, some of these officers will be paid by head office and assigned to the respective corporations.

Mr. Young SC: But we are dealing with the specific Borough Corporation here in Diego Martin.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. So, what I—

Mr. Young SC: So, you are moving them from the Ministry—but they were under short-term employment here at the Borough.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: According to you, they went to the Ministry, and now they are coming back in the Borough to be paid by the Ministry?

Hon. Ameen: No, they are a part of the unit at the Ministry. They are assigned to

the regional corporation and, therefore, the payment of their salary does not come under here. So, the corporation could then utilize—because this corporation actually has an increase under Contract Employment.

Mr. Young SC: Of $2,000?

Hon. Ameen: Yes. So, they could utilize that for other things, because those officers will now be paid by head office.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. And now when you go down line Item 46, which is of particular concern to the constituents of Diego Martin and the burgesses of Diego Martin, Natural Disasters. You see a reduction in the Natural Disasters, line Item 46, of $535,000.

Hon. Ameen: So under—

Mr. Young SC: Yeah, 46.

Hon. Ameen: 46?

Mr. Young SC: Yeah.

Hon. Ameen: Right. So, under 46, we have—the Disaster Management Unit, I would have indicated to the House that we have restructured that unit; the head office, the Ministry, and we also have given them additional workers, for instance under NPUPS, and so on to be—

Mr. Young SC: Given who? The borough corporation?

Hon. Ameen: All corporations, yeah, across the board.

Mr. Young SC: From the Ministry?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, the NPUPS workers assigned there with who are trained for disasters. And this deals with the Goods and Services under Natural Disasters. We have had—

Mr. Young SC: Right, so not the workers?

Hon. Ameen: Right—

Mr. Young SC: This is Goods and Services?

Hon. Ameen: This is Goods and Services.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Ameen: This is not the workers, right?

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Ameen: Sorry. So, the Goods and Services, all the equipment that we had in our main warehouse. We have supplied that to all corporations. In addition, we had a donation from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of over one point something million dollars in items, and that, too, has been sent to corporations. So, a lot of items that they would have planned to purchase, such as power saws, and power washers, and pumps, and so on, even boats, we have life rafts, and so on, have now been provided to them. So, they do not need to expend that amount of money.

Mr. Young SC: And then this, one—well, the Member for Couva South is not here—but this one, line Item 68: Water Trucking.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

4.30 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: You see, there has been a reduction in the water trucking.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: But certainly—and I am not the representative for Diego Martin, so I am encroaching on my colleagues here, but I can say from personal experience there have been serious water problems throughout Diego Martin, Port of Spain as

well, but we are on Diego Martin—

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC:—and I am seeing a reduction here of water trucking, which has been critical in the provision of water to the burgesses of Diego Martin.

Hon. Ameen: Oh, no.

Mr. Young SC: Why did you all reduce those—

Hon. Ameen: No, no, the—

Mr. Young SC: No, no?

Hon. Ameen: The water trucking Vote in all corporations is very separate from the water truck service provided by WASA to its customers. This water trucking Vote is for persons who do not have a pipe-borne supply of water.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Ameen: So, there are still areas, particularly the rural areas—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Ameen:—and it is constantly reducing. Because more and more areas are getting infrastructure and—

Mr. Young SC: [*Laughter*] In Diego Martin, there has been no laying of new infrastructure for water.

Hon. Ameen: Well, this has been in all corporations. This is what it is for, right? When WASA customers need water trucking, that comes from WASA, not the corporation.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. Young SC: So, they are laying new pipes?

Hon. Ameen: No, this is in line with what they used last year.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to follow up on the question from my colleague for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West with water trucking. Mr. Chairman, you will see in 2026 the Revised Estimate of $840,000 that would have been based on the actual spend in the Diego Martin Borough Corporation. Mr. Chairman, the line Minister, I agree, this is separate and apart from the WASA service. However, there are still communities in Diego Martin that do utilize water trucking. So, having just gone through a financial year where you have spent $840,000 as an actual spend, there is a reduction of $190,000. So, based on what went on last year, Minister, do you think that this $650,000 allocation is adequate?

Hon. Ameen: In 2025, they utilized $453,000. In 2026, the allocation was $650,000. Based on their Revised Estimate, again based on usage, they were given additional funding to come up to $840,000. The $650,000 is similar to their allocation in 2026 and therefore water trucking is something that fluctuates, so if they need additional, just as they did in the current fiscal where it was revised, the same thing could happen. And if it is less, then the revised will reflect less. Water trucking is something that fluctuates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: He lives in Diego Martin, but he is not a representative. I am a representative. I am listening to what the Minister is saying on 02/22. The Minister said that the reduction, and if you look at from 2025 down to 2027, the reduction is almost 50 per cent. The allocation for short-term employment between 2025 and 2027 is virtually 50 per cent. The Minister explained that away

by saying that short-term employment contracts are being replaced by long-term, and so on. I have a question. Who would be the employer of these workers or officers who would be sent to Diego Martin with respect to this transition that you are talking about, that you are moving away from allowing the corporation to hire people on a short-term basis, and your Ministry, at head office, is now employing people and sending them to the corporation? Who is the employer?

Hon. Ameen: I think we would have explored that already.

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no, no.

Hon. Members: "Oooo!"

Mr. Imbert: I am the first person to ask that question.

Hon. Ameen: That was answered.

Mr. Chairman: I think what the question is seeking to elicit, perhaps—

Mr. Imbert: Directly.

Mr. Chairman: I was going to say rather—anyway.

Mr. Imbert: I know what you were going to say. I say directly.

Mr. Chairman: No, you really would not want me to say how I was going to describe the question—

Mr. Imbert: But, Mr. Chairman, I am an elected representative.

Mr. Chairman: Let me try to assist you as best as I can. Minister, I think the question is: who does the employment contract exist between the employee and the employer, or who would be the employer in the sense of giving the contract, if there is such one?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, when we came into office, the number of vacancies existing in these corporations because the Ministry failed to employ, and the

biggest bulk of that were chief officers such as engineers and corporate secretaries and so on, medical doctors, the financial officers, the engineers. These corporations, in the meanwhile, were scrambling to employ those persons under short-term employment. I indicated that we are providing relief because we are establishing several units to streamline the corporations, several units.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: The question here is not about those units and where those workers will be paid but with regard to Item 02, line 22: Short-term Employment, whoever the corporation has on short-term employment will be paid on this Vote. I explained why there was that reduction because a number of those positions are now being filled in consultation with PMCD and the other authorities to streamline things.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Well, since we have had that answer, I will go to Diego Martin West.

Mr. Imbert: I have not gotten an answer to my question. I am still on 02, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I am going to Diego Martin West. I will come back to you.

Mr. Imbert: I am still on 02.

Mr. Chairman: I am going to Diego Martin West. I will come back to you.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I will come back to you. I am going to Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to go back to 68: Water Trucking. In light of us being in the situation with El Niño and the reduction of $190,000, and we see it was $840,000 in 2026. Would it not make more sense to increase rather than to decrease that amount in 2027 based on all

factors considered?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. So, keep in mind that people who have a WASA connection, their water trucking is covered by WASA, not by this Vote. This Vote provides only for persons who do not have a water connection. You would see that the allocation here, the $650,000, is similar to what was allocated in the previous fiscal. In all corporations, sometimes, based on rainfall, it varies tremendously. So, there is always that flexibility with finance. And based on their need, they do the service and then the Ministry supplies the additional, as they did in the last fiscal, where the revised estimate was $840,000.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, Minister. But given the fact that we know for a fact we are going into a harsher dry season and no new pipelines have been laid in Diego Martin in terms of those that do not have water connections currently, would it not have made more sense and been more fiscally responsible to budget for it inside of this fund?

Hon. Ameen: Well, the $650,000 actually represents an increase because in previous years it was $400-and-something thousand. So, as I said, this is one of those Votes that is really flexible based on need. So, it—

Mr. Des Vignes: Minister, that is not true.

Hon. Ameen:—usually fluctuates either—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin, come on, come on. Come on. You cannot do that.

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Chairman, respectfully, the Minister is saying it is not—

Mr. Chairman: You cannot—what you just did is accuse the Minister of lying.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay.

Hon. Member: Are you saying yes?

Mr. Des Vignes: Based on—

Hon. Ameen: I do not think the—

Mr. Des Vignes: I did not say yes.

Mr. Chairman: All right, I am not—

Mr. Des Vignes: I did not say yes. I withdraw the statement, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: I am not going to belabour that point. So, unless you have another question, let us just move on.

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Chairman, no worries.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Des Vignes: I shall move on, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Diego Martin North/East. See? I promised you I would come back to you.

Mr. Imbert: It is all right. Same line Item. Is the Minister expecting an improvement in pipe water supply in—

Hon. Ameen: Which one?

Mr. Imbert: I have not finished my question yet.

Hon. Ameen: So, we are on 68? If we are expecting—

Mr. Imbert: I said, "same line Item", and I have not finished my question yet.

Mr. Chairman: No need for that exaggeration.

Mr. Imbert: Why is there no need for that?

Mr. Chairman: No need for the exaggerated exasperation.

Hon. Ameen: Your colleagues are making a lot of noise on that side, so I cannot hear you.

Mr. Imbert: "You does harass me." You do not harass her. May I ask my

question, please? Based on what the Minister said, the allocation for water trucking in Diego Martin has been reduced by $190,000 or 22 per cent in fiscal 2027. Based on that, is the Minister expecting an improvement in piped water supply in Diego Martin in fiscal '27 because this Item is for areas that are not serviced by a pipe-borne supplier? That is my question.

4.40 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: I think the Member would better pose his question to the Minister of Public Utilities when that time comes.

Mr. Chairman: All right. So, we go now to Item 002: Cemeteries; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority. 005: Local Health Authority? All right. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, I am seeing a line Item at 005/13: Maintenance of Vehicles, a decrease of $99,000. Minister, do you believe that the $50,000 Estimate—given the fact that the previous year, the Actual spend was $149,000—will be adequate for the borough's maintenance of vehicles—

Hon. Ameen: Yeah.

Mr. de Nobriga:—inclusive of water trucking vehicles as well?

Hon. Ameen: No. They do most of their water trucking on contract, but this Item is not about water trucking. This is about all the vehicles in the corporation under public health.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, would it not include the water trucking vehicles in there as well?

Hon. Ameen: Most of their water trucking is done by contract.

Mr. de Nobriga: But they have two water trucks.

Hon. Ameen: Yes, but the bulk of water trucking is on contract. The two water trucks are included—

Mr. de Nobriga: Would be covered by this.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. de Nobriga: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: But there are several vehicles under health. So, the maintenance of vehicles—what I have observed, and I have been examining these Heads over some time—apparently, the $50,000 is a general amount that they applied to this Vote, and depending on their requirements—because it fluctuates—they would give them more. So, even in the previous fiscal where $50,000 was allocated, in 2025, they used $74,000; in 2026, they got the same $50,000, but based on their need, the supplementary funding, you would see in the Revised Estimate it was $149,000. So, the allocation this year seems to just be in keeping with that, where it is $50,000 that is applied, but there is no issue with their maintenance ended up going above. So, they usually cater for that.

Mr. de Nobriga: So, you have a minimum that you would then top up if required.

Hon. Ameen: It is usually done, yes.

Mr. de Nobriga: All right. Chairman, can I ask as well at 005/28: Other Contracted Services? Minister, there is a decrease of $6.286 million. Much of this Vote does concern itself with scavenging.

Hon. Ameen: Yes. In this Vote, there was a little issue with this corporation—in fact, not this corporation alone. Because this is one of those Votes that they provide based on where they show they have commitments for existing contracts. So, based on what the corporation supplied, they would have given this allocation.

But we know that they had some additional documents that they did not supply to the Ministry of Finance, so we expect that this Vote will have to be revised. So based on the documents they submitted at the time, the allocation was made. But I am very mindful of that with this particular Vote, that it will have to be revised, and they know what documents they need to provide.

Mr. de Nobriga: Minister, just as a follow-up, I was informed that the request to the Ministry for this Vote was $29.5 million. Are you saying that the corporation did not give you documentation to justify the $6 million difference?

Hon. Ameen: Well, actually, that is not the amount we have on record that they requested. I am not sure who is the "they" but based on our records from—remember, they would meet with the Chief Financial Officer, CEO, and so on. That information is different from our records. But as I indicated, what we anticipate that they should need is $29.3million. Based on what they supplied, they would have gotten this allocation, and this is one of those Votes that will have to be revised. So, we will work with them to ensure, as we do with all corporations.

Mr. de Nobriga: One other question under this heading, Minister. I am seeing that you have an Estimate under Medical Expenses—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. de Nobriga:—of $5,000, which mirrored the 2026 Estimate of $5,000, but the Revised 2026 was $80,000. Could you explain what that spike means?

Hon. Ameen: Yes, so as per the collective agreement—is it every three years?—every three years workers go for medical; every three years.

Mr. de Nobriga: This is the third year.

Hon. Ameen: So, in some years, it is very high, and some years. it is very low.

So, the $5,000 remains. Last year, we spent $80,00 based on the number of workers who were due to get their medical at that time.

Mr. de Nobriga: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I just want to get it straight. "They", the legal entity—that is, the Diego Martin Borough Corporation—according to the Minister—this is now a question—

Hon. Ameen: Sorry, which Head and Sub-Head?

Mr. Imbert: The question: A cut of $6.3million, in this line Item—

Hon. Ameen: Which Head and Sub-Head?

Mr. Imbert:—005/28—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Imbert:—the legal entity, Diego Martin Regional Corporation, requested a reduction of $6.3 million.

Hon. Ameen: No, I did not say they requested a reduction. I did not say that.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are saying this allocation—$23 million—was based on the documents submitted by them.

Hon. Ameen: The documents submitted. But based on our knowledge, I expect this Vote to be about $29.3 million.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: So, we will work with them—there is no issue with that. We will work with them to have the Vote supplemented.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I just want to clear it up because I am going to ask them.

Hon. Ameen: You are hearing something completely different from what I said.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are saying that the corporation requested, based on the documents submitted to you, by the legal entity—the corporation—they requested $6.3 million less than last year.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no, no, no.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, I think I answered that.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: You have not answered it, and I am still—

Mr. Chairman: Well, I think you want to hear the answer which you want to hear.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, you are not listening to the answer. It is a classic case of confirmation bias.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: It is a classic case of confirmation bias. You want to hear the answer you wish to hear. The Minister has answered the question three times in three different iterations. Look, let us move on and stop quivering.

Mr. Imbert: I do not know what that means.

Mr. Chairman: I do not expect you to.

Mr. Imbert: Because it does not make sense.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: My question was asked already, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Sorry, Chairman, my question was asked already.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Laventille West.

Mr. Des Vignes: When we move to the next Item, I will ask a question.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Let us move on. Line Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, are we on 006 yet?

Hon. Ameen: We are now moving on.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, could the Minister explain why, in addition to the damage done to the DP, the Materials and Supplies for maintaining local secondary roads in Diego Martin have been cut down to $250,000? You can barely patch one pothole with that. So, why has the Materials and Supplies allocation been cut by 60per cent for patching of roads?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, in the last fiscal year, they were allocated $250,000. Based on their needs, the Revised Estimate was $632,000. This year they have been allocated $250,000 again, and if there is a need, the Vote will be revised. So, this is to materials and supplies for construction—

Mr. Imbert: Patching roads.

Hon. Ameen:—for maintenance—

Mr. Imbert: Patching roads.

Hon. Ameen:—as well as patching—not only patching, for roads and traces.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: "I tell yuh, worse yet".

Hon. Ameen: Again, Mr. Chairman—if I am allowed to finish—in the last fiscal, they got $250,000. As they utilized it and they had the need for more, and they applied to us, the Revised Estimate shows a significant increase to $632,000. So,

the revision of the Item is there based on their need. And we have been working very well with them to increase that and revise it as needs be.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

4.50 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, I was listening to the Minister very carefully. The Minister mentioned $632,000 for the Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads in the borough of Diego Martin, and went on to say this is for construction work—

Hon. Ameen: Construction of box drains and stuff.

Mr. Imbert:—although the line Item is maintenance—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Imbert:—but maintenance, but you say it is for construction work, and you mentioned $632,000, but that was last year's figure.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Imbert:—this year's figure is 250.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Imbert:—so you cut from 632 to 250—

Hon. Ameen: No.

Mr. Imbert:—and I am asking why?

Mr. Chairman: No, Minister asked and answered. If you had bothered to pay—

Mr. Imbert: The Minister said why?

Mr. Chairman: If you had bothered to pay attention to the entire—

Mr. Imbert: The Minister never said why she cut by 60 per cent.

Mr. Chairman: Could you stop interrupting me?

Mr. Imbert: Is alright, is alright do not bother, is alright.

Mr. Chairman: Could you stop that?

Mr. Imbert: "Ah done, let us move on".

Mr. Chairman: It is infantile at best.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, you are very insulting.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And unnecessarily so.

Mr. Imbert: And unnecessarily so.

Mr. Chairman: No.

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: If you invite it, you will get it.

Mr. Imbert: Very insulting.

Mr. Chairman: Well, if you invite it and you want to quibble with me, you will get it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman [*Inaudible*] insult you.

Mr. Chairman: You could try. You are certainly welcome to try. You are certainly welcome to try. Right. So, asked and answered. If you had bothered to pay attention to the entirety of the answer, as you often do, you seem to get distracted when you do not get the answer you wish to extract. Alright. So, look, asked and answered, let us move on. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chair. So much like Materials and Supplies, with the 60 per cent cut, when we look at no. 13, Maintenance of Vehicles, we see the same situation: 60 per cent cut in terms of the Maintenance for Vehicles under Item 13. What is the reason for this cut, Minister—

Hon. Ameen: Yes, so—

Mr. Des Vignes: —and how is the Diego Martin Borough Corporation supposed to maintain their vehicles with this vast reduction?

Hon. Ameen: This is for Maintenance of Vehicles. So, a lot of it is like replacement for parts and routine maintenance, and it varies. So generally, they put an allocation of $200,000. In 2025, they used less than the $200,000. They used $179,000, so there was no need to revise the Estimate. But in last year, they used more than the $200,000, and the provision was revised to 218. So again, the $200,000 is a sort of general figure that they put, and if their need goes up, we revise it. If they utilize less than, well, so be it. But they have—this is really for parts and replacements, so it is sometimes difficult for them to budget for the year because they do not know necessarily what vehicle might break down or what parts they would not have all that information. So, the $200,000 is the initial, and then as need be in all the corporations, they get additional funding, accordingly.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, is the Minister saying the figure submitted here of $200,000 that was put in this book in front of us was the amount that was put by the Diego Martin Borough Corporation?

Hon. Ameen: No, I am saying that every year, if you look back, they usually put $200,000 as a general starting figure.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes.

Hon. Ameen: So that is the general starting figure, and as I indicated in 2025, they did not even use the whole amount.

Mr. Des Vignes: Minister, this—

Hon. Ameen: In 2026, they needed more than the amount, it was revised, and it was provided for. So, this $200,000 is only the starting point, and based on their need, as the year progresses, it will be revised.

Mr. Des Vignes: Minister, what this is, is a situation where we are seeing the increase in figure, and with all due respect, this is under-budgeting because we know what it will cost from what happened the last year, so it is under budgeting.

Hon. Ameen: No, actually in the previous year, the cost was $179,000. The cost was less than the $200,000.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, but we know it has gone up.

Hon. Ameen: Again, Mr. Chairman, we are repeating ourselves—

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, alright.

Hon. Ameen:—this is a Vote that is the starting point.

Mr. Des Vignes: We can see it is gone up in the books, Chairman.

Hon. Ameen: In the previous year, 2025, the amount utilized was less. In last year, the amount utilized was more, and it was revised. If they need to go above this year, it will be revised.

Mr. Chairman: Alright, I think we have exhausted the potential answers to that. So, I propose now, there being no other question on this Head, to go to Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; 001: General Administration; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds, and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 007: Households—29, San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, pages 404 to 405 inclusive, Personnel Expenditure: 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings,

Grounds, and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads, et cetera. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Under 02/001: General Administration, line Item 43. You had an allocation—

Hon. Ameen: Hold on "eh" we are under Minor Equipment, or you are under Goods and Services?

Mr. Young SC: No, no, no, Goods and Services 02. Page 405.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Line Item 43.

Hon. Ameen: Go ahead. Security Services?

Mr. Young SC: You have decreased it by $2.4 million. It went up to three, well, $4 million in 2026, and now it is back down to 1.5.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. Last year they had an issue with a security firm that they engaged, and we had to settle some debts in last fiscal.

Mr. Young SC: So, it was for settling of outstanding?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. There were some issues when it was resolved—

Mr. Young SC: So, the one and a half would be sufficient?

Hon. Ameen: Well, the one and a half is what they usually require, but if it needs to be supplemented, we will go back to Ministry.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 02/001/08, Rent and Lease of Office Accommodation and Storage. Under this line Item, I am seeing that there is an increase of $1.5

million for Office Accommodation. In the last fiscal, there were issues with the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation.

Hon. Ameen: Hold on "eh", you are on Goods and Services, Item what?

Mr. Chairman: 08.

Hon. Ameen: Yes, Lease of Office Accommodation and Storage?

Mr. Marcelle: Yes. So—

Hon. Ameen: Oh, this is not for councillors' offices "eh". That one is not for councillors. Go ahead. Ask your question.

Mr. Marcelle: So, I am asking under General Administration, 08: Rent and Lease of Office Accommodation and Storage. I am seeing there is an increase of $1.5 million for this fiscal. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the rationale for the same?

Hon. Ameen: The landlords for the building that the San Juan/Laventille main offices are at—

Mr. Marcelle: MTS?

Hon. Ameen:—yes, the MTS Plaza—had given them an eviction notice. We subsequently met with them and renegotiated because that lease expired in 2021, and they were on a month-to-month arrangement with no kind of certainty. Since then, we have met with the MTS. We have renegotiated the lease, and we felt it was important for the citizens of the Barataria/San Juan/Laventille region to keep the office there because it was a convenient location and so on. So, I want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities and those at MTS for renegotiating the lease to allow them to stay. So there has been a small increase in the lease because, as I

indicated, the last lease expired in 2021. We have now corrected that, so that is responsible for the bulk of the increase.

5.00 p.m.

Mr. Marcelle: So to be clear, the $1.5 million increase under this line Item would be for the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation to remain at the MTS Plaza, just with renewed rates, correct?

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly.

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

Mr. Marcelle: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Under line Item 005/28: Other Contracted Services, I have noticed that the Actual spent for garbage collection and other services in 2025 was $41 million, and even in the Revised Estimates from 2026, it was $41 million. I am seeing a reduction of $3.2 million under this heading. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the reason for reducing the San Juan/Laventille budget in relation to their garbage collection and other services?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. Well, this is not garbage collection alone, as you would appreciate. Other Contracted Services under the public health include, but it is not limited to, garbage collection. There are some variations in terms of what they will need this year. The Corporation will have to request additional funding in the mid-term if the funds provided here are not adequate. So during the first six months they will know in terms of their projected spending and then they will make the

request. So we will work with them with regard to that.

Mr. Marcelle: Hon. Minister, under the said line Item, you used a rationale earlier in relation to Chaguanas Borough Corporation, in relation to their increase in population, in relation to the new business development districts, and so on.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, also have—

Hon. Ameen: No, that does not apply to San Juan/Laventille. The explanation for Chaguanas, it does not apply to San Juan/Laventille.

Mr. Marcelle: If I may be allowed to complete my question please, Minister, unless you want to come over here and ask the questions for yourself.

Hon. Ameen: Well, maybe, if you ask some sensible questions—

Mr. Chairman: There is no need for that.

Mr. Marcelle: If you would just wait and have some respect.

Hon. Ameen:—on the line Items because we are on San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West, there is no need for that.

Hon. Ameen: The rationale for Chaguanas does not apply.

Mr. Marcelle: If I may, Mr. Chairman, the Minister cannot be allowed in between my question to start her answer.

Ms. Benjamin: Neither you would be allowed to—

Mr. Marcelle: I am respecting. Moruga/Tableland, mind your business.

Hon. Ameen: You are asking a question based on false premises.

Mr. Chairman: Hold on. Hold on. I think your question was based on a foundational premise, which the Minister was merely trying to point out, might not

entirely apply to this Corporation, and that is all she was doing. But go ahead and ask your question. Perhaps you might go ahead and ask your question.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, you made a comment earlier in relation to the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, in relation to the same line Item concerning Other Contracted Services, where you indicated that there was a significant increase in their allocation because of the growing population, because of the different business developments, the new housing developments, and so on. I am asking, in light of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, including the new areas of Aranguez, El Socorro, in terms of the business development hubs, and so on, that have been added within recent times. I am asking, most respectfully, why was that same rationale that was used to increase Chaguanas Borough Corporation not used to increase the allocation in San Juan/Laventille, but instead reduce it? Is it the only difference is that one is PNM and the other is UNC?

Mr. Chairman: Oh, come on. Minister, are you able to answer that? Forget the unhelpful hyperbole added to the end, right. It is a simple, sterile question.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, the question does not arise.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Item 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Road etc. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 407 to 408; Item 001: General Administration; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

30 - Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation; Sub-Head 01, pages 413 to

414, inclusive. Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Routes etc; 007: Municipal Police; 008: Disaster Management Unit.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 007: Municipal Police. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers.

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

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

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

32 - Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation; Sub-Head 01, pages 430 to 431, inclusive. Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Routes etc.

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

5.10 p.m.

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

33, Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, pages, 439,440. Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration;002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; 006; Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

34, Siparia Borough Corporation, page 448. Personnel Expenditure; Sub-Head 01; Item 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds, and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; 009: Other transfers.

35, Penal/Debe Corporation, pages 456, 457 inclusive. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; 002: Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority.

Mr. de Nobriga: Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Member for Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Chairman, just one quick question at 005/28 the increase of $2.5 million, if the line Minister can explain the increase.

Mr. Chairman: Could you repeat that?

Hon. Ameen: What Head are you on?

Mr. de Nobriga: 005: Local Health Authority.

Mr. Chairman: Page 457.

Mr. de Nobriga: Other Contracted Services, 28. The increase of 2.586 million.

Hon. Ameen: Under, Goods and Services?

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, are you not at page 459?

Hon. Member: 457.

Mr. Chairman: No.

Mr. de Nobriga: I have gone ahead of you, my apologies.

Hon. Ameen: Yes, he is on 457.

Mr. Chairman: I have not gotten there. We are at 457.

Mr. de Nobriga: Fair enough.

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

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you very much, Chairman. The question is the same then.

005/28: Other Contracted Services, the increase of 2.586 million.

Hon. Ameen: Under this, we have some additional things to do in that area that are part of our collaboration with some serious flood mitigation. So the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure has been doing extensive work with the major watercourses there. There is a need for the management of some of the watercourses that fall under the local authority. It will also include putting in retention ponds and so on. They have done a lot of groundwork and footwork. So part of this allocation is geared towards an additional increase in maintenance for drains and rivers and watercourses that fall under the local authority, that ties into that bigger drainage and flood mitigation issue that is being managed there in

conjunction with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, Drainage Division.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

36, Princes Town Regional Corporation. Sub-Head 01; pages 465 to 466 inclusive. Personal Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; 002 Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; 002; Cemeteries; 003: Markets and Abattoirs; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority.

Mr. de Nobriga: Chair, just one quick question again at 28: Other Contracted Services, the increase of $3 million.

Mr. Chairman: 005?

Mr. de Nobriga: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: At page 468.

Hon. Ameen: Local Health Authority?

Mr. de Nobriga: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, 28.

Hon. Ameen: 28. All right. This corporation is also part of this initiative, Mr. Chairman, that I would have discussed earlier. The proliferation of poultry waste in that region is something that was identified by the public health officials as creating a serious issue. So that is part of it in terms of their bulk waste, but the poultry waste is one of the biggest issues that we will be working with them on.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc. Sub-

Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, 468 to 469. Item 001: General Administration; 004: Maintenance of Buildings, Grounds and Pastures; 005: Local Health Authority; 006: Maintenance of State Traces, Local Roads etc.; 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

37, Regional Corporation Services – General, page 473. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households. 38, Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities, page 477.

5.20 p.m.

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. Okay.

Hon. Members we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We start at the Consolidated Fund at page—[*Mr. Chairman confers with Clerk*] Okay. Consolidated Fund, page 112. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure; D. Roads and Bridges. Hon. Members, Item 00—Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you the very kindly, Chairman. Line Item: 003/15/D./001: Restoration of Local Roads. I am seeing an increase of $3.3 million for the Restoration of Local Roads. Can the hon. Minister indicate which local roads are going to be targeted within this fiscal.

Hon. Ameen: Yeah. This increase is actually to pay some outstanding debt. When we came in, we had a lot of debt that rolled over, and so we are still managing some of those. So, the additional there is to treat with projects that were already executed, that we are still honouring.

Mr. Marcelle: So, which percentage of that roll—in terms of the 7.5—

Hon. Ameen: The $3.3 million, that increase is for outstanding payments.

Mr. Marcelle: So, you do not intend to do any new roads within this fiscal?

Hon. Ameen: Yeah, the $3.3 million is the net increase.

Mr. Marcelle: "Mm-hmm".

Hon. Ameen: What is the standard amount that will apply? We will do projects with those, but the $3.3 million, which is the net increase, that is for the projects that were done.

Mr. Marcelle: Yeah, so I am asking you about the standard amount—

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle:—which local roads, which areas do you intend to carry out these projects within this fiscal?

Hon. Ameen: So, let me tell you, eh. This is one of those—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Marcelle: Tell us, tell us.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Marcelle: Tell us!

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, Local Roads and Local Bridges is one of those areas where I do not think there will ever be enough funding. We would have received a lot of complaints and concerns, and our engineers have been doing estimates, and we were waiting until this budget, so we will know how much money we have to take out of the Estimates that we have. But our engineering department has done estimates for a number of projects throughout the country, and based on funding, we will now have to prioritize. So, there is no list that is already approved. The list

is as long as the room here, but certainly, based on the funding, we will then have to go in and prioritize.

Some of them Mr. Chairman, include for instance a school, a road to a school, where there are over 300 pupils, "and half of de road done gone down in ah landslip". There is an access road to a TSTT tower. So some affect residents directly, but some affects critical infrastructure like the TSTT tower.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Marcelle: Unless any other questions on this line Item, I have one for 003/15/D./010.

Hon. Ameen: Under D./10?

Mr. Marcelle: Yeah.

Hon. Ameen: Restoration of Landslips? Hold on.

Mr. Chairman: Can I remind Members that we still have seven Heads to complete? It is 5.30 in the evening and we still have—

Mr. Marcelle: We will be very short on this point, Mr. Chairman. Similar to the last question, please, Minister.

Hon. Ameen: Right, so this $3.7 million increase will support additional priority landslip restoration projects that were proposed in the last fiscal, and we now have to prioritize. We have five that are deemed as very critical. We have 11 that are deemed as high priority, and so based on this increase, we will be able to facilitate some.

Mr. Marcelle: Can the hon. Minister provide in terms of the high-priority listing that you intend to—

Hon. Ameen: Right. So, as I indicated, our engineering department would have done the estimates and made suggestions based on priority. Now that we have the allocation, we will sit with the engineering team to determine the priority. So, we would not be able to provide you with a list now. We have to decide based on the allocation.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, great. Hon. Members, Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services spans 11 pages. Therefore, I will announce the project groups. A. Administrative Services, pages 113 to 114. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, under A./line Item 050: Municipal Police Equipment.

Hon. Ameen: Item 05?

Mr. Young SC: 50—050: Municipal Police Equipment.

Hon. Ameen: 050: Municipal Police Equipment, yes.

Mr. Young SC: There was an Estimate of $1 million for 2026.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: It has gone up to $2.5 million now. This is the Municipal Police Equipment. Is this increase to replace the firearms from the San Fernando Municipal Police Station that went missing or was stolen?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, as I indicated in my budget contribution, under Municipal Police Equipment, we intend to procure, not only guns and ammunition, but protective gear, such as bulletproof vests, body cameras. The police have also asked for heavy-duty printers and other office equipment that fall under municipal police, but it also includes some ICT infrastructure that we will be putting in for

them.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, well, I am glad you have provided all of that. My question is a very specific one. Is it going to be utilized, any of it, to replace the firearms that were stolen from the San Fernando municipal police outpost in that grim murder?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, because that is part of an active investigation that includes the murder of a woman police constable, I will prefer to refrain from answering that.

Mr. Young SC: "I doh see de nexus".

Hon. Ameen: The police have an investigation going on—

Mr. Young SC: But that has nothing to do with the purchase of new equipment.

Hon. Ameen:—and as I indicated, the broad scope—

Mr. Young SC: "Look, you could avoid yes".

Hon. Ameen:—I indicated a list of what we are going to be purchasing. So, it is not limited to guns and ammunition—

Mr. Young SC: All right.

Hon. Ameen:—it includes body cameras, bulletproof vests.

Mr. Young SC: At line Item 060: Development of an ICT enabled Operational Ordering and Reporting System for the Fourteen (14) Municipal Corporations. You all recently passed legislation here and in the other place to increase the number of corporations.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: What is going to happen?

Hon. Ameen: Well, at present, there are 14, so that is what the budget will

provide for. And when the new corporations come into effect, then line Items for every new corporation will then come on the books.

Mr. Young SC: So, is it that you all do not intend to do it in the next fiscal?

Hon. Ameen: No, no, no. I did not say that.

Mr. Young SC: Well, do you know this is the only time that can be done?

Hon. Ameen: At present, where we are now, in October of 2026, there are 14 municipalities. When the time comes and the Act is proclaimed, the line Items for every new municipality will be added to the books, and therefore, the numbers will change. So, right now, it is 14, and when it is proclaimed and they come into being, it will also provide for them.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: But for that to be done, and for the addition of the line Items and allocations to be done, that can only be done in a national budget. Do you understand that? So is that you are saying to the population that for the next fiscal year there is no intention to do it, because they could have put it—

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Young SC: I am not finished.

Hon. Ameen: Clearly.

Mr. Young SC: You could have put in a line Item there that would have said an allocation for the implementation of the new corporations to come up.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, you cannot budget for what is not a legal entity.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I do not think that is a fair question, and for many reasons—

Hon. Ameen: "Is not yuh brother bank".

Mr. Chairman: —particularly legal reasons. I do not that is a fair question.

Mr. Young SC: The whole purpose of a budget is to foresee what will be done in the next year.

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, both you and I know—

Mr. Young SC: "Dat dey doh know what dey doing"?

Mr. Chairman:—that for legal reasons, you cannot do that now. Both you and I know that.

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chair, I have moved on. You all continue. I am finished with that Ministry.

Mr. Chairman: Public Buildings page 114. G. Equipment and Vehicles. A. Port of Spain City Corporation. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I see under item 09/029 the Port of Spain Corporation has been given a paltry sum of $500,000 for its Local Roads and Bridges Programme. Could the Minister what is expected to be able to be done on all of the roads and bridges in the city of the Port of Spain with $500,000 dollars?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, in the last fiscal year, they were allocated $500,000—

Mr. Imbert: That was also discriminatory.

Hon. Ameen:—and based on their need, that was revised, and they got almost three times that amount. They got $1.4 million.

Mr. Imbert: So, $500,000 is adequate?

Hon. Ameen: This year with $500,000—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Could you allow the Minister to answer? You see, that is the problem—

Mr. Imbert: I am asking my question.

Mr. Chairman: No, that is the problem.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine.

Mr. Chairman: You interject your own reasoning in an answer.

Mr. Imbert: Alright. Okay, whatever.

Mr. Chairman: That is why it is counterproductive. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: So she wouldn't answer meh question because you stop her"?

Mr. Young SC: Under the same Port of Spain Corporation A, I am looking at line Item 014: Drainage and Irrigation Programme. You would have seen that the Revised Estimate for 2026, up from $500,000, was actually $9,645,000. As you are aware, there is a flooding problem in the city of Port of Spain that occurs whenever the tide is high and there are heavy rains. Why is there now a decrease from $9.6 million to $480,000?

Hon. Ameen: Tidal flooding and those issues do not fall under the corporation. This falls under the Drainage Division of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. So, there are a number of areas where you have coastal flooding and there are mechanisms such as flood gates and so on that the installed, and some of them have to be revamped because it is years of neglect. It is not only in Port of Spain Corporation, but there are several other areas like Diego Martin and Cedros and so on.

Mr. Young SC: But we are focused right now on Port of Spain.

Hon. Ameen: So, I am saying that coastal flooding is the responsibility of the Drainage Division.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you. Now, in the city of Port of Spain, forget South Quay and coastal flooding, there is a drainage system.

Hon. Ameen: That is what you asked about—

Mr. Young SC: I am speaking about Port of Spain. You could talk about Cedros, and wherever else you want after.

Hon. Ameen: No, you asked about the coastal flooding.

Mr. S. Young SC: Port of Spain, right, so I am still at line Item 14. There are drains that need attention in the city of Port of Spain. Why has the Government dropped the funding under the Drainage and Irrigation from $9.6 million to $480,000? You all have taken away from the city of the Port of Spain $9.2million under this line Item. Why is that?

Hon. Ameen: So, Mr. Chairman, in 2025 the Port of Spain Corporation spent $0 under this line Item. In 2026, they were allocated $500,000, and as we worked with them, thanks to the generosity of the Minister of Finance, they got $9.1 million more in the mid-year review. In this budget, they have gotten $480,000, and again it is open to revision.

Mr. Young SC: Alright, and then under disaster preparedness.

Hon. Ameen: Just say the number.

Mr. S. Young SC: 037.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: You would have seen that in 2025 there was $452,000. You all

reduced it to $100,000 in 2026 and have come back with the same $100,000 in 2027, when this, as you would have been told or the Ministry would have been told by the Port of Spain Corporation, is not sufficient. Why did you all not increase this as well?

Hon. Ameen: In 2026, Port of Spain Corporation was allocated $100,000 under disaster preparedness. Do you know how much they spent? None. None.

Hon. Members: Woahh! None?

Hon. Ameen: We have again given them $100,000.

Mr. Young SC: Because they did not get the releases.

Hon. Ameen: No, no.

Mr. Young SC: They did not get the releases.

Hon. Ameen: We have given them $100,000 in this budget, and we intend to work with them to ensure that they send in the necessary.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. The last one that I will raise is at line Item 017: Development of Recreational Facilities.

Hon. Ameen: 017?

Mr. S. Young SC: 017, the second one, right.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: It was revised upwards from $100,000 to, let us say, $475,000. You have come back now with $100,000. I am told that was indicated that the Port of Spain Corporation would like to upgrade the Jackson Square that would be $200,000, the Nelson Mandela Park playing courts a refurbishment of $5 million, Woodford Square—to restore Woodford Square $600,000. Despite those requests, they have only gotten $474,000. The Nelson Mandela Park is a critical facility,

and, in fact, the playing courts are for the whole of Port of Spain and environs. Would the Ministry consider providing further funding under this particular line Item so that the project can be completed or started?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, it is really nice when a corporation could list—like make a wish list. The fact is, not everything you request you will get in the budget. But a big part of what Budget Division looks at is your capability to utilize the funds. In 2025, under the last Government under this line Item Development of Recreational Facilities you how much Port of Spain utilized? Zero.

Mr. Young SC: But they had none. It was zero.

Hon. Ameen: In the following year, this was under the last Government—

Mr. Young SC: That was not how much they utilized. That was—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Ameen: When we came into the office, we gave them $500,000. In working with them, that was actually increased.

Mr. Young SC: You are looking at the wrong thing, you know. You gone back to drainage. We are talking about underneath that.

Hon. Ameen: No—we are on—sorry—oh yes, my apologies. They were given $100,000 under development, but in 2025 they spent zero. In 2026, they were given an allocation of $100,000, which the generosity of the Ministry of Finance increased to $474,000. This year they have an allocation of $100,000 again, and it is open to revision. But we of course—it is impossible to give everybody their complete wish list, but we will continue to work with all corporations to prioritize.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Arima Borough Corporation. Arouca/Lopinot pages 115 to 116.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes. Minister, sub-Item 044: Drainage and Irrigation

Programme. I observed that in 2026 the allocation was $2.7 million from an initial allocation of $1 million, but in 2027 it has been reduced to $400,000. What is the reason for this drastic reduction for a very important line Item or sub-Item Drain and Irrigation?

Hon. Ameen: So, in 2025, the allocation was $1 million, $1 million. Based on our working with them and the work that they were able to do, it was increased to $2.7 million. This year, they have allocated $400,000, and from what I understand—$2.3 million—sorry, sorry, 2.3—

5.40 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: This is one of those Corporations where we are waiting for some outstanding commitments; for them to send in documents for some outstanding commitments. So again, just as we did last year, if we need to revise, we will. But clearly, as I said, last year they were allocated $1 million, and they got more than that. They got $2.7 million. So even though their allocation is that, once they have the appropriate documentation we will work with Budgets if this needs to be revised.

Mr. Chairman: I think the Minister of Finance wants to intervene.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, please. Member, as you would be aware, a significant amount of work was actually done, more than was projected for in the last fiscal. So, we had projected $1 million worth of work; $2.7 million of work was actually done. This is not for new construction. This is for continuation of work on drainage and irrigation. The $400,000 is a preliminary figure that would treat with what we experienced now, what we have to treat with now, and should the need arise, further supplementation will be done.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, can you please indicate—I do not know if you have the information, but how much of that $400,000 would go towards settling outstanding arrears or outstanding bills from the last fiscal year?

Mr. Tancoo: As you would be aware, when the former administration left office, they left a significant amount of outstanding bills, a substantial amount of outstanding bills. The Minister has just indicated, and we still have bills coming in for work that was done. Therefore, I cannot give you a figure at this point.

Mr. Gonzales: So, the question is, Minister, that you have allocated $400,000. Out of that $400,000, what will go towards settling bills from 2026?

Mr. Tancoo: I just answered you.

Mr. Gonzales: And what was the answer?

Mr. Tancoo: I could not give you a figure because there is a substantial amount of material and information still coming in. The Minister just indicated bills are still coming in.

Mr. Gonzales: So, you are not too sure how much of that $400,000 would go towards the actual repairs—

Mr. Tancoo: Should I speak in another language?

Mr. Gonzales:—of drainage and irrigation in this fiscal year?

Mr. Tancoo: I have made that very clear.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Next question.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes. 059: Local Roads and Bridges. In the last fiscal there was a revised allocation of $2 million. It has been reduced to $500,000. Very important line Item, Local Roads and Bridges. What is the reason for that drastic reduction?

Hon. Ameen: Oh. Well actually, this was a drastic increase in the last fiscal.

Because in 2025 their Actual spend was $365,000. In 2026, we allocated $500,000 to them. In their Revised Estimate it is $2.09 million. And some of that was for bills left by the previous Government, where contractors were given contracts, and they executed the work. The Ministry of Finance under the last Government provided a confirmation of funds that authorized the Corporations to engage in the contract. When they engaged in the contract, the Ministry of Finance never released the money to the Corporation, never.

Hon. Members: Ohhh.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: And this was a PNM corporation, still is. So, there are so many bills that we have been honouring, and based on that we had to go to the Ministry of Finance to get a Revised Estimate. So, you would notice, as I said, in 2025 their Actual spend was $365,000. This year they have been given an allocation of $500,000, and again we will work with them because if they have any outstanding bills, for instance, we have to honour those within the current fiscal.

Mr. Gonzales: So, Minister, are you finished? Are you finished, sorry?

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes. So, from that $500,000 allocation, how much of that will go towards settling outstanding arrears from 2026?

Hon. Ameen: As I indicated—you see you did not hear what I was saying because you were talking to your colleague. I answered that already.

Mr. Gonzales: No, you did not.

Hon. Ameen: He was distracted.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, do you have—thanks, Mr. Chair. Do you have in your

records the list of projects that the Arima Borough Corporation intends to execute under this Item for 2026?

Hon. Ameen: So, at the end of the fiscal year, each Corporation would produce what is called a Draft Estimate.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Ameen: They make a wish list essentially, and they list all the projects. Their engineers do estimates and they have it on standby. When the budget is passed and based on the allocation they have here, they will then select what projects they want to do. So, they are not yet at that stage, and this is the part where MPs, for instance, might want to consult councillors to say, well help "meh" do this project, et cetera. So, they are going to go into that stage now. We usually meet with them—

Mr. Gonzales: So, they have not submitted to your Ministry a list of the projects that they intend—

Hon. Ameen: They submit Draft Estimates. You were a Minister, so you are supposed to know, they submit Draft Estimates like in July/August, and then after budget they select from the Draft Estimates, so it is the same process that we do.

Mr. Chairman: C. San Fernando City Corporation. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: In a previous Item I had asked, what could possibly be done with $500,000 to fix roads in Port of Spain? I am now going to ask C. 089. What can possibly be done to repair and maintain and upgrade roads in San Fernando with $840,000? What is expected to be done in terms of all the roads in the San Fernando Corporation with $840,000?

Hon. Ameen: This 089 is for Local Roads and Bridges.

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Hon. Ameen: The Corporations would have done their estimates in terms of the projects they would like to engage in and when they get this allocation they will then determine. So, no Corporation would have a list of what they are going to do exactly. They have a big list, which is the Draft Estimates, and as the budget is passed, they would be selecting which projects they want to do out of that.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Can I ask a supplemental now? In 2025, the San Fernando Corporation actually spent $3.7 million on local roads. The original Estimate for 2026 was $5 million, and now the Estimate for 2027 is $840,000. Who is responsible for reducing the allocation by 83 per cent in 2027 from the original Estimate in 2026? Who? Is it the Government, is it the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government? Who is it?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, the Member skipped out one column. The Estimate in 2026, their allocation was $5million. He skipped out the part where they only use $1.5 million; $3.5 million unused. So, they have been given an allocation, they will determine what projects they want to prioritize, and, of course, we will work with them and, if it needs to be, supplemented. But they were given $5 million by this Minister of Finance in 2026, and they did not utilize it. They utilized $1.5 million.

Mr. Imbert: Supplementary question. They were not given $5 million; they were allocated $5 million. They were only given—

Hon. Ameen: Yes, and they did not utilize it.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I have been behaving myself. I did not interrupt the Minister when she was speaking. Can I finish my question, please?

Hon. Ameen: When?

Mr. Chairman: Finish your question.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. The San Fernando—

Mr. Chairman: Is it a question or are you making a statement?

Mr. Imbert: No, I am allowed run-up. It is five minutes I am allowed.

Mr. Chairman: If you take five minutes, we will be here until tomorrow, you know.

Mr. Imbert: That may be so, but that is what the Standing Order says. I did not make the Standing Orders; the UNC made the Standing Orders in 2014. Not me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: So that the 2026 allocation was $5 million. The actual money given to them was $1.5 million, and now that is cut by almost half to $840,000. All I want to know is who is responsible for cutting it from $5million to $850,000? And what can be done with $840,000 with all the roads in San Fernando?

Mr. Chairman: I think the second part of the question was answered already. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: I did not get that answer.

5.50 p.m.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may. If I may. The Member opposite served as the Minister of Finance for quite a long time before he was removed and replaced by his Permanent Secretary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: The Member is very concerned—

Mr. Imbert: I thought editorializing was not allowed?

Mr. Tancoo: Can I finish? Can I finish?

Mr. Imbert: I thought editorials were not allowed?

Mr. Tancoo: Can I finish please?

Mr. Imbert: You could editorialize though?

Mr. Tancoo:—allow me to finish. You had objections when people were speaking, and you were—

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Go ahead.

Mr. Tancoo:—anyway. Anyway. I should not be distracted. The Member is very well aware of the financial constraints that this country faced when they left office. He is very well aware of the need to manage because he attempted it in his time. So, to come here to create this illusion is very unfortunate.

Mr. Imbert: What is he talking about?

Mr. Tancoo: The fact is that the Government is required to manage its resources effectively and efficiently and attempt to spread it across Trinidad and Tobago for the benefit of the country.

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Mr. Tancoo: That is what this budget, that is what this budgeting exercise has attempted to do.

Mr. Imbert: Great.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Good.

Mr. Marcelle: So why Penal—

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East? Laventille West, you have a question or you are just shouting out something?

Mr. Manning: Yes, so, Minister of Finance, why does it seem that it is only a recession in the PNM corporations?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: Can you say which line Item?

Mr. Tancoo: If I may.

Mr. Chairman: Minister that refers to no line Item.

Mr. Tancoo: This has nothing to do with that.

Mr. Chairman: That is not a valid question.

Hon. Ameen: He is just looking for attention.

Mr. Tancoo: Be relevant for once.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. D. Point Fortin Borough Corporation.

Mr. Manning: No, sorry. No, sorry.

Hon. Ameen: He had another question?

Mr. Manning: We have another question here please.

Mr. Chairman: No. I called D.

Mr. Manning: Yes, he had his hand up.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, after I called D.

Mr. Manning: No, Sir. No, Sir. Sir, San Fernando is an important corporation. We are not going to skip it over, please.

Mr. Chairman: I called—

Mr. Manning: There are several questions that need to be asked here.

Mr. Imbert: "Doh look at me."

Mr. Chairman: I called D and the Member knows that he responded to me.

Mr. Imbert: "Doh look at me."

Mr. Manning: No, Sir. No, Sir. No, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: "What you looking at me for?"

Mr. Manning: Sir, Sir. San Fernando is very important.

Mr. Imbert: "He looking at me."

Mr. Manning: Okay. And I had my hand up before Diego Martin.

Mr. Chairman: No. Diego Martin had his hand up.

Mr. Imbert: I will not support you in that, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: No. Diego Martin—

Mr. Manning: Sir, I had my hand up.

Mr. Imbert: I will not support you in that sir.

Mr. Manning: I had my hand up.

Mr. Chairman: Because you know very well when I called Point Fortin you—

Mr. Imbert: I am not supporting you to discriminate against my colleague.

Mr. Manning: No, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no, no, no.

Mr. Manning: No, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no, no. I am not accepting that. That is an entirely unwarranted accusation—

Mr. Manning: I have several questions.

Mr. Chairman:—which I am not prepared to accept.

Mr. Manning: I have several questions about San Fernando, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Wait. You should have asked it when you had the chance.

Mr. Manning: Sir. I am ready now. I am ready.

Hon. Ameen: Because of—[*Inaudible*] no.

Mr. Manning: And Diego Martin had his hand up. I have given him a chance.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin had his hand up after I called Point Fortin.

Mr. Manning: Right here Diego Martin Central had his hand up.

Hon. Ameen: He is like a little child, man.

Mr. Chairman: No. No.

Mr. Manning: He did. He did.

Mr. Chairman: We have moved—

Mr. Manning: I allowed him to ask his question.

Mr. Chairman: We have moved to Point Fortin.

Mr. Manning: Sir, sir we cannot bypass San Fernando.

Hon. Ameen: It is—you are not the Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I am not bypassing San Fernando.

Mr. Manning: Yes you are. You are overlooking Fernando.

Mr. Chairman: No.

Hon. Ameen: You were not paying attention.

Mr. Manning: Sir. I asked a question, Diego Martin had his hand up—

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East—

Mr. Manning: I am prepared to ask another question.

Mr. Chairman:—I have ruled. We are moving on.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I called—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, we cannot bypass San Fernando.

Mr. Chairman: I called Point Fortin.

Mr. Manning: And then Diego Martin Central had his hand up.

Mr. Chairman: For Point Fortin.

Mr. Manning: I did not want to—

Mr. Chairman: So, we are going to Point Fortin. Diego Martin North/East, Point Fortin.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, we cannot bypass San Fernando.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: I have moved passed that, 116 to 117.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman. I have a question about San Fernando.

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East, I have ruled.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, the budget has been reduced to 3.8, I would like to know why. I would like to know why.

Mr. Chairman: I have ruled.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, the budget has been reduced—

Hon. Ameen: "Oh, God, Brian boy, behave yourself nah, boy."

Mr. Manning:—from the $15 million to $3 million. I would like to know why.

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East.

Mr. Manning: And the people of San Fernando would like to know why.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East, last time. We moved on to Point Fortin.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, we are not going to bypass San Fernando.

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East.

Hon. Ameen: "Brian, yuh was sleeping?"

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East, take a walk for the rest of the evening. We will see you tomorrow.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, we are not going to bypass San Fernando.

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East, we will see you tomorrow.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: I will see you tomorrow.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, the people of San Fernando—

Mr. Chairman: Marshal.

Mr. Manning:—will see you before that.

Mr. Chairman: Marshal. Marshal.

Mr. Manning: Ridiculous.

Mr. Chairman: Marshal, would you escort Mr. Manning out of the Chamber please.

Mr. Manning: I do not need any escort, I am fine.

Hon. Ameen: But no, why is his mic still on?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: All right. Point Fortin Borough Corporation 116 to 117. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Too much noise you know.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Let us give the Member—remember the silence this

Member requires.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]—know who you are talking to. Remember that.

Mr. Chairman: San Fernando East.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: All right. I have called, I have called the attention to the House on the times that I have warned this Member. He has used objectionable, abusive, offensive language. I have directed him. I am going to proceed to name the Member now, Brian Manning.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Somebody has to move the Motion.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: All right. I have named him. Nobody has moved the Motion.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the Standing Orders of this Parliament, I wish to—I beg to move that the Motion be carried forward in relation—

Mr. Marcelle: Chairman, Chairman.

Mr. Padarath: You calm down.

Mr. Marcelle: You are not in your seat. You are not in your seat and cannot raise a Motion.

Mr. Padarath: The Speaker has to recognize me not you.

Mr. Marcelle: He is not in his seat.

Mr. Padarath: You are not in control of this House.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West. Clearly, the arrangements do not conduce to the Member being in his seat. This is the arrangement for San Fernando.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: [*Chairman confers with Procedural Clerk*] Okay. I am advised that because I have already pronounced on the time period that the Member is to be excluded from the House—I am very grateful to Ms. Peterkin. I do not think we could proceed with the Motion, although we have named the Member. I think I had already pronounced on it. So, I am going to rule on that, that we are not going to entertain the Motion: Standing Order 55(1)(b).

And I think it would be double punishment but I want to make it abundantly clear that I called Point Fortin. The Member had his chance, and I am not going to use the adjective to describe what he was doing whilst I proceeded to call Point Fortin. As I called Point Fortin, the Member for Diego Martin North/East raised his in response to that call. So, it is not a question that I moved on and that I bypassed San Fernando. Right, let me make something abundantly clear. I have displayed a tremendous amount of patience and tolerance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: I am not a subscriber to ejecting people from this House, because that is the quintessence of democracy. People have a right to choose their own representatives. It is not for me to pronounce on the quality of representatives that people choose across the board, and that is the quintessence of democracy. I have demonstrated a remarkable amount of patience, but let me remind the Members of this House that after the first significant Allied victory in World War II in El

Alamein, Sir Winston Churchill gave a speech at the lunch of the Lord Mayor in which he said this, which is quite apposite now:

> This is not the end. Neither is it to be viewed as the beginning of the end. But what it most certainly is, it is the end of the beginning.

I am not prepared to tolerate that from anyone. After 17 months here, I have been very tolerant and very patient. But let me make it clear, I am not prepared to tolerate that. So, let us move on. Point Fortin, pages 116 to 117. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have ultimate discretion to revisit any Item. But let me go to this one, the D. 129. In 2025, in which year a significant portion of the releases were made by the UNC Government. Mr. Chairman, I think it is necessary for me to educate those opposite and to enlighten those who are listening that the UNC Government came in in May of 2025, May 1st or April 29th, whatever you want to say. So, for five out of 12 months, releases to corporations came from the UNC Government.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: In 2025, under this line item, Local Roads and Bridges, the Point Fortin Corporation received $3.6 million—$3.671 million actually. In 2026, for unknown reasons, that was reduced for all the local roads in Point Fortin, from $3.67 million in 2025, to $200,000 in 2026. That was the original Estimate. That Estimate was subsequently revised to $1.1 million, less than a third of the Actual expenditure in 2025, and now it is $460,000. What is expected to be done in a corporation like Point Fortin, which is a mix of urban, suburban, and rural, with $460,000, with respect to local

roads? What does the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government expect to be achieved with $460,000, when they were given $3.67 million in 2025?

Hon. Ameen: Are you finished with your question?

Mr. Chairman: The Minister of Finance—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Ameen: Okay.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Chairman. Chairman, bearing in mind that this is now 6.01 p.m., we started at 10.00 this morning. We are still on the second Head, and we have a substantial way to go to complete—in order to—

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, I am assured—

Mr. Imbert: We are going to finish. "We go finish".

Mr. Chairman:—that we are finished with this Head, basically, and—

Mr. Imbert: No. We are not finished with this Head. But we will finish the Heads.

Mr. Chairman: I am assured that we will finish the Head because, as I said yesterday, I was willing to be reasonable in terms of reallocating time. But let us move on. I am assured we are finishing the nine Heads today.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Chairman. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Leader of Government Business.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, in light of the agreement that we had yesterday, when we engaged first in the Standing Finance Committee, laying out the parameters, we indicated, through our representative, and you and the Opposition were very much aware of it, that the agreement was that Heads will not roll over once they are not completed today.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: No. We are not rolling over—[*Inaudible*]—today.

Mr. Young SC: "Aye! Dey had no agreement on dat". What is going on? "Behave yuhself". We have two more hours. Press on.

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, that is entirely uncalled for. There is no—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: No, there is no need to shout at anyone.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, if the Opposition cannot manage themselves and their times properly, the Government is not prepared—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: There is no need for that, you know.

Mr. Young SC: But how have we reached here?

Mr. Padarath:—to inconvenience public servants—

Mr. Young SC: We still have two hours to press on.

Mr. Chairman: There is no need for that. We have public servants here.

Mr. Padarath:—to be continuing to behave like a hooligan.

Mr. Chairman: All that is being expressed is the concern for the public servants, which I expressed yesterday. I am assured that we are finishing today. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, that shouting is entirely uncalled for, right? It is unwarranted. It is entirely uncalled for. It is needless. You ought not to do that.

There is no need to shout at anyone here. No one is shouting at anyone. So, let us move on. I am assured we are going to finish all nine Heads today. Right.

Mr. Imbert: I had asked the Minister a question.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Right. So, the Minister is answering. Minister? The Minister of Finance is answering that question.

Mr. Imbert: No, he did not answer.

Mr. Tancoo: Right. I think the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government has made it very clear, based on the allocation, that the various regional corporations will now provide a priority list for themselves, and that will be shared with the Member, if he is so inclined, at some subsequent point in time, after decisions are made by the relevant regional corporations.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. L. Chaguanas Borough Corporation, Diego Martin North East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For previous Items, we have been told that the corporations will manage the allocation they have been given. And that is the explanation for little, piddling amounts for roads and so on, in PNM corporations. Can the Minister explain L./149. Port of Spain got $400,000, San Fernando got $840,000, Point Fortin got $460,000 for all of the roads, but Chaguanas is getting $15 million.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Can the Minister explain why Chaguanas is getting $15 million, when PNM corporations are getting $400,000 for the same thing?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Minister?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, with reference to the specific corporations the Member is asking about—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, there is a lot of noise. There is a lot of noise. I want to hear the Minister.

Hon. Ameen: The population of Port of Spain Corporation is 29,000. The population of Chaguanas Borough is more than 80,000. The population of Point Fortin is 17,000. You cannot compare the three based on their geographic size and based on the population they cater to.

Mr. Imbert: All right. Supplementary question. Based on the data just presented by the Minister, where the Minister said that the population of Chaguanas is a little less than three times the population of Port of Spain—notwithstanding the fact that Port of Spain is a huge commercial area, with many commercial outlets that all require road access, but forget that. The Minister said that the population of Chaguanas is 80, compared to 29 or 30 in Port of Spain, but the allocation for Chaguanas is not three times Port of Spain. It is 50 times Port of Spain, 5-0. So, it cannot be on a population basis. Could the Minister explain why you are using—

Hon. Ameen: I do not know what kind of math this Minister is using.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, oh God, I am still talking.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Imbert: I am still asking my question.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, first off, the Member's math is incorrect.

Mr. Imbert: I am still asking my question.

Hon. Ameen: His math is incorrect.

Mr. Imbert: I am still asking my question.

Hon. Ameen: Secondly—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I have been accused of doing this.

Hon. Ameen:—this line item is to do with Chaguanas Borough Corporation.

Mr. Imbert: You accused me of doing this.

Mr. Chairman: Just now.

Hon. Ameen: So, if it is concerning Chaguanas Borough Corporation, we could deal with it here.

Mr. Imbert: I am still asking my question.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: All right. Can you complete your question then?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Sir.

Hon. Ameen: And make it relevant to the Head.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: The Minister said the population of Chaguanas is a little less than three times Port of Spain.

Mr. Chairman: You have said all that all ready.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, but there was too much noise.

Hon. Ameen: He is repeating himself.

Mr. Chairman: No, you said—I heard you and the Minister heard you. I am

sure. So, you said all that already. Can you just ask one question in one sentence?

Mr. Imbert: Can you explain why, on a proportionate basis—

Hon. Ameen: No, Mr. Chairman, this is not a comparison with others.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Ameen: This is a specific line item—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am asking my question.

Hon. Ameen:—149; Chaguanas Borough Corporation.

Mr. Chairman: That is the answer you are getting.

Mr. Imbert: To what? I did not ask my question yet.

Mr. Chairman: No, that is the answer you got, and you repeated it.

Mr. Imbert: No, Sir. No, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Listen, this is the third—

Mr. Imbert: My question is, Chaguanas' population is three times that of Port of Spain, why is Chaguanas getting 50 times as much for its roads?

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Mr. Imbert: That is my question.

Mr. Chairman: And the Minister has answered.

Mr. Imbert: What was the answer?

Mr. Chairman: I do not—

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Chairman, can I just have a ruling, please? This is maybe my sixth year I am in the Standing Finance Committee, and we have developed a practice in this Committee that when you compare the line item, you can compare

to the previous year, but you cannot go back and compare to what we have already passed or what is to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: The Member for Diego Martin North/East raised those objections.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, that was not my question.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hosein: He raised those objections in the past, and that was a settled practice of this committee.

Mr. Imbert: I am not talking about the past.

Mr. Hosein: Can I have a ruling, please, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Imbert: I am talking about the past.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, I rule with you in the sense that even the question that is asked is really not for consideration of the Committee here. So, we are going to move on. Next question. Okay, good.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central, stop making a speech. All right. Let us move on. Diego Martin Borough Corporation; San Juan/Laventine Regional—

Mr. Imbert: "Chairman, wais dis? Why yuh does turn away yuh head from me? I have meh hand up".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Would you really like me to answer that?

Mr. Imbert: No, it is wrong.

Mr. Chairman: No, looking at you sometimes is a difficult proposition, you

know.

Mr. Imbert: It is wrong. It is wrong.

Mr. Chairman: Looking at you sometimes is a very difficult proposition—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, that is wrong.

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

Mr. Imbert: It is not funny and it is wrong.

Mr. Chairman: Ask your question.

Mr. Imbert: It is insulting, not funny, and wrong.

Mr. Chairman: Ask your question.

6.10 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. In 2026, the Diego Martin Corporation was given $3.4 million under M.; 164: Local Roads. This year, the Diego Martin Corporation is being allocated $400,000, 12 per cent of what they got last year. Could the Minister explain why the allocation for local roads in Diego Martin has been cut by 88 per cent between 2026 and 2027?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, it must be noted that in 2025, when that Member was Minister of Finance, the Diego Martin Corporation, under Local Roads and Bridges, got $0, zero. When we came into office, they were allocated $500,000. They had a lot of bills from the previous year, which were based on contracts awarded by the corporation after that same Member, who was then Minister of Finance, gave them confirmation of funds, and did not honour it by releasing those funds to the corporation.

In this fiscal, we have treated with $2.9 million, approximate, in old bills, previous commitments that the PNM Government, central government

left. This year, they have been allocated $400,000, but just as we did in the last fiscal, if this needs to be revised to meet their needs, we will do so, as we have proven that we did on the last occasion. But when you were the Minister of Finance, you released zero dollars to that same Diego Martin Corporation. So, the answer, Mr. Chairman, is that we will work with the corporation based on this allocation. If it needs to be revised, it will be revised.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: With respect to the statement just made by the Minister, that when the PNM was in Government—and I will make the point again, that five out of 12 months in fiscal 2025 belonged to the UNC. But, quite apart from that, is the Minister aware that the Diego Martin Borough Corporation did not exist in 2025? And therefore, on page 118 of these estimates, the reason why there is zero— it was not a borough. It was a regional corporation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, the Member is being disingenuous. Because he was Minister of Finance, and they changed the name of the Head and they maintained it, because in the previous fiscal, as well, the line Items continue. So, I do not understand what he is trying to score there. I do not know if he forgets. I do not know if he chooses to selectively remember what he did not do, and what he failed to do as Minister of Finance in the past.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: And I want to give the assurance to this Committee and to members of the public that every corporation, where there is an allocation, as we work with

them, if it needs to be revised, it will be revised. And a lot of the revision in the last fiscal was because of millions of dollars in debt left because the Member for Diego Martin North/East, then Minister of Finance, failed to release the money to the corporations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: And ironically, PNM corporations were the major victims of this; Port of Spain Corporation, Diego Martin, several of them. They were victims of his—I have to say, his misconduct. "Because yuh give dem de confirmation, tell dem proceed tuh award contracts, and then you did not release the money tuh them."

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I would like the opportunity to correct the record. If you look on page 118—

Mr. Chairman: If you are going to ask a question, I will entertain a question.

Mr. Imbert: How can the Minister say that what is in the book was what was allocated and spent by Diego Martin Borough in 2025, when every single line is a zero. The borough did not exist. That is why it is zero.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. We have heard that. We have heard that.

Hon. Member: The road existed.

Mr. Imbert: The road did not exist.

Mr. Chairman: Alright, I propose to put San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation.

Hon. Ameen: Yes, San Juan Laventille, N.

Mr. Chairman: San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation; Tunapuna/Piarco

Regional Corporation.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, we move on. You were quarrelling. I moved on. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Instead of muttering to yourself, you should have paid attention.

Mr. Imbert: That is not true. I was speaking, and I had question on Diego Martin.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot. P. Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, page 119.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Chairman, 214: Construction of Markets and Abattoirs. Mt. Chair—

Hon. Ameen: Tunapuna/Piarco?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Ameen: Which Item?

Mr. Chairman: Item 214. At page 119.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, I am seeing a reduction by 50 per cent. What is the reason for this? Construction of Markets and Abattoirs.

Hon. Ameen: This Corporation had some improvement works to do in their market. That work has been completed. They have some other work to do, but it is not as extensive as what they did last year.

Mr. Gonzales: And what do you expect to achieve with outstanding works under this Item?

Hon. Ameen: The corporation identified three priority projects that they would want to do, and it has to do with strengthening the market facility. They want to refurbish the food booths. They want to do some roof work and framing work; they want to replace the soffit material, and they want to install ventilation panels, because the issue of ventilation and the heat in the market is an issue. So that will improve the airflow and make it a little more comfortable, particularly for the vendors. So that will expand the lifespan of the existing infrastructure. So that is what they have identified as what they want to do in this fiscal. Last year they had some different things.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, what are the cost estimates for all of these items that you have just mentioned?

Hon. Ameen: It is 400-and-something thousand. So, this 500 more than adequately covers it.

Mr. Gonzales: So, the corporation submitted an estimate of $ 400,000 to do all of these things that you have just itemized?

Hon. Ameen: Well, if you notice the things that I read out, if we talk about ventilation, these are not humongous costs, you know.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: They want to refurbish the food booths. They want to replace the soffit material in the market. They want to install ventilation panels. So, the total of what they proposed to do was 300-and-something thousand.

Mr. Gonzales: Sub-Item 228: Local Roads and Bridges. Minister in 2026—

Hon. Ameen: Which Item are you on?

Mr. Gonzales: Sub-Item 228—

Hon. Ameen: 228. Go ahead.

Mr. Gonzales:—Local Roads and Bridges Programme.

Hon. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: In 2026, there was a Revised Estimate of $5.8 million. I am seeing a drastic reduction for 2027 to $2.3 million.

Hon. Ameen: Yes, because they, too, had a lot of bills that we met. In 2025, their Actual spend was $3.3 million. They had an allocation of $5 million in the last fiscal. Including their current year's work and some of the bills they had outstanding, they utilized $5.8 million. So, they do not have those bills to treat with in this fiscal under this particular Vote. So the allocation, there, they will decide how they want to prioritize the funds that are allocated to them, and if need be, it could always be supplemented. But the spike in spend on the last fiscal, a lot of it had to do with some outstanding bills that they had from the previous Government.

Mr. Gonzales: So, you are saying that the TPRC, under this item, does not have any outstanding commitments from 2026? And this $2.3 million will go exclusively for new projects that the corporation will finalize?

Hon. Ameen: They actually had, I think, about 50, 000 rollover, but that was all, which is minimal compared to some others. So, they did treat with some of their debts in the last fiscal. From what I understand, they have 50, 000, again, that rolled over—

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Ameen:—from a particular project, and that could be treated with under this Item.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, thank you. Item 385: Disaster Preparedness. In 2026, Minister, there was a revised allocation of the $664,000. I am seeing another drastic reduction in Disaster Preparedness, especially the concern that in the Arouca area, and some of those areas in Tunapuna, we have a lot of flooding, Five Rivers, that would normally take place, and that line Item is quite critical. The reduction is quite concerning.

6.20 p.m.

Hon. Ameen: Well, first of all, Tunapuna/Piarco is home to the Caroni River Basin. And the tributaries that come down onto the Caroni plains lead to a lot of flooding from the Bamboo, Grand Bazaar area, the entire St. Augustine south, and along the Eastern Main Road because that is the foothills. So, in Arouca, in Tunapuna, in St. Joseph, you have a lot of flooding along the Eastern Main Road—

Mr. Gonzales: Absolutely.

Hon. Ameen:—simply because that is the foothills. In this particular line Item, 385 for Disaster Preparedness, a lot of what they had originally proposed to do under this was to procure equipment such as chainsaws to remove fallen trees, wheelbarrows, power washers, pumps. They also had generators and that type of equipment, shovels and so on. We have gotten a huge donation from the Church of the Latter-day Saints that I mentioned earlier, and that is about $1.8 million that we have distributed to all corporations. So, some of the things they wanted to purchase, they have been gifted those things.

In addition, we had items in our warehouse, our one warehouse in El Socorro, that instead of having one stockpile, we have established stockpiles in every region to make it more accessible in a time of disaster. So, in

Tunapuna/Piarco, their need for purchasing those things has been reduced. What we also have in terms of strengthening their, well, the personnel would not fall under this, but we also have strengthened their personnel. But in terms of what they had intended to procure, the need is reduced because of the gifting of those items to them.

Mr. Chairman: Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Page 121, Item 361—or Sub-Item 361.

Hon. Ameen: 361?

Mr. Chairman: 361 on 121.

Mr. Imbert: Local Roads and Bridges. I note an allocation of $7 million, and in that context, since the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, a UNC-controlled corporation, is being allocated $7 million for local roads and bridges, with—I am using the Minister's data—a population of 17,000 persons, which is about one-sixth of the population of Diego Martin, can you explain why you are giving the Mayaro/Rio Claro Corporation 20 times as much for local roads per population as Diego Martin?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, the population for Mayaro is not—

Mr. Imbert: You said 17,000.

Hon. Ameen: I said—

Mr. Chairman: Yeah and—

Hon. Ameen: Point Fortin's population is 17,000. It is not my job to come and educate the Minister in data—

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ameen:—that is available at the CSO.

Mr. Chairman: All right. In any event—

Hon. Ameen: Concerning this—

Mr. Chairman: The comparative exercise, I do not think, is appropriate for here.

Hon. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Specific questions can be asked. We are not going to do the comparative exercise.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to know what the rationale was for that.

Mr. Chairman: Alright.

Hon. Ameen: So, Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: All right, so can we move on?

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*] the rationale for the allocation?

Hon. Ameen: No, I do not mind—

Mr. Chairman: I think that has been asked and answered. We have ruled—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, in all fairness, I could just ignore the part where he is trying to compare and answer with regard to this specific Vote for Mayaro.

Mr. Chairman: All right, Minister, I propose to put Siparia Borough Corporation now.

Hon. Ameen: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are not allowing the Minister to explain why Mayaro, which has less than a third the population of Diego Martin—

Mr. Chairman: No, I think the Minister says she has answered.

Hon. Ameen: Just take a drive in Mayaro.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: The Minister says she has answered. We are moving on.

Hon. Ameen: It has nothing to do with any other corporation.

Mr. Chairman: Plus, the time is—

Mr. Imbert: We will finish no problem.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, we have to finish these nine Heads today. Penal/Debe Regional Corporation.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Princes Town Regional Corporation. You want a question for Penal?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. Penal/Debe, by the way, has 89,000 residents, for the information of the Minister. And Penal/Debe, which has less than Diego Martin in terms of population, is getting 23 times as much for its local roads, under 318, $10.5 million. Why is Penal/Debe getting $10.5 million for local roads, when Diego Martin is getting a couple hundred thousand, with a bigger population?

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, again, I will ignore the comparison—

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Ameen:—and treat with Item 318: Local Roads and Bridges, under Penal/Debe Corporation, which this committee deals with. Mr. Chairman, if you would observe the allocations here, in 2025, Penal/Debe, you know how much they

got from that Government? $1.2 million. In 2026, they were allocated $7 million. In 2026, their revised was $10.428 million. So, the amount allocated is in line with that. I also must indicate to you, Mr. Chairman, that Penal/Debe is part of the South Oropouche River Basin. The beating that those roads have taken because of flooding requires a lot of repairs, and the amount of neglect that corporation faced under PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: So, actually, they have a very long wish list as well. We could not give them all the roads that they wanted. But this is to deal in large part with the neglect and the flood damage that that corporation, the roads there, would have experienced. With the flood mitigation work being done by the Ministry and collaboration with the Ministry of Works, we expect that we will have reduced flooding in some of those areas.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ameen: And those roads could survive.

Mr. Imbert: Supplementary question?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Is the Minister aware that half of fiscal 2025 was UNC?

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Hon. Ameen: What line Item is that?

Mr. Imbert: Because you keep referring—

Mr. Chairman: That is an impermissible question.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*] as PNM. Half of 2025—

Mr. Chairman: It is an impermissible question. It does not point to a line Item.

It does not conform to the rules. Let us move on.

Mr. Imbert: I know what the rules are.

Mr. Chairman: You clearly do not. Princes Town Regional Corporation. All right, Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Same question. Princes Town Regional Corporation, 339: Local Roads. Allocation of $10 million, 25 times the allocation for Diego Martin for roads with comparable populations. Could the Minister please explain why you are giving—

Mr. Chairman: I understand—

Mr. Imbert: The question is not finished.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*] local roads.

Hon. Ameen: Mr. Chairman, you know—

Mr. Chairman: As you have done, you have ignored the invitation to compare.

Hon. Ameen: Certainly.

Mr. Chairman: Can you provide—

Hon. Ameen: Specifically with regard to Princes Town Regional Corporation, I really think, Mr. Chairman, when we become an elected Member for a particular constituency. It is always useful to know and understand the whole of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ameen: And anybody who knows that region of Princes Town and some of

the terrain in that area, this Princes Town includes the Moruga area. And if you know Moruga and landslips, you will know that this allocation is not even sufficient to do the roads that they need. So, we will work with them. But I think it would be really nice for Members to take a drive and see some other parts of the country, the roads in these regions and—

Mr. Chairman: All right, Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I propose to take that as your answer and move forward. Infrastructure Development Fund, page 260. Item 004: Social Infrastructure. A: Community Development. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 261. F: Public Buildings. All right. I propose to put the question.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 42 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. This has gone quite a long time, more than we had anticipated.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: No, we are stopping at 8.00. And we are finishing the nine Heads today. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: No, no, the Standing Orders say 8.00. But we are finishing all of this.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: All right, Head 46—Minister, are you ready?

Head 46: Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, $486,427,100.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs to make a very brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Bear in mind it is 6.32. We propose to finish six other Heads.

Hon. Watts: Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Estimates of Expenditure for the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for fiscal 2027. I welcome this opportunity to explain our priorities, account for the resources entrusted to the Ministry, and respond to the questions of this honourable Committee. I approach today's proceedings with a clear understanding that every dollar allocated to this Ministry is public money, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve to know how it will be used, and what it will achieve.

For me, the responsibility is not simply to spend within an approved budget; it is to ensure that our spending makes a meaningful difference through programmes that reach our young people, support that helps our athletes progress, and facilities that serve our communities. Mr. Chairman, at the heart of this Ministry's work are people. I want our young people to have access to opportunities that help them build confidence, develop practical skills and take their next step towards employment, entrepreneurship, and productive lives. I also want our athletes to have the support they need to develop their talent and to compete, and our communities to have access to sporting spaces that are safe, functional, and welcoming.

These priorities belong together. Sport and youth development are not separate from the wider work of national development. They are part of how we build healthier communities, encourage discipline and leadership, and create opportunities for people to contribute. There is also an economic opportunity in

sport. Hosting regional and international events can support local business, create employment opportunities and strengthen Trinidad and Tobago's standing as a sporting destination. My focus is on pursuing those opportunities while remaining clear about the benefits we expect to achieve and the resources required.

In youth development, I am especially focused on ensuring that our programmes respond to the reality young people face. That means connecting training with practical opportunities, making mentorship and national service meaningful, and helping young people prepare for a changing world of work. Mr. Chairman, these priorities provide the context of the Estimates before this committee. For financial year 2027, the Ministry has been allocated $519,927,100. This allocation also reflects the inclusion of YTEPP, NESC, and MIC, among the entities now assigned to the Ministry. The resources will support the Ministry's operational transfers to implementing agencies, youth development programmes, athlete support, and investment in sporting and youth facilities.

But Mr. Chairman, an allocation is a starting point, not an achievement in itself; the real test is delivery. Are programmes reaching the people they are intended to serve? Are facilities available for use? Are athletes receiving the support intended for them? Are young people gaining skills and access to meaningful opportunities? Those are the questions that must guide my work as Minister and the work of the Ministry. I recognize, too, that delivery must be matched by sound financial management. We must set priorities, monitor implementation, and be prepared to explain both our progress and the challenges we encounter.

That is why I welcome the scrutiny of the honourable committee. It is an opportunity to explain our plans, clarify our expenditure, and strengthen

accountability for the decisions we make. I also wish to thank the permanent secretary, the management and staff of the Ministry, our implementing agencies and our stakeholders for their continued work. Their contribution is essential to turning policy and budgetary provision into services and opportunities that people can access. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to a constructive discussion with members of this committee. My commitment is to manage the resources entrusted to this Ministry responsibly and keep our focus on the people where we have to serve. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Question proposed: That Head 46 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $486,427,100 for Head 46: Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*—page291. Sub-Head details—these are to be found between pages 292 and 293 inclusive—Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Physical Education and Sport Division; Item 004: Youth Affairs; Item 005: National Youth Development Apprenticeship Centres. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services—pages 294 to 298; Item 001: General Administration; 002: Physical Education and Sport Division; 003: Youth Centres; 004: Youth Affairs; 005: National Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment purchases—pages 298.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, can I just be allowed to read this in some quietude? Sub-Head 03, Item 001: General Administration; 002: Physical Education and Sport Division; 003: Youth Centres; 004: Youth Affairs; 005: National Youth

Development and apprenticeship Centres; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers Subsidies; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; 004: International Bodies; 005: Non-Profit Institutions; 006: Educational Institutes; 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers; 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* at page 131, Sub-Head 09: Consolidated Fund; 004: Social Infrastructure—pages 132 to 135.

6.40 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, Item 004: Social Infrastructure spans five pages. Therefore, I will also announce the project groups: D. Vocational and Technical; J. Science, Technology and Applied Arts; C. Sports; D. Youth Development. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services. Infrastructure Development Fund; Item 004: Social Infrastructure; C. Sports; D. Youth Development. There being no questions?

Hon. Members: No. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Head 46 ordered to stand part of the Schedule

[DR. ALI *in the Chair*]

Head 26: Ministry of Education, $4,876,760,300.

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

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am pleased to present the Estimates for Head 26: Ministry of Education for fiscal year 2027. These Estimates support this Government's commitment to give every child in Trinidad and Tobago the opportunity to learn, develop their talents and build a better future. Our responsibility begins with the child entering an early childhood centre, and

continues through primary and secondary school. It includes children who need additional support, young people discovering their practical abilities, and families who depend on public education to open doors for their children.

The Ministry's strategic plan for 2025—2030 provides a clear direction for this work. It places children, parents and the education system at the centre of our programme of reform. Our task in fiscal 2027 is to translate that direction into improvements that students, teachers and families can experience. Madam Chairman, the Estimates provide approximately $4.647 billion in Recurrent Expenditure, together with $230 million in development funding through the Consolidated Fund, and $58.7 million through the Infrastructure Development Fund.

The comparison with 2026 must be understood in its proper context. In that year, additional provision was made for salaries, arrears and back pay for teachers. That provision addressed obligations related to earlier years and was not a permanent addition to the annual payroll requirement. The fiscal 2027 Estimates reflect the different requirements of the new financial year, following that exceptional provision.

School infrastructure funding must also be considered across the Ministries now responsible for delivering the work. Responsibility for vacation and emergency school repairs has shifted to the Ministry of Public Utilities, where separate provisions totalling $311.086 million appear in the fiscal 2027 Infrastructure Development Fund Estimates. Those resources sit alongside the school infrastructure provisions retained under the Ministry of Education. We will work closely with the Ministry of Public Utilities and the National MTS to coordinate priorities and support the delivery of school repairs.

Madam Chairman, our first priority is children. We want learning difficulties to be identified early, so that a child receives help when it can make the greatest difference. Through PEARL and support for students with special educational needs, we are strengthening the connection between screening, assessment and appropriate assistance. We will strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy through targeted teaching, better learning resources and support for teachers. Priority schools and after-school study centres form part of our approach to helping students overcome learning gaps and make steady progress. Digital access will support that work. Devices, connectivity and useful learning materials must be accompanied by teachers who are prepared to use them effectively. Our purpose is to improve what students can do with technology in the classroom and at home.

Participation in education also depends on practical support. School feeding, transport, and assistance with books and supplies help families keep children engaged in learning. We will continue to connect these services with our wider work on school nutrition and student well-being. A safe school is essential to learning. We are bringing school security together with counselling, student protection and the code of conduct. Restorative practices and opportunities in culture and sport will support the development of confident young people who understand their responsibilities to others.

Our second priority is parents. Parents are our partners in their children's education. Through the national parenting training and support programme, improved access to information and simpler digital admission processes, we will make it easier for families to engage with schools and obtain the support they need. We will pursue the proposed parental responsibility Act, alongside practical measures that help parents support attendance, learning, and behaviour. We are

enhancing curriculum and assessment reforms so that teaching responds more effectively to students' needs. The phased reintroduction of the continuous assessment will help teachers identify gaps earlier and use evidence of students' progress to guide instruction.

Madam Chairman, as I conclude, these Estimates support our government programme with a clear purpose to improve the education a child receives and the opportunities that follow from it. We will judge our progress by whether students receive timely support, teaching improvements and schools provide better conditions for learning. I thank you.

6.50 p.m.

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

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $4,876,760,300 for Head 26: Ministry of Education is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure during the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly,* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, pages 175 to 177; Item 001: General Administration. Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you very kindly, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, through you, Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I notice an increase of $88 million, could the Minister explain why that is so high?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Thank you, Madam Chair. The increased funds are to pay

arrears of increments, acting allowances, acting arrears, arrears of salaries to public servants for 1,533 staff members.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The arrears of salaries, what exactly would account—how much is involved in those arrears? Is that a salary increase, is it what?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, it will cover the increased cost of the back pay for public servants and teachers. Sorry, public servants only; my mistake.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So that is the increase in the—is that PSA?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Sorry?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is it PSA?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is it for back pay?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is it back pay at what per cent, is it 40 per cent?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: It is an initial allocation.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is a what?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Initial.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I understand that, is it the entire 40 per cent, is it less than the 40 per cent increase? What proportion of that is the increase in its $88 million?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, it is an estimate of the 40 per cent.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 005.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am still on 001.

Madam Chairman: My apologies.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So I am going to 03: Overtime, there is an overtime here and there was no allocation in 2026. There is a $2 million allocation in 2027. Could the Minister explain why?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Through you, it is the overtime for monthly-paid officers approved by the CPO.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I understand that. I understand that is the description of it. I am asking, if there was no allocation, how come there was no allocation in 2026? That $2 million, does it represent arrears?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes. It is arrears of overtime for those public servants who worked for the back pay and the book grant.

Madam Chairman: St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you. Again, for 08: Vacant Posts-Salaries and COLA (without incumbents), there was no allocation in 2026, I am seeing a $1.1 million allocation in 2027, can the Minister explain which posts are expected to be filled here?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, this Vote caters for posts that are vacant without incumbents, but which are critical to the operations of the Ministry.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, I understand that, I am asking what are the vacancies that you intend to fill?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, it is for newly created posts by PMCD for persons who have been transferred from other Ministries to the Ministry of Education.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: How many newly created posts are these and what are the

positions?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: We do not have that information presently.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could I request that that information be provided in writing, please?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Sure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you. Moving on to 14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees, I notice that there is a revised expenditure of $60,000—is it $60,000 under 2026, and there is a $600,000 allocation in 2027. Is there an intention to increase the Cabinet-Appointed Committees in this fiscal?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, there is a proposal for a national advisory committee on education to be constituted.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: An additional one, okay. How many members would be on that committee and how much would the expenditure—how much is the projected expenditure on that new committee?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: We have a proposal, but we will have to go to the Ministry of Finance to determine the remuneration.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So the allocation that is made here is made on what basis then?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: We have done estimates.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay—[*Inaudible*]—the Estimates, so okay. No more under this section for me.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 005: Secondary Education. Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Under 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances, I notice a $920 million reduction here, can the Minister

explain why?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, those were the funds that covered the back pay for secondary school teachers in the last fiscal year.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. How many vacancies are there for secondary school teachers at this time that are paid under this line Item?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Four hundred and three vacancies.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I notice that the allocation is similar to 2025 at this time, so is there an intention to fill any of these vacancies in this fiscal year?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, we are working presently with the Teaching Service Commission to fill these vacancies as quickly as possible.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And if those vacancies are filled through the year, would this allocation be enough to deal with the new teachers that are taken on? Four hundred teachers is a substantial amount.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes. This will be sufficient.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So you are saying that the Estimate under 2027 takes into account space for new teachers, and, if so, how much is allocated to new teachers—for hiring of teachers out of these 403 vacancies?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: This amount covers 163 new teachers, 163.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: One hundred and sixty-three new teachers.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yeah.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Under the same sub-Head 32: Remuneration to Substitute Teachers, I notice an increase here of just over $3 million, are there any arrears to be paid in this fiscal for substitute teachers?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, there are no arrears.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No arrears in this year?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yeah.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So the increase is intended to hire more substitute teachers?

7.00 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes, so we will be advertising.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: How many substitute teachers are presently engaged?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Presently, there are 12 substitute teachers engaged.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Twelve, and how many do you project to hire?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Ten.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Ten, substitute teachers?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yeah.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And your allocation goes up by $3.2 million to hire 10 substitute teachers?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It seems like quite an overkill. How many substitute teachers did you have in 2026 that were paid $7.5 million?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: 77 teachers.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: You had 77 and you expended $7.5 million. You have 12 at this time and you are hiring 10 more and the allocation is $10.8 million? Okay.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, that is the—okay. Minister, let me just say that that seems a very strange calculation; those "maths do not seem to be mathsin" but okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, on that same line Item, in 2025, the Actual

Expenditure was $10.7 million for substitute teachers. I think I heard you say at that time they had 77 substitute teachers hired for that $10.6 million, correct?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: That is what I was advised.

Mr. Young SC: And you then have told us now that at this time, there are only 12 substitute teachers, so what happened with the 65 others?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: All right. So it is my mistake. Presently, we have 77 substitute teachers, so I am correcting the record.

Mr. Young SC: So you presently have 77?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So if you have 77 now, and I assume there has been no reduction in salaries and packages.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: No.

Mr. Young SC: So you have 77 now, with an Estimate that has now gone up to the $10.8.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So that is why it is in line with what it was in 2025, the same 77.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So when you just told us that you are seeking to advertise and hire more.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: About 10 more, yeah.

Mr. S. Young SC: Ten more.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: And that would fit into this $10.8?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Just a clarification. Minister, when I asked you in 2026, you said you were at 77. When I asked you how much you have presently, you said 12.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yeah, that was my mistake.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That was an error?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: I corrected it.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Primary Education.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, with respect to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I see an increase here of $26 million. Could the Minister explain that increase?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Thank you. The increase covers 163 new teachers and 113 vacancies to be filled in 2027.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: How many, 163?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: 113, 163 new teachers, 113 vacancies, and in addition, the payment for 6,479 teachers.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So you are hiring more teachers here.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And you have an increase. In the secondary school, you did not have an increase, but you are still hiring more teachers there. All right. I see in the Government's Contribution to NIS under line Item 05, there is a decrease. Could you tell me why there is a decrease there?

Madam Chairman: Minister?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Okay. Through you, Madam Chairman. [*Member confers with technocrat*] This amount represents the increase in payments for NIS rates. Whatever the deficiency, money will be vired in or transferred, where necessary.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So is there a deficiency?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay, so there is an underbudgeting here for the NIS, okay. With regard to line Item 32, which is the Remuneration to Substitute Teachers under the primary system, there is no increase. Is it that you do not intend to hire any more when you are advertising, is it only for secondary teachers?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Right, Madam Chair, through you, it is at the primary that we have 12 substitute teachers and we will be advertising also for 10 more.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: If you are advertising for 10 more with regard to this, you have not had any increase in your allocation. Is your allocation sufficient to be able to hire the 10 more?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: This allocation will be able to cover the 22.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So if you used up the same allocation—What you have allocated in 2027 is the same thing as for 2026. So if you are hiring more, how could this allocation be enough?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, if there is a need for extra funding after hiring those new teachers, funding will be vired in.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Will there be a need to get more money to hire more if the expenditure that you have is the same as you are allocating? Will there be a need? A straight question I am asking.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: So, we are looking at the existing system and see if there is a need for it, but we have planned.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: All right. I am just asking a straight question. You expended $1.45 million, you have allocated $1.45 million and you have said that you are hiring more teachers. If that is so, will you need more money to pay more teachers?

Madam Chairman: Member, I believe that was asked and answered already.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yeah.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Asked and answered? No. I am still waiting for the answers; I keep asking, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: The Member has answered to the best of his ability.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: To the best of his ability. Okay.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, please. The Member clearly indicated that if required, internal virements will be looked at. They will look at the existing—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry, sorry. Member, I am not hearing you clearly.

Mr. Tancoo: Yeah, please pay attention. Please.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, speak a little louder, please, Member of Fyzabad.

Mr. Tancoo: The Member clearly indicated that they will look within their existing funding for virement and I wish to add, that should additional funding be required, they always have the access to the Ministry of Finance to ask for a supplementation. Thank you.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am sorry, he did not indicate about virement, number one. And number two, I am trying to establish if enough is being budgeted here. So the issue of going to the Minister of Finance, I understand that. But I am simply asking if enough has budgeted, that is all I asked.

Mr. Tancoo: Asked and answered.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And the answer was, no.

Mr. Tancoo: Asked and answered.

Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: "Mhm." That is fine.

Madam Chairman: Member for Port of Spain North/Ann's West. No questions anymore? Okay. Moving along, Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 178 to 180, Item 001: General Administration. Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly, Madam Chairman. With regard to line Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence, there is an increase of $1.1 million thereabout; is it

that there are arrears owed under this line Item?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, there is an increase in the travelling rate and the increased funds are allocated to pay the arrears and upkeep to Third Schedule officers, school supervisors, curriculum officers, et cetera.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. With regard to line Item 16: Contract Employment, I note in 2025 a total of $228 million was expended; in 2026 that was cut by $33 million. So in 2026 there is 194 expended, a difference of $33 million and in 2027 the allocation is $195 million, which means that it stays at the level of 2026. So my question is, how many vacancies are there in the positions paid under the line Item, that will correspond to this?

7.10 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, for Contract Employment, we have total contract positions, 1,493, filled 1,137, vacant, 356.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is the Minister able to say how many of those vacancies arose within the last fiscal?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: I do not have that information available.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is it possible to get that in writing?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Sure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is the Minister able to tell me whether the School Social Workers are paid from this Vote?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And the Guidance Counsellors?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: School Safety Officers?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes, this is for Contract Employment.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Business Operation Assistants, in the primary schools?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I look forward to that listing. Thanks.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Sure.

Madam Chairman: St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I want to ask about line Item 17: Training. I see an increase here of over $2 million, and I would like to know what would have accounted for this increase.

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Thank you. Madam Chair, this Vote is to fund the international participation fee for what is called PISA studies for 2029.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. And under line Item 37: Janitorial Services, I notice an increase of $35 million. Could the Minister explain that one?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Right, Madam Chair, through you, the increase is to pay the arrears for Janitorial Services.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: If there are arrears, $211 million was allocated, $170 million was spent. So, why are there arrears because the allocation was not fully used?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, it is that we pay as we receive the invoices.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, the invoices did not come in, so that would have accounted for that, okay. I want to move to, I could move to 99: Employee Assistance Programme? Still in the same Sub-Head?

Madam Chairman: Can you repeat that, please?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I want to move to 99: Employee Assistance Programme, still in the same Sub-Head right? So, I notice an increase of $1.2 million. Could the Minister account for that?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Which Item is this?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: 99: Employee Assistance Programme.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, the Ministry has discharged its outstanding financial obligations to the previous EAP provider, and the increased provision for fiscal 2027 is to facilitate the restoration and continued delivery of the EAP services. And so, the Ministry is in the process of procuring these services.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The projection of $3 million is above what has been traditionally expended in 2025 and 2026. Why is that increase included?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Is this under the EAP?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yeah. In 2025, it was $1.6 million expended. In 2026, it was $1.72 million expended, even with the arrears, and what you are projecting in 2027 is $3 million, which is almost twice that.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, the last contract was 20 years old

and so there are new market rates, so, this is an estimation.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And so, the $3 million, what you are expecting is that would restore the service to all teachers for free?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: All teachers, yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: For free?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, on that same line Item, have all the arrears to the previous service provider been paid?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, all the verified bills from the previous provider have been paid in the last fiscal year, which was—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And may I ask if when you put out for a new service provider, whether the previous service provider will be included in those persons who are approached?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Right, so it will be open tender, we follow the procurement.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Open tender?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yeah.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You follow the procurement rules? That is good to know.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: We always do.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Good to know.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Thank you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Secondary Education; Item 006: Primary Education; Item 007: District Services Division; Item 008: Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre; Item 009: Early Childhood Care and Education Unit.

Sub Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 006: Primary Education; Item 008: Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Center; Item 009: Early Childhood Care and Education Unit. Sub Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organisations; Item 006: Educational Institutions. Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly, Madam Chairman. With regard to line Item 19: Servol Junior Life Centres, there is an increase of $7.4 million. Could the Minister explain this increase?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Just give me a minute to get the—the question is?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: 006/19: Servol Junior Life Centres. There is an increase of $7.4 million, could the Minister explain why?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Right, Madam Chair, through you. Events were obtained previously for one term, now additional funding has been provided for the full three terms.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Payments were—sorry, I did not understand what you said. Payments were—?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Payments were previously provided for one term, and now additional funding has been provided to cover for three terms.

7.20 p.m.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In 2025, the expenditure was $9.7 million. In 2026, $3.6 million was allocated, and that was for one term, so the entire budget for the year only allocated money for one term for Servol last year?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: So, Madam Chair, through you, normally moneys are vired in to cover the expenses.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And what happened this year?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: So, now we have the allocation to cover it.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yeah, but I am asking, why was it underbudgeted to that extent? That is what I am really asking because the previous year, the expenditure was $9.7 million, but all that was budgeted was $3.6 million. So therefore, you have arrears. How much arrears do you have?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: We do not have any arrears. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for affording us the opportunity.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, okay, so you have $3.6 million allocated and $3.6 million expended. So then, if you do not have arrears, then it means that the total cost is $3.6 million. So, why is the increase to $11 million in this allocation?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Why is it increased to $11 million? Previously, payments were made for one term, and so now additional funds were provided to cover the full three terms.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, in 2025, your expenditure was $9.7 million. So, is that the cost of it, and if that is the cost, then why was only $3.6 million allocated in 2026, and why was only $3.6 million spent in 2026? You said previously that funds are usually vired in. Are they vired during the year? After the year? What is the cost? What is the actual cost for the year?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Give me a minute for that. [*Minister confers with technocrat*] Approximately $10 million is the cost.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So then, the allocation, in 2026, of $3.6 million was woefully inadequate, and if you only expended $3.6 million under this line Item in 2026, then you must have arrears. Either that or this figure is wrong.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: So, Madam Chairman, through you, previously for—what

year was that?—2026, funds were vired from other Votes, and so for 2027, sufficient funds were received.

Madam Chairman: Does that answer your question, St. Ann's East?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, it does not, but I think I will just rest at this point. I will move to 33: Grants to Private Secondary School. I notice a decrease of $16million. Could the Minister tell us if it is that less secondary schools are being included in this programme, meaning that less children have access to places? What is the situation here?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chairman, through you, these funds are for Bishop Anstey High School East and Trinity College East, and the Sixth Form school. So, this is pending the transition to the government-assisted model.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, is that within this fiscal year they are going to move into the government-assisted model and therefore, they will be having an increased allocation? Will they get money from another Vote?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes. So, for the last fiscal year, they were paid $50million, and we have $34million moving forward as they transition.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: On that same line Item, would you be able to say how long the transition will take, and would it be a decreasing amount each year?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: The transition is expected to occur within this fiscal year.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The entire transition within this year?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. Is the school aware?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: They are very aware.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They are?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay.

Madam Chairman: St. Ann's East?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Just another question on that. The school is aware. The schoolboard is aware of this as well?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: We met with them up to last week.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households. St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you. Under, line Item 15: Student Support Services Programme. I notice an increase of $2million here, and that is within the context of a decrease in contract employment that I noted earlier on. What is the increase due to here?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, this is to develop a national parenting programme that falls under the SSS.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, $1.7 million is allocated to that parenting programme directly?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could you tell me some of the elements of that programme?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: The elements are the development of a parent portal, the recruitment of a programme manager to ensure that we have a programme of training for parents, and also to develop a system of certification for parents from the training programme, et cetera.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And it is to be handled in-house by the Ministry?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The administration of it?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay, and do we have an idea of when that programme is supposed to come on stream?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: It comes in within this fiscal year.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: All right. The budget for this fiscal. It comes in this—[*Inaudible*] Okay.

Madam Chairman: St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: School Supplies and Book Grant, I see—line Item 42. So, there is no allocation for that, as there was none in 2026, but in mid-term, $20 million was allocated. So, I am asking, in this fiscal year, is it anticipated that there will be a School Supplies and Book Grant?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, the funding for the book grant will be dealt with mid-year. Presently, we are reevaluating the efficiency and reach of the School Supplies and Book Grant. I want to note that in 2025, the PNM provided no money for that School Supplies and Book Grant that they campaigned on.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, you have had the two years now of doing the School Supplies and Book Grant. So, even if you got caught out of it in 2025, then in 2026, there was opportunity, and now there is opportunity to cater for the School Supplies and Book Grant. So, at this time, can you say whether there will be a School Supplies and Book Grant in 2027?

Madam Chairman: I believe that was asked and answered, Member.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: What was the answer, Madam Chairman? Maybe you could help me.

Madam Chairman: I will allow the Minister to repeat.

Mr. Tancoo: Revert to your *Hansard*.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: What was the answer? Because it is a yes or a no.

Mr. Tancoo: Revert to your *Hansard*.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: What is the answer? Oh, the answer is no?

Mr. Young SC: The answer is that the PNM had none? That is an answer?

Mr. Tancoo: Revert to your *Hansard*. An answer was presented.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: An answer was not presented, but the population will hear the answer. Very good, no problem. So, there is no allocation for the School Supplies and Book Grant.

7.30p.m.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could I ask another question on this very line Item, please? In 2026, I see an expenditure of $20,000. Could the Minister tell us how many book grants were—

Mr. Young SC: $20 million.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: $20 million, sorry. Could the Minister tell us how many book grants were paid in 2026, out of the $20 million?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: $20,773.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Minister, I am aware as of this morning, quite a few persons who had approved emails indicated that they have not been paid the book grant. Now, I know you had previously indicated that all approved persons would receive the book grant, but that is not so based on the information that I, myself, and I also polled other colleagues.

So, the question is, is it that persons who have been approved and who have not

received a book grant, will they receive it in this fiscal?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, all payments went out for the book grants up to $20 million.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So that means no more payments will be dispensed, even if you had an approved email? It is a yes or a no?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: All approved.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, all approved did not go out. Minister, "oh gosh." All approved were not paid. Let us be clear. I am representing 28,000 constituents, and I am asking on behalf of them, because I have asked this question over and over, and I have not been able to get an answer, so I am here in the Standing Finance. There are people who have approved emails, and they have not received their disbursement. If it is that no more will be paid for this fiscal, that is the answer, that is the answer. Will anymore be disbursed in this fiscal to those who have not gotten it?

Madam Chairman: St. Ann's East, just allow the Member some time to answer.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Right. So, Madam Chair, through you, all approved applications were paid out by the Ministry of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That does not mean that those who did not get, will not get. I understand that. I am not sure if I could move to 04 now, 17, under 011? Are we still there, or do you have to move me? I would like to go to 011/17.

Madam Chairman: Yes. So item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Going to 17: MTS - Principal Payment, $200 million, two-year, 3 per cent Fixed Rate Syndicated Loan, due 2028, yeah. I am seeing an Estimate of $100 million here, and I am asking, is this a new loan?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Member, which line Item?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry, 17.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: 17?

Madam Chairman: Page 187.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, this is not a new loan.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, there was no allocation made in 2026 for this loan. So, when was this loan taken?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: The information I have is that the original loan was paid off in fiscal 2022, and then refinanced in fiscal 2022.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: 2020—

Hon. Dr. Dowlath:—Two.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay, so how come there were no payments in 2025, no allocation in 2026, and there is now an allocation here in 2027?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, we will provide this information in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under the *Draft Estimates for Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, Item 004: Statutory Boards, appears on page 188 of the Draft Estimates. However, the detailed examination of these allocations is continued in *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. We will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, page 235.

Head 13: Trinidad and Tobago National Commission for UNESCO, Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure, page 235, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03; Minor Equipment and Purchases; Item 001: General Administration.

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

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Chairman. With respect to line Item 042, the Minister, there is an allocation of $100 million and I would assume that is for the laptop programme. The Minister would have expended $135 million in 2026. Why is there less allocated in this Estimate?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, there is an additional $40 million through CAF funding.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Through what? Sorry.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: CAF.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Through CAF. So, the total price would be $140 million for the laptops that you are purchasing?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And how many laptops is it that you are purchasing?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Eighteen thousand.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And the procurement for these laptops is happening through whom?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: It is well advanced right now.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is it the Ministry handling it?

Madam Chairman: Asked and answered, Member.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No.

Mr. Young SC: No. Where did they answer that?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: I asked who is handling the procurement. He said it is well advanced.

Mr. Young SC: Is the Ministry handling that?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, I asked, is the Ministry handling the procurement?

Mr. Young SC: And he is getting the answer. And you say asked and answered.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes. The Ministry is handling the procurement through—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Directly?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: No. Through TSTT.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, who is handling the—

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: TSTT.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: "Oh, TSTT is doing the procurement. Thanks. With regard to line Item 050—

Madam Chairman: Member, before you move on, Port of Spain North had put his hands up.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, with line Item 037: Implementation of School Improvement Projects in selected schools in the Laventille community. There was no provision for this year under that line Item. Is it that there is absolutely no intention to continue that?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: [*Confers with technocrat*]

Mr. Young SC: What is being done for the Laventille community schools?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: We did not receive any allocation.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: With regard to line Item 050, this—I am asking. This project, there is a project with a very similar name mentioned in the PSIP booklet, and it is mentioned at $16.3 million, but I only see $1.5 million budgeted here. Is it the same programme—050?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes. Through you, Madam Chair. Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yeah. So why is only $1.5 million budgeted if the programme was announced in the budget presentation as $16.3 million?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: So, Madam Chair, through you, we are putting the relevant assessment and needs analysis in place at this time. And once completed, we will approach the Ministry of Finance for the additional funding.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, what would have brought about the estimation of $16.3 million if you have not put the programme together yet?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: There is a draft proposal.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, if there is a draft proposal, why was the 16.3 not budgeted for?

Mr. Tancoo: If I may answer that. The draft proposal came in very late in the game. And therefore, it was not considered here. But as you are aware, it is possible to make funding available in another measure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. If funding has to be available, then that is another $16 million added. That means that the budget would be understated again by that amount in just this very one line Item.

Madam Chairman: Any question on that?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Just saying.

Madam Chairman: Okay. F. Public Buildings. St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Under line Item 042, there is a line Item—that is the Emergency Repair/Refurbishment Works to schools; $58 million was allocated and expended in this fiscal. Only $15.9 million is allocated here. What does this allocation represent?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Through you, Member, which line Item?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry, 042.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: 042. Madam Chair, through you, these funds are to cover previous years' commitments.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Previous years? So, it is arrears?

7.40 p.m.

And in line Item 044, there is a $70 million allocation, which is a CAF loan, and seven schools are supposed to be repaired under this loan of $70 million. Could the Minister tell me which schools?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Madam Chair, through you, this list is being presently finalized.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, the seven schools have not been determined yet. Is there a criteria for choosing these schools?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: With respect to these schools, the criteria involve infrastructure condition and urgency, and priority is given to schools that are decanted or at risk due to structural deficiencies and deteriorated infrastructure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, Minister, if that is the criteria, I am sure you have many more than seven schools that you would like to do.

Madam Chairman: Member, please ask questions only. No comments.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: "A-a". But what is going on, Madam Deputy Chairman? That s very unkind. I am just making a comment based on the answer. Bit

aggressive.

[MR. SINGH *in the Chair*]

Mr. Young SC: Welcome back, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, under F. Public Buildings, is that where we are?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. I am told that is where we are.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you very quickly. Minister, under F., line Item 042, I see that you have been provided with a small Estimate of just about $16 million, $15.9 million for 2027. Yes, under line Item 042?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Chair, through you, that was for previous years' commitments. That was asked.

Mr. Young SC: Oh, that was for arrears.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So, Minister—

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: That was asked and answered.

Mr. Young SC:—there is nothing provided for this year, or is it under the 044, the CAF Loan?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Right, Chair, through you, emergency repairs and vacation repairs were transferred to the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Mr. Young SC: All right, but on the Resilient Schools Infrastructure Programme—

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: That is the CAF Loan.

Mr. Young SC: That is the CAF Loan?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: What I am trying to enquire about, Minister, and I thank you for the earlier conversation, in the constituency of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West,

there is an emergency situation with respect to the Gloster Lodge Moravian Primary School. And thank you, you were very aware of it and said that you are looking at doing what can be done. but, would this fall under any work to be done, or the construction of a new school fall under this 044?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Presently, that school falls under the emergency works.

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we will now go to the Infrastructure Development Fund; Social Infrastructure, Item 004: Pre-Primary. B: Pre-Primary or Pre-Primary A, anyone?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, Sir. Pre-Primary, thank you. Under line Item B02: Improvement, Refurbishment, Extensions to the ECCE Centres, there is an allocation of $4 million, but only $1.07 million was spent. Could the Minister explain why the entire allocation was not expended?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Chair, through you, the Ministry of Education would have paid all invoices that were received.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So that means that there was no other work going on at ECCE Centres to use up the $4 million. That is all the invoices you received?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: The balance may be "uninvoiced".

Mr. Chairman: Yes?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Primary.

Mr. Chairman: B. Primary.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: B.120. Through you, Mr. Chairman, Minister, there was an allocation of $50 million to Improvements to Primary Schools. Only $30 million was used. Could the Minister explain why the entire allocation was not expended?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: It is similar to the situation with the ECCE Centres.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: With reference to the amount of primary schools that need fixing, it was disappointing that all of that was not used. And could I ask the same thing about 397, Curepe Presbyterian, where $2.5 million was allocated and none was expended? I am sure the Member for St. Augustine will be very interested to understand why the Ministry got a $2.5 million allocation, and none was spent.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Through you, Chair, the works at Curepe Presbyterian will be completed during this fiscal year.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, there were no invoices coming in during this year, and is any work ongoing during this year?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: No work was executed in the last fiscal year.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could the Minister explain why, if you had an allocation?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Right. So, my information is that the Presbyterian Schools Board changed the scope that was required to be completed.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, they changed the scope, so no work was expended? No money was expended to doing any work here for this year.

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Right. So the scope has now been finalized.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And with reference to line Item 444: Construction of Gaines Normal , where $3.4 million was allocated and none was expended, could the Minister explain why?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: Chair, through you, with the funding that was spent, $1,032,163 was spent on designs.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: If it was spent, it was not registered here as anything being spent. Is it that it was not paid?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: It was paid, according to my advice.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, if it was paid, why was it not recorded here in the Budget

documents?

Hon. Dr. Dowlath: It was paid on September the 30th.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Thank you. All right.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. E: Special Education. Item 005: Multisectoral and Other Services. F: Public Buildings.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 26 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you very much to you and your staff. If we could perhaps, do not mean to be rude, but if we can perhaps, please have the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. Thank you all very much, and I apologize for the long wait you had have today.

7.50 p.m.

Head 72: Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training $1,355,248,80.

Mr. Chairman: Can I crave your indulgence for the economy of time? We want to finish the nine Heads today. I know you have prepared, and I really want to apologize to you, but can I crave your indulgence to dispense with the opening statement?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Padarath: No, no, no.

Mr. Tancoo: I want to make it very clear, Chairman—

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, we are not agreeing to that.

Mr. Tancoo:—with the greatest of respect, the failure of the Opposition to execute their job properly should not be used against us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: I hear everyone on that. My only concern with that is if we do not—if we take the five minutes, we are going to get to five to eight. Thereafter—

Mr. Young SC: There is no failure—there is no failure of the Opposition.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Tancoo: Therefore, they knew what they were doing. They should have managed their time appropriately.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Young SC: Our—[*Inaudible*]—is to examine the accounts.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Let us not have a quarrel with that. If there is no agreement, will the Minister make the opening statement?

Mr. Young SC: "Allyuh running from de House".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: Thank you, Chairman, and good night to Members of the committee. I am pleased to appear before the Standing Finance Committee, alongside the Parliamentary Secretary, Permanent Secretary and members of the Ministry's technical team to explain and defend the budget allocation for the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

The main focus for this year is to build upon and further consolidate the policies and procedural frameworks developed and being finalized to produce the competent skills and technology-savvy human capital base to support sustained economic growth and diversification in an efficient and cost-effective manner, through a coherent, well-articulated, seamless operational structure, and also to increase access to unserved and underserved areas.

Upon assumption of duties as Minister last year, the team and I found

the tertiary level and training sector in which institutions were operating in silos. There was a lot of duplication of offerings and a fall in enrollment numbers. So, we decided to act upon it, Chairman. And this is our list now, some of the achievements and progress over the last year. It includes an institutional framework in consultation with agencies for all institutions to work in the complementary and synergistic framework, the sharing of resources, increasing revenue targets and reducing the rental of buildings—unnecessary buildings in fact.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: Significant progress has been made in this regard. For example, YTEPP and MIC now share physical infrastructure. It never happened before; it is happening now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: UTT and UWI have signed several MOUs and are working together, the last one being a joint venture innovation incubation upon which private sector funding has been obtained. So, as you can see, Chairman, there has been a lot of sharing of resources, and further, there has been a significant uptick in the enrollment at the institutions.

Through the Touch of TVET caravan, headed by the National Training Agency, citizens of rural communities, like Cedros, Moruga, Rio Claro, et cetera, are being reached by the YTEPP, MIC, NESC, COSTAATT, UTT and NIHERST, the defence force and a host of private educational institutions, thereby exposing these underserved/unserved communities to the possibilities of education and employment. By doing so,

Chairman, we are elevating the status of TVET from a second-class option to a first-class.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: Work towards the opening of the UWI Penal/Debe Campus is well on the way, not only in the physical infrastructure that has been rehabilitated, but also the educational infrastructure, so that students will have access to a variety of academic programmes of national relevance, spanning pre-university, undergraduate and postgraduate studies. And therefore, when the campus opens, it will be a full opening, not a so-called practical one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: Finally, there will be another high-quality tertiary-level institution in south Trinidad to put an end to geographic discrimination.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: A National Policy on Apprenticeship has been approved to bring industrial training and apprenticeship practice into the modern era. In conjunction with the Commonwealth of Learning, a national micro-credential policy is in the final stages of stakeholder consultations. This policy will allow for lifelong learning, enhanced educational opportunities and professional development.

Mr. Young SC: Time is up. Time is up.

Hon. Member: Finish it. Finish it.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: Specific recommendations of an advisory committee set up to make recommendations to strengthen the financial stability, operational efficiency

and economic contribution of institutions under the Ministry are being developed.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Speaker, the five minutes are up.

Hon. Prof. Persad: In conclusion—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chairman, the time is up.

Hon. Prof. Persad:—Mr. Chairman, the Ministry has been restructured and refocused to facilitate greater impact on the sector for national development.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chairman, the time is really up. Mr. Chairman, the five minutes are really up. It is really up. It is really up. Come on.

Hon. Prof. Persad: As the hon. Prime Minister says, you know, for progression, we are going to progress, and we need to consolidate before we progress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I think the time is up now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: We are prepared to answer questions now.

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

Mr. Chairman: All right, the said sum for Heads 72: Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training is comprised of monies proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

The Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditures is to be found at page 375. And I am just going to go through the formality because I understand that there are two questions, but for the record: General Administration, 001; 002: Eastern

Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry; 003: Technical/Vocational Education; 005: National Examination Council; 007: Scholarships and Advanced Training Division. Item 008: On The Job Training.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration; 002: Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry; 005: National Examinations Council; 006: Spanish Secretariat; 007: Scholarships; 008: On The Job Training Programme.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; 001; 008: On The Job Training Programme.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 001: Regional Bodies; 002: Commonwealth Bodies; 004: International Bodies; 006: Educational Institutions; 007: Households.

Mr. Imbert: Question.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: 006—hand up. Item 24: University of Trinidad and Tobago. To the Minister, through you, Mr. Chairman, this $178 million, is it used to pay the UTT Board?

Hon. Prof. Persad: It is—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is that subvention used to pay the UTT Board?

Hon. Prof. Persad: UTT's Board—$178 million is for its subvention to UTT, yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay, and how much of that subvention is used to pay the salary of the Executive Chairman for the year?

Hon. Prof. Persad: Presently, the Executive Chairman has not been paid as yet—his remuneration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Prof. Persad: He is being paid as Chairman.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: He is not being paid a cent?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, you are saying that the Executive Chairman of the UTT attracts no salary?

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am asking how much of the $178 million—

Hon. Prof. Persad: Right now, we are awaiting word from the CPO to set his remuneration. But in the meanwhile, he is Chairman, he has been appointed Chairman, and he is being paid the remuneration for Chairman.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Which is how much every year?

Hon. Prof. Persad: $10,000 a month.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay, good.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 007: Households.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards, page 384.

Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under the *Draft*

Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards & Similar Bodies; Item 004: Statutory Boards appears on page 384 of the *Draft Estimates*. However, the detailed examination of these allocations is contained in the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of Tobago House of Assembly*.

8.00 p.m.

We now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies of the Tobago House of Assembly*. National Institute of Higher Education (Research, Science and Technology); Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001; General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration—

Mr. Tancoo: Chairman, if I may interrupt. It is now 8.00p.m.

Mr. Chairman: It is eight o'clock. I propose to put the questions on the remaining—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: For the rest of the Items under consideration today, I propose to put the question.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 72 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Head 58: Ministry of Justice $226,344,700.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Head 58 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Head 12: Public Service Appeal Board $4,371,800.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Head 12 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Head 07: Statutory Authorities Service Commission $9,322,815.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Head 07 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Head 38: Environmental Commission $8,502,755.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Head 38 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: This Standing Finance Committee is suspended until tomorrow morning, Wednesday at 8.00 a.m. Good night, everyone.

Hon. Members: At 8.00 am?

Mr. Chairman: At 10.00 a.m., sorry. 10.00 a.m., I beg your pardon.

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