HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 21, 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: My apologies for the few-seconds late start.

Mr. Young SC: Once we get back that 52 seconds at the end, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Good morning, once again, everyone and members of the public. May I apologize; I think we were about 20 seconds late. This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will now resume, and we will move promptly to Head 39, Ministry of Public Utilities.

Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, $3,636,904,75.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister to make a brief opening statement, and I do not think I need to remind the Minister of the five-minute time limit.

Hon. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For fiscal 2027, the Ministry of Public Utilities has been allocated approximately $4.087 billion, reflecting this Government's continued commitment to improving the quality, reliability, and sustainability of essential public utilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. When we assumed office, we inherited a utility sector plagued by years of neglect, aging infrastructure, operational inefficiencies, and a troubling disconnect between billions of dollars in annual expenditure and the quality of services delivered to citizens. We inherited the situation where too many families could not depend on a

regular supply of pipe-borne water, where critical infrastructure required urgent attention, and where hardworking employees were expected to perform without adequate resources, equipment, or direction. We did not come into office to make excuses, Mr. Chairman. We came into office to make a difference.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: And in fiscal 2026, despite the significant challenges, we have been demonstrating what focused leadership, strategic intervention, and responsible expenditure could achieve: Mr. Chairman, 12 new and refurbished pipeline projects covering more than 21 kilometres of mains, improved service to approximately 66,840 citizens, in addition to new production wells, which strengthened the water security for another 24,064 persons. We commissioned five town farms, and more is to come. We accelerated leak repairs to further secure this most precious resource, with more than 11,800 leaks repaired in just the first five months of 2026.

These are no longer just promises on a political platform. These are measurable interventions, affecting real communities and real people. But I will be the first to acknowledge that work is far from finished. We must also acknowledge that challenges within the public procurement process have contributed to delays in the execution and completion of several critical projects. However, we remain committed to addressing these bottlenecks, whilst ensuring the necessary standards of transparency and accountability are maintained without compromising the timely delivery of essential services to our citizens.

We cannot reverse years of deterioration overnight. However, we can ensure that every dollar allocated advances the transformation of this sector. For fiscal 2027, our priorities include: Improving water production and distribution,

rehabilitating critical infrastructure, strengthening operational efficiency across our agencies, and delivering more dependable services to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Chairman, let me make one thing abundantly clear: The days when billions could be spent in the public utilities sector without sufficient accountability or meaningful improvement in service delivery have come to an end.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: The people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve better, and this Government intends to deliver better; better promised, better delivered, and had much better to come. Mr. Chairman, I also wish to recognize my parliamentary colleagues, Minister in the Ministry, Clyde Elder, Member for La Brea; and Parliamentary Secretary, Shivanna Sam, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla; the Permanent Secretary who joins me; and dedicated employees of the Ministry and all our state enterprises, whose commitment, support, and expertise remain essential to achieving these objectives and whose strength upholds the Ministry of Public Utilities. Mr. Chairman, we have begun the process of restoring direction, accountability and confidence to this critical sector, and our responsibility, now, is to turn investment into infrastructure, expenditure into efficiency, and promises into performance. Mr. Chairman, we remain at your disposal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

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

Mr. Chairman: That said sum for Head 39, Ministry of Public Utilities, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar*

Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

The Head details: Sub-Head 01—these are to be found between pages 246 to 247, inclusive—Item 001: General Administration. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Sub-Item 01—001, which is the Head-Item—Sub-Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, I have observed an increase in this allocation by $14.5 million. Can you give an idea or tell us the reason for that increase?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly. The increase in allocation, the intention is to utilize for the possible payment of outstanding arrears due to public officers. Also, it is with respect to the implementation of the agreement on revised Salaries and COLA, pursuant to Ministry of Finance Circular No. 08 of 2025.

Mr. Gonzales: Is that the 40 per cent settlement with the Public Services Association that has given rise to this?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Does that also include the outstanding 60 per cent negotiations or settlement?

Hon. Padarath: Obviously, you know that, based on the utterances of the Minister of Finance, how that is being treated with.

Mr. Gonzales: So, I cannot recall, Minister, and for the benefit of the viewing audience, what is the utterance or what are the utterances of the—

Hon. Padarath: I suggest you check the public record. It is there.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister of Finance? I see your hand.

Mr. Tancoo: The increased allocation here would treat with an average above 40

per cent.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: That has been stated before. But this is just an average figure. There has been no settlement at this point with regard to the 40 per cent, 60 per cent, 50 per cent, 10 per cent, or otherwise.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. So, just to confirm, this figure is for the settlement of the 40 per cent outstanding?

Mr. Tancoo: I think the Minister has answered that question already.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, no problem.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. I think the Minister of Finance just answered what I was going to ask, but let me just confirm: Minister of Finance, you said a short while ago, there has been no settlement. So, is that confirmation that there has been no agreement from the Public Service Association to accept 40 per cent cash?

Hon. Padarath: Negotiations are ongoing.

Mr. Tancoo: That is in the public domain.

Mr. Young SC: That is what?

Mr. Tancoo: It is in the public domain. All of those issues with regard to the negotiations with the CPO are currently in the public domain.

10.10 a.m.

Mr. Young SC: We in the Standing Finance Committee are asking you a question as the Minister of Finance, where you are allocating money under the particular line Item of Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance for an increase of $14.5 million dollars. We were told by the Minister of Public Utilities that this is an Estimate of a 40 per cent salary increase and arrears. Did it include both arrears and the salary

increase?

I see the Minister nodding his head—the Minister of Finance. So, the answer to that is yes. So, then this question becomes: Are we allocating money for something, one, that is an average, an Estimate at this stage, but two, there has been no acceptance by the Public Service Association for it?

Mr. Tancoo: I think the question has been asked and answered already.

Mr. Young SC: I do not think so, but fine. Let us move on.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Okay? Item 002: Meteorological Services. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chair, Sub-Item 03: Overtime for Monthly Paid Officers. Minister, I observed a $300,000 decrease. Can you explain the reason why we have a decrease in allocation by $300,000 compared to the $400,000 that was set aside in the previous financial year?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, pursuant to line Item 03 under Met. Services for overtime, the overtime for staff below Range 46, their breakdown of payment was conducted in the last financial year for the outstanding sums that we would have had, and we believe that this allocation is sufficient to meet the expenditure coming out of this line Item.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, 002/01. The Met. Services, as it is commonly called, is playing a more and more important role as we try to predict what is taking place with the climate that, in particular, we have heard you tell the population it is going to affect our nation's water supplies. Might I ask what the current permanent establishment complement for the Met Service is?

What is the total?

Hon. Padarath: That is 72 officers.

Mr. Young SC: 72 officers. How many are currently in post?

Hon. Padarath: Member, the breakdown would be 26 appointed officers. There are nine vacancies. With respect to acting officers and temporary appointments with bodies you have 37 vacant without bodies. The Ministry of Public Utilities, like several other Ministries, is in the process of liaising with the Service Commissions Department to have this addressed. I do share your concern, particularly on the reliance on Met. Services as it relates to El Niño and the impact that some of these severe weather patterns are having on Trinidad and Tobago and parts of the Caribbean. So, it is something that we are actively looking at.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. And as well, I am glad you said the Caribbean because my recollection is that they also play quite an important role in the OECS region, especially during the hurricane season, for example, and providing them with the necessary information. So, out of all of those vacancies, are they filling those vacancies via the use of contract workers, some of them?

Hon. Padarath: Member, I am advised that some of them are being advertised. While we continue to liaise with the Service Commission, some of them have been met with contract officers.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 005: Electrical Inspectorate. 008: On the Job Training Programme. Port of Spain North.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, we have heard that your Ministry, OJT as it is commonly known, this On the Job Training Programme, has now been transferred from the Ministry of Tertiary Education to your Ministry, so this is the first year, I

believe, that your Ministry is going to be implementing and managing the programme. I see here that they have given you, the Minister of Finance, $2 million for the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance of the permanent staff at the OJT. How many permanent staff positions are there at the OJT?

Hon. Padarath: The following is the breakdown, hon. Member. The number of positions is 35: permanent 24, filled with bodies 10, filled without bodies—

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, 35 permanent?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: 24, you said 24 what?

Hon. Padarath: There are 35 positions.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Padarath: 24 of which are permanent.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Padarath: There are 10 filled with bodies right now.

Mr. Young SC: Mhmm.

Hon. Padarath: And without bodies, it is one. That is the breakdown.

Mr. Young SC: So, 24 permanent. So, those 24 permanent are filled?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And then 10 filled with bodies as a separate category.

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Right. Who is the current Executive Director of the OJT Programme?

Hon. Padarath: The position is vacant right now.

Mr. Young SC: Is there someone acting there?

Hon. Padarath: No.

Mr. Young SC: Does any of this amount of money here, this $2 million, include the settlement of the payment for the former Executive Director?

Hon. Padarath: Not under this line Item.

Mr. Young SC: Not under this line Item? Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. 001: General Administration. We go now to pages 248 to 251 inclusive.

Mr. Young SC: I see my Chief Whip has—

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot?

Mr. Gonzales: Oh, sorry.

Mr. Young SC: No, go ahead. I am still under 02/001: General Administration on page 248.

Mr. Gonzales: I am—thank you very much, Chair. Sub-Item 22: Short-term Employment. Minister, I observed an increase in Short-term Employment by $1,000, and the total allocation for 2027 is $5.5 million. How many short-term employees do you have at the Ministry that this allocation will be for?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly. The details are as follows, Member. There are currently 56 short-term positions and the details regarding those 56 short-term positions: 16 officers transitioned from long-term contracts to short-term contracts, there are 20 new positions, 20 new positions were renewed from the previous fiscal year.

Mr. Gonzales: With respect to those persons who would have moved from established contracts, I suspect three-year contracts, into short-term, how soon will the Ministry get the appropriate approval so as to advertise these positions, and so as to move those persons from short-term arrangements back to a more established arrangement under contracts of employment?

Hon. Padarath: We are working towards accelerating the process as soon as the budgetary process is completed, so in the short term.

Mr. Gonzales: All right. Thanks. How many departments are those persons deployed in?

Hon. Padarath: Twelve.

Mr. Gonzales: Twelve departments? Do you have a list of the departments?

Hon. Padarath: Yes, we do.

Mr. Gonzales: Can you provide it to us?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly.

Mr. Gonzales: Are you going to do it now?

Hon. Padarath: Oh, you want it now? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Padarath: Member, the following departments are:

- The Human Resource Management Unit;
- The Administrative Support Services Unit;
- The Finance and Accounts Unit;
- Information and Communications Unit;
- Monitoring and Evaluation Unit;
- Sectoral Programmes and Projects Unit;
- The Customer Service Unit;
- The Economic Research Policy and Planning Division;
- Legal Services Division;
- Communication Unit;
- The Permanent Secretary's Secretariat;

- The School Repair Programme; and
- Government Electrical Inspectorate Division.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Minister. And the $5.5 million allocation, would that be sufficient to cover the entire fiscal year of 2027?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North.

10.40 a.m.

Mr. Young SC: My friend adequately covered the Short-term Employment. I was going down a couple lines down, Minister, to line Item 42: Street Lighting—page 248—02/001: Street Lighting. I see that we went from $108 million at the budgetary process last year up to $196 million, which was a welcome significant increase, and now you are back down to $111 million—a decrease of 85 million. Is this the line Item that covers what you were discussing last year—and I believe maybe, in the midterm, about being able to not only to do your LED street lighting, but also adequately cover the replacement of bulbs and street lights across Trinidad and Tobago—[*Inaudible*]—came out of T&TEC?

Hon. Padarath: Hon. Member, no, this is not that line Item. We are still on Recurrent Expenditure.

Mr. Young SC: Right. So this is for what exactly?

Hon. Padarath: Member, this would be for recurrent with respect to existing infrastructure, not through the other programmes that would be for new street lighting, et cetera. So, where you have instances of parks and open spaces that require street lighting from time to time, that may need some sort of assistance in terms of changing out, this is for that recurrent expenditure.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, so, is it still a capital expenditure line Item? So, it is still—so for example, a park needs to replace its lights; this is where it would come under.

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thanks very much, Mr.Chair. Member, just to follow up on the questions by my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West on that same line Item: Street Lighting. This money is paid by the Ministry to T&TEC as a monthly bill for the lighting of our streets, and it is not really to conduct any repairs to lights or grounds.

Mr. Padarath: No.

Mr. Gonzales: No. Of course, T&TEC lights our streets all over the country. Somebody has to pay that bill, and the bill is paid by the Ministry of Public Utilities. The question is that we have noted a decrease of $84.9 million. Because normally, you have a set rate per annum. But this $84.9 million is concerning, and the question, therefore, is why? Is this that you expect a lower bill for fiscal 2027, or is it that you had to fulfil outstanding requirements from the previous fiscal year that you no longer have to satisfy in this fiscal?

Mr. Padarath: I am happy you are raising it, hon. Member. You see, hon. Member, you left me a bill of $98 million for the financial year 2024/2025, and in order to clear off that, we would have had to budget for it last year through the kind assistance of the Member for Fyzabad, Minister of Finance. So had you not left me that $98million unpaid bill, then the figures here would have reflected very differently.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, just to follow up on the response by my colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities. He would recall that, at a similar exercise, I asked the Minister whether or not the allocation in the last midterm review was sufficient to clear outstanding bills, and he said that it would be sufficient. So I am quite surprised that the Minister is saying that he was encumbered by a bill from the previous year when he told this Standing Finance that the allocation by the Minister of Finance would have been quite sufficient, and therefore, it is not right to indicate that—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, I—

Mr. Chairman: Member.

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, it seems to be very convenient for the Member of Arouca/Lopinot to cherry-pick those conversations understanding that when we go through the budgetary process there are Estimates and are Actuals. Therefore, at times, I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that despite my friend is no longer in office for about 18 months now, bills from the previous administration still continue to pour in all Ministries across the public sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I am glad we have had some clarification as to precisely what this line Item is. Because I was a little surprised by the initial answer but anyways, we have gotten there. So, Minister, the 2027 Estimate of $111million to pay for street lights across the country, as you have

said—recreational parks that are lit across the country, et cetera. Are those T&TEC rates? Because I assume what they are as, collectively—T&TEC sends a collective bill—they would not send per street light. Are those rates part of the increase that are increased rates that the Minister of Finance announced in the budget? Will they be affected by that increase? Because it is going to be over 3,000 kilowatts.

Hon. Padarath: Yes. Mr. Chairman, that is a discussion that we are having with the Ministry of Finance. Because, as the Member is fully aware, from time to time, there are exemptions, and therefore, those conversations are happening with the Ministry of Finance. And maybe, at another occasion, we will be able to share a bit more detail.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, I want to move to Sub-Item 53: Refunds to WASA Re: Water Improvement Rate. I noted an increase of $4.4 million compared to the previous year. Those rates are what you normally would receive from commercial and industrial customers at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, and they are basically more or less the same every year. But the increase is notable. The question, therefore is: What has given rise to this increased Estimate of this revenue by $4.4 million?

Hon. Padarath: Thank you, Member. Mr. Chairman, under line Item 53: Refunds to WASA Re Water Improvement Rate, there are some outstanding funds to be covered under this line Item and that will provide the explanation for why there has been an increase.

Mr. Gonzales: The outstanding sums in terms of what customers are owing to WASA that you—or rather, WASA plan to recover in this fiscal.

Hon. Padarath: No.

Mr. Gonzales: What is the outstanding sum?

Hon. Padarath: The outstanding sums would be the payments by WASA.

Mr. Gonzales: So, let me get it, Minister. The refunds to WASA—that refund to WASA is from the Ministry of Public Utilities to WASA?

Hon. Padarath: To WASA.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. So, does the Ministry of Public Utilities have this outstanding sum of $4.4 million that they intend to settle?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, fine. Thanks.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 002: Meteorological Services.

Mr. Young SC: Under 002, line Item 15: The Repairs and Maintenance of Equipment: Is this the line Item, Minister, that deals with the MET services ensuring all of the equipment is fully functional? It seems so, because it is not minor equipment. And I could not find anywhere else that had—so for example, the maintenance of their radar system and all of the associated components?

Hon. Padarath: Member, that is covered—the areas that you have mentioned are covered in another Vote, so you will have the opportunity—this I am seeing here also covers repairs to in-house equipment servicing of more administrative things— photocopiers, printers, et cetera.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 005: Electrical Inspectorate; 008: On The Job Training Programme. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, I observed in Sub-Item 17: Training, there is an allocation for $275 million. It is saying an increase, but I do

not know if that is really an increase because it is the first time that this department has been placed under the Ministry of Public Utilities. Is that really an increase, or is this the standard amount that would normally be provided to the OJT?

Hon. Padarath: Member, that is the standard amount that is usually provided to OJT.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, I thought so. But in terms of—just for clarity's sake—is that for the payment of stipends to trainees? And how many trainees do you plan to have in the programme for fiscal 2027?

Hon. Padarath: Member, roughly there are just over 4,000 trainees currently in the programme. You will recall that the Minister of Finance did indicate that there would be some realignment in terms of needs of Ministries, government departments, et cetera, with respect to the intake of trainees. You would appreciate that, now that this programme has come to the Ministry of Public Utilities, we would need to look at government policy as it relates to the policy that was enunciated by the Member for Fyzabad and align it to the needs right now. So, we are in the process of that, but as of now, it is just roughly over 4,000 and therefore, we will make a policy statement as the months proceed in terms of additional takings into the programme.

Mr. Gonzales: So just to be clear, you have 4,000 trainees—

Hon. Padarath: Roughly over 4,000.

Mr. Gonzales: In the programme now.

Hon. Padarath: In the programme right now.

Mr. Gonzales: And moving towards the new fiscal year of 2027, do you plan to increase that 4,000 or probably streamline it downwards?

Hon. Padarath: Member, you would realize that after 18 months, a lot of the

persons in the programme would have straddled the former administration. And therefore, now taking policy decision of aligning government needs with intakes into the programme, we will need to take a look at those who are currently in the programme right now meeting, that mandate—obviously they will remain in the programme until the completion of their tenure in the programme, but it will also give us the opportunity as some are exiting the programme, to realign our needs. So, a lot more would be said about that in the very near future, but that process is ongoing right now with OJT, since it has been realigned to the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Mr. Gonzales: So there is a review being done of the entire programme, the composition of the trainees, and how the Government plans to move forward in terms of the structure, intention, and the number of persons.

Hon. Padarath: In terms of the needs of the public sector.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Hon. Padarath: So it will not be 100 per cent restricted to purely the needs of the public sector, but obviously, there are spaces and places that may not be very popular in the public sector in terms of particular disciplines. And therefore, you may have anomalies where you just have a very small number of persons in the programme that are really geared towards things like actuarial science and that sort of thing, which is really a small cohort of persons. So it will not be restricted purely, but the focus will be, obviously, on the needs of the public sector.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Minister. Sub-Item 16: Contract Employment. Are those contract officers currently within the programme—employees?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: How many?

Hon. Padarath: So the number of positions is 85. I am sure you would like to know how many are filled and so on, so I will give you that breakdown. The number of positions filled is 62. There are 23 vacant positions.

Mr. Gonzales: 22 vacant positions?

Hon. Padarath: 23 vacant positions.

Mr. Gonzales: The allocation of $6.5 million—would that also be for the vacant positions that you intend to fill in fiscal 2027?

Hon. Padarath: Since it has been moved to the Ministry of Public Utilities, we are looking at an assessment. Member, you would be quite surprised to know that our research has found, at least in the last seven years, that a number of these vacancies have not been met. And the OJT programme really has been running on autopilot. The facilities there are in a complete mess. We are working assiduously with MTS, where OJT was running between 8.00 a.m. and 11.00 a.m., and then the staff on the establishment just go home. Because of the conditions that we have inherited and so on, since it has been moved to the Ministry of Public Utilities, we have been working closely with MTS to get the facilities up and running to get the staffing in place so that the programme, in terms of the administration of the programme, can run a lot more efficiently. The expectation is with this allocation. There may eventually be the need to supplement, but because of the assessment at this point in time, we were comfortable working with this figure with the Ministry of Finance, giving us the assurance that should we need supplementation at some point, the Minister of Finance would be most willing, understanding that it impacts our young people here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Gonzales: And the vacant positions that you alluded to, that include the position of executive director?

Hon. Padarath: Correct—and deputy.

Mr. Gonzales: And the deputy?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: And the plan, obviously, is to have those positions filled.

Hon. Padarath: Obviously, those two positions will have to be advertised and be filled in the shortest possible time. I did speak with the permanent secretary to start advertising and going out for those positions.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, this programme which has become quite an important programme, especially for young professionals in Trinidad and Tobago—forgetting any political division, many of our young people, because of the benefits of tertiary education that we are fortunate to get in Trinidad and Tobago at subsidized, government-paid, and some people even getting it free—you find a lot of frustration with our youth. And this is a programme when they have qualified and they have graduated, it is difficult—and it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to get necessary work experience, and that is the core principle of this programme—the OJT, and hopefully to give them that work experience as they go off into the working world.

I listened to you very carefully as you answered my colleague from Arouca/Lopinot, and you made certain comments. So, under the Short-term Employment, you said that it was understaffed and not adequate administration being looked—I think you said it was on autopilot. This Short-term Employment, how many positions are there currently covered under Short-term Employment?

Hon. Padarath: Thirteen.

Mr. Young SC: Thirteen.

Hon. Padarath: Yes, 1-3.

Mr. Young SC: So this $1.4 million for one year divided by 13—presumably, there will be different levels, et cetera—12 months— that is going to be sufficient to assist? How many are in post?

Hon. Padarath: All 13 of them are in post.

Mr. Young SC: All 13. And this is sufficient, you are told, to cover the cost.

Hon. Padarath: We believe, at this time, it is, yes.

Mr. Young SC: And now, with respect to line Item 17 and training, you said that this is the usual—

Hon. Padarath: Stipend.

Mr. Young SC:—figure given to the stipends—it is $275 million. How is the allocation of these positions or placements going to be done in this fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, I believe that I covered that quite extensively when I spoke to the alignment of government needs in the public sector. But I maintain it—

Mr. Young SC: Correct. I heard you said that is the positions. You talked about—for example, I heard you talk about actuarial science and these types of things, and depending on what the needs of the Government service. For example, from a national security point of view, in Forensic Science Centre there is always a dearth of qualified people in the Forensic Science Centre. And this is one of the areas that the Government will try to align, that we will give you GATE funding to go and study forensic science, et cetera. I understand that. And my question is different. My question is an administrative question. There are tens of thousands of hopeful applicants to the OJT Programme. How is the OJT programme going to filter those applications and then place them? That is my question. Are they

applying online? What is the continuity of how it is going to happen?

Hon. Padarath: Member, the programme itself, in terms of the application process, has been quite archaic in that it is still very paper-based. The permanent secretary advised me when it came under the Ministry of Public Utilities that OJT is paying something like $2 million to $3million annually to rent a 20-foot container to house all these application forms. I would not go into the details to tell you who owns this 20-foot container to get $2 million to $3million annually, but that is the sort of archaic system, and therefore, obviously, it needs revamping. So the intention is to work with the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence to have it digitized, first of all, in terms of the applications. You have applications that have been there for over five years.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. Padarath: And therefore, we intend on working with Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence to improve the application process by going digital—online, yes, but also, we will have to do an updated system seeing that the 20-foot container has reached its capacity with old application forms. So therefore, I believe that anything over five years, we will have to do a re-registration and make it a lot more friendly and easier for our young people living in a digital world.

10.40 a.m.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, Minister. You see, and that is a point, because there is, of course, a ceiling—an aged ceiling on this as to how old or how young you can be to get into the programme, and the concern is exactly that. Because as Members of Parliament, we are faced—a big cohort that come to see us are young people with a sense of almost hopelessness for employment and therefore, this is a

very important programme, which is why I am spending a couple minutes on it. What you have said about updating the system, might I also suggest, in that computerization of it, that you also put in place an objective filter system, so there is not that kind of interference that takes place to put a cold blanket on the hopes of the youth outside there and that—

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Young SC: No, it is not all right. I am speaking—

Mr. Chairman: No, Port of Spain/St. Ann's West—

Mr. Young SC:—and that they allowed the opportunity to apply specifically—

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

Mr. Young SC:—for what it is that you all have available.

Mr. Chairman: Whilst I understand the need to speak, and I do not think this is a forum for discussion, I think—whilst I have allowed you—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]—I have five minutes to ask my question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Would I be allowed to get to my question, please, Mr. Speaker. You truncated me, so I will ask the question now.

Mr. Chairman: No, I did not truncate you, you know. It is not a question for an overall—it is not—

Mr. Young SC: But I have not asked the question as yet.

Mr. Chairman: Well, if you would hang on a second, I would explain to you what I was about to say. All right? Whilst I understand all of that, and the general rule is that the Standing Orders provide for a five-minute speaking time in Committee—

Mr. Young SC: Not the general rule, that is the Standing Order.

Mr. Chairman All right. I am just simply going to ignore that for the moment. Whilst I allow a generous run-up with that, ultimately, there must be a question, you know, it is not a general discussion we are having.

Mr. Young SC: And I just said I will ask the question now.

Mr. Chairman: I will be very grateful.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. All that you have spoken about, and all that I have in my long run-up too, might I ask if this is going to be implemented in this fiscal?

Hon. Padarath: That is the expectation, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Hon. Padarath: Obviously, I shared with the Committee some of the challenges that we have met, and the intention is to work assiduously with Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence to do the implementation.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, and to my friend with the debate—[*Inaudible*] Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 252, 253 inclusive; 001: General Administration; 002: Meteorological Services; 005: Electrical Inspectorate; 008: On The Job Training Programme.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, pages 253, 254; 001: Regional Bodies. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Chair. Minister, I observe that there is a $4.2 million reduction in this allocation for the Caribbean Meteorological Institute. What is the annual contribution to this institute?

Hon. Padarath: Member, with respect to the Caribbean Meteorological Institute, our annual contribution is $4.6 million.

Mr. Gonzales: $4.6 million? So, this $4.6 million—so, the $5 million allocation would be sufficient. Do you have any outstanding arrears from the previous year?

Hon. Padarath: I am conferring with the technocrats to see if we have any outstanding contribution to CMI. [*Minister confers with technocrats*] Member, we will have to verify—

Mr. Gonzales: Sure.

Hon. Padarath:—but I can tell you that in the last fiscal, we did pay a $4.2 million. So that would have been for fiscal '25.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes. Thank you. So that information will be provided subsequently.

Hon. Padarath: Sure.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 003: United Nations Organisations; 007: Households. Arouca/ Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, thank you. Member, I observed that for Refunds to T&TEC –Re-Rebate on Electricity Bills, there has been a reduction by $27.6 million. So, the revised allocation in 2026 was $87.6 million, and it has dropped to $60 million, a shortfall by $27.6 million. Can you indicate what would have resulted in that significant reduction?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly. Mr. Chairman, under line Item 08: Refunds to T&TEC Re-Rebate on Electricity Bills, the rebate programme provides a 35 per cent rebate to T&TEC's residential customers on bills that are $300 or lower, inclusive of the customer's initial kilowatt consumption charge for the bi-monthly

period; the bi-monthly customer charge of $6 and a value added tax of 12.5 per cent. The programme obviously is aimed at encouraging customers to reduce their electricity usage. The rebate is non-transferable, as you know, from one account to another and cannot be used to liquidate arrears. So far, 170 persons accessed this facility. This would help the hon. Member to understand the breakdown in the figures here.

In the previous year's payment was $33.769 million between April '25 to September 2025, covering six months. Fiscal payments for 2026 was $50.668 million, covering October '25 to June 2026, nine months. The monthly bill ranged from $4.7 million to $6.6 million. The average monthly bill of $5 million will cover payment for July 2026 to June 2027.

Mr. Gonzales: '27. So, you are saying, Minister, that the $60 million allocation is to cover outstanding arrears from last fiscal and into this fiscal that will take you up to June.

Hon. Padarath: Correct.

Mr. Gonzales: So, are you expecting, I guess, at the mid-term review a supplementation to take you towards the end of this fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: Well, Member, obviously, having been here before, you would understand that this is part of the budgeting process. These are Estimates. So, based on what we project, this could very well take us to the end of the financial year, but based on the patterns of previous years, it is suggested that this may take us up to June 2027. So, I am not ruling it out that the Minister of Finance may have to make an adjustment here for us. However, we will work with T&TEC to see whether we can stay—I am sure that will bring a smile on the face of the Member for Fyzabad, but we will try to stay within this allocation.

Mr. Gonzales: How many citizens, Minister, do you expect to benefit under this programme for this fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: Yeah, in the last fiscal, we had about 170 persons, and that has been the average annually for the past couple of years.

Mr. Gonzales: 170 citizens with a budget of about $60 million—$87 million?

Hon. Padarath: Yes. And as I mentioned before, this is a challenge that successive administrations have carried. That is how we came up with the projection for the next fiscal year, looking at the average from around 2020 to now. It is a conversation that we are having with T&TEC, but it also is a conversation that has not received the attention it should have. I keep reminding the country that the bill that was left to us between T&TEC and NGC was close to $9 billion, and therefore, in this instance, a lot of this type of approach continues. However, it is my intention to work with Ministry of Finance and others to have—this is just one example of the continued burden the State continues to carry.

Mr. Gonzales: So, you are saying that the Government may be looking at this programme and the feasibility of continuing it in the future?

Hon. Padarath: Well, Member, if you cannot put 170 persons and juxtapose that against the expenditure of over $60 million, then something is wrong.

10.50 a.m.

Mr. Gonzales: So you are saying that the Government may be looking at this programme and the feasibility of continuing it in the future?

Hon. Padarath: Well, Member, if you cannot put 170 persons and juxtapose that against the expenditure of over $60 million, then something is wrong.

Mr. Gonzales: Something is not wrong. You are answering questions, there is a purpose for this Standing Finance Committee. There is an allocation of a

whopping $60 million, you would understand. Our responsibility here—

Hon. Padarath: The Government understands balancing—

Mr. Gonzales: I am not finished.

Hon. Padarath: Sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. Gonzales: So our responsibility here is to do exactly that. Look at the figures, the persons who benefit, and, of course, you as a policymaker would indicate and have the opportunity to tell the country, through this Parliament, what your intention might be moving forward, given what we are facing with at this point in time.

Hon. Padarath: Member, obviously, it is a balancing act in terms of providing for the most vulnerable in our society—

Mr. Gonzales: I understand.

Hon. Padarath:—but also understanding the maths. If there are 170 persons benefiting from this, with an expenditure of over $60 million, obviously it tells you that there is a need for review. I am not saying that we are eliminating it, that is not the Government policy at this time, but, obviously, there must be an element of review in terms of value for money and this type of expenditure.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, 009: Other Transfers, and, in particular, I am focused on the bonds and the loans attributable to T&TEC, especially in light of the conversation. So, I am at 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and in light of what you were just telling my colleague from Arouca/Lopinot, because it is a fact, and sometimes I think the population does not understand somebody has to pay for the gas that generates electricity. You said that when you came into office,

it was $9 billion owed from T&TEC to NGC. I suspect it might be close to $10 billion now. Are any of these new loan facilities to assist T&TEC with the payment of that outstanding debt?

Mr. Tancoo: Member, you are referring, if I may, please, through you, Chair—

Mr. Young SC: Thanks.

Mr. Tancoo:—you are referring to several loans—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Mr. Tancoo:—principal and interest payments. Yes. None of those here are new. These are loans, if you look, you would see allocations that would have predated this Government being in office. So, these are loans—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Tancoo: Sorry?

Mr. Young SC: Go on. I am asking if any are new, because I am familiar with these, none are new.

Mr. Tancoo: None of these are new.

Mr. Young SC: Alright. So that leads to my second question. What is the Government's intention to relieve T&TEC? I accept it is a long, outstanding problem that you face as a government, but to relieve T&TEC of that outstanding bill, which is now about $10 billion to NGC for the gas.

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, I can assure the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, it is an active discussion that has been happening. There are some negotiations that we are actively discussing with NGC, and therefore more will be said at the appropriate time. But I can give the assurance to the national community that it is something on our radar. One of the very first things I spoke about on becoming Minister of Public Utilities was this existing debt between

NGC and T&TEC. In the very near future, a lot more will be said about it, but it is receiving our attention.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. It must, and it will give the poor Minister of Finance some additional sleepless nights because it is a tremendous debt that needs to be covered. My next—

Hon. Padarath: Chairman—

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, go on.

Hon. Padarath: Member, I appreciate the conversation we are having, and I know that the practice has always been for the Minister to be asked questions. I do not know if I will be allowed to ask a question in light of the conversation. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West admittedly said that when they demitted office, it was about $9 billion.

Mr. Young SC: You said it was $9 billion that you met.

Hon. Padarath: Well, it is $9 billion. That is on the public record, hon. Member.

Mr. Young SC: Yeah.

Hon. Padarath: The question really, and I am hoping the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West or the Member for Arouca/Lopinot can share with us, why was it allowed to balloon to this $9 billion under your tenure in 10 years and why was it left unaddressed?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much for that. I mean, the answer, before I get to my question I was about to ask, is quite a simple answer. You went to the population, you asked to be in charge, you are in charge for 19 months now, deal with it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: Now, my question—

Mr. Chairman: Can we get a question?

Mr. Young SC: So my question to you now is, can you give the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago an assurance that you will not be raising electricity rates to assist T&TEC to pay this debt to NGC?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, what I can assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago is that we are committed to dealing with this challenge of $9 billion, going on $10 billion, left in legacy debts by the former People's National Movement administration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: This $9 billion to $10 billion was accumulated under my colleagues, and no amount of posturing will change that fact that they created this situation between NGC and T&TEC that we are now being forced to clean up. That is the assurance and the commitment I can give to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, just to close off on this issue, I would tell the Minister, if he goes back to the dustbin and locates—

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Gonzales: No, no, or wherever it is, wherever the RIC report is, he can go there, and he would realize that in that report there was a roadmap to treat with this debt owed to NGC. So do not be smart with—

Mr. Chairman: You have a question then?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairman: What is the question?

Mr. Gonzales: The question is on Sub-Item 04: Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (TTPost). Minister, I observe an allocation of $69 million, I suspect that is a subvention for the running of TTPost. Can you tell us whether or not TTPost has a board?

Hon. Padarath: That is being addressed by the Cabinet.

Mr. Gonzales: So the answer is, no, TTPost does not have a board?

Hon. Padarath: That is being addressed by the Cabinet.

Mr. Gonzales: For the last 18 months, TTPost does not have a board.

Hon. Padarath: That is being addressed by the Cabinet.

Mr. Chairman: Thanks. Asked and answered.

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, if you would allow me, my colleague spoke about the RIC report. I want to remind my colleague that when he left it at the last Cabinet, parts of that report says that the burden of an increase, up to 81 per cent in some instances, is what is contained in that report, that citizens were expected to carry the burden of. So when the Member speaks about a plan to address the situation between NGC and T&TEC, their plan was to burden the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by higher electricity rates.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: This was not just for part of the population, this was across the board.

Mr. Elder: Everybody.

Mr. Gonzales: Not true.

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

Mr. Young SC: Minister, thank you very much for that theatrical display, but, as I said before, you are in charge now for the last 19 months, and for a short period

you may still continue to be in charge. However, the question now—and I could assure the population, the PNM's plan was not to increase any electricity rates.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: An RIC report is an independent report that is sent to Cabinet, you have to bring it to Cabinet.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: So the question remains, we have now had two increases in electricity rates since the last two budgets that you have presented, when is it that you all intend to increase the electricity rates for the population of Trinidad and Tobago across the board?

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West alluded to the RIC report being a report, an independent report. Mr. Chairman, it seems as though the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has selective memory, because the Member for Arouca/Lopinot is on the public record as it relates to these increase in electricity prices.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, I have an excerpt of that report before me. Mr. Chairman, in some instances, the increase to citizens' electricity bills under my colleague for Arouca/Lopinot would have been in the vicinity of 70.1 per cent, 66.6 per cent, 60.7 per cent, 55.9 per cent, and so it goes. So I will take no advice from my colleagues opposite—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath:—as it relates to the handling of T&TEC and electricity bills.

11.00 p.m.

What we have sought to do, Mr. Chairman, unlike colleagues opposite who

advocated for the rich to get richer off the backs of the poor, the Prime Minister has said that there must be a balancing. There must be a redistribution of who will carry that burden. What the Member for Fyzabad has sought to do is that the less than 10 per cent that has 3,000 and more kilowatt consumption, that surcharge will apply to them, not the 90 per cent of the population who consume less than 3,000kilowatts.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is amazing that this is the same individual who said that there will be no T&TEC increases in Trinidad and Tobago. It is an absolute falsehood and a broken promise by the Member for Couva South.

Hon. Members: What is the question?

Mr. Gonzales: The question, Mr. Chairman, is—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Gonzales: Listen, stop harassing me.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Mr. Chairman: No. We have not gone there yet.

Mr. Gonzales: Oh. Sorry. No. No. No. 009/24: Community Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). I observed an allocation of $7 million. Minister, can you indicate what this $7 million is for? I assumed that T&TEC was already closed down.

Hon. Member: CEPEP.

Mr. Gonzales: Not T&TEC; CEPEP. I am sorry.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: "Yuh so want to hit him with T&TEC".

Mr. Gonzales: "Ah talking T&TEC so much".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Gonzales: CEPEP.

Hon. Padarath: Member, as the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West will be aware, there are a number of legal matters—

Mr. Young SC: One this afternoon.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Padarath:—some of which he is intimately involved in, that require the company to still have some level of operational ability. That is why an allocation of $7million is there. There are some settlements that are still occurring and a few employees that are required to maintain the status quo, so that the matters before us can be addressed legally—those legal matters.

Mr. Gonzales: How many employees are currently working within the CEPEP organization?

Hon. Padarath: I am advised it is three employees.

Mr. Gonzales: So, the $7 million is to pay three employees?

Hon. Padarath: No. The $7 million would include some of the settlements that are outstanding, as well as some of the operational costs that are still associated with the disposal, even though there has been no disposal of the assets just as yet. It is more for operational costs and some legacy debts that the company has.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Does that include the payment of outstanding legal fees?

Hon. Padarath: Obviously.

Mr. Gonzales: Anand Ramlogan?

Hon. Padarath: Obviously.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. I understand.

Hon. Padarath: That is why he won.

Mr. Gonzales: Sure.

Hon. Padarath: That is why CEPEP has won.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Let me put on record that, as the Minister has pointed out, I am intimately involved. There is a matter of CEPEP suing the former Board on this afternoon. So, I will ask to be excused at the appropriate time to go into that matter. So, I have that interest. I am not earning any fees, unfortunately, for any of them.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Young SC: But, with respect to this $7 million, Minister, would you, as the line Minister, be seeking to get an increase in this $7 million? Because it certainly is not going to be adequate to cover the level of damages that I intend to have awarded against—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Young SC:—the CEPEP company for firing en masse of the 350 contractors.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I think that is—

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, I think after Anand Ramlogan drags him over the coals—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: All right. In any event—

Hon. Padarath:—he may be anticipating something that will not come.

Mr. Chairman:—I do not think it is a permissible question. It is too futuristic. It is uncertain.

Mr. Young SC: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Let us employ—

Mr. Young SC: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—the language of the law; its remoteness. You do not satisfy the test of remoteness. All right. Let us move on.

Mr. Young SC: That remote hurdle has been well-crossed.

Mr. Chairman: Let us move on. We go now to 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, 254. We are on 254, hon. Minister. All right. There being no questions, here is what I propose to do.

Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate under the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards & Similar Bodies; Item 004. Statutory Boards appears on page 255 of the *Draft Estimates*. However, the detailed examination of these allocations is contained in the *Draft Estimates of the 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 the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* at page 301.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Chairman, what page?

Mr. Chairman: Page 301. So, Sub-Head 01/51: Water and Sewerage Authority; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 301; 001: General Administration. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, we have observed

some drastic reductions. In the interest of time, Mr. Chair, if you would allow me, as opposed to going through the individual Sub-Items, I can collectively refer to all of the Sub-Items where we are seeing drastic reductions under the Water and Sewerage Authority. For example, Wages and Cost of Living Allowance, we are seeing a reduction by $53 million; Wages and COLA, $101 million; Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers, $13 million; Government's Contribution to NIS, $19 million; and Overtime–Daily-Rated Workers, a reduction by $24 million. Significant decreases, Minister, in this allocation for the Water and Sewerage Authority. What is the reason for those massive reductions as it relates to Personnel Expenditure?

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, sometimes I am very surprised by the Member for Arouca/Lopinot. You see, it was in financial year 2024/2025, that where I sit today, the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, with a lot of glee, told the country that the $60 million cut in NIS for WASA workers was as a result of WASA employees possibly going home.

Mr. Gonzales: Possibly going home?

Hon. Padarath: I want to take a very different approach, to assure WASA workers on the establishment that this does not reflect any cuts of employment at WASA.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: This is a part of the usual budgetary exercise. Obviously, there will have to be a supplementation. Therefore, the Minister of Finance has given me the commitment that WASA will be supplemented in order to ensure employees are kept. Therefore, I give all employees on the establishment the commitment this morning that this will not impact their employment status at WASA.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, are you aware that, currently, a number of WASA workers are being served with termination notices or notices indicating that their contracts of employment will come to an end by the end of this month and there will not be any renewal of their contract of employment? And is that in relation to, or as a result of, the drastic cuts we are seeing under this line Item?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, the Member very well knows that short-term employment is handled very differently at WASA. It is for intervals of three months and in some instances, six months. Therefore, this is a usual practice of a notice being served to persons once you are short-term. That is why in the budget books it says Short-term Employment.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: Therefore, as the need arises for short-term employment—this is the same Member who was wanting and raving just a few months ago about over 500 employees hired at WASA.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Padarath: So, he speaks on one side of his mouth, complaining about 500 employees hired. Now that it comes to an end, based on a short-term contract—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Padarath:—the Member now complains that the contracts are coming to an end. There must be an assessment of the needs for short-term employment. But as I have indicated before, the variation in the figures that the Member has presented has to do with employees on the establishment. Therefore, there will be no interference in terms of sending any of these employees who are on the establishment home at WASA. Unlike him, we are committed to keeping WASA employees employed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, just to respond to my colleague, just to let him know the reason why I was shouting and making noise about the 500 employees is because I am totally against the political manipulation of persons for [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: This is a question and answer exercise.

Hon. Padarath: I think the Member is just totally against people being employed—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: From Diego Martin and the East-West Corridor.

11.10 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: This is a question and answer exercise. So, Member for Port of Spain North / St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, 09, we are under Goods and Services, right, 02/09?

Mr. Chairman: We are not there yet.

Mr. Young SC: Oh, sorry, you are still above. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: General Administration.

Mr. Young SC: My apologies.

Mr. Chairman: But I am prepared to go to Goods and Services. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you to my colleague, the Chief Whip, for giving way. Okay then, let me start—well, no, I will leave that one for him; 04: Electricity. I see that there is an increase here of $40 million for electricity to WASA. When I

looked across, I saw that in 2025 it was about 79/$80 million, 2026 it was $85 million, but with a Revised Estimate, which I was quite surprised to see, of $45 million So I assume that means they only got $45 million released under this line Item to pay electricity and then you went back up in 2027 to the $85 million, which is the $40 million increase. Is it that this $85 million now once it is released will cover WASA's electricity bills? Because, as we know, they run on electricity, all the pumps, et cetera, et cetera. Is this sufficient, the 85?

Hon. Padarath: Member, to provide you with some detail, roughly the authority's monthly projection for electricity in terms of the bill is roughly about $9 million. Obviously, when you calculate that 12 by nine, you get the $108 million, an allocation of $85 million here, and therefore what we have been doing over the past couple of years, in particular, coming from your tenure into this administration, you have had some legacy arrears and so on that have been treated with. The Member for Fyzabad and I had a conversation. While there is an allocation of $85 million there, there may be a small shortfall and we will address that at the appropriate time. But I believe that this is a fair allocation at this point in time compared to years gone by when we were significantly left with arrears in this particular area.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. And now to go down to line Item 08: Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment. And I saw here quite a drastic drop, almost, well, not almost, $100 million lower in this line Item for, Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment. Now, there would not be a single citizen who would not be seeing WASA vehicles all over and they are constantly being called out to do their jobs because there are a lot of remote locations and even in urban locations that they must go to. Is this going to cause a significant drop in the number of available

vehicles for the Water and Sewerage Authority, $100 million less?

Hon. Padarath: Thank you, Member. There is more than one thing happening in this line Item. First of all, WASA has been engaged in less reliance on leasing and renting vehicles and equipment, and looking into investing into critical areas that are needed. So we have done some of that over the last financial year. This obviously is an area that we will have to get some funding vired to us and those discussions are actively happening. So as far as we can mitigate against some of what you have raised, we too have flagged it, and we are working with the Ministry of Finance to have that matter addressed.

Mr. Young SC: Because the last thing, of course, you would want is that WASA now has no vehicles to be able to do what they need to do. Okay. Thank you very much. And then, well, I leave a couple of these for my colleague. I have been seeing—I am now down at line Item 43: Security Services. I have seen some association recently in the past week, week and a half; it is not the EPA, but some security services association, seems like a private security services association, making a particular cry, and I am pretty certain it is with respect to WASA and saying there are outstanding sums owed, et cetera. Would this increase here, I see there is an increase of, let us say $9 million, a few dollars short of $9 million, would that help WASA to alleviate the concern with respect to these arrears? Presumably, after an audit is conducted and this type of thing. Are you seeing it? Line Item 43.

Hon. Padarath: Yes. Yes. Yes, Member. Member, I can share with you that there are 14 companies that provide security services to WASA facilities.

Mr. Young SC: One-four?

Hon. Padarath: Yes. Many of these 14 have been providing security at WASA

facilities for a number of years. Between the period May 2025 to the 15th of October, 2026, a total of $$50,053,928.64 was paid. I can provide you with the breakdown. I know, based on correspondence that has been sent to me, that some of your colleagues have been writing pre-action letters and so on to WASA.

Mr. Elder: Yes, colleagues.

Hon. Padarath: Randall, Renuka and that lot.

Mr. Elder: Colleagues.

Hon. Padarath: Yeah. Hopefully they will tell you about it before.

Mr. Young SC: Well, they are qualified attorneys.

Hon. Padarath: Certainly.

Mr. Young SC: And they are entitled to carry on their practice.

Hon. Padarath: Certainly. I have no objection with that, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: And neither of them are in the Parliament.

Hon. Padarath: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, however, while the $50.53 million has been paid, a number of these companies were left out in the cold, in that they were not paid for over three to four years. And therefore, on an annual basis, the very little that has been provided for security services did not help to clear out the backlog, and after paying the $50.53 million between May '25 to October '26, this is an ongoing exercise. Obviously, the allocation where you have an increase of $7.236 million, there may be a need to supplement, but we are—

Mr. Young SC: Actually, it is an increase, Minister, of $8,969,000.

Hon. Padarath: Sorry. Sorry. Yes, I was reading—yes, it is $8.969 million. You are correct, $8.96 million—

Mr. Young SC: So that will help to alleviate?

Hon. Padarath: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: But, I mean, it is recurring.

Hon. Padarath: Correct. Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Because every month you continue to have so—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Padarath: But we are actively having discussions with them. I want to also add that there was an utterance in the public by some of those representing that association indicating that at one point in time WASA facilities were left unmanned, that is completely untrue.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I saw you said that.

Hon. Padarath: So, we have contingency plans in place. But I always believe that anytime there is a breakdown in communication, it is a recipe for disaster. And therefore, WASA's mandate has been to bring all parties to the table, bring a speedy resolution and to see how we can pay some of these legacy debts that were left over the last three to four years. But we have paid $50.53 million.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Minister. And thank you for that mature approach and I would ask you to pay some attention to it because the last thing I want is my colleagues calling me to ask me to come and do another free matter to assist them. [*Laughter*] So, now moving down to, well, I will let the Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, I am at Sub-Item 16: Contract Employment, another massive reduction by $97.8 million. So you have an allocation for 2027 of $346.5 million. How much is needed in that allocation that would take you comfortably towards the end of the fiscal year 2027?

Hon. Padarath: Member, this is a line Item that obviously continues to be under review. This will be purely dependent on the needs assessment that is being done by WASA and the contract employment that would have taken place in the last fiscal. So therefore, I will be able to provide you with more information as we go along in terms of this line of expenditure over the next couple of months, we should be able to you with some more detail.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Can you tell the committee how many persons you have employed under contract employment inside of WASA?

11.20 a.m.

Hon. Padarath: Currently, the line Item consists of the following categories of employees: For contract employment, the total number of contract employees at WASA is 4,064.

Mr. Gonzales: Four thousand contract employees?

Hon. Padarath: Four thousand and sixty-four is the total. This includes short-term employees. The fixed term contracts are 13, the executive management is 41, bringing a total number of employees to 4,118 at this time.

Mr. Gonzales: And how many permanent employees do you have?

Hon. Padarath: Member, I believe it is just roughly over 600.

Mr. Gonzales: Six hundred, okay. Other Contracted Services—that is Sub-Item 28: Other Contracted Services, there is a massive increase by $126.395 million. Can the Minister confirm whether that increase would include payment for desalinated water in WASA?

Hon. Padarath: Member, you should know this, Desalcott is paid from a different Vote for desalinated water.

Mr. Gonzales: No, you have a next desalination company.

Hon. Padarath: Yeah, but in effect, that desalinated water is paid from another Vote.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, can you indicate what is the planned item of works, or rather what would have amounted for that increase by $126 million?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Gonzales: Correct.

Hon. Padarath: Member, this relates to another line Item that we spoke to earlier with respect the rental of vehicles, lease arrangement, et cetera. This is purely an administrative matter and therefore, part of it will be used to be vired to that Head.

Other than that, we envisage that there will be critical repair works required at various water and wastewater facilities to ensure compliance under the Water Pollution Rules, 2019, and in accordance with section 29 of the EMA Act. You will recall that there were one or two instances under your tenure that you left us to clean up, and therefore, part of this allocation will be used for the continued works in compliance with the EMA rules for some of those facilities.

There is also the ongoing pipeline repairs and maintenance to minimize non-revenue water. There are some smaller expenditures as it relates to professional fees, medical expenses for employees, commission and collections, and that is some of the things that Other Contracted Services will be responsible for with respect to this allocation.

Mr. Gonzales: Sub-Item 68: Water Trucking, an increase by $30.1 million. Can you provide a list of the services providers for us?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly.

Mr. Gonzales: In writing.

Hon. Padarath: Sorry?

Mr. Gonzales: In writing?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: And can I ask that it be provided before the end of this exercise? The Standing Finance Committee, not today.

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, I will have to speak with the technocrats, inclusive of the CEO of WASA, so I cannot give that assurance that it will happen during the Standing Finance Committee or at the conclusion, because you will have to pull the data and so on.

Mr. Chairman: Let us agree to a reasonable period—within a reasonable time.

Mr. Gonzales: Well, as you know, Mr. Chair, part of this exercise is that we request information. And if it cannot be provided immediately by the Minister, that it will be provided at a time that, before the budget is passed, the Opposition will have access to the information.

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, in the ideal world, that applies, but I sat here for 10 years and waited for the information to be furnished to me, and I got it months after.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: I am not saying that I am taking that approach, what I am saying is that I will have to speak with them and therefore, I cannot give the assurance that it will happen during this—

Mr. Chairman: In any event, I am advised that the minimum period is 14 days. All right. Shall we move on? Diego Martin Central, I got a note that you wanted to ask something. Can you identify the line Item, please?

Mr. de Nobriga: I will, Chairman. Chairman, thank you very much. Under 69: Road Reinstatement. Minister, I am very happy to see an increase of $4.5 million

for Road Reinstatement. As you well know, I will message you from time to time, particularly with long-standing issues. I do not know if this $4.5 million, added to the existing amount, gets broken up by region, or if it is handled directly at WASA. I would just ask on behalf of the constituents of Diego Martin Central, one of the big issues that has cropped up is, of course, leak repairs taking a while to get done, but then road reinstatement not being conducted.

Hon. Padarath: Thank you, Member for Diego Martin Central. Member, I know you are particularly concerned about your constituency and that particular part of Trinidad, because from time to time, we have seen the all the viral videos, et cetera, coming out when you have leaks, particularly along the—I know for Diego Martin West, the Western Main Road, for Member for Diego Martin Central and Diego Martin North/East, the Maraval Road and so on.

The challenge in some of these areas has been the outdated, dilapidated infrastructure. I want to thank my colleague from Couva North who has been working very closely along with WASA to try to bring some relief, whether it is a temporary or a permanent fix. However, we do not work in silos and therefore, we have been collaboratively working towards road restoration. Sometimes it appears to be a little longer because of the dilapidated old mains underground.

You would realize in Maraval in particular, on three occasion, there was an attempt to restore the pipeline—the underground pipeline and then within a week or so, the issue resurfaced, and that has to do with the condition of the lines. Some of those lines have to be replaced. They have not been replaced for decades and therefore, you will continue to see problems like this happening from time to time.

However, I do give you the assurance in this financial year, there will be the acceleration in terms of the change out of some of these aged, old and dilapidated

pipelines that create the problem, and then you have to have road reinstatement and experience the frustration by motorist, and so on, utilizing some of these roadways.

So, collectively between Works and Infrastructure, myself, and Transport and Civil Aviation, we are looking at mitigating some of these challenges. But from time to time, we have had these reoccurrences because of the condition of the pipelines. You fix it, and then in a couple weeks, it happens again because it has been there for decades, the deterioration over a period of time. So, obviously, we will keep the conversation going with Members of Parliament on both sides so you can maintain your public duty towards your constituents as well.

Mr. de Nobriga: Chairman, through you, just to thank the Minister for that. I do agree, and I think when we get to the *Development Programme*, there is a line Item where we will continue that conversation. When we do that, on behalf of my colleague from Diego Martin West, and obviously, myself, the issue of the Diego Martin Main Road as a main traffic artery, both were road reinstatements as well as the issue that you have raised, we will definitely want to have that with you.

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]—of the deferment of that, let us move on. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households. Arouca/Lopinot, page 302.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, thank you very much, Chair. Member, I am looking at Sub-Item 02: Gratuities and Pension, and I noted a decrease of $3.2 million. Can you explain the reason for that decrease? Gratuities and Pension, Sub-Item 02.

Hon. Padarath: Under line Item 02: Gratuities and Pension. Member, I am advised this expenditure covers 37 daily-rated employees who will attain

retirement age in 2027. So, it is the belief that this will sufficiently cover 37 employees.

Mr. Gonzales: What I note is a decrease, so I am just wondering is that you do not expect to have the same amount in the previous fiscal that what you anticipated to pay in this fiscal?

Hon. Padarath: Obviously, they retire at different rates. So, while this year we anticipate 37, in the previous year it may have been more.

Mr. Gonzales: Different?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: 009: Other Transfers. Alright, we go now to 55 - Regulated Industries Commission at page 321, just so that we could pause so everybody can find their page. Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, 001: General Administration. 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, 007: Households. 009: Other Transfers.

Alright, having exhausted that, Hon. Members, we will now move on to *the Draft Estimate of Development Programme* at page 103 of the relevant volume. Sub-Head 09, *Development Programme* pages 103 to 108 inclusive, Consolidated Fund; Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, A. Electricity. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Member, I am looking. Sub-Item 5. A 581: National Street Lighting Programme, and I observe an allocation of $10million. My question on that allocation is whether this allocation would afford you enough financial resources to meet the pressing requirement to keep up with streetlight repairs. Almost on a daily basis throughout the country. My question is really influenced by the fact that as you drive around some parts of

the country—sometimes you see T&TEC repairing lights, and shortly after, the lights are going out, and there are many dark spots all over the country as you drive around, which can pose a very serious security hazard as well as a safety hazard for motorists. So, the question is whether that $10 million allocation is sufficient for the Ministry of Public Utilities and T&TEC to meet the demands for street lighting that we have across the country?

Hon. Padarath: Thank you, Member. Member, I want to thank you for recognizing the very good work of T&TEC, particularly over the last year—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath:—over 30,000 streetlights have been repaired. Some in your constituency. At this point in time, we are comfortable with the allocation. One of the things I believe that was required to accelerate and I have asked T&TEC to have an ongoing audit of streetlighting throughout the country, particularly on our highways and byways. Because I too from time to time what I found myself doing is sometimes to and from the Ministry, counting how many streetlights are not working on the highway or we require. And I think for every successive Minister of Public Utilities, we are very mindful of that. But T&TEC, through its General Manager, Mr. Ian Ramrattan, and the others, I really want to compliment them for the approach that they have taken—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath:—sometimes two/three o'clock in the morning, they are on the phone giving you updates. But at this time, Member, I believe that the $10million allocation will be sufficient. I believe what was really required was two things: Competence inside of T&TEC—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath:—and political will on behalf of the Government, and that is why we are very happy that in the short space of one year we were able to fix over 30,000 streetlights as far as Mayaro.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: Moruga/Tableland, I get letters from her every single day. So, constituents have been well represented on both sides. Obviously, we could have gotten more. We would appreciate it. But historically, this has been the allocation for this programme. But we have been able to do much more compared to over the years. I think it really requires the competence inside of T&TEC since this administration came into office in terms of its leadership through the General Manager at T&TEC, Mr. Ian Ramrattan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Elder: Excellent service. Excellent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just to respond to the Minister, the annual repairs of $30,000 for streetlights are very much consistent with the history of T&TEC over the years.

Mr. Chairman: Let us just—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: And that is the reason I have always commended T&TEC on their performance where street lighting is concerned.

Mr. Chairman: Alright.

Mr. Gonzales: No, no.

Mr. Chairman: Is there a question in there somewhere?

Mr. Gonzales: Of course there is a question, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, can you please? I have been very cordial—

Mr. Chairman: You have, and so have I.

Mr. Gonzales:—you understand? I have been very cooperative.

Mr. Chairman: You have, and so have I.

Mr. Gonzales: Right, and I know the Minister is being allowed the space to say whatever he wants to.

Mr. Chairman: The problem—

Mr. Gonzales: All I want is the opportunity to do the same.

Mr. Chairman:—yes, but the problem with that—

Mr. Gonzales: Consistency and equity, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: So, my question—

Mr. Chairman: You know, there is a saying in the law of equity—anyway, I best not say that.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, I have observed in a number of areas, especially the busy streets and the Priority Bus Route, those crosswalks where you have high volumes of pedestrians crossing. Unfortunately, a number of those lights they keep going out and again that is the reason I am stressing on the safety issues. I just want to ask you under this line Item and impress upon if you can get T&TEC to focus on some of those areas so that we do not have unfortunate accidents taking place where lights have gone out by those busy pedestrian crossings and some of our main roads. I am just using some of those areas as an example, but it is all over the country. I am sure if you are going to San Fernando, in Chaguanas, Tobago, you might have some of those issues.

Hon. Padarath: Thank you. Member, I share your concern and give you the assurance that it is being addressed. Mr. Chairman, there was a statement made that I think may have been a miscommunication with the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Ministry of Finance. In that, last year in the Standing Finance, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West in particular raised the issue of the change-out of the lights, particularly on the highways and byways, in terms of moving to LED.

In the budget presentation, the Minister of Finance indicated that there were roughly over 300 lights that were changed. Actually, it is more than 300. It is 3,000. Now, initially the Minister of Finance indicated that we would embark on a programme of addressing 8,000. Now, the Minister of Finance meant 8,000 over a period of time, not necessarily 8,000 over one fiscal year. And therefore, one may have left with the impression that it was meant to cover one fiscal year of 8,000.

With the allocation that was received, only 3,000 was possible in this financial year, and it is an ongoing programme. I want to thank my colleague from Fyzabad, Minister of Finance, for his support on this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: I think it may have been a miscommunication between us that we left out a zero in the figure that was communicated to Finance. So out of the 8,000, roughly 3,000 have been delivered in terms of the LED lights, and it is a programme that will accelerate into this financial year based on the allocation that we have received.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much. Minister, 586: Lighting of Parks and Recreational Grounds. You have an allocation of $7,000. Do you have the work

programme to be implemented for this fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: This is for Lighting of Parks and Recreational Grounds. Member as you are aware, what traditionally happens is that all Members of Parliament, regional corporations, even civil society religious organizations, et cetera they will write from time to time. While this allocation is quite similar to what we received last year, we will provide that information as we go along in terms of which ones will be approved.

11.40 a.m.

Mr. Gonzales:—for the list of the parks and the recreational grounds that you intend to light in this fiscal year with the $7 million allocation.

Hon. Padarath: As you know, this is almost like a rolling situation.

Mr. Gonzales: I understand that.

Hon. Padarath: So, Member, as it is coming into the Ministry of Public Utilities, I am sure we will find a way to communicate with you.

Mr. Gonzales: Under Sub-Item 593: Electrification Programme. You have an allocation of $1 million. How many projects do you plan to implement in this fiscal year with your allocation of $1 million?

Hon. Padarath: I am advised, hon. Member, that we envisage that there will be 40, 4-0, projects.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Is that allocation going to be utilized to satisfy any demand from the last fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: Obviously there is a process to go through this. The process is not handled by the Minister.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Padarath: There is a process within the Ministry itself to identify which

projects are to be done, and that will take its usual course. So, it will not obviously be limited to intakes only, in terms of applications only coming in post September 2026. I am sure that the committee responsible for that will also do a review because they too would have had scopes and so on, done and they will make their recommendations.

Mr. Gonzales: Do you have a list of the 40 projects that you intend to execute in this fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: I am sure, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Can you provide it for the Committee?

Hon. Padarath: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: C. Postal Services. Arouca/Lopinot, page 104.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you. Minister, I am looking at C. 005: Refurbishment and Construction of Post Offices aAnd you have an allocation of $4 million. How many projects do you have ongoing under this line Item that you would utilize the $4 million to continue into this fiscal year or the 2027 fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: There are three ongoing projects, and at this time there is one that is under review. So, the total that you are looking at are about four.

Mr. Gonzales: Four projects? Which one is under review?

Hon. Padarath: I am advised by TTPOST that it is in the constituency of Chaguanas East, in the area of Cunupia.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. And the three projects that are being implemented or executed at this point in time, can you name the three post offices?

Hon. Padarath: Yes. It is Curepe, Morvant and Santa Flora.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you. At Sub-Item 016: Restoration of TTPOST Legacy

Post Office Building. You have an allocation of $2 billion. Can you indicate or confirm whether this allocation is to start the construction or rather the restoration of the Sangre Grande Post Office?

Hon. Padarath: Yes, that is ongoing.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. So, the $2 million allocation, the intention is to commence the refurbishment or restoration of the Sangre Grande Post Office?

Hon. Padarath: Member, something tells me that you are very well aware that that project is already ongoing and it is far advanced.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, no. So, what I know about it is what you would have told the Parliament previously when I asked the question. And just to remind you, you did confirm that the project was placed on hold pending further review. So, I am now seeing a $2 million allocation, and therefore I am asking whether that review is completed and that you intend to commence the construction or rather the refurbishment of that Legacy Building in this fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: Member, I recall very well how we arrived at this situation. Your initial question to me, over a year ago, was, what was the status of it? We indicated it was under review. Subsequent to that, on another occasion you asked the same question, and I indicated that we were proceeding with it. Now I can tell you at this stage the project has commenced and it is far advanced.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I. Water and Sewage, page 105. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Member, I observe that you have a $6million allocation for Desilting and Rehabilitation of the Hillsborough Dam in Tobago. Is that $6million to satisfy outstanding bills on that project?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: And would that mark the completion of all outstanding financial obligations on that project?

Hon. Padarath: No, Member. It is envisaged that there may be additional sums. However, we will treat with it as we cross that bridge.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Do you have any ongoing works taking place at that Hillsborough Dam at this current time?

Hon. Padarath: I am advised, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: And what is the nature of those works?

Hon. Padarath: Sorry.

Mr. Gonzales: What is the nature of those works?

Hon. Padarath: What is the nature of those works? I would provide that to you.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you. At Sub-Item 009: The Design and Implementation of an Intelligent Virtual Guarding System at WASA Installation. You have an allocation of $800,000. So, the question is being asked in the context of some of the security issues that we have been observing on WASA installation, the sabotaging of some of its critical installations, which obviously would result in the disruption of the supply of water to affected communities. My question on this Item is whether or not you expect some movement and progress to take place in this fiscal year so that it can bolster WASA's security infrastructure to protect some of its key assets.

Hon. Padarath: Yes. Member, the status of the project is that it is moving into its second phase. The procurement and installation of the IVG hardware and software components, integrating state-of-the-art virtual surveillance capabilities across selected locations into the Operational Control Centre. Several sites have been identified. They have been doing some preparatory work there, and therefore, yes,

this allocation is expected to accelerate that project.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Under C. Welfare Services, Residential Electrification Assistance Programme or REAP. Minister, you have an allocation of $1 million. How many REAP brands do you intend to distribute in this fiscal year with this allocation?

Hon. Padarath: Member, we are looking at about 37.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Thank you. Minister, can you provide the Committee with a list of persons who would have received REAP brands for fiscal year 2026?

Hon. Padarath: 2026?

Mr. Gonzales: 2026.

Hon. Padarath: I am sure that information can become available.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you. I look forward to it.

Mr. Chairman: C. Welfare Services; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, pages 107 to 108. A. Administration Services. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, I point you to the Community Water Improvement Programme, CWIP, which is Sub-Item 061, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, General Public Services. You have an allocation of $10million. I noted that your allocation for 2026 has been $5 million. How many projects have been completed under the Item in 2026?

Mr. Chairman: Member, six of those projects have been completed.

Mr. Gonzales: Which—

Hon. Padarath: I am very happy to report that six of those projects are helping the people of Penal, Debe, Oropouche East, Oropouche West, Barrackpore,

Moruga/Tableland to alleviate years of neglect.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, can you say whether the projects that you have just alluded to in those areas are the construction of the tank farms?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Are they being funded under the community water—

Hon. Padarath: I am very proud to say, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: What is the average cost of each of the project?

Hon. Padarath: Member, you would recall when I first launched these projects that was a question that was posed to me. And the average for one of those tank farms in terms of the establishment is roughly about $500,000 to $600,000.

Mr. Gonzales: The allocation for this fiscal year is $10 million. How do you propose to utilize that $10 million allocation in the budget?

11.50 a.m.

Hon. Padarath: Certainly. There are a number of projects, inclusive of the tank farms, that we intended on using this allocation for. There is—is this the one where the pumps are on? Right, so this one I can share with you the scope of work. We are looking at the areas of Cedar Grove, I believe that is in the constituency of Naparima. I am sure the Member for Naparima would be happy to hear this. In the area of Moruga, I am sure the Member for Moruga/Tableland will be happy to hear this. In the area of Barrackpore, St. Mary's, Stone Bright, that is in Guayaguayare, the Member for Mayaro. Also in the area of Scotts Road, Penal. Also in San Pedro, which straddles the constituencies of Princes Town, Tabaquite and Mayaro. And also, Member, this will impact on some of the projects that we are looking at doing in terms of alleviating some of the challenges in the north-

west part of Trinidad as well.

Mr. Gonzales: Do you have a list of the projects that you plan to execute in north-west Trinidad under this line Item?

Hon. Padarath: That, Member, I will share more with you. What is happening is, I did take into consideration some of the things that the Member for Diego Martin North/East in particular has raised over the last couple months.

In that a number of the challenges being in Diego Martin North/East, because of the very nature of the constituency, depending on gravity flow and so on, we had to spend a lot more time looking to see some of the projects there, how we can rescope those projects to give you long-term benefits. So, in some of those areas, and we will speak more to it in another line Item, where the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about these pumps. A number of these pumps have not been changed out for a number of years. We cannot get the parts for the pumps, and therefore we are looking at another line Item to treat with that, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

However, similarly to what was done years ago in Laventille, where you have tanks on the hills, it is also being recommended by WASA that we look at an approach like that, so that you have the water storage utilizing, again, gravity flow and the technology for pressurized systems to allow for more water to be placed in the system and giving greater relief to areas like Diego Martin North/East, et cetera, where you have a lot of hills.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Thanks.

Mr. Imbert: On that same point, that same Item, there was a project of that same nature for Dundonald Hill, which was commenced in 2024, going into 2025, to put a storage tank to the top of that hill and then feed it by gravity. That was

abandoned. How come?

Hon. Padarath: Member, that was abandoned because of the fact that you, as Member of Parliament and Minister of Finance, did very little to nothing to finance the project.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: That is entirely untrue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: That is entirely untrue. The money was provided to public utilities.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: I am advised, Mr. Chairman, that little or no money was released for those projects—

Mr. Imbert: Entirely untrue.

Hon. Padarath:—and this is coming from the Member who served for one month as Minister of Public Utilities but spent $1.2 million—

Mr. Imbert: Entirely untrue.

Hon. Padarath: To renovate his office.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. Let us—

Mr. Imbert: That is also untrue.

Mr. Chairman: Let—

Mr. Imbert: That is false.

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, that is in the Estimates before us right now. The Permanent Secretary has advised me that $1.2 million has already been expended to the contractor—

Mr. Imbert: Not true!

Hon. Padarath:—and a further $90 thousand—

Mr. Imbert: Not true.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Lets—

Hon. Padarath:—for vanity— [*Inaudible*] $1.3million—

Mr. Chairman: Let us bring this to an end.

Hon. Padarath:—that was brought about by the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Chairman: Let us bring this to an end. San Fernando East, you had a question. Can you identify the line Item?

Mr. Manning: Yes. Thank you. It is 005/061: Community Water Improvement Programme. Minister of Public Utilities, it seems to be a regular event where I ask you about this line Item. In 2025, there was $12.2 million allocated here. There was nothing done for the people of Pleasantville, even after you promised.

In 2026, $25 million allocated, nothing done for the people of Pleasantville. 2026 Revised, actually $5 million was spent. In 2027, I see now there is an allocation of $10 million. Minister of Public Utilities, your Minister in the Ministry came to this Parliament and swore up and down that the project had started. That has not been the case. Will it finally happen this year that this programme will be implemented in Pleasantville to bring some relief to over 5,000 residents of the Pleasantville community?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, I want to thank the Member for La Brea, who had given the commitment together with myself for this project in Pleasantville. But I also need to thank the Member for Tunapuna. On two to three occasions, and I believe it was three occasions, there was an attempt to start that project. However, the contractors were run out of that area by criminal elements.

The Member for Arouca/Lopinot would recall that this is not unique to this

administration, in that from time to time, when you have projects in what is considered some "hot spot" areas, sometimes you have to recruit police, additional security to go in with the contractor. You have to factor in that cost and so on. And that has stymied the progress of that project. As I said, on three occasions there was an attempt to start it. There were security concerns. We had to get the Member for Tunapuna involved, and I am hoping that the Member for San Fernando East will speak with residents in the area to ensure that we are not faced again with that challenge, because we understand the plight of the residents of Pleasantville, but it cannot be that this is to the detriment of the safety and lives of persons working on those projects.

Mr. Manning: Minister of Public Utilities, first of all, Pleasantville is not a "hot spot". That is first of all, and if you need any assistance in getting any project done in Pleasantville or anywhere in San Fernando East, all you have to do is call.

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, from that response, clearly I can tell that the Member is not familiar with his constituency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: I am not familiar with Pleasantville?

Hon. Padarath: Otherwise he would not be making those ridiculous assertions.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central, you had a question?

Mr. Manning: I find that disrespectful.

Mr. Young SC: No matter what he is, he is accepted by the communities. Unlike you all.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: I would like to put that on record.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Young SC: That is why you ran out of Princes Town.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Chairman, can you censor the Minister, please, with these?

Mr. Chairman: Well, I will have to censor all of you all.

Mr. Manning: I have not said anything outside of what is required—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Including Port of Spain North/ St. Ann's West. Everybody except Diego Martin for once, for once Diego Martin—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, I forgot you as well. So, Diego Martin Central, it seems as though your colleagues do not want you to ask the question.

Mr. de Nobriga: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. Minister, I was happy to hear you include certain projects in North/West. I distinctly remember one of the projects in Diego Martin Central that was being done at the time—that my colleague, the Chief Whip, was the substantive Minister of Public Utilities, was the Cocorite Terrace Booster Station. That project was well advanced. The contractor had already ordered the pump. I am just asking if, in this allocation, Cocorite Booster Station will be completed.

Hon. Padarath: Member, that is under a different Head from this one, but it is on the cards.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. F. Public Buildings. Diego Martin—I mean Arouca/ Lopinot, sorry.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, I observed under Public Buildings there is a new project, 002: Relocation of the Ministry of Public Utilities. Can you tell this Committee where you propose to move the Ministry of Public

Utilities? I am assuming it is the head office.

Hon. Padarath: Yes, Member, it is no secret that the State, because of your own doing, has been saddled with close to a $1 million bill monthly being paid to Sen. Faris Al-Rawi and his family.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, Standing Order 48(6).

Hon. Padarath: But that is on the public record.

Mr. Gonzales: The Member said because of my own doing, Mr. Chair, I will not accept that. And I would ask the Member to please withdraw that.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Can I just ask Members—

Mr. Imbert: That is also untrue.

Mr. Gonzales: And it is not true.

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, I meant when I said their own doing, I was referring to the former administration.

Mr. Chairman: All right. So there is nobody to identify person with personal responsibility.

Hon. Padarath: So, I do not know why my friend is so jumpy about taking ownership of—

12.00 p.m.

Mr. Gonzales: No, no, no. No, no, no. I am not jumpy. I am not jumpy. He said because of my own doing. I will not accept that. I would ask the Member to please withdraw that.

Hon. Padarath: No, I am not withdrawing it because I meant the PNM. It is on the public record. It is true.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: So, I have clarified my statement, Chairman.

Mr. Young SC: That was rented by the UNC.

Mr. Gonzales: Exactly, it was.

Hon. Padarath: That was rented by your Government.

Mr. Imbert: No.

Mr. Gonzales: It was rented by the UNC Government.

Hon. Padarath: The money was going into the pockets of the family and the former Member for San Fernando West while he served as a government Minister.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Chair—

Hon. Padarath: That is factual

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Gonzales:—48(6) Sen. Al-Rawi is a sitting Senator, and the Member ought not to impute improper motives on a sitting Senator.

Hon. Padarath: But that is factual. There is no imputation there.

Mr. Chairman: The problem with that interpretation, and I keep saying it, is that 48(6)—if you interpret 48(6) in such a manner that prevents any statement of fact on the Floor of the Parliament—and if you read the McGee, it is very clear. You can relate statements of fact. What you are not permitted to do is, by a statement of fact, say Member X did this for the purpose of so and so, or ask—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes—or impute the reason for doing so is for an improper motive.

You see, if you interpret it in such a broad and permissive manner, or such a—I should perhaps say a strict manner, because that is the interpretation that you are advocating for, what it means is that Members have a general immunity from other Members commenting on their conduct, or stating facts as it relates to them. That cannot, and could not, and is not the general breadth, width and purport of the

Standing Order, and I could just point Members—there is a passage in McGee that deals with it. So, I think the Minister was—

Mr. Imbert: Chairman, I would like clarification on your ruling.

Mr. Chairman: Hang on a second. I will entertain you shortly. I think insofar as this statement is concerned, Member, I think the Minister was careful enough to absolve you personally from any wrongdoing and referred to "your"—when he said "your doing" in a collective sense. I do not think it is—that much is clear that no blame was being attached to you personally, in your personal capacity.

Mr. Gonzales: But it requires further clarification, Mr. Chair. Because, of course, he cannot ascribe any wrongdoing to me, but is he ascribing any wrongdoing to anyone in this statement?

Mr. Chairman: Well, I am not so sure it was a wrongdoing.

Mr. Gonzales: But that is what he said, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: No, listen, we are wasting too much time on this. I think I have—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: I will hear you shortly. All right, I do not intend to take too much time on this. We are already two hours into this Head. Diego Martin, North/East, I will hear you very briefly on this point.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you quoted or referred to a passage in McGee, with respect to the statement of facts. What happens if what the Member says is not a fact and it is untruth?

Mr. Chairman: Well, if you can find evidence that what the Member uttered on the Floor of the Parliament, either in the Sitting of the open House or at a committee stage, the sanction of privilege applies.

Mr. Imbert: Well—

Mr. Chairman: And that is—hang on a second. And that is why the—Port of Spain North/St. Ann's, I am hearing you, right? Stop that. Do not do that. It is a little too early for you and I to engage. It is a little too early for you and I to engage in this sort of "hurly-burly" this morning.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: It is a little too early. I know you want to be relieved to go to court, but do not use me as the excuse.

Mr. Young SC: I will not abdicate my duties. I will go and come back.

Mr. Chairman: I know you want to go to court, so do not use me as the excuse to go to court, right? Right. The problem with that and the way the architecture of the Standing Orders is, it attempts to draw a proportionate balance in the sense that it allows statements of fact, it allows representations of fact. But against that must be checked your obligation to ensure that what you are saying on the Floor is factually correct, okay? And if you are reckless or indifferent to the factual correctitude of what you are saying, then you run the risk of being subject to the sanctions of the House collectively. And that is via the Motion of Privileges through a contempt Motion.

Having said that, a Member who brings a contempt Motion has an obligation to show *prima facie* by evidence, that what the Member is alleged—said is actually false or actually misrepresents the position, where it has the effect, or could have the effect of misleading the Parliament. If you were to apply such a narrow and restrictive view to it, it has what constitutional lawyers refer to as a chilling effect on the absolute privilege of parliamentarians.

There are only two places where this absolute privilege applies like that, and

Port of Spain North/St. Ann's will know. The Parliament is one place, where you are subject to the sanction of the privilege procedure. And the next place is the court. A barrister presenting a case has an absolute privilege to say whatever he wants. However, even in a court, a barrister is subject to the disciplinary process for misleading the court. So—all right, I have said enough on that. Let us move on. So, I propose to go now to—

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]—clarified the part where he withdrew his statement or clarified it. I just want to know where—

Mr. Chairman: He clarified it and ascribed no blame to you personally.

Mr. Gonzales:—the relocation—the new building—which building are you going to be occupying under this line Item?

Mr. Chairman: Minister?

Hon. Padarath: We will provide the information in due course.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. So, shall I move on, Member? I propose to go to H. Meteorological. H. Meteorological.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, 015: Purchase of one (1) Ranger-X5, X-Band Dual Polarity Weather Radar System. I observed that you have no allocation, and in the last fiscal year, you would have—or in some statements to the public, you have indicated a commitment to this project to bolster the capabilities of the Meteorological Services Division.

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, I am happy to report to the Standing Finance Committee that this project is far advanced, in that, the radar is here in Trinidad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: And therefore, we expect that the completion of the installation will be announced very soon. So, we are very happy that we were able to lend our

support in providing this very essential service and bringing to fruition this project.

Mr. Gonzales: Can you indicate, Minister, the cost for that Ranger X5, X-Band Dual Polarity Weather System?

Hon. Padarath: It cost the people of Trinidad and Tobago TT $12 million.

Mr. Gonzales: And that was funded from this line Item in the Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Padarath: It was funded by the IDB.

Mr. Gonzales: Was that a loan from the IDB?

Hon. Padarath: It was, yes. It was a loan executed through the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence.

Mr. Gonzales: Can you tell us when that loan was executed by the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly, we will provide you with that information subsequently.

Mr. Gonzales: I look forward to that. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: G. Sanitary Services. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chairman. Item 13: Upgrade of Recovery and Recycling Facilities, Plant and Equipment. We see in 2025, $158,560 was budgeted and in 2026, over $5 million was allocated to this particular item. What is your reasoning for these upgrades not being done in 2026?

12.10 p.m.

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, I can report to the hon. Member and the Committee that the RFIs are currently in progress, and therefore, once we receive the information through the RFIs, this work will accelerate in this regard.

Mr. Des Vignes: When can we expect this work to be carried out?

Hon. Padarath: Within this fiscal year.

Mr. Des Vignes: Within the fiscal year. Alright, thank you. I will like to go Item 21: Implementation of the Beverage Containers Deposit Refund Policy. This particular Item, as you would know, is one that is very dear to the environmentalists in our country. We see that in 2025, just about $500,000 was allocated to this Item. In 2026, $2 million was allocated and none spent. What was the reasoning for the lack of implementation of this particular initiative and Item?

Hon. Padarath: Sure. Chairman and members of the Committee, this is not a project that operates in a silo, in that, there must be supporting legislation to bolster much of what we seek to do in terms of the policy and the operational element to be carried out thereafter. The Ministry of Public Utilities has been working assiduously with the Office of the Attorney General. I know several colleagues opposite; this has been a project that has received the attention of successive administrations. It is our hope that we will be able to bring this legislation to this Parliament within the next couple of months. Therefore, we are working alongside the Attorney General's Office to ensure that we work out the dynamics.

As it relates to the Bill itself, there is a 2015 draft Bill. We have been reviewing that in terms of the industry standards. As you would recognize, that is over 10 years from the last draft Bill, and therefore, the Permanent Secretary and others, through SWMCOL, have been working with the AG's office to review and revise that Bill. Therefore, much more will be said about that as well. So, I expect that the work regarding the beverage container deposit will accelerate in this fiscal year, inclusive of legislation to come to the Parliament.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, the justification of $500,000 would more than likely be because, the $2 million, a lot of the pre-work was done with the 2015 Bill?

Hon. Padarath: A lot of the work is ongoing, but as I mentioned to you, the industry standards would you have changed from 2015—

Mr. Des Vignes: Of course. Of course.

Hon. Padarath—significantly, and therefore there is a need for review, but that has already commenced with the Office of the Attorney General and the stakeholders.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thanks, Chair. Minister, Sub-Item 023: Development of a Transition Plan for the Transformation of the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management. I assume you would be aware that over the years, technocrats, stakeholders in the Ministry of Public Utilities and the wider public service, would have crafted three very key policies for the transformation of the solid waste sector in Trinidad and Tobago: the Recycling Policy, the Solid Waste Management Policy, as well as an Integrated Waste Management Policy. Is the Government committed to the implementation of these policies in the context of this line Item in the Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Padarath: Member, pursuant to Cabinet Minute 1526, 2nd Session, dated December 11th, 2025, inter alia, Cabinet agreed to rescind the decisions recorded in Minute No. 904 dated May 9th, 2024, pertaining to the approval of the revised policy framework for the municipal solid waste management sector and the transformation of SWMCOL. Subsequently, Cabinet, by Minute 1795 of July 10th, 2026, agreed to issue a request for information, RFI, to identify opportunities for the environmentally sound processing, treatment, transportation, collective disposal and recovery of waste across all solid waste streams in Trinidad and

Tobago. The way forward would be informed by the outcome of the RFI and RFP and their processes.

Mr. Chairman, I can also indicate to the Committee that, while there was the development of the transition plan for the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management, a lot of the theoretical things involved in the transformation plan did not significantly address the systemic challenges that SWMCOL experiences. Therefore, the time has come where the model of SWMCOL must change. The hon. Prime Minister and the Member for Barataria/San Juan have spoken about the burden of some of these enterprises, whether they are public companies, state enterprises, et cetera, that carry significant losses.

Also, the Member for Arouca/Lopinot will be aware that you have challenges in these companies where there are beneficiaries of the State through these projects, companies, and programmes that do not redound to the benefit of the taxpayers. Therefore, what I have discovered inside of SWMCOL is that you have many entrepreneurs who get their raw material from SWMCOL and there is no return to the company, and that has been left to languish for quite a while.

Now I raise this because the Member raises the issue of the transformation plan. To me, the real operational issues must impact the balance sheets; the dollars and cents of the company, and it must make sense to the taxpayers that, if they are being asked to carry this burden, there must be a return. Therefore, we are more interested in looking at the business model of the company, and that is why we felt it necessary to meet—I have been meeting with SWMCOL. They did raise with me the transformation when I first came in as Minister. And while there are elements of it that we are still considering, there must be a vast change in approach

to the way in which the company is structured in terms of their business model to make it profitable instead of being a burden on the taxpayers. Because there is the element of the company that allows for the company to be in a situation where they can make a profit, as opposed to just purely being dependent on Government subvention.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, are you considering, or rather, is it the policy of the Government to consider a public-private partnership model for the solid waste management in Trinidad and Tobago at SWMCOL or a full privatization of that sector?

Hon. Padarath: Member, the Cabinet has to determine that. We are waiting to get the information from the RFIs.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Padarath: Once that comes in—

Mr. Gonzales: But is it something under consideration?

Hon. Padarath: Yeah, once that comes in, we have our own thinking—

Mr. Gonzales: Right.

Hon. Padarath:—but obviously we need to consult with the stakeholders, see what the proposals are, and I will not rule out any option that is available to us. But bearing in mind what the Member for Barataria/San Juan and the hon. Prime Minister has said in terms of other entities, it cannot be that SWMCOL continues to carry these huge losses, especially when others are benefiting from the work of the company in other ways, and the company and the taxpayer are being asked to carry the burden of that.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: We go on now to the Infrastructure Development Fund, which is at page 255. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Minister—I believe our conversations before will lead us to B. 011: North West Water Supply Improvement Programme, with regard to the Cocorite Terrace Booster Pumping Station, if it will be considered under that line Item?—sorry, in your words, "if it is on the cards" under that line Item?

Hon. Padarath: 255?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, 255.

Hon. Padarath: Member, can I ask you to repeat the question?

Mr. de Nobriga: Based on our previous conversations, is the Cocorite Terrace Booster Pumping Station on the cards under this line Item?

12.20 p.m.

Hon. Padarath: Cocorite? Member, to be quite honest with you, I am not seeing it here. However, I give you the assurance that I will have a discussion with WASA, and subsequently I will have a discussion with you regarding this. I am not seeing it here, but it does not mean that we cannot vary, because I am seeing that there are a few projects within your constituency listed here for me. And therefore, if we have to re-prioritize to get that up and running, it is something that I might be open to.

Mr. de Nobriga: Well, Minister, can I then ask that when you can, that I can get a list of those projects so that we can look at a prioritization exercise?

Hon. Padarath: Sure, I can have a discussion with you.

Mr. de Nobriga: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair. Member, I am pointing to B. I am at B. 009: National Water Sector Evolution Programme. There is an allocation of $45 million. Can you clarify whether that $45 million is from the first loan operation from the IDB?

Hon. Padarath: I am advised no. It is not.

Mr. Gonzales: Do you have a list of projects that this line Item is intended to fund?

Hon. Padarath: Obviously, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Are they projects that started in the last fiscal year that you intend to continue in this fiscal year?

Hon. Padarath: Straddles both.

Mr. Gonzales: I am not hearing you.

Hon. Padarath: Straddles both.

Mr. Gonzales: Straddles both.

Hon. Padarath: But also, I want to say that under this line Item, it addresses some of the concerns raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East regarding the pumps and the motors, et cetera. We have had to source some of these things from abroad, and therefore this line Item will address that particular area, but it will also look at civil and structural works, storage and plumbing, interconnections parameters and site security, implementation of the SCADA monitoring and other activities as well.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, can you provide us with a list of the projects that you plan to continue to fund under this line Item? I go on to North West Water Improvement Programme. Finally, thankfully, I am seeing an allocation of $8 million. Do you have a list of the projects that you plan to implement with this

allocation?

Hon. Padarath: Yes, Member.

Mr. Gonzales: Can you provide us with that list?

Hon. Padarath: Yes. So, I can speak to you about some. It is quite extensive, so as you know, from time to time there will be some wiggle room in terms of variations and changes. But for now, it is envisaged that the Maraval water treatment refurbishment will take place under this, the Upper Pioneer Drive, BPS.

Mr. Gonzales: Has that project stalled?

Hon. Padarath: Which one? The Upper—

Mr. Gonzales: Maraval?

Hon. Padarath: The Maraval water treatment refurbishment?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Padarath: I was told that it was engaged. However, there needs to be an acceleration in terms of the works to be done in that area, and therefore that is why it is at the top of the list.

Mr. Gonzales: Do you plan to complete that project in the 2027 fiscal?

Hon. Padarath: It is almost at its completion, so, yes. We also have works in St. Ann's. I know the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West did raise a particular issue—

Mr. Gonzales: The St. Ann's wells?

Hon. Padarath:—on the interconnectivity with the wells.

Mr. Gonzales: Wells, yes.

Hon. Padarath: I have spoken with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. The Member for Couva North has been working with me on this, and therefore, I expect that very shortly the bottleneck that created some challenge to have it come

to fruition will be addressed. So, I give you that assurance.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, the National Water Stabilization and Improvement Programme, I have been asking about the Arouca Water Improvement Programme and the integration of the Arouca wells to augment and improve the supply of water to parts of Arouca, Five Rivers, Lynton Gardens, La Florissante, Bon Air West, just to name a few. Do you plan to fund or restart these projects under the National Water Stabilization and Improvement Programme?

Hon. Padarath: Member, it all depends on the availability of funding. We have engaged in an exercise with WASA in terms of whether or not there will be sufficient allocation to accelerate, and therefore, it is a conversation that I am open to continuing with you on this matter.

Mr. Gonzales: I sincerely appreciate that. But can you also provide maybe some of the projects that you plan to implement in this fiscal year with this $10 million allocation?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly. That information, as you know, again, is a rolling situation. While we do have a scope of work, there will be variation from time to time. So, I just put in that caveat for your understanding.

Mr. Gonzales: The Second Loan Operation for the National Water Sector Evolution Programme, there is an allocation of $13 million. When has the Government signed the loan with the IDB for access to the second loan operation?

Hon. Padarath: It is in the process of happening.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. When do you expect discussions and/or negotiations with the IDB—

Hon. Padarath: These discussions—

Mr. Gonzales:—for the execution?

Hon. Padarath: Sorry. These discussions and negotiations are far advanced, and therefore it will be shared subsequently.

Mr. Gonzales: And do you have a list of the projects that you plan to implement under this Loan Operation?

Hon. Padarath: Certainly.

Mr. Gonzales: The $13.8 million allocation that you have here, do you plan to fund or to commence the construction of the three desalination plants under this line Item?

Hon. Padarath: It is under active consideration with the IDB.

Mr. Gonzales: So, it is not confirmed as yet?

Hon. Padarath: It is under active consideration with the IDB.

Mr. Gonzales: So, it is under active consideration. But the assurance or assurances that you would have provided to the Parliament and, by extension, the country, for the construction of the desalination plant in Mayaro—I think it is in Tobago—I cannot remember where else, that assurance is contingent upon the finalization of discussions with the IDB?

Hon. Padarath: Member, there is a process to get us to where we want to be.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Padarath: There is a process to get us to where we want to be, and therefore when I spoke about that, I did so with the assurance from the IDB that it will be funded. True. But we have to cross our Ts and dot our Is in terms of working out the arrangements that are happening between the Ministry of Public Utilities, WASA and the IDB, but I give the country the assurance that, when I made that commitment, it was liaised with the IDB and we were given the assurance that, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Do you plan, Minister, to implement some critical projects in constituencies represented by the Opposition under the Second Loan Operation?

Hon. Padarath: We look at the needs of the entire country. Mr. Chairman, obviously, prioritizing swaths of the country that do not receive water, whether it is pipe-borne or truck-borne under the former administration for two and three months, is part of the priority of WASA and the Ministry of Public Utilities. However, we understand that it is a commodity that is needed by all citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. So, therefore, we do not focus on which constituencies are Opposition and which are Government. We are guided by the data from WASA.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, do you plan to formally engage Members of Parliament on this side as you move towards finalizing this loan resource with the IDB in terms of finalizing and completing the design and the implementation of projects for the Second Loan Operation?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, my colleague for Arouca/Lopinot served as the Minister of Public Utilities for close to five years. I have many unanswered calls, many unanswered letters that are not unique to me but to many Members across this Bench when we served in Opposition. That is not the position that I wish to take, unlike my colleague when he served as the Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Padarath: I am open to having discussions with all, on both sides of the House, once it will benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but also within reason in terms of the allocation and the funding that is available to us and the data that tells us that south and central Trinidad, parts of east Cumuto/Manzanilla, Toco/Sande Grande, I believe, as well as has been knocking at my door, where for

months these people do not receive water. So, forgive me if my focus and attention have been placed on some of these areas, but I am open to speaking to all colleagues.

Mr. Gonzales: Just to respond to that, Mr. Chair, and I thank you for the opportunity. If the Member could check the record and the facts, he would realize that the legacy of the former Minister of Public Utilities in the water sector is that every corner and every constituency in Trinidad and Tobago saw an improvement in their supply of water.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: And I reject what he said completely out of hand because it is not based on facts.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: You know, this is not an exchange or a speech-giving exercise.

Mr. Young SC: He made the statement.

Mr. Chairman: In response to a question you asked.

Mr. Gonzales: Correct the record.

Mr. Chairman: No, you have to ask questions.

Hon. Padarath: Mr. Chairman, if that was the case, Oropouche East, Oropouche West, Siparia, Fyzabad, La Brea, all of these south constituencies along the east and central Trinidad, they would have been in a much better position than they are when we came into office.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East you had a question, or has it been answered?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I put up my hand three times, I was wondering whether you would recognize me. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I think your Member for Arouca/Lopinot was not allowing me to recognize you by pressing on.

Mr. Imbert: That is okay, I am glad you recognize me. So, with respect to this Item B, let me get the general heading: Local Water Sources, page 255. This is what we have been discussing, Item B. I heard the Minister say that with respect to a particular badly needed water facility in my constituency in Dundonald Hill, that the reason why the project was abandoned after the April 2025 General Election was that I, as Minister of Finance, did not release the money for the project. That is not correct. But let us put that aside. Could the Minister say why, in the five-month period between May 01, 2025 and September 30, 2025, the money was not released for that project?

Could the Minister say why, between October 01, 2025 and September 30, 2026, no money was released for that project, and the project remained stalled and abandoned for 18 months. Can the Minister state why that also occurred with respect to the Maraval Waterworks Improvement? Again, another project abandoned after the 2025 election. The whole of the period of the UNC in 2025 elapsed, and the whole of 2026 elapsed, and therefore the Minister—I have to assume logically that the new Minister of Finance did not release any money for these projects. Can you tell me why?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, had the Members for Diego Martin North/East and Arouca/Lopinot not left us with mounting debt, with contractors knocking at our doors, we would have been able to satisfy all projects. But because of the situation, the wanton wastage and mismanagement at the Ministry of Finance, the

Member for Fyzabad had to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Water and Sewerage Authority remained afloat. So the Member asks why? It is because of your incompetence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Supplementary question. You did not release any money for these projects in my constituency for 18 months, affecting over 10,000 people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Do you intend to release money in fiscal 2027 for these projects?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman—

Mr. Imbert: Dundonald Hill, Gravity Feed Project. I am going to list them—the Maraval Waterworks.

Mr. Chairman: You have said all of that already. Allow the Minister to answer.

Mr. Imbert: No.

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, I am so very happy to hear—

Mr. Imbert: I am asking if he is going to release it in 2027. It is a different question, Mr. Speaker. Do not try that. Different question.

Mr. Chairman What I meant was, you identified the areas. That is all I meant. There is no need to do that again. Minister.

Hon. Padarath: Asked and answered.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well.

Mr. Imbert: So, he said he is going—he had answered that he will do the projects this year. He said that?

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

Mr. Imbert That is not true.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister—sorry, Chair, let me just make sure, because I just heard my colleague say B. We are at B and not F as yet?

Mr. Chairman No, we are at B. We are going to F now.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. I wanted to go to F.

Mr. Chairman All right. Member for Arima has a question on B I would imagine.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, thank you, kindly. Hon. Minister, 014, can I enquire whether the project that was stopped in Aripo, can you indicate whether that project is going to be back on, under 014 or—Heights of Aripo?

Hon. Padarath: 014, Member?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—or 013, any one? It started and they simply moved all the equipment and everything. It was ongoing in 2025.

Hon. Member: This is under 014/013.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah, any one, if it is under 013 or 014.

Hon. Padarath: This is the project in—?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Heights of Aripo.

Hon. Padarath: Heights of Aripo.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: It started, it was ongoing, they moved pipes, equipment, and everything. If you can give me any feedback at a later stage—

Hon. Padarath: Sure.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—I will be happy.

Hon. Padarath: Member, I will provide you with some detail, but just to touch on it—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Padarath:—I know that there was a challenge with respect to a similar situation like what occurred in Pleasantville—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Padarath:—but I will speak with you further on it and see how we can help in that regard.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah, I will be surprised if that is a "hot spot". That is a little village, a few hundred people. I am sure the Member for St. Augustine—

Hon. Padarath: Sure.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—that is rural. I know there is a challenge. The challenge would more be the terrain.

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—but "hot spot"? No.

Hon. Padarath: Sure. I will share the information that was shared with me, but obviously it is something I can look into.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. F. Other Water Projects. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, under F. Other Water Projects, I see that at 19 you have Refurbishment of Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant, and there was an estimate of $12 million for last year. It was revised to the same $12 million at the end of 2026, and now another provision for $12 million for this fiscal. Might I ask if the $12 million was spent in the last fiscal?

Hon. Padarath: Sure. Thank you, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, you would recall that there were some challenges with the EMA, in particular with respect to this project.

Those negotiations with the EMA have been ongoing over the last year, and minor work has happened at the plant. It is expected that after coming to a conclusion with the EMA, we will be able to accelerate those works in the start of this fiscal year.

Mr. Young SC: So, the answer is not the full $12 million was spent?

Hon. Padarath: Not the full $12 million. Correct.

Mr. Young SC: But a $12 million allocation has been put for this fiscal?

Hon. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: You are hoping that once matters are settled with the EMA and—

Hon. Padarath: Correct.

Mr. Young SC:—there is a resolution you all can press forward. But what is the project?

Hon. Padarath: Member, all the works has to do with the compliance of the wastewater effluent, safeguarding the public health and environmental risk to the population. The reduction in terms of under-treated waste-water discharged into the environment. Increased potential for exploring the reuse market for returns on investment upon completion is the aim of the project. But that pretty much gives you a synopsis of the challenges of what it is that they are addressing.

Mr. Young SC: Now, just to clarify, this is the existing facility separate from the facility that was under litigation. Correct?

Hon. Padarath: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: So the facility that was under litigation with SIS and NGC, et cetera, that remains to the side, and this is the existing facility to get it operational and safe.

Hon. Padarath: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. F. Public Buildings. G. Sanitary Services. All right, Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chairman, I was looking down the line to see if my colleagues—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, too late Port of Spain North/ St. Ann's West, you could send it differently. G. Sanitary Services. Arouca/Lopinot, you have something in G?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, Mr. Chair. Minister, with respect to G. 006, the Establishment of an Engineered Sanitary Municipal Solid Waste Landfill, Forres Park. What progress has been made by the Ministry or SWMCOL with respect to the commencement of this project?

12.40 p.m.

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, the final environmental and social impact assessment report was submitted to the EMA for review in support of the issuance of a CEC. As we are aware, the project is intended to strengthen national waste management infrastructure through the development of a climate-resilient engineered landfill. In 2027 fiscal, it is envisaged to support the completion of the review of the environmental and social impact assessment by EMA. I think the Member is aware that in order to meet some of our statutory obligations, the project is purely dependent on getting some of this clearance and so on. So, now that that has happened, and some of this is still before the EMA, it is expected that that will accelerate in 2026/'27 fiscal.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you. Is the Government committed to the construction of that engineered landfill in Forres Park?

Hon. Padarath: Chairman, similarly, this is a project that has gained a lot of national attention and interest, particularly by stakeholders, residents, et cetera, within that area. Actually, the one in Forres Park is close to my own constituency, and therefore, there have been issues raised. I would like to further my discussions with the EMA, seeing that we are on the cusp of finalizing the environmental and social impact assessment before speaking further on this matter.

Mr. Gonzales: And just, finally, Minister, what are some of the funding arrangements that you are considering for this project?

Hon. Padarath: Again, Mr. Chairman, based on some of the issues that I have enunciated regarding SWMCOL, and the RFIs that are open in other areas, all things are available and open to us at this point in time.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. As we come to the end, I propose to put the question.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 39 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: And might I be allowed to pay gratitude to your staff, and thank you very much. And to the committee as a whole, we got through what, I think, was a very heavy Ministry in just over two and a half hours. So, thank you all very much. Your preparation has been excellent and very helpful. We move now to Head 64.

[DR. ALI *in the Chair*]

Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police Service $3,049,173,900.

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Alexander: Madam Chair, if am I permitted to call you, fiscal 2027 Budget and the sum that was allocated, $3,049,173,900, transformation of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the strengthening of national security. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has demonstrated, through its fiscal 2027 national budget, the safety and security of our citizens remain among its highest priority. The allocation for the TTPS is clear and it an indication of the Government's determination to provide our protective services with the resources, capability and infrastructure necessary to effectively confront crime, restore a greater sense of safety and security throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Chair, the Commissioner of Police and his team, we are here to answer the questions. Thank you.

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

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $3,049,173,900 for Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: Police Service. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good morning to the Commissioner and his team. Minister, 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, in 2025, the Actual was $1.2 billion; in 2026, it was estimated at $1.1 billion. I see the Revised Estimate

went up to $1.250 billion, but in 2027, we are increasing it by $116 million. May I ask what is the current permanent number of bodies that are approved for the whole Trinidad and Tobago Police Service that would come under this line Item? How much on the establishment is approved?

Hon. Alexander: We are looking at 8,484 police officers.

Mr. Young SC: Right. Approved on the establishment?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: How many are currently in post? I do not mean physically present, understanding the way the service works. How many permanent positions are currently filled?

Hon. Alexander: Madam Chairman, 5,800 police officers; regular police officers, that is.

Mr. Young SC: Fifty-eight hundred?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: So, you have a vacancy of approximately 1,600, roughly.

Hon. Alexander: All right. We also have, among them, 715 civilian staff and 6,435 Special Reserve Police officers.

Mr. Young SC: All falling within this line Item? So, this is not—because when you go down—so, this includes—because I saw—well, we will get it, but there are also other areas. I guess that is contract employment. Right. So, this is 5,800 police in post on the establishment, police officers, serving police officers, and then you have 715 civilian members, and then you have 6,500 SRPs covered by this amount.

12.50 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: Also, Member, we have increased the police sanctioned

strength.

Mr. Young SC: The police?

Hon. Alexander: Sanctioned strength. As a result of that, we expect 800 new recruits to come on board.

Mr. Young SC: In this—because I was going to ask about that.

Hon. Alexander: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Young SC: Because of the natural process of attrition, every year you have recruitment exercises, normally, what, 200 and 300 a batch?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah. Between 250 to—

Mr. Young SC: So, you are hoping for what, three batches at least in the next fiscal?

Hon. Alexander: In the next fiscal. Yes, Sir.

Mr. Young SC: As opposed to how many this year?

Hon. Alexander: We had two this year, Sir.

Mr. Young SC: So, that is an additional.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: This $116 million increase in salaries and cost of living allowance, the police service has already had their arrears and their increases in salaries covered in the previous fiscals, correct?

Hon. Alexander: Not all, Sir.

Mr. Young SC: So, this includes some of that? Backpay and arrears?

Hon. Alexander: Yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: How much of it is backpay and arrears?

Hon. Alexander: Member, every effort will be made to provide that in writing to you.

Mr. Young SC: Alright. And out of the numbers that you have just told us about; how many police officers are currently on suspension but still getting full pay or half pay?

Hon. Alexander: We will also provide that in writing to you, Member.

Mr. Young SC: You do not have that information here?

Hon. Alexander: No. We do not.

Mr. Young SC: I am sure the Commissioner knows the strength of his men and women and how many are currently on suspension.

Madam Chairman: The Member already gave his answer.

Mr. Young SC: **"**What is all dat steupsing for? What is dat steupsing for"?

Madam Chairman: The Member already gave his answer.

Mr. Young SC: What is the answer?

Hon. Alexander: We would provide it in writing.

Mr. Young SC: He would provide it in writing?

Madam Chairman: What more can you want?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: That the information is provided here.

Madam Chairman: He said it is going to be provided in writing. Can we move along to a different line Item?

Mr. Young SC: Alright. So, the police service comes here and does not know that question. Fine. Let us—

Madam Chairman: No comments. Questions only.

Mr. Young SC:—move along. Let us now ask, out of this $116 million additional, how many additional men and women of the police service are expected to be added?

Hon. Alexander: But I already answered you. I told you—

Mr. Young SC: No. You answered about how many batches you are hoping to take on. There is a process of natural attrition, so some would be leaving, et cetera.

Hon. Alexander:—800 new recruits.

Mr. Young SC: Right. So, 800 new recruits. How many are expected to leave in the next fiscal?

Hon. Alexander: We would also provide that in writing for you.

Mr. Young SC: You see, Minister, you are—listen, if St. Augustine "steups" once more.

Ms. Ameen: "Wah yuh go do"?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Young SC: "Yuh see?" Listen, when they behave like that, let the population look on, "doh tell us on dis side anything, eh?"

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Okay. Members, let us all refrain from "steupsing". Right?

Mr. Young SC: We are looking at an allocation to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service of $1.3 billion for salaries and cost of living. As we get further down, we will see there is also Contract Employment, et cetera. All of us in here give the support to the police service because of the important role that they play.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Alexander: What? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Young SC: We are concerned—

Madam Chairman: Member, may I ask what line Item and question you have?

Mr. Young SC: I have not reached the question as yet. This is my five minutes. I am line Item 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living. I just said we are dealing

with $1.3 billion of allocation.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Young SC: So, that is where I am. Thank you, Madam Chairman. What I was about to ask is: It is $1.3 billion we are being asked to allocate for this task. Out of that $1.3 billion, how many—or do we expect to have any promotion exercise? Because, of course, that then also affects the calculation of the wage bill, et cetera. How many promotion exercises do we expect, hopefully to be successful—that is no fault of the Commissioner—over the next fiscal period?

Hon. Alexander: Promotion is one of the criteria of the police service. When you reach a certain rank, you would be promoted once you are qualified. So, promotion is, in fact, added.

Mr. Young SC: I know. But my question, Minister, was how many promotion exercises do we expect to have? So, normally, they may do promotions to corporal, promotions for sergeant, go up the ladder.

Hon. Alexander: Member, it is difficult to answer that question at this time because we have a number of matters before the court. We are awaiting the outcomes of those matters to proceed in terms of promotions.

Mr. Young SC: But it is expected that, hopefully, if there are successful promotions, this will cover the knock-on cost associated.

Hon. Alexander: Yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: The information provided is that we currently have 6,500 SRPs on establishment.

Hon. Alexander: Yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: How much did we start the last fiscal at?

Hon. Alexander: That is another question I would have to provide in writing.

Mr. Young SC: Answer provided in writing?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah. We will provide the answer in writing, sorry.

Mr. Young SC: Alright. Let us move along now to 01/001/03: Overtime - Monthly Paid Officers. Now, I see here, well, first of all, let me understand. Would you please advise who these monthly paid officers are? Are these just Trinidad and Tobago police officers who are active on duty? They are the only ones who attract overtime?

Hon. Alexander: All Second Division Officers in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service will attract overtime.

Mr. Young SC: All the Second Division?

Hon. Alexander: All Second Division.

Mr. Young SC: What is the average shift before you attract overtime?

Hon. Alexander: A 40-hour workweek.

Mr. Young SC: A four—

Hon. Alexander: A 40.

Mr. Young SC:—14 or 4-0?

Hon. Alexander: A 4-0.

Mr. Young SC: A 40-hour work week, and after that, you attract overtime.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: I see in 2025, it was $412 million in 2020, an Estimate of $400 million, but it was revised to $500 million. So, an additional $100 million. If I remember correctly, that would have come up in the mid-year review. There was an addition in the mid-year review of either the full hundred or a bit more. It was the—I do not know if the Minister of Finance can remember. But let us say it was the $100. How much of that additional $100 million, added to the previous

overtime bill of $400 million, is attributable to overtime for officers as a result of the 12-month State of Emergency?

Hon. Alexander: Member, let me answer you this way. Out of that sum, we also had to pay previous arrears.

Mr. Young SC: Previous arrears of overtime?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: But you got $100 million additional dollars in the mid-year review. So, the overtime bill for the last fiscal, as far as we are aware, is half a billion dollars, which, actually, is almost half of the salaries bill, which includes, not only police officers —well, actually it is. Because it includes SRP, civilians and police officers. Right? That Bill is $1.2 billion. The police service got $500 million for overtime. Half a billion dollars for overtime. My question is how much of that is attributable to the extra work that the police would have had to have done during the 12- month State of Emergency?

Hon. Alexander: Member, it is difficult at this time to calculate because not all officers would have submitted their overtime claim.

Mr. Young SC: So, you still have overtime to come in?

Hon. Alexander: We still have persons yet to come in.

Mr. Young SC: So, if you still have overtime to come in and you got $500 million for that period, and you just told us you still have arrears to come in, why, then, are you now down at $458 million for the next fiscal for overtime?

Hon. Alexander: Right.

Mr. Young SC: Because some of that will be eaten up from what you have just said, in arrears.

Hon. Alexander: Member, as I answer the question, I want us to understand, also,

that with the recruitment of the officers—

Mr. Young SC: That, what? Sorry.

Hon. Alexander:—with the recruitment of the new officers and trying to bring the police service at a level where they could provide the type of safety and security that the country needs, when this is done, obviously, the overtime rate would decrease.

Mr. Young SC: Should.

Hon. Alexander: Over the years, there were problems with recruitment as your administration did not properly calculate the attrition rate of the police and now, we are short by several thousands. So, what we are trying to do is to fix it at this stage. That is why you see, from time to time, the overtime rate seems to always be an issue in terms of you communicating and asking those questions.

1.00 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. I do not think there was an answer there, but let us press on. You just made a point that during "our" time we did not calculate the rate of attrition properly.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: I would like to draw your attention, understanding you are new this and you have just crossed over from the police service yourself, to section 123A, of the Trinidad and Tobago Constitution, which says:

"...the Commissioner of Police shall have the complete power to manage the Police Service and is required to ensure that the human, financial and material resources available to the Service are used in an efficient and effective manner."

So what that means, Minister, and certainly it applied during our 10 years in practice, including the time I was Minister of National Security for three years, is

that the Executive has no role to play in the administration and the finances of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. What you do is you work along with them, et cetera, based on what the information provided to you is. Is it that now that has changed and the Executive is interfering in either the administrative or the financial side of the police service?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: That is my question.

Hon. Alexander: That is an inappropriate question. We are [*Technical difficulties*] telling me to go into—"I going" into some kind of—That is sounding crazy.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. So now—

Mr. Tancoo: Allow me, please, Member. I noticed that you stated that:

> "…the Executive has no role to play in the finances…of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service."

Ironically, the Executive is sitting here today discussing the allocation to the TTPS. So I think it should be a bit clearer; I think I know where you want to go, but you have not quite gotten there. The provision of financial support to the TTPS is the role and function of the Executive.

Mr. Young SC: The provision—

Mr. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—of financial resources, meaning allocations—

Mr. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—is a role of the Executive, not how the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service manages the expenditure of money.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: I am clearly responding to a statement that you said and I wrote down your statement, that:

"…the Executive has no role to play in the finances of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service."

The role that I have just identified is that the Executive provides the finances to the TTPS, which we have done.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. So what section 123A of the Constitution says is:

"...the Commissioner of Police shall have the complete power"—which means in law, no interference—"to manage the Police Service and is required to ensure"—

Madam Chairman: Member, do you have another question?

Mr. Young SC: I have five minutes, and I am getting there. Would you please stop disturbing me?

Madam Chairman: But you have read this already.

Mr. Young SC:

"And he is required to ensure that human,"—

Madam Chairman: You have read it already.

Mr. Young SC:

"...financial and material resources"—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Young SC: "And is"—okay—effective—

Madam Chairman: Member, once again I am asking you, what is the question?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He is getting to it.

Hon. Member: He has five minutes.

Mr. Young SC: I am getting to the question.

Madam Chairman: Do so soon.

Mr. Young SC: You have to—you cannot just ask, question mark. You have to give the context to the question.

Madam Chairman: You do not need to tell me that.

Mr. Young SC: Well, thank you. So the:

"...the Commissioner of Police...is required to ensure that the human, financial and material resources available to the Service are used in an efficient and effective manner."

Having regard to that constitutional provision, through you, Minister, is the sum of $458 million for overtime for the next fiscal, $458 million for overtime in the next fiscal, sufficient for the Commissioner of Police to manage what he needs to get done on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago at the police service?

Hon. Alexander: Member, if it is not sufficient, we will return.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. On that same Item: 01/001/03, I noticed that the original allocation was $400 million, but the revised was $500 million. What was responsible for that $100 million increase?

Hon. Alexander: Asked and answered, Member.

Mr. Imbert: You answered that? You explained why it went up by $100 million? I do not remember that.

Hon. Alexander: Well, then, you need to pay attention.

Mr. Imbert: I do not think what you are saying is correct, you know. All right. So you are alleging that you answered that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Mr. Imbert: No, I am not finished. I am still on 01. Okay. Could you explain why we have an overtime bill of $500 million?

Madam Chairman: That is the same question.

Hon. Alexander: Asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: But you did not answer that either.

Hon. Alexander: I did not answer you.

Mr. Imbert: You did not answer anybody.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Trincity/Maloney.

Mr. Imbert: I am still on 01.

Madam Chairman: Do you have another question, Member?

Mr. Imbert: I have plenty of Items here in 01.

Madam Chairman: A new question.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. A new—I am going through them one by one. I started with 03, okay. I am now going to 05. Well, the Minister—the TTPS cannot speak in this thing, the Commissioner has to tell you. Why are you spending $60 million more in national insurance in 2027 than what was spent previously?

Hon. Alexander: Check your document, Member. Check your document.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Let me assist. Let me assist.

Hon. Alexander: Check your document.

Mr. Imbert: 01/001/05.

Hon. Alexander: Right.

Mr. Imbert: The 2025 Actual figure was $113,967,970 and the 2027 Estimate is $175 million. The difference between those two numbers is $61 million and a few dollars, so I rounded it down to $60. Could you explain why, in 2027, the police service is paying $60 million more in national insurance than it was paying in

2025?

Hon. Alexander: Member, let me address this from—Member, the NIS contributions and the increase in the sanctioned strength went up in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Mr. Imbert: That is the answer? So, more people—

Hon. Alexander: More people, more contribution.

Mr. Imbert:—and higher contribution. The increase in contributions is actually 52 per cent, I just wanted to see if you knew that. Can I move on now to 01—

Hon. Alexander: By half of the whole?

Mr. Imbert: No. You gone back with that? [*Laughter*] NIS rates went up by 52 per cent, that is the correct answer.

Hon. Alexander: All right.

Mr. Imbert: That is the correct answer.

Hon. Alexander: Okay, okay. All right. All right.

Mr. Imbert: Let us go now to 01/27.

Hon. Alexander: 01/27?

Mr. Imbert: I note—27.

Hon. Alexander: All right.

Mr. Imbert: Gov't Contribution to Group Health Insurance - Monthly Paid Officers. I note that the original provision was $505, 000, but the Actual Expenditure in 2026 was $420, 000. What caused that? Is that you are in arrears in terms of your health plan, what went on? Why you spent less than allocated?

Hon. Alexander: Member, although the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is in arrears from everything that you all would have left, it would be the amount necessary at the time of the request.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Since you have said that, does that mean that every police officer that made a claim against this health insurance plan received their benefits during fiscal 2026, which is why you spent, well, not you, but this is why the police service spent $85,000 less on premiums for the health insurance plan? Every single police officer who applied received their benefits in 2026?

Hon. Alexander: Member, you and I should know this by heart because "you is ah" financial man.

Mr. Imbert: A half of the whole.

Hon. Alexander: And I am half of the whole of the financial man.

Mr. Imbert: You are half of the whole. Go ahead.

Hon. Alexander: So what I am saying to you is this, persons also would have left the service and all of these things. So when you calculate that back, those who are here and those who would have left, that is the reason and those who would have made a claim, that is how we came up with that.

1.10 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, no problem. So let us move to the 2027 allocation. So, the premiums paid for health insurance for police officers in 2026 went down by $85,000, but you say everybody—I am assuming from what you are saying, I had to translate what you said—every police officer who put in a claim got their benefit?

Hon. Alexander: I did not say that.

Mr. Imbert: "Well, ah translating what yuh said."

Hon. Alexander: Nah, doh translate, doh translate."

Mr. Imbert: "All right, doh worry. Dat is de impression I got."

Hon. Alexander: "Nah, doh translate."

Mr. Imbert: So it is my impression. So 2027, 420, is that enough to pay for all the claims against this health insurance plan that will be made in 2027?

Hon. Alexander: Member, if it is not, I will return.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, I am back at 01/001/03: Overtime - Monthly Paid Officers. Could you say, given the fact that the amount has been reduced by $42 million, can you say what critical operational challenges or gaps were addressed in the previous fiscal by the increased overtime allocation, and how will the TTPS ensure that these needs remain adequately covered given that the allocation is reduced?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we have again increased the stanchion strength of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, which will reduce the spending of the overtime and then we had to pay arrears.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, are you saying that whatever operational challenges you had in the previous year, because you had to have overtime of this level, that now, with your stanchion strength it will not happen again?

Hon. Alexander: Member, what I am saying is, it is an unpredictable environment in terms of crime and criminality, and you should know that. We started off with an SOE—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I should know.

Hon. Alexander:—created by you. So, whenever these things arise depending on what is happening in the State at that time, we have to treat with it, and if it means doing what we have to to protect our citizens, we will.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. So, you think that we will not have this overtime

issue at that level again, and the operational challenges that you had to address will not occur?

Hon. Alexander: I cannot predict that, Member. However, as I said before, "If the need be we will be glad we don't, but if we do, we will just return".

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, the police service has a permanent Commissioner of Police now for just over a year with the appointment of the Commissioner, and for this whole section, 01: Personnel Expenditure for the police service, we are looking at $2.3 billion. Might I ask through you, of the Commissioner, the Professor Deosaran report that was done with respect to the police service, and the whole manpower issue of the police service, which is a perennial problem to get the right manpower formula with the police service, but that was the last in depth study done, and I am certain by now the Commissioner would have perused it or had his team look at it, et cetera, is that being implemented for the utilization of that $2.3 billion or any part of it?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the situation with the manpower resources is one that must be investigated carefully, and how we are doing that, we are looking at crime where it is taking place, the number of persons necessary, the working hours of law enforcement in order to get the best result from it. So, yes, I too, would have perused the document by the goodly gentleman, and what I can tell you is this, yes, we are perusing the document and we are looking to see how best we could treat with it at this time.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, and my last question on this section, 06. So, 01/001/06: Remuneration to Board Members and the provision of the same

$396,000. What is this in relation to, this expenditure?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the Examination Board.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: Police Service Trinidad. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I noticed in the 2026 expenditure, the original allocation for uniforms was $9 million, but the revised expenditure was $20 million, what caused that $11 million increase which is actually 122 per cent increase?

Hon. Alexander: Where are you at?

Mr. Imbert: 02/001/03.

Hon. Alexander: Zero-three? Okay.

Mr. Imbert: 03: Uniforms, there is only one Item for Uniforms.

Hon. Alexander: All right. Member, this is for uniforms—the purchase of uniforms for police officers.

Mr. Imbert: I asked a question. The original allocation was $9 million for uniforms, the revised allocation/expenditure was $20 million.

Hon. Alexander: Member—

Mr. Imbert: It went up by 122 per cent. I have not finished.

Hon. Alexander: Member, if you pay attention, if you pay attention—

Mr. Imbert: I have not finished, Madam Chairman—

Hon. Alexander: Oh, you want to finish?

Mr. Imbert: I want to finish my question.

Hon. Alexander: "Yuh say half ah de question yuh reach?"

Madam Chairman: Ask your question, Member.

Hon. Alexander: "Ah doh know if is half ah de whole yuh was trying to ask me

so ah waiting."

Mr. Imbert: "Yes, de half cud never be de whole."

Hon. Alexander: "Yeah, he duz take he time."

Mr. Imbert: I would like to ask my whole question. The original allocation for Uniforms in the 2026 Budget was $9 million, the revised expenditure is $20 million, an increase of 122 per cent. What caused that $11 million increase for uniforms?

Hon. Alexander: Member, you ready? All right, take notes because I know you would ask me this question again down the road. So, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service purchased uniforms for the regulars, the special reserve police officers, senior police officers, special sections in the police service, special reserve police officers, Guard and Emergency Branch, IATF, the MOPS, every section of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is to be outfitted with uniforms.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I listened very carefully, I did not interrupt the Minister as he interrupted me, I just wanted to know why the expenditure doubled? I did not want to know—

Madam Chairman: Asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no. He did not explain why it doubled. He did not.

Hon. Alexander: "How yuh mean I eh answer why it double?"

Mr. Imbert: "Yuh didn't say why it doubled."

Hon. Alexander: All right, okay, okay. "Well, you see I tell yuh yuh wasn't paying attention all de time."

Mr. Imbert: To what? You have not explained why it doubled.

Hon. Alexander: I also informed you before that—

Mr. Imbert: Was it an underestimate? What was the reason?

Hon. Alexander: We have increased the stanchion strength of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Mr. Imbert: You changed uniform?

Madam Chairman: Allow the Member to answer please.

Hon. Alexander: We have increased the stanchion strength of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: By 100 per cent? "Dat cannot be correct."

Hon. Alexander: "Yuh want meh to answer the question, half of de question, or de whole question?" Answer me.

Madam Chairman: I believe the whole question was answered twice.

Hon. Alexander: Or the whole question?

Mr. Imbert: "Dat is not correct, Madam Chairman."

1.20 p.m.

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

Mr. Young SC: Madam Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Alexander: And then—

Mr. Young SC:—to assist the Minister—

Hon. Alexander: No, no, no, do not assist the Minister.

Madam Chairman: Do you have a question, Member?

Hon. Alexander: Do not assist the Minister. Also—

Mr. Young SC: Under Uniforms—oh, you are still answering. Go on.

Hon. Alexander: Also, we need to replace the uniforms at its present unit.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Alexander: I do know why—

Mr. Imbert: I am asking why is the Revised twice the original?

Hon. Alexander: You see, you were not listening. You are not listening.

Mr. C. Imbert: But you are not answering.

Hon. Alexander: Because you are not listening.

Mr. Imbert: Is it an under-estimate?

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East, this has been answered sufficiently more than once. You may refer to the *Hansard*. We are moving along. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I am on 02 as well.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Okay, Diego Martin North/East, you may finish, and then Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Imbert: Let me serve notice, I will be asking questions on 04, 05.

Madam Chairman: Okay, Member, ask your question.

Mr. Imbert: I just want you to know because we are moving on from me. So, Electricity: The original allocation was $20 million. The Revised was $15 million, okay? When I looked at the allocation for 2027, it is $15 million. What was the reason for the $5 million reduction in expenditure on Electricity, and is $15 million adequate for fiscal 2027?

Mr. Sturge: That is two questions.

Hon. Alexander: Which one of the questions do you want me to answer first, Member?

Mr. Imbert: Both.

Hon. Alexander: So, what is the first question? "Because yuh tying up de tongue and tying up and"—

Mr. Imbert: I am not tying up anything.

Madam Chairman: Kindly repeat the question.

Mr. Imbert: I am speaking clearly and simply.

Hon. Alexander: "You "tyng up de thing".

Madam Chairman: Can you repeat the question?

Mr. Imbert: I will repeat. I will repeat. He asking me to—

Hon. Alexander: One question at a time, then I will answer you.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, but if I ask—

Hon. Alexander: Take your time.

Madam Chairman: Member, please just ask—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I will move on, you know.

Madam Chairman: Member, please ask the question.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I see nothing wrong with asking two questions.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And for the last time, please ask the question or else I will move on.

Mr. Imbert: One by one?

Madam Chairman: One by one.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Why was the expenditure $5 million less than budgeted?

Hon. Alexander: Why was—all right. That is the first question, eh.

Mr. Imbert: You asked for it one by one. You are getting it

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, yeah, I will deal with you one by one.

Hon. Member: One by one.

Hon. Alexander: One by one.

Mr. Young SC: One by one is half of two.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Alexander: It is possible.

Mr. Imbert: "Doh try dat".

Hon. Alexander: Member, there was a consolidation of certain units in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Mr. Imbert: They use less electricity? That is what you are saying?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Okay. You shut down the police station I am hearing here. Could I move now to my second question on this Item?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Is $15 million adequate for fiscal 2027 for electricity consumed by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service?

Hon. Alexander: If it is not enough—

Mr. Imbert: You are coming back. Okay, nice. I am going to 05 now. The original allocation—and it is interesting. The original allocation was not an exact number. It was $42.664 million for Telephones—a huge bill, I must say—and the Revised was $35 million. Why was the expenditure on Telephones $7.664 million less than what was allocated? Eighteen per cent reduction.

Hon. Alexander: Member, I do not know if you wanted to ask this question, but I will answer it.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Alexander: Member, the telephone—

Mr. Imbert: It is not a half question, eh.

Hon. Alexander:—line was included as a mobile device on the Internet, the GPS tracking, and WAN. So, in other words, you all put everything together and make

it a package. So, now we are separating the package, so that is why you get lesser telephone bill.

Mr. Imbert: I see. So, the expenditure you refer to that was separated, that was paid somewhere else on some other line Item?

Hon. Alexander: Ask the question again.

Mr. Imbert: You said that you had a whole set of things bundled up together and there were separated, and this is why expenditure was $7.6 million less than budgeted. So, therefore, those things that were separated and taken out, were they paid for under another Item or not paid?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the line Item, it would have included GPS tracking and other arrangements that we have discontinued.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, you stopped paying for certain things?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: No longer tracking GPS, okay, all right, no problem.

Hon. Alexander: No, no, we are tracking on our own—

Mr. Imbert: You said it was discontinued. You just said that.

Hon. Alexander: Oh, that is what you mean. We disconnected from the price.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Alexander: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: I would like to move on now to move onto Item—

Mr. Young SC: "De man laugh, yuh know".

Mr. Imbert: I do not know what is going on. I want to go to Item 15—02/15. I see that the allocation for Repairs and Maintenance – Equipment was reduced. The actual expenditure on Repairs and Maintenance of Equipment was reduced by 80 per cent in fiscal 2026, from $1.5 million to $300,000. How come?

Hon. Alexander: Member, this Vote has been allocated for the repairs and maintenance of all office machinery, such as computers, photocopying machines, printers, et cetera, and the IT unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has now taken on that responsibility.

Mr. Imbert: So, money was spent elsewhere? The money was spent on some other Item?

Hon. Alexander: There is no longer a need to outsource for these things.

Mr. Imbert: No longer a need to outsource for computers? So, you are making computers in the police service now?

Hon. Alexander: The maintenance of these things—you see, "that is why you does get half of de whole, yuh know".

Mr. Imbert: I see.

Hon. Alexander: "Because you does always come up with yuh own thing".

Mr. Imbert: All right, okay, no problem. That is what you are saying. Okay, if that is what you are saying. Let me go to 21: Repairs and Maintenance – Buildings. I see that the original allocation was $20 million. The Revised allocation is $31.5 million, an increase of $11.5 million. Why the increase, and what was it spent on? Repairs and Maintenance – Buildings went up by 57 per cent.

Hon. Alexander: Member, you will appreciate that these buildings are ageing infrastructure—

Mr. Imbert: It is the Revised that I am talking about—

Hon. Alexander: You see how you are not listening, and then you go tell me that I did not say—

Mr. Imbert: No, no, sorry, I am being disturbed.

Hon. Alexander: Asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: I apologize. I was being disturbed.

Hon. Alexander: Well, I answered the question.

Mr. Imbert: No, I am sorry. I apologize.

Hon. Alexander: You did not hear?

Mr. Imbert: I apologized to you.

Hon. Alexander: All right, okay.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Alexander: [*Laughter*] "He gone again".

Mr. Imbert: Go ahead, Sir.

[MR. SINGH *in the Chair*]

Hon. Alexander: I have to wait, Mr. Chairman, until he is satisfied that he wants to hear. Anyhow, Mr. Chairman, I hope that the Member appreciates that these buildings are ageing buildings. These are ageing infrastructure, and as a result of that, from time to time, we will have to move or discontinue the occupation of those structures. Yeah?

Mr. Imbert: So, the reason was that, because of the age of these buildings, you spent more than anticipated?

Hon. Alexander: Well, you remember this Vote alone does not allow for just repairs of buildings, but the repair and maintenance also of generators and elevators and air-conditioning and camera systems. It is civil work. We must keep consistent with OSHA requirements.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, the original allocation for Repairs and Maintenance – Buildings, which we are now seeing includes fixtures and fittings and other things that are associated with buildings, you had an original allocation of $20million,

and it went up to $31.5 million because you say the buildings are old.

Hon. Alexander: "Mm-hmm".

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I would think in this year, they are older, but you went back down to $20 million.

Hon. Alexander: You see, again, if you were listening, if we used that before to repair some of the buildings, then now we could be asking—then you would have come back and said, "Look, we asking for too much." But if you need more, we shall return.

Mr. Imbert: I see. So, even though the buildings will be older in fiscal 2026, and therefore, logically, you may need more money, will you cut it by—

Hon. Alexander: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, that is an unfair characterization of what—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: It is.

Hon. Alexander: You will get half of the whole—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, it is, in my view, but it is an unfair—but it is also—

Mr. Imbert: I am asking the Minister.

Hon. Members: Yes, but you have a duty to be fair to the Minister. You have a duty to be fair and characterize the evidence upon which you receive in a fair manner.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you cannot answer questions.

Mr. Chairman: I am not purporting to answer any question. But you have to be fair.

Mr. Imbert: And I am—[*Inaudible*]—40: Food at Institutions. It went from

$12.5 million to $20 million. How come?

1.30 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: Member, this Vote caters for the provision of meals for police officers during occasions such as Carnival and joint exercises, to ensure the officers are properly refreshed over a lengthy time, right. Also—

Mr. Imbert: Was it an underestimate?

Hon. Alexander: Why would it?

Mr. Imbert: It was 12; it went to 20. Was it an underestimate?

Hon. Alexander: No, you also have to remember we had a state of emergency.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Alexander: Member, you have to understand—

Mr. Imbert: That is okay. That is okay.

Hon. Alexander:—we are not the weathermen, and we cannot cater for what will happen.

Mr. Imbert: That is your answer; it is okay, it is alright.

Hon. Alexander: You have left so much destruction for us that we have to fix it all.

Mr. Imbert: Alright, we got your answer.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Can I go now—

Mr. Chairman: Member-

Mr. Imbert: I want to move on to another—

Mr. Chairman: Yes, but you cannot pre-empt the Minister. What you are trying to do is pre-empt the answer when you do not like the answer.

Mr. Imbert: That is not true, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: That is what it appears to me.

Mr. Imbert: That is not true, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, you cannot come to that conclusion.

Mr. Chairman: Why?

Mr. Imbert: Because I got the answer.

Mr. Chairman: No.

Mr. Imbert: So, I am assisting the process because ee have nine Heads to do, I am moving on to another Item. You cannot come to that conclusion.

Mr. Chairman: Why?

Mr. Imbert: You are entering the debate, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: No. I am not entering the debate.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, you are.

Mr. Chairman: And first of all, this is not a debate; this is a question and answer process in which I have the overriding duty to ensure that the questioning process is fair.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Shut down everything.

Mr. Chairman: No. I disagree with you entirely. But ask your question.

Mr. Imbert: I did. I got an answer.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So let us move on. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no.

Mr. Chairman: Do you have other questions?

Mr. Imbert: Of course. Mr. Chairman, you were not here.

Mr. Chairman: Well, no. I saw Port of Spain North/St. Ann's—

Mr. Imbert: I said I was moving on to another Item.

Mr. Chairman: Well, if you wait for the context of why I moved to Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, perhaps you would understand. I was not denying you. I saw Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West as disciplined as he is waving his hand, so I thought there was an—

Mr. Imbert: He was simply waving to speak after me.

Mr. Chairman:—implied agreement that you were finished.

Mr. Imbert: You hear that, Stuart? You hear that?

Mr. Chairman: That is all I was doing.

Mr. Imbert: I am not finished. I am not finished.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, well, ask your question, ask away.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. Medical expenses. The original allocation for medical expenses was $34 million.

Hon. Alexander: What line Item?

Mr. Imbert: "Oh gosh man."

Mr. Chairman: 58.

Mr. Imbert: 58. "Read de book, nah man". You want to give picong, but you—come on read the thing. [*Laughter*] 58: Medical Expenses.

Hon. Alexander: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Imbert: The original allocation was $34 million. The Actual expenditure, $10 million. A reduction of $24million or 70 per cent. Why?

Hon. Alexander: Member, this Vote caters for the payment of medical expenses of all members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Police officers receive free medical, free dental, optical, hospital treatment, medication, et cetera. Mr. Chairman, also, the facility is divided into two entities or two institutions. One in South and one in Port of Spain. Right? The medical service is provided to officers

of the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service through the TTPS medical facility too. So, the fire service often comes to the institution to receive medical.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, but that is not my question.

Hon. Alexander: What is your question?

Mr. Imbert: My question was, there was a reduction of 70 per cent. The original allocation was $34 million; the Actual expenditure shown in the book is $10 million, a reduction of $24 million or 70.6 per cent. Is it that police officers were extraordinarily healthy in 2026, or is it that they did not receive their medical benefits? Which is it?

Mr. Lee: Mr. Chairman, just let me jump in here. If I draw the Member for Diego Martin North/East to the Actual of 2025, which is $3.7 million. So, the $10million that is being allocated or requested is more or less in line—

Mr. Imbert: I am not talking about requested. I am talking '26.

Mr. Lee: No, I am just saying that it is in keeping with the Estimate of 2025, thereabout, which was under your tenure, $3.7 million. So the $10 million that is being allocated now is reasonable at this point in time.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask a supplementary question of the person sitting in the chair for Fyzabad. I am not speaking about 2027. I do not know why you are telling me about 2027; 2027 did not emerge from my lips. I spoke about 2026, okay, and I can speak about 2026. I am only speaking about 2026. All I want to know, there was an original allocation for medical expenses for police officers, $34 million, the Actual expenditure shown or revised is $10 million, and why was there such a drastic reduction? That is all I am asking—2027 is irrelevant to my question.

Hon. Alexander: Member, the sum before was for the opening of the south

medical facility. At this time it is partially operational. That is the answer.

Mr. Imbert: I give up.

Hon. Alexander: I hope you would.

Mr. Imbert: I give up, because you did not answer the question. I give up.

Mr. Sturge: He answered all.

Mr. Imbert: I give up, I give up.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister—

Mr. Imbert: Yuh didn't answer" [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Why are you responding—

Mr. Young SC: So, Minister, under 02: Goods and Services; line Item 13: Maintenance of Vehicles. Police vehicles experience a lot more wear and tear than the average use and are subjected to a lot more vigorous use and therefore require a higher level of maintenance and it is a constant problem, the keeping of vehicles on the road in a serviceable condition. So, last year it was $25 million, fortunately, an increase was given to take it up to $30 million. That is the Revised Estimate. Out of that $30 million, how much was actually received and utilized? So out of the $30 million for this year, how much did the police service actually receive and were able to utilize?

Hon. Alexander: [*Confers with technocrats*]

Mr. Young SC: You see, because very often these figures; we put figures there and the police service suffers because they do not get to utilize their allocation; they do not get the release. So that is why I am trying to get at to start.

Hon. Alexander: Member—

Mr. Young SC: Yeah.

Hon. Alexander:—from what I am seeing here, the entire amount was utilized.

Mr. Young SC: So, you got the full $30 million?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, that is good news.

Hon. Alexander: You must also remember that this to is an aging fleet.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Alexander: And as a result of that every effort is being made to have them replaced, because you continue to just service them for a short time.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. Further down as we get into the documentation, there is a provision for the purchase of police vehicles, so we will come to that. So, the next question I have, is how many serviceable, working police vehicles do we currently have?

Hon. Alexander: We have at this time 1,400 working police vehicles. And as we are speaking now, the likelihood of one of them going down or two—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Alexander:—is possible.

Mr. Young SC: As we speak. Agreed.

Hon. Alexander: As we speak.

Mr. Young SC: And this being the maintenance of vehicles, can I ask, how many companies are currently on the list to maintain police vehicles?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we are looking at 22 companies.

Mr. Young SC: Twenty-two approved companies. Might I ask for a list of those companies? You could provide that in writing.

Hon. Alexander: We will take that into consideration.

1.40 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Now, I am going straight along to line Item 51: Relocation of Overseas Staff, on page 327, under Housing Accommodation, line Item 51. There is a Revised Estimate of $1 million for 2026 and a provision was—or a suggestion of a provision of another $1 million for 2027. Might I ask where do we currently have Special Branch officers allocated overseas?

Hon. Alexander: London, Miami, New York, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Just in those three places at this time? London, Miami and New York.

Hon. Alexander: New York.

Mr. Young SC: Is there an intention to deploy more of the TTPS officers to other overseas territories during the course of this year?

Hon. Alexander: Member, if that need arises, I am sure the Commissioner of Police would have it treated.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I would imagine so. But the question was, was there an intention? So, your answer is, at this time, there is no intention, but if the need arises, he will do so.

Hon. Alexander: If the need arises. Again, every situation will be dealt with on its own merit and will be treated with.

Mr. Young SC: All right. And then we go to line Item 96 now, which is Fuel and Lubricants. So, you see, we had $30 million allocated for maintenance of vehicles, but now under line Item 96, which is Fuel and Lubricants, we have another $20 million allocated here, both in 2026 and 2027. So, $20 million of taxpayers' money is being allocated for fuel and lubricants. Might I ask, similar to before, out of that $20 million, how much was utilized in this line Item for 2026?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we have utilized $19,970,000.

Mr. Young SC: Commissioner, you have a $30,000 there left to spend. [*Laughter*] All right, under my last line Item under this 002, I see my colleagues from Tobago West and Tobago East here now in the Chamber, and as usual, I am pleased to see them. So, when I look now at line Item No. 13, because we have been dealing with the police service in Trinidad and Trinidad alone. So, Trinidad got $20 million for Maintenance of Vehicles, and they got $20 million for Fuel and Lubricants. $50 million in Trinidad.

When I go to Tobago, and I go to line Item 13, I see that Tobago is only being allocated $400,000 for Maintenance of Vehicles. Page—yes, it is the same 02, same 02, Police Service.

Mr. Chairman: No. No, no. From what I am seeing here, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's, it seems as though it is divided into two. Now, nothing prevents you from making—

Mr. Young SC: So we are not under 02? We are under 02 Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman: We are under 02 but—

Mr. Young SC:—which is Goods and Services.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, but we are specifically under 001 dealing with Trinidad.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: So, you could make your—

Mr. Young SC: No, no. I may have colleagues—I do not want to prevent any colleague from asking about Trinidad.

Mr. Chairman: You can make your questions. You can ask your question—

Mr. Young SC: Because I—

Mr. Chairman: You can ask your question when we get there at the appropriate time. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am back at 02/001/21. I have three questions under this line Item. I want to know whether this allocation will address long-term maintenance needs or is it intended for urgent and immediate repairs, under maintenance, Repairs and Maintenance to Buildings.

Hon. Alexander: The answer is the both situations, Member.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Thank you. Would the Minister undertake to provide a list of the specific buildings scheduled to receive repairs and maintenance under this allocation, please?

Hon. Alexander: Yes. Member we could provide the list.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, and could you also provide a list of the companies selected to undertake the repairs and maintenance?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we will take that into consideration.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, would this be forthcoming or not?

Hon. Alexander: We will take that into consideration, Member.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I guess, Mr. Chairman, we cannot get a better answer than that.

Hon. Alexander: I guess not.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I will take that into consideration. Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, I am on line Item 002/001/08: Rent and Lease of Office Accommodation and Storage.

The actual spend in 2025. It was $22.2 million. In 2026, there was an Estimate, an allocation of $26.5 million. However, there was a Revised Estimate

of $28 million, an increase thereabout of $5.6 million between 2025 to 2026. Can the hon. Minister indicate what accounts for that increase in 2026?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service rents, leases, approximately 24 properties, including car parks throughout Tobago, for employees to conduct its operation, at $2,281,925 monthly and $27,383,100 annually.

Mr. Marcelle: We are seeing, in terms of that increase, but there has been an increase in terms of what was actually spent in 2025 to what was allocated and revised in 2026. So, I am asking, in terms of the accountability, is it that there were any new contracts or revised leases that would have accounted—or the payment of arrears—that increase from 2025 to 2026?

Hon. Alexander: Member, again, we had to move out from some of the old accommodations and move into new accommodations in order for the police officers to perform their duties effectively.

Mr. Marcelle: How many new rental arrangements were entered into in fiscal 2026?

Hon. Alexander: Again, Member, we will consider that—your question and treat with it accordingly.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 02/001/09: Rent and Lease of Vehicles and Equipment. I am seeing in 2025—an Actual was spent of $18.4 million. In 2026, it was increased to $25 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate what accounts for the increase between 2025 to 2026, please?

Hon. Alexander: Member, 187 vehicles are rented and 51 vehicles are leased throughout the divisions and branches in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to conduct covert operations, gather intelligence and surveillance. The Trinidad

and Tobago Police Service has embarked on a leasing arrangement for multifunction photocopying machines and printers throughout the divisional headquarters of the TTPS. We anticipate that it would reduce downtime and cost associated with numerous breakdowns of these machines.

Mr. Marcelle: Understood. The procurement process in terms of procuring these Items, in terms of whether rental or lease, is it done internally in the TTPS?

Hon. Alexander: Say the question again?

Mr. Marcelle: Whether the procurement process under line Item 02/001/09: Rent and Leases of Vehicles and this Equipment, under that said Item, I am asking whether the procurement process in order to get these vehicles or equipment rented or leased, whether it is done internally?

1.50 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: Internally.

Mr. Marcelle: I want to go to line Item 03/01/16: Contract Employment. In 2025, there was an Actual spend of $73.9 million. In 2026, in terms of the Revised Estimate, it moved to $75 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many contract workers are employed in 2026 from this $75 million?

Hon. Alexander: Member, how many—

Mr. Marcelle: How many employees are employed under Contract Employment with the TTPS in 2026, included for the $75 million allocated?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the total number is 912 under the establishment.

Mr. Marcelle: All of them, sorry, go ahead.

Hon. Alexander: We have 598 posts filled, and we have 305 vacant.

Mr. Marcelle: What steps will be taken in this fiscal to ensure the filling of these 305 vacancies?

Hon. Alexander: Recruitment is ongoing at this time so we could fill all these vacancies that could better assist the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service with their mission to provide safety and security all over this country, and two, inclusive Tobago.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 02/001/21: Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings. In 2025, there was $19.9 million allocated to the TTPS for repairs and maintenance of its buildings. In 2026, $20 million was allocated however, there was a Revised Estimate of $31.5 million in the 2026 fiscal. Can the hon. Minister account for what the increase of almost $11 million in terms of, with specific mention, I know that you discussed in terms of some of the older buildings and maintaining. But if you can identify which specific buildings in 2026 received those upgraded repairs and maintenance.

Hon. Alexander: Member, as you said before, I answered this question somewhat, but I will consider the question and treat with it accordingly.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 02/001/23: Fees. I am seeing in 2025, $77.3million was paid in Fees and in 2026, $30 million was paid in Fees. Can the hon. Minister indicate the rationale for the decrease in Fees under this line Item in 2026?

Hon. Alexander: Member, this particular Vote caters for the annual payment of software licences, technical support, forensic software, maintenance, accounting services, brokerage fees, and annual subscription of maintenance; fees associated with science from the laboratory of the Government's chemist and also the UK to attend court, DNA testing and language translation fees.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Item 002: Police—oh, no, sorry.

Mr. Imbert: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay, well, you are easily forgotten. What can I say. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I will ask the question. With respect to 02, 08 and 09, could we get a list of the properties being rented and a list of—well, where are these properties? Who is the landlord? And also the rental lease of vehicles and equipment, who are these vehicles and equipment being rented or leased from?

Hon. Alexander: Say it again.

Mr. Imbert: A list. Who is the landlord—

Mr. Chairman: Insofar as properties rented—

Mr. Imbert:—and vehicles.

Mr. Chairman:—the request is for a list of the properties rented and the landlords, and in terms of the vehicles, the number of vehicles and the companies from which they are rented. If I could make it very simple.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, correct.

Hon. Alexander: Mr. Chairman, obviously we have no issues with providing the buildings that are being rented, at least some of them that are rented by law enforcement. But the vehicles, Mr. Chairman, we think that it would be against national security if we were to display some of those vehicles for members of the public. It would offer us no advantage at all.

Mr. Imbert: No problem, and let me clarify my question. With respect to the rental and lease of vehicles, take out vehicles rented at least for covert operations, and could I get a list of the rental and lease of vehicles for non-covert operations? Who are you renting from? That is all I want to know.

Hon. Alexander: The question, Member, would be considered and the appropriate response will come.

Mr. Imbert: Whatever.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Chair, let me get some clarity on this point. The Member keeps saying that the question would be considered, leaving the impression that it is up to someone to determine, or there is a discretion. I just want the Member or the Minister to understand that the purpose of this exercise is for accountability where allocations are concerned.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: And we—hold on—and expenditure of public funds.

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Gonzales: No, Mr. Chair, this is very important to this exercise.

Mr. Chairman: Excuse me? What did you just tell me?

Mr. Gonzales: I said no, Mr. Chair—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No to what?

Mr. Gonzales: No, no, no. I am just explaining something.

Mr. Chairman: And I was—

Mr. Gonzales: I was making the point, Mr. Chair. Can you please allow me to make the point because this exercise is one of accountability.

Mr. Chairman: You are making a point to admonish the Minister—

Mr. Gonzales: No, I am not admonishing anyone. I am not admonishing anyone, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "Cause yuh tone go up a little bit."

Mr. Gonzales: So, and that is the reason why the Member for Diego Martin North/East—

Mr. Chairman: I understand all of that.

Mr. Gonzales:—is asking for it to be placed in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Mr. Gonzales: So that we understand the needs of national security.

Mr. Chairman: Listen, anybody who has read the cases of *Conway v Rimmer*, and all the cases coming forward from that—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: What?

Mr. Chairman:—you would understand that there are polycentric considerations. There is a way to address that, if you get the list, you are unsatisfied with it, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West could advise you on the alternative methods of addressing that, right. It is a simple way to do it. Even the *Conway v Rimmer* considerations are even addressed in statutory form. It is not for me to advise you, but I am telling you. Should you wish to avail yourself of the statutory prescription to do so, there is an exception to the *Conway v Rimmer* exception embedded in the statutory provisions. So, I think at best what we can extract from the Minister at this stage is: I will consider it. I suppose when he says he will consider it, the *Conway v Rimmer* considerations, the public interest immunity considerations which are well known to most lawyers. Aranguez/St. Joseph, I would normally have invited you to give a dissertation on the law—

Mr. Gonzales: No, no, no.

Mr. Chairman:—but I will not do so.

Mr. Gonzales: No, no, no.

Mr. Chairman: I would not do so.

Mr. Gonzales: No.

Mr. Chairman: Right, but look, suffice it to say that I suppose it is what it means and it is the extent of the answer we will get for now. Right. Anyone who has

read *Conway v Rimmer* the Spycatcher cases—

Mr. Imbert: Please, let us move on to the next Item, please.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I know.

Mr. Imbert: This is not a place for you to lecture us. Let us move on, please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, I find it—you see, because of the nature of the questioning, sometimes I find I have to have constant recourse to giving you, in particular, a lecture.

Mr. Imbert: Let us move on. We got the point. It is either he will tell us or he will not tell us.

Mr. Chairman: Are you sure you got the point?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Well, your behaviour certainly does not bespeak of that. Item 002: Police Service - Tobago, page 328. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, we are now on Tobago, and I would like to go to line Item 13—the Members for Tobago East and West being here—Maintenance of Vehicles for the Tobago arm of the police service. The amount of $400,000has been provided. In 2026, originally, it was $600,000, and we are seeing now a Revised Estimate of $400,000. So, it went downwards. How many police vehicles are there in Tobago?

Hon. Alexander: It is my understanding, Member, that we have a fleet of about 14—

Mr. Young SC: 14? 1-4?

Hon. Alexander: 1-4 vehicles in Tobago.

Mr. Young SC: And out of the $600,000 that was originally estimated, and now a Revised Estimate of $400,000, that is sufficient to maintain 14 vehicles in Tobago?

Hon. Alexander: What we normally do, Member, for the repairs that cannot be accommodated in Tobago, we bring them to Trinidad.

Mr. Young SC: All right. And out of those 14 vehicles assigned to Tobago, how many are currently working and serviceable?

Hon. Alexander: All 14.

Mr. Young SC: And out of those 14, how many are the electric vehicle pick-ups in Tobago?

Hon. Alexander: No electric vehicles were sent to Tobago, Member.

Mr. Young SC: None?

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mr. Young SC: All right.

Hon. Alexander: None were executed there.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I will ignore the use of the word "executed" when it comes to this. Now, let us go to Fuel and Lubricants. Fuel and Lubricants for Tobago—in Trinidad, $20 million was provided and in Tobago, only $50,000was provided, but when you look at 2025, the Actual spend was $1 million in Tobago. I assume that million dollars was to cover arrears and to also ensure that vehicles in Tobago were being properly maintained?

Hon. Alexander: Member, this Vote also did not just cater for vehicles, but also equipment—

Mr. Young SC: Under Fuel and Lubricants?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: So, what? You vired money from Fuel and Lubricants to assist

with other equipment?

Hon. Alexander: No, no. Fuel and Lubricants would generate—for the generators for different stations—

Mr. Young SC: Shirvan and Roxborough, et cetera.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, for different stations. So—

Mr. Young SC: It was not only for vehicles?

Hon. Alexander: It was not just for vehicles. We also have to cater for the generators at different occasions when the current goes.

Mr. Young SC: Familiar with it. So why, in 2025, was it $1million, and now it is being dropped to $50,000, which is $950,000 short? Actually, it is the full $1.010 million short, because in 2025, it was $1.063 million or $1.064 million. And now it is only$50,000. Are the generators currently working?

Hon. Alexander: Give us a second, Member. Let me just—

Mr. Young SC: No problem.

Hon. Alexander: "Leh meh calculate here".

Mr. Young SC: But you see what I am talking about?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: So, $1.010 million shorted—Tobago shorted by $1.010 million.

Hon. Alexander: Member, what we noticed over the period is that many of these generators were down. They have since been repaired. So, it is just to maintain them now. So, the cost of maintenance, obviously, would have gone down.

Mr. Young SC: So, to get them back up, it was that $1.010 million in 2025?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, it cost some money.

Mr. Young SC: But this would also include fuel and lubricants for the vehicles as well.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: It is not just for the generators and other equipment. So, this $50,000is going to be sufficient, or every time you have to do an oil change, "it hadda come down tuh Trinidad?"

Hon. Alexander: Also, Member, we had some arrears, and the fleet card for refuelling.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, this also includes the purchase of fuel at the pump? There is no way $50,000is going to be sufficient for a whole year for 14 active police vehicles in Tobago. So, is it that Tobago is being shortchanged?

Hon. Alexander: No, no. What we do, if we realize that we have an issue—

Mr. Young SC: "Yuh bring down de car tuh Trinidad, ship it down and send it up?"

Hon. Alexander:—I shall return.

Mr. Young SC: You shall return?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: You shall return? "Well, yuh better return quick, because $50,000 nuh even going tuh cover ah month in Tobago". Tobago, you all hearing that? And Carnival is coming up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Alexander: No, no, Member. Member, no, no. Member, you are jumping out—

Mr. Young SC: No further questions.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, let us go. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Diego Martin North/East. Item 001.

Mr. Imbert: I am going to assist the Minister by speaking clearly and slowly.

Item 03/001: Police Service (Trinidad); 01: Vehicles, I noted that in 2025, the Actual spend was $23 million. The Estimate in 2026 was originally put at $15 million, and only $8 million was spent. This is the first part of my question: How come only $8 million was spent on vehicles in fiscal 2026? Then, the second part is: How come it has up to $20.7 million in 2027? Third part: Could I get a list of the companies that sold vehicles to the police services in 2026?

Hon. Alexander: "Member, yuh know, yuh know how you and I does go?"

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Alexander: "So, de first thing yuh do is tuh ask de question one at ah time, because yuh does get confused, right?"

Mr. Imbert: No, well, this Speaker might run away, eh. So, let me go one at a time.

Hon. Alexander: "I doh want tuh be confuffled and"—

Mr. Imbert: One at a time.

Hon. Alexander:—"you doh want tuh be confuffled, so one at a time".

Mr. Imbert: I am following your advice.

Hon. Alexander: So, let us go with the first question—

Mr. Imbert: First question—

Hon. Alexander: One.

Mr. Imbert:—why was the expenditure, almost 50 per cent of the allocation, almost half, it was reduced by $7 million? The original Estimate, $15 million; Actual spend, $8 million on vehicles. How come?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the vehicles have reached their expiry date. Look at it that way. So, they are at the end of their life. So, at this time, we are using the fund to get new vehicles, because those vehicles under this line Item, they are used

for replacement of vehicles, and the number of vehicles has reached the end of their useful life, and they are due for board of serving.

Mr. Imbert: With due respect, Minister, that is not in any way related—in any way, in any universe, to my question. Why was the expenditure half of the allocation? I know you are buying vehicles. I know you are replacing. I want to know why the expenditure was half of the allocation. What happened? It was a procurement problem? What went on?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we understand that procurement started late.

Mr. Imbert: So, it is a procurement issue?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine.

Hon. Alexander: Procurement started late—

Mr. Imbert: No problem—

Hon. Alexander: That good?

2.10 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: So, I go now to question number three.

Hon. Alexander: Alright.

Mr. Imbert: No, question number two, sorry. Why has it gone up? Why has the allocation increased to 20.7? Do you think whatever issues you had in 2026 will be resolved in 2027 in terms of acquisition of vehicles?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. And then could I get a list of the companies that sold vehicles to the police service in 2026?

Hon. Alexander: Well, we will provide that information.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, do not be sensitive.

Hon. Alexander: No, no, wait—

Mr. Imbert: It is public funds.

Hon. Alexander: Wait, wait. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: And, Minister, please, I do not know why the Minister of Housing. He is not the Minister of Finance, you know. He is not supposed to answer. I am asking you. Housing, you know, and he is talking about cars. [*Laughter*] Could the Minister—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Could you give me a list of the vehicles, please?

Hon. Alexander: Your request will be considered.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. Thank you, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Let us move on. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I am on the same heading, 03/001/01: Vehicles. Can the hon. Minister indicate in 2026 fiscal whether the vehicles were procured internally by the TTPS or externally?

Hon. Alexander: What line Item are you at now?

Mr. Marcelle: 03/001/01.

Mr. Chairman: The first line Item, Minister.

Hon. Alexander: The TTPS did their procurement, and as a result of that, it was done through the TTPS.

Mr. Marcelle: In fiscal 2027, is the intention for the TTPS to procure the purchase of the vehicles internally as well?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Mr. Marcelle: One more question, please, Mr. Chairman, on that line Item. What source of tendering or procurement process was used in 2026 for the purchase of the said vehicles internally? Under 03/001/01, what was the method of procurement or tendering, if any, in 2026 for the procurement of these vehicles?

Hon. Alexander: Open tendering.

Mr. Marcelle: Open tendering. In 2027, would it also be open tendering or a sole select?

Hon. Alexander: Open tendering.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Police Service (Tobago). Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies. 001: Regional Bodies. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Page 329, for the avoidance of doubt.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I am on 04/007/03, Severance Benefits.

Mr. Chairman: I am not—you are on what, sorry, Member?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Well, I know we are on 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, no, I think you are—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I have jumped ahead.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, we have not gotten there yet, so—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Alright. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 005: Non-profit Institutions. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 005/01: Police Youth Clubs. In 2025, an Actual amount of $972,301 was spent in 2025 on Police Youth Clubs. In 2026, the Minister of Finance allocated $1.3

million, an increase, to the Police Youth Clubs. However, the Revised Estimate, the Police Youth Clubs were cut by $800,000 in fiscal 2026. Why were the Police Youth Clubs significantly cut by $800,000 in 2026 after there was a promise to increase it?

Hon. Alexander: Member, under this line Item, the Police Youth Clubs will be increasing activities in 2026 for the 80 active Police Youth Clubs. The present members of approximately 7,500, range in age from 5 to 29 years old across 10 divisions. Their present operations are in keeping with international youth standards, the United Nations and the Commonwealth. Since 2020, the Youth Clubs are required to register as a non-profit organization at the Ministry of Legal Affairs. To date, 80 are so registered.

Mr. Marcelle: Minister, you indicated that there is an intention in terms of the increase, and you have listed out, quite helpfully, the amount of Police Youth Clubs and so on. But why, after allocating $1.3 million, was more than half of that cut in 2026?

Mr. Lee: Chair, I just want to help my colleague behind. I am holding the seat for the Minister of Finance. Right? Under 2026, there is a Revised Estimate and my colleague from Diego Martin North/East would know that the Revised Estimate of $500,000 is close to the spend, the actual spending that took place in 2026. So, the $1.3 million that was estimated was just a budgeted amount, Member for Laventille West. So, you would see there is an increase actually taking place for 2027 for $300,000 additional. So, there is not a decrease, but really there is an increase. I learned this from the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Marcelle: Hon. Minister—

Mr. Imbert: That is untrue, and you should not be speaking.

Mr. Marcelle: Hon. Minister, with all due respect, it simply does not make sense. In 2025, $972,000 was actually spent and that was reduced in terms of the next year by almost $400,000.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Marcelle: But I understand, Mr. Chairman, and I will move on to save time.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, under the same line Item, hon. Minister, you said there are 18. Is it that 18 are funded, or are there 18 youth clubs? If you could tell me the difference, and are there any youth clubs that are inactive?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the number is 8-0.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Eight-tay?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, alright. And those, all 80, are functioning, 8-0?

Hon. Alexander: All 80 are functioning, yes. [*Confers with technocrat*] We will have to get back to you with respect to that answer for how much operating at this time.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So, since you have said there are 80, could you provide me with the list of the 80? I do not need it now. I can be provided with it later on. Thank you.

Hon. Alexander: No problem.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Item 007: Households. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Chairman, through you, Minister, can you say why there was no allocation for your Revised Estimates in 2026?

Mr. Chairman: Which line Item?

Hon. Alexander: Under which line Item is it?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, I said 04/007/03: Severance Benefits. There was an allocation of $300,000, but none was utilized.

Hon. Alexander: Member, we understand that with respect to the line Item there was no claim—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No claim?

Hon. Alexander:—by any of the workers. Yeah.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Alright. Given the amount for this year of $300,000, would you be able to say how many officers are projected to receive severance benefits this year? And also, is there a backlog of officers awaiting severance benefits?

2.20 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: Member, we will provide this to you—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: In writing?

Hon. Alexander:—in writing.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, 009: Other Transfers. 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*, Sub-Head 09. Pages 150 to 152, for the assistance of Members. Consolidated Fund Item 004: Social Infrastructure, B. Police Service, pages 150 to 151. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, A. Administrative Services. Trincity/Maloney. Page 152 for the avoidance of doubt.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, sorry. You passed 004: Social Infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman: I did.

Mr. Marcelle: No. You did not call it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I did not realize that was passed.

Mr. Chairman: I did. I am afraid I did.

Mr. Marcelle: What? You did not call it.

Mr. Imbert: No, Mr. Chairman [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Marcelle: Check back the record. You did not call it.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I heard what—

Mr. Marcelle: You did not call it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah. I know you would normally pause to see if there is anybody who is interested in asking a question.

Mr. Chairman: No. I did. I did pause. I said, Item 004: Social Infrastructure, B. Police Service, pages 150 to—

Mr. Imbert: No, Mr. Chairman this is [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: Could you stop your protestation?

Mr. Imbert: That is not so, Mr. Chairman**.** You are denying us the opportunity to examine this.

Mr. Chairman: Not at all.

Mr. Imbert: You moved on after less than a second, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Not at all.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Not at all.

Mr. Imbert: The record would show that. [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Not at all.

Mr. Imbert: We ask questions to understand this [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: Not at all

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: I am now going to do 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Mr. Imbert: No man. "We cah ask questions on the police Development Programme?"

Mr. Chairman: Well, if you—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: You moved on in a half second.

Mr. Chairman: No.

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Not at all.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: You did.

Mr. Chairman: I called it. No one raised their hand.

Mr. Imbert: No, Mr. Chairman. No. Come on. Be serious.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: No. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 152. A: Administrative Services.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: That is a travesty. You moved on in one second. You want us to walk out or something? One second.

Mrs Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, if all of us are making a point collectively that we want it, I cannot understand.

Mr. Imbert: That is wrong.

Mrs Beckles-Robinson: I mean you ought to be able—that is not fair.

Mr. Chairman: Madam Leader of the Opposition, I am very accommodating with that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: But this time I called it. I normally allow a lot of leeway. I called it. I moved forward.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you moved in a second.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Speaker, sometimes you move very quickly. Sometimes you move much quicker than others. This was one such—all of us have our books open on the Development Programme.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I understand Trincity/Maloney has her hand up for 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 152. This is where we go to.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I originally had my hand up for 004. But given that you are insisting that you gave us enough time—

Mr. Chairman: It is not a question of time, you know.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—which I dispute. I am on 005.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, may I offer some advice? There is another method to do it, even though, you know.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, 005/06, 005/12: Development of a Computer System for the Police Service. Could I ask the Minister to indicate to us what are the main deficiencies existing within the current system?

Mr. Chairman: Page 152. It is A./001.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: On page 152, A. Administrative Services, 001: Development of a Computer System for the Police Service, page 152. I asked the question, and I have six questions under this. What are the main deficiencies within the current system? That is not a question?

Hon. Member: Give me a number with the question.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Excuse me?

Hon. Member: So, could you state what number you want to ask about? The quantum.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Page 152.

Hon. Member: Right.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Item A. Administrative Services; 001: Development of a Computer System for the Police Service.

Hon. Member: Right.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I said that before.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: My question, one, what are the main deficiencies that exist within the current system?

Hon. Alexander: Mr. Chair, let me address this. The problem is not deficiency. The problem is technology evolving. As a result of that, we are upgrading to get the best type of technology available. So, it is not a—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, you are upgrading the entire system.

Hon. Alexander: We are upgrading the system.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, could I ask in what ways will the new system enhance crime detection rates?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the last regime, I guess that was you all, would have purchased items that were not compatible with each other. So, what we are doing now is we are purchasing things that could be interconnected, both cameras, computers and systems that we could use in order to fight crime effectively. So, now we have to discard the old thing. We might sell it via auction. But we need to

discard it in order to improve on our ability to use technical evidence in the fight against crime.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Will this new system enhance your cyber-security detections?

Hon. Alexander: Most important—and that is a good question, Member. Yes. It does. At this time, we are battling effectively.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, we expect to see an increase or an enhancement in your crime detection rate with this new system that you are putting in place?

Hon. Alexander: Everything being equal, yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All things being equal. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund, Item 004: Social Infrastructure; B. Police Service, page 280. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, I am looking at B./011: Construction of Mathura Police Station. There is no allocation for this programme. Can you indicate whether or not the Government has stalled or discontinued with this very important project for the people of Toco?

Mr. Lee: Mr. Chair, there is no allocation underneath this line Item 011: Construction of Mathura Police Station. So, the question does not arise.

Mr. Gonzales: But it is mentioned as an Item in the document before us.

Mr. Lee: It might have had a line Item there at some point in time previously, but there is no allocation there for—going back.

Mr. Gonzales: So, I am the Minister; what is the status of the project?

Hon. Alexander: No allocation available, Member.

Mr. Gonzales: No, what?

Hon. Alexander: Allocations.

Mr. Gonzales: No allocation available?

Mr. Lee: The line Item does not arise—

Mr. Gonzales: What is the status of the project?

Mr. Lee:—presently because there is no allocation to question.

Mr. Gonzales: You are the Minister of Housing.

Mr. Chairman: No. No. No. The Minister is occupying the Chair.

Mr. Gonzales: What Chair?

Mr. Chairman: You know this constant referring that he is—

Mr. Gonzales: No. He is not the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Chairman: That is—

Mr. Imbert: He is not the Minister of Finance. He does not prepare the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: But that is beside the point.

Mr. Gonzales: No. He cannot.

Mr. Imbert: No. That is not beside the point.

Mr. Chairman: If the Minister of Finance has reposed confidence in the Minister of Housing—

Mr. Imbert: He has no information.

Mr. Chairman:—to answer the questions.

Mr. Imbert: This is ridiculous.

Mr. Chairman: I do not know what oracle you have consulted to know that he does not have the information.

Mr. Imbert: I consulted the oracle where they are supposed to be able to answer questions on the *Development Programme*, which you skipped over.

Mr. Chairman: Which you refused to respond to.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Look. Arouca/Lopinot, do you have further questions?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, please.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Can we get on with it?

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, Sub-Item 030: Relocation of the TTPS Administration Support Centre (Trinidad House). You have an allocation of $8.4million. Where is this administrative support centre going to be relocated?

Hon. Alexander: Member, I think you are speaking about Trinidad House.

Mr. Gonzales: What is the answer?

Hon. Alexander: Trinidad House.

Mr. Gonzales: You are saying that they are going to Trinidad House?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: What are the works that you expect to be completed with this allocation?

Hon. Alexander: Member, it is part of a multi-year sector where there is more than one project available there in terms of repairs. At this time, the TTPS continues to undertake that project to facilitate the police officers that occupy that building.

Mr. Gonzales: Is the work being done internally by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service or do you have an external contractor that has been engaged by the TTPS to do, I guess, refurbishment work on that building?

Hon. Alexander: It is being done through the UDeCOTT.

Mr. Gonzales: It is being done through?

Hon. Alexander: UDeCOTT.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Has a contractor been engaged already?

Hon. Alexander: We understand that phase one has been completed and phase

two is not yet allocated to continue.

Mr. Gonzales: So, is it at the procurement stage, as you move toward phase two?

Hon. Alexander: We understand that phase two would be started in this fiscal.

Mr. Gonzales: Phase two, you expect. The expenditure of $8.4 million, do you expect to utilize that full expenditure within the fiscal year?

Hon. Alexander: As much as humanly possible.

Mr. Gonzales: As much as humanly possible. Can I ask you to look at 035: Upgrade of Police Administration Building. I am seeing an allocation of $20 million. I am assuming that is the Police Administration Building in Port of Spain. What type of refurbishment upgrade work do you plan to do in the 2027 fiscal year under this Item or this allocation?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the Police Administration Building, over the past couple years or more, there are some issues leading from both the electrical and otherwise. The electrical upgrade, refurbishment work on the conference room, the projected alignment of strategic pillars, the organized development, improved health and wellness, operational excellence, improved effectiveness and efficiency of the Trinidad and Tobago operation and equipment. The 2025/2027 strategic initiative provides modern office accommodations and facilities, national output and outcome improvement of service delivery. All these are areas we are trying to improve at the Police Administration Building.

Mr. Gonzales: So, everything that you have just said, Minister, you plan to do or is part of the scope of works for the upgrade works at the Police Administration Building?

Hon. Alexander: Yes, Member.

Mr. Gonzales: Have the works already started?

Hon. Alexander: Not yet, Member.

Mr. Gonzales: Have you reached the procurement stage already?

Hon. Alexander: Not yet, Member.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, can I point you to the Upgrade works to the Commissioner of Police Residence? You have an allocation of $6million. What type of upgrade works do you plan to do at the Commissioner of Police residence?

Hon. Alexander: That is the mould-infested building. Member, that building was used by Commissioners of Police of the past. I cannot say if they were in fact Commissioners of Police, but they occupied the building. They did not notice, however. If they had done investigations, they would have noticed that the building is mouldy. As a result of that, that needs to be changed. A full roof recovery repair, electrical, plumbing, flooring, and the greenness of the pool.

Mr. Gonzales: The what?

Hon. Alexander: [*Laughter*] It is uninhabitable at this time, Member.

Mr. Gonzales: The greenness of the pool? What is that?

Hon. Alexander: The moulds.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. The moulds.

Hon. Alexander: And the algae in the pool.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Hon. Alexander: The mosquito-infested pool.

Mr. Gonzales: Has that residence been occupied by anyone who has not occupied the office of Commissioner of Police?

Hon. Alexander: If it was ever occupied by anyone?

Mr. Gonzales: Who was not the Commissioner of Police.

Hon. Alexander: I cannot recall.

Mr. Lee: That question does not arise.

Hon. Alexander: We cannot recall.

Mr. Gonzales: What do you mean it does not arise?

Mr. Gonzales: He said that the—

Hon. Alexander: I cannot recall.

Mr. Lee: That question does not arise because there [*Inaudible*]. This is a numbers exercise we are doing.

Mr. Gonzales: He said something. I am asking—

Mr. Lee: No. This is a numbers exercise we are doing.

Mr. Chairman: No. No. No.

Mr. Lee: He explained why there is work. There is a need for an upgrade. He talked about the electrical, plumbing, and so forth.

Mr. Gonzales: : [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Member. All right.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: It does not arise on the line Item.

Mr. Gonzales: I have more questions on that line Item, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: You do?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Well, go ahead.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you. Minister, how far has the TTPS reached in the planning and implementation of the works at the Commissioner of Police residence?

Hon. Alexander: We have reached as far as receiving a proposal from UDeCOTT.

Mr. Gonzales: So, UDeCOTT, I assume, is the project manager for this project?

Hon. Alexander: Pardon me?

Mr. Gonzales: Is UDeCOTT the project manager for this project?

Hon. Alexander: Yes. They are. UDeCOTT is going to be inviting contractors to execute the works at the residence?

Hon. Alexander: I guess that is how the project is.

Mr. Gonzales: No. I am asking if UDeCOTT is going to be inviting —

Hon. Alexander: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Gonzales:—and managing the procurement.

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Hon. Alexander: That is how the system is.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Item B/028: Development Works at the Police Academy.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Imbert: I am asking the Minister about item B./028: Development Works at the Police Academy. I saw an original allocation of $10million; Actual expenditure, zero. Could you kindly explain that?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the contract for the refurbishment of the police training academy was just awarded.

Mr. Imbert: So, the answer is an inability to execute the works in 2026.

Hon. Alexander: Pardon me?

Mr. Imbert: The answer is, an inability to execute the works in 2026.

Mr. Chairman: No. The answer is it was just awarded.

Hon. Alexander: No. The answer is that the contract was just awarded.

Mr. Imbert: That the contract was just awarded.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: We are in fiscal 2027 now. So, it means in 2026, the works were not executed.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Any other questions, Member?

Hon. Alexander: The contract was just awarded.

Mr. Imbert: I have plenty questions.

Mr. Chairman: Well, go ahead. Minister. Ask the next question.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. The development works—just one second. Establishment of a Canine Branch Tobago; original allocation $3million—

Hon. Member: What is the line Item?

Mr. Imbert:—line Item 033. It is right there, Mr. Chairman. The 2026 Estimate, $3million, original; actual expenditure $500,000. How come?

Mr. Chairman: Page 280.

Hon. Alexander: The establishment of the Branch in Tobago represents a significant step in enhancing the operational capacity—

Mr. Imbert: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Alexander:—of the specialized police units in Tobago. The initiative aims to introduce the canine unit to support crime prevention, search and rescue, and patrol operations across the terrain of Tobago.

Mr. Imbert: That is not my question.

Hon. Alexander: What is your question?

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask what it was. I said, the original allocation was $3

million. Only $500,000 was spent. How come? That is an implementation rate of 16 per cent. Why?

Hon. Alexander: Just now. Just now. We understand that the work started and it is continuing.

Mr. Imbert: "It start late". Okay. Move on to 034: Establishment of a State of the Art Police Training Academy, Cumuto; original allocation $5 million; Actual expenditure in fiscal 2026, zero. How come?

Hon. Alexander: Member, no work has started at that location.

Mr. Imbert: Well, I know that. I could see that. Why has no work started?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: This is in 2026. "Doh try dat". They had an allocation of $5million. How come—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert:—hush. How come the allocation of $5million was not spent?

Hon. Alexander: I understand that we are waiting on the assessment from the UDeCOTT team.

Mr. Imbert: From the, what?

Hon. Alexander: We are waiting on the assessment from the UDeCOTT team.

Mr. Imbert: Oh. Okay. All right, 035: Upgrade of Police Administration Building; 2026 origin allocation $25 million; Actual expenditure $3 million. That is a 10 per cent implementation rate. How come.

Mr. Lee: He answered already.

Mr. Imbert: No. He did not say why they only spent $3 million out of $25 million. Why?

Hon. Alexander: "Why we spent?"

Mr. Imbert: The allocation was $25 million, but only $3 million was spent. How come? Procurement issue, execution problem, implementation problem; what was it?

Mr. Lee: No. Mr. Chairman, that question was asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: He did not answer. That question was not asked. The question was asked about the 2027 allocation. Mr. Chairman, the Minister of Housing knows nothing about these Estimates. He is not the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: He is interrupting. He asked about 2027. I am asking about 2026. Just stay out of this.

Mr. Chairman: No. Come on. That is no way—

Mr. Imbert: I can say that if I want.

Mr. Chairman:—no. You see, again—

Mr. Lee: **"**He just doh not like me here" because he knows I am very experienced [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk and *laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Again, it comes back down—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: You see, it comes down to you thinking that you can speak to any Member in the manner in which you like and when you are spoken to in that manner you take objection.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*],

Mr. Chairman: That is the problem.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you do that every day.

Mr. Chairman: That is the problem.

Mr. Imbert: You make insulting remarks and derogatory remarks. You do that every day.

Mr. Chairman: That is the problem with you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: That is the problem with me? That you make remarks?

Mr. Chairman: I am going to rule that your question is permissible because it deals with a different aspect from what the Member for Arouca/Lopinot asked.

Mr. Imbert: Of course. Everybody knew.

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Hon. Alexander: Mmeber, after an investigation was done by the UDeCOTT, they recommended that the building be decanted. As a result of that, the officers are now moving from point A to point B.

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, this is the admin. building, police headquarters, just around the corner there. It has been evacuated?

Hon. Alexander: Not completely.

Mr. Imbert: You said decanted.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah. Not completely.

Mr. Imbert: But—

Hon. Alexander: The recommendation is that it be decanted.

Mr. Imbert: People come out. So, that is why the work did not progress as anticipated.

Hon. Alexander: Yet.

Hon. Member: You know the answer.

Mr. Lee: You know the answer and "yuh" asking [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Imbert: Why are you all—"I talking to de Minister of Homeland Security". All right, 036: Development Works at Nos. 151–155 Eastern Main Road, Laventille. What is that facility for? Before I go on to question two.

Hon. Alexander: Member, that building is no longer available for the TTPS.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So why was $1 million spent on it in 2026?

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: What Lee getting involved for? I am asking "Xander".

Hon. Alexander: Member, all this kind of [*Inaudible*] allocation, no money was spent there.

Mr. Imbert: But it says $1 million was spent.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Chairman—

Hon. Alexander: "You see it spend there"?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*] Diego Martin North/East understands that even though the figure is a Revised Estimate—that is the wording "Revised Estimate". At the end of the day, next year, you might see there might have been zero spent in that particular Item. So, he knows that.

Mr. Imbert: I do not know that.

Mr. Imbert: I see $1 million; I assume it was spent. So, since—"look. Ah doh want Housing interfering with my ting". .Let me go on to 037: Restoration and Refurbishment Works at the Police Museum; $1 million dollars allocated, no money spent. How come?

Hon. Alexander: What line Item are you on?

Mr. Imbert: Item 037.

Mr. Chairman: Item 037 [*Inaudible*] restoration of the police museum

Hon. Alexander: Member, UDeCOTT would have submitted their proposal late.

Mr. Imbert: Good answer. Well, not good answer, but I will accept that answer. Could we move on to 038, if you do not mind? Establishment of Mobile Command Vehicle Units for the TTPS; original allocation $10 million, only $1.5million spent and in 2027, zero. Could you explain why only $1.5million was spent out of $10 million and why there is a zero allocation in 2027?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the TTPS did not spend any money on that line Item.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah. I know that. I want to know why. I said that they did not spend money. I want to know why they did not spend money.

Hon. Alexander: Because those units were handed over to the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Imbert: The Ministry of what?

Hon. Alexander: Defence.

Mr. Imbert: Mobile police units? Okay. Is that why there is a zero allocation for 2027? Is it that the police is discontinuing this project?

Hon. Alexander: Pardon me?

Mr. Imbert: This police is discontinuing this project, that is why it is a zero—

Hon. Alexander: No. No. No. It came under the National Security Council. But it came under Defence.

Mr. Imbert: No. These are mobile police units, not army units.

Hon. Alexander: Defence force and police micro-units.

Mr. Imbert: Let me go back and take a very good look at this, Mr. Chairman, if you would allow me.

Mr. Lee: If you look, you might see a line Item there. We would come back to that.

Mr. Imbert: Line Item, 038, it speaks to police. It does not talk about army. Why are you saying that? It says mobile command police units for the TTPS.

Mr. Lee: The Minister gave a response.

Mr. Imbert: "It doh say defence force". So, can you explain? $1.5 million spent out of $10million on mobile command units for the TTPS?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, what is going on in 2027 then?

Hon. Member: "He answer yuh already".

Mr. Imbert: No. He did not. We spoke about '26. What is going on in '27?

Hon. Alexander: The same thing.

Mr. Imbert: Has the police decided they are no longer responsible for this Item?

Hon. Alexander: No. The National Security Council, they took possession of this line Item.

Mr. Imbert: What?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: "What dat have to do with de"—these are police command units. "What dat have to do with the National Security Council? Look. I eh able nah".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: "I eh able".

Mr. Chairman: All right. No other questions?

Question put and agreed to.

Head 64 Ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

2.50 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Members, I propose to take the lunch break now. It is 2.51 p.m. We return at 4.00 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: Chairman, before we go, I want to thank the Commissioner of Police and his team.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Alexander: So, as they go forward and they are going out of their way to make us proud, I want to thank the Commissioner and again and his team and other members, the civilian staff. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: So, would I. It would be remiss of me not to thank the Commissioner and his staff and all the hard-working public servants who have attended here, your hard-working Permanent Secretary and the senior staff. Thank you all very much. And we return at—it is 2.52 p.m. We return at 4.00 p.m. Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Chairman: Minister, shall I give you a few minutes or are you ready?

Hon. Alexander: Whenever you are ready, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Are you ready?

Hon. Alexander: Yes, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Members, ready?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Sorry?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I would take that to mean you do not have many questions.

Head 83: Ministry of Homeland Security, $2,103,437,800.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Homeland Security to make a brief opening statement, not to exceed the usual five minutes.

Hon. Alexander: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Homeland Security has received an increase in the allocation of the fiscal year 2027 under Head 83. These resources are intended to support the Ministry's responsibility, particularly the operation of the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, the Immigration Division, and other units and programmes under the Ministry's remit. Mr. Chairman, our responsibility is to ensure that these funds are managed prudently, that taxpayers receive value for money, and that the services entrusted to the Ministry are delivered effectively to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I am therefore prepared, Mr. Chairman, to take questions from the hon. Members on the estimated allocation before the Committee. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed: That Head 83 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: The said sum for Head 83: Ministry of Homeland Security is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We firstly shall consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. These items are to be found between pages 450 to 452 inclusive. Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration; 002: Fire Service.

Mr. Young SC: No, no, no—but you looked at me, I had my hand up.

Mr. Chairman: I looked at you; I saw your hand was up.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Mr. Chairman: And then you put it down.

Mr. Young SC: Well, because we made eye contact.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. 01/001/01 Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, Minister. This is for the permanent staff at the Ministry of Homeland Security on the establishment, correct?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And the staff would have been split last year between the former Ministry of National Security, and now the Ministry of Homeland Security and the Ministry of Defence. Correct?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Has that exercise been completed?

Hon. Alexander: And the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Young SC: And the Ministry of Justice. Has that exercise been completed?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: How many Members of permanent staff are there on the establishment at the Ministry of Homeland Security?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we have 145 permanent staff.

Mr. Young SC: 145 permanent staff. Now, last year for the whole full year, you had $15,800,000 provided for Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Did all public servants on the establishment receive their salaries for that period last fiscal?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: But this year now, you have jumped by $38.5 million for the same Ministry—there is an increase, a proposed increase of $38.5 million. Can you please explain what that $38 million increase is for?

Hon. Alexander: The increase, Member, is the allocation which will be utilized to pay salaries for additional staff recruited in 2026. Facilitate the 10 per cent increase in salary based on the 2014-2019 salary negotiation, and the funds have been allocated to cover the 40 per cent payment of arrears to staff in all divisions under Homeland Security. In addition, the Service Commission Department continues to fulfil its mandate in filling vacancies within the public service, as such, appointments for critical and administrative positions are ongoing, and additional staff expected in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. You told us a short while ago you have 145 members of permanent staff on the establishment. How many vacancies out of that 145?

Hon. Alexander: I have 145 positions.

Mr. Young SC: Correct, and I now am asking how many vacant positions.

Hon. Alexander: Right, I have 61 positions filled, and I have 84 posts vacant.

Mr. Young SC: Right, and you just told us that included in this additional $38.5 million is a 10 per cent increase, so that is for the 10 per cent increase in recurrent salaries every month, correct?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And you talked about a payment of 40 per cent, payment of arrears. That is with respect to back pay, correct?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Now, this 40—

Hon. Alexander: All the Ministries and all divisions.

Mr. Young SC: Well, you could talk about all the Ministries. I am talking about Homeland Security, right?

Hon. Alexander: All the divisions under the Ministry.

Mr. Young SC: All the divisions—no, well, this is not all the divisions. This is under General Administration so, this is for the Ministry. You have the divisions of fire service, immigration, right? So, we are dealing with the Ministry. So, this $38.5 million—that 40 per cent payment of arrears—that is the 40 per cent cash payment that has been proposed by the CPO. Correct?

Hon. Alexander: This, Member, this is for fire, immigration and prison service. All the divisions under Homeland—Finance put it under Homeland Security.

Mr. Young SC: So, here under this line Item of General Administration at 001/01, that is for the payment of the fire service, immigration and the general staff at the Ministry?

Hon. Alexander: Back pay. Underline the word back pay.

Mr. Young SC: So, in this $38 million, is the back pay for the prisons and for immigration and fire? That is what you are telling us.

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So, why is it put under this, as opposed to every single one of those divisions have their Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance? Every single one of them, fire, prisons, immigration, all of them have that same line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living.

Hon. Alexander: Member, I suggest you check the paper. Nearly all Ministries are done in this in a similar way.

Mr. Young SC: What is that?

Hon. Alexander: Nearly all the Ministries are done in a similar way.

Mr. Young SC: All the Ministries are done in a similar way? There is no other Ministry, the fire service. There is no other Ministry, prison. There is no other Ministry, immigration.

Mr. Chairman: I think what the Minister is saying is across the board, all the Ministries.

Mr. Young SC: I understand what he is suggesting, but we have now been through a number of Ministries, some of them which have had different divisions, and that was not done in any of those.

Mr. Chairman: I do not think that question was advanced.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I have enough experience to look at the figures and to know what division. So, I just want to make sure and give the Minister the opportunity to just put what he just said on—so, this $38.5 million under the Ministry of Homeland Security, under General Administration; 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance includes the back pay for the general staff, for fire service, prison service, and immigration as well.

4.10 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Has the PSA indicated that they are accepting that 40 per cent cash payment?

Hon. Alexander: You are asking if the PSA—what?

Mr. Young SC: Has the PSA, the Public Services Association, indicated that they have accepted that 40 per cent cash payment for the back pay?

Hon. Alexander: I think you should direct that question to the PSA.

Mr. Young SC: To the PSA? Well, I know the PSA currently, the President, is

part of the UNC, but she is not here. What sort of answer is, "Direct that to the PSA"?

Hon. Alexander: You would still need to ask her—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: How would he—

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chair, let us be honest—

Mr. Chairman: No, come on.

Mr. Young SC: What do you mean, no? This is a question to the Minister of Homeland Security for expenditure on behalf of taxpayers of $38.5 million.

Mr. Chairman: All right, well calm down.

Mr. Young SC: "What you telling me about PSA for?"

Mr. Chairman: Calm down and do not shout at me. I am not shouting at you. Calm down and do not shout at me.

Mr. Young SC: Where does the PSA come in this?

Mr. Chairman: How is the statement that the President of the PSA is a member of the UNC, one, even known to this witness; two, relevant to this enquiry?

Mr. Young SC: It is relevant because the Minister raised, "Ask the PSA."

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, that statement you made—I am confining my commentary to the statement you made; the disparaging statement you made of the union leader. That is all I am confining myself to.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I agree with you, it is disparaging to be part of the UNC. That we can agree on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mr. Young SC: You just said that. I never said it is "disparaging".

Mr. Chairman: Disparaging in the sense that a union, which is supposed to—

look—

Mr. Young SC: "Mr. Speaker, leh me give yuh some free advice, leh we move on, eh."

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no. Let me give you some free advice, and do not press this point with me. Right? So, ask your question and stop using this as a platform to denigrate people.

Mr. Young SC: I am not denigrating anyone.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you are.

Mr. Young SC: I asked a simple question, and I will break it down again very slowly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chairman: How would the Minister even know that? But go ahead, ask your question and let us move on.

Mr. Young SC: The 40 per cent that has been referred to, that is covered by the $38.5 million, I am asking, and I asked, does the Minister know if the 40 per cent proposal has been accepted by the PSA for this line Item?

Hon. Alexander: No, I do not.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. I have no further questions under 001. I do not know if any colleagues have.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: With respect to 01/001/01, I heard the Minister say that back pay is included for the fire service, for the prison service and various other services within the Ministry of Homeland Security under this particular line Item. Is that what the Minister said because I have a follow-up question?

Hon. Alexander: Yes, it is.

Mr. Imbert: Right. That back pay, does it relate to public officers, or public

servants, as they are called, members of the PSA, or does it also relate to fire officers, prison officers and so on? Is it just restricted to the public servants or does it include back pay for fire services officers and prison officers and so on?

Hon. Alexander: Chairman, I would have answered this question already.

Mr. Imbert: No, it is a different question. Whether the back pay you are referring to is just for the public servants who are within these—because you will have public servants within these various divisions. Is it restricted to the public servants or does it include the officers?

Hon. Alexander: Allow me to read again. Funds have been allocated to cover the 40 per cent payment of arrears to staff in all divisions under the Homeland Security.

Mr. Imbert: Fourteen per cent you said? Fourteen per cent?

Hon. Alexander: 4-0.

Mr. Imbert: Four per cent?

Hon. Alexander: 4-0.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, which period of negotiations, you know, which collective agreement does this back pay associate itself with for prison officers and fire officers?

Hon. Alexander: I think, Member, there are some things that we need to address with the relevant Public Service Commission, you know, and the CPO.

Mr. Imbert: Now, I know that fire officers, prisons officers, and so on, received back pay in December of 2024, arising out of a settlement of a collective agreement. Since then, since that collective agreement was settled for prison officers, fire service officers, and so on, not public servants, has there been another settlement that would result in back pay for prisons officers and fire officers? I just

want to know, because I know that they got their back pay in 2024 December.

Hon. Alexander: Member, these are the public servants that work under the different divisions.

Mr. Imbert: You have answered my—that is my first question. All you had to say was, "Yes, this is just for the public servants within these divisions." All you had to say was "yes", not all this rigmarole?

Hon. Alexander: No, I wanted to give you half of the amount.

Mr. Imbert: "No, doh try dat". [*Laughter*] You just had to say "yes". Okay? Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Fire Service. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Is there any element of back pay for fire officers in this Item, Item 002/01?

Hon. Alexander: This is payment of salaries and cost of living, provision for filling the vacant positions, awards of increments, acting allowances, overtime, allowances for monthly-paid officers, government contribution of NIS—no, no, sorry. Payment of salaries and cost of living allowance to members of the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service—just for the fire officers.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, "doh" try that. It was a different line Item, "doh" try that; a completely different line Item. And based on the answer to the preceding Item, I just wanted to know, within this 01, under 002, whether any of this $298 million is associated with back pay. That is all. It is a "yes" or "no" answer.

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mr. Imbert: I know the answer is "no".

Hon. Alexander: "Is ah no answer".

Mr. Imbert: I am glad you also know it is "no". All right. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Alexander: "Ah glad you know dat I know, so we both know".

Mr. Chairman: Item 003: Prison Service. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, I am at 003/03: Overtime - Monthly Paid Officers under the Prison Service. I noted that you have a significant increase in that allocation by $100 million, which is $165 million in the allocation. What accounts for that massive increase?

Hon. Alexander: Member, for the past three or four years, or five years**,** or 14 years—

Mr. Gonzales: Fourteen years?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah. For the past 14 years, overtime arrears have been accumulated by the prison service.

Mr. Gonzales: For the past 14 years?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, because of lack of manpower, and all of these things. So, this is the point where we have reached in terms of the prison service.

Mr. Gonzales: How much is being owed to prison officers for overtime?

Hon. Alexander: Mr. Chairman, $135 million between 2011 and 2025.

Mr. Gonzales: Between 2011 and 2025, $135 million, and that $100 million is to cover for 14 years of outstanding overtime for our prison officers?

Hon. Alexander: Mr. Chairman, $135 million out of it.

Mr. Gonzales: The $135 million—you say $135 million of that is to cover outstanding arrears for 14 years to the tune of $135 million? The outstanding balance from this, is it going to be sufficient to cover for overtime for the 2027 fiscal year?

Hon. Alexander: Yes. I would want to answer that yes. If needs be, we will come back. However, because of the recruitment that is taking place presently, we would see, going forward, a tremendous decrease in overtime at the nation's prisons.

4.20 p.m.

Mr. Gonzales: Do you have an idea as to how many officers are to benefit from this payment of $135 million?

Hon. Alexander: Not before me.

Mr. Gonzales: Can you provide that information for us at an appropriate time?

Hon. Alexander: Well, it will be considered.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, following up on the questions and conversations that you all were just having on this same overtime—if it is 14 years, that would include prison officers who would have retired during that period of time as well.

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And this would be pursuant to some collective agreement? Where does the overtime for 14 years since 2011 come from?

Hon. Alexander: My understanding, Member, is that the persons who accumulate the overtime would be judged by the time they would have left and the arrangement in terms of salary, negotiations, and overtime.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. And it would have to be retroactive, et cetera.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: Has the audit been completed as yet—as in process?

Hon. Alexander: It is in process.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 004: Immigration. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, under 004: Immigration—01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance—there has been no increase under this line Item, but the Revised Estimate for 2026 was the same: $71,700,000; that was the Revised Estimate. But I see here in the Estimate that this includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents. But it being revised to the $71,700,000 for 2026—this fiscal year we are closing now and the same figure being provided now for 2027—are they going to put additional officers under this same $77.1 million?

Hon. Alexander: Hon. Member, we have a vacancy for—recruitment is ongoing.

Mr. Young SC: That is the Public Service Commission recruitment, right?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah. And we have a vacant post of 122. As soon as we start filling more of these posts, we can return mid-year for additional if the need be.

Mr. Young SC: So this does not cover any potential increases because of course—

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mr. Young SC:—it is the same as the bill from last year.

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Chair, I am under 02: Goods and Services.

Mr. Chairman: We have not gone there yet.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: I will be happy to go there once you invite me.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and services; Item 01: General Administration. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, I am at Sub-Item 16: Contract Employment. The allocation that you received for 2027 is $15.6 million. How many persons do you have employed in the Immigration Division that would be paid under this Item for this allocation?

Hon. Alexander: Member, this applies to the Ministry and not to Immigration department.

Mr. Gonzales: No, it is under Immigration—

Hon. Alexander: This line Item.

Mr. Gonzales: What is that?

Hon. Alexander: This line Item—Contract Employment—is to the Ministry and not to the Immigration department.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. How many persons, then, do you have employed as contract officers that would be paid under Sub-Item 16?

Hon. Alexander: We have the number of posts filled—1-1-5—115.

Mr. Gonzales: What is that?

Hon. Alexander: One-one-five.

Mr. Gonzales: One hundred and fifteen officers?

Hon. Alexander: Posts vacant, yeah.

Mr. Sturge: Posts filled.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Gonzales: So, it is 115 persons that you have employed as contract officers?

Hon. Alexander: In the Ministry.

Mr. Gonzales: In the Ministry? How many vacancies do you have?

Hon. Alexander: Two hundred and sixty-eight.

Mr. Gonzales: Two hundred and sixty-eight vacancies?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Gonzales: When do you have a plan to fill those vacancies?

Hon. Alexander: We have—

Mr. Gonzales: So, just to be clear Minister, I just want to ensure that you are answering the question that I am asking and the line Item. So we are under Goods and Services—02, Travelling and Subsistence—01, and Sub-Item 16: Contract Employment. Do you have that?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Gonzales: That is the Item that you are on, right?

Hon. Alexander: "Umm hmm."

Mr. Gonzales: So is it correct that you have 115 officers employed under Contract Employment that would be paid under this Item?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes? And you are saying that there are also 268 vacant positions?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: When does the Ministry intend to fill those vacancies?

Hon. Alexander: We are looking at 2027.

Mr. Gonzales: In the 2027 fiscal year?

Hon. Alexander: Not all the vacancies, "eh".

Mr. Gonzales: What is that?

Hon. Alexander: The more critical vacancies would be filled in this fiscal.

Mr. Gonzales: I guess the more critical positions.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, in this fiscal.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. So the $15.6 million allocation, would it be sufficient to pay for the outstanding vacancies or some of the vacancies that you propose to fill in this current fiscal year?

Hon. Alexander: Some of the vacancies.

Mr. Gonzales: The $15.6 million—I just want to be very clear—that is to pay outstanding salaries for the 2027 fiscal year for the 115 persons who are employed as contract officers.

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes. You have 268 vacancies, and you plan to fill some of the critical positions. Am I correct?

Hon. Alexander: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. When and if you fill those critical positions, would the $15.6 million allocation be sufficient?

Hon. Alexander: If it is not, I will return.

Mr. Gonzales: If it is not—

Hon. Alexander: If it is not, I will return.

Mr. Gonzales: I guess you would talk to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, thanks.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, line Item 05: Telephones—hopefully the Permanent Secretaries would be able to assist with this. The telephone numbers at the Ministry of Homeland Security, 627-1032 and 224-4667—are you familiar with those two numbers—main lines—for the Ministry

of Homeland Security?

Hon. Alexander: Say the question again, Member.

Mr. Young SC: The telephone numbers for the Ministry of Homeland Security—well, first of all, let me ask the question this way: This $370,000 for Telephones is to pay for the telephones at the Ministry of Homeland Security. Correct?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And I saw in 2026, the amount was put at $1.7 million—roughly $1.8 million—and then it was revised to $370,000. Do you see that?

Hon. Alexander: "Umm hmm."

Mr. Young SC: So that is a drop of just about $1.4 million last year that was taken away from Telephones. Correct?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young: Now, the same is being provided for this fiscal—$370,000. The main telephone numbers for the Ministry of Homeland Security are 627-1032 and 224-4667. Correct?

Hon. Alexander: Only the number that starts with 224.

Mr. Young SC: So, the 224-4667 is the Ministry of Homeland Security number?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

4.30 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Is that bill current? Is it up to date?

Hon. Alexander: There are some arrears associated with the bill.

Mr. Young SC: Well, might I suggest, through you, to the public servants who handle the money that they pay the bill because the lines are cut and people have been complaining to me about calling that number and they cannot get through because they are saying the line is just cut.

Hon. Alexander: No, no.

Mr. Young SC: It rings twice and then it just cuts off. Well, I am just passing on the information; you could ignore it and say no. But I have now told you all and made sure it is covered under this. Thank you.

Hon. Alexander: **"D**at person must be "doh have money on their phone."

Mr. Young SC: They have no money on their phone? Well, if that is how you respond to the population, so be it.

Hon. Alexander: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 02/001/36: Extraordinary Expenditure. Hon. Minister, can you indicate what specific Items or activities are classified under Extraordinary Expenditure?

Hon. Alexander: 52/001. Yes, Member, could you repeat the question again?

Mr. Marcelle: Do you want me to repeat the question? Yeah.

Hon. Alexander: Repeat the question.

Mr. Marcelle: So, line Item 02/001/36: Extraordinary Expenditure. I am asking what specific Items or activities are classified under this line Item?

Hon. Alexander: What I can tell you, Member, under this line Item, under the Ministry of Homeland Security, it provides for a dedicated fund for specialised, sensitive and operational operations and equipment.

Mr. Marcelle: Under the same line Item. What criteria are being used to determine whether the different expenses qualify and go into this line Item as opposed to another? What are the—so in other words, what are the internal controls and approvals that allow the Ministry to use from this line Item?

Hon. Alexander: Member, once it is considered a national security interest,

sensitive intelligence, and not for the public interest, it falls under this line Item.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, on this line Item. I am going to line Item 02/001/22: Short-term Employment. In—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Marcelle: 02/001/22: Short-term Employment.

Hon. Alexander: What page?

Mr. Marcelle: Same page, page 453. With me?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Marcelle: With me? Yeah. In 2026, there was $1.7 million allocated and there was a Revised Estimate of $4.2 million, an increase of almost $3 million. Can you indicate, firstly, what accounts for that increase within the last fiscal?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah. There were a number of contract employments that came to an end. And some of the persons would have been retained on short-term contracts.

Mr. Marcelle: All right. How many—out of that $42 million, which I see is continuing to 2027.

Hon. Alexander: $4.2.

Mr. Marcelle: $4.2 million, sorry. In terms of it continuing into 2027. Can you indicate how many employees are on short-term as we speak in the Ministry?

Hon. Alexander: We have 28 employees at this time on short-term.

Mr. Marcelle: Were these employees continuing from the former Ministry of National Security, or is it a case where they have been brought on in terms of under the new Ministry?

Hon. Alexander: Continuing.

Mr. Marcelle: Continuing. All right. Deeply grateful. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I had my hand up.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, I was not told that. Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I am back on 02/001/36: Extraordinary Expenditure. Would the Minister be able to indicate whether, by chance, given the large sum under this that has been allocated here, if by chance any of the expenditure here may be recurrent in nature and therefore may be better classified under a different line Item?

Hon. Alexander: All right. My understanding is that this operates under a special division system and it cannot be reclassified.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So this is the best mechanism—

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—for using this funding. It just seems, Mr. Chairman, it is a really large amount, $51 million. But I suppose the Ministry of Homeland Security would best understand how it is used. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. So we go now to 002: Fire Service. Member for Diego Martin North/East. Quick out of the blocks.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I said quick out of the blocks.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*] I had to keep it up too. All right.

Mr. Chairman: I am sure that might be quite a challenge.

Mr. Imbert: Not at all. You could go ahead with your insults, you know. "It doh bother me." Let us go to 02/002/17: Training. I observed that only $60,000 was spent on training for the Fire Service in 2026, but you have an allocation of $5 million in 2027. Could you explain the huge adjustment in Training for the Fire

Service between '26 and '27?

Hon. Alexander: Member, you need to speak into the mic. I did not hear the question.

Mr. Imbert: That was because the Chairman was making rude jokes. 02/002/17: Training.

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: You were making rude jokes. "Dohtry dat." The video is there. The 2026 Revised Estimate was $60,000 for Training, and the 2027 Estimate is $5 million. Can you explain why, having only spent $60,000 on training of fire officers or for Fire Service in 2026, you intend to spend $5 million in 2027?

Hon. Alexander: Member, $60,000 was for in-house training. And then in 2027, there will be an addition of—how many officers? [*Member confers with technocrat*] We will be having some "train the trainer" courses, emergency management technicians, 91 persons. So a number of persons are going to be trained within the Fire Service.

Mr. Imbert: 91?

Hon. Alexander: And we have arrears to COSTAATT.

Mr. Imbert: Arrears to COSTAATT?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: For what? You said it was in-house. COSTAATT is not part of your Ministry, yet.

Hon. Alexander: Previous, 2025.

Mr. Imbert: "Allyuh does move ting around", but it is not part of your Ministry yet.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, 2025.

Mr. Imbert: All right. Okay. So you are outsourcing the training, you are bringing in providers, and you are going to spend $5 million on training for 91 fire officers, is that what you said?

Hon. Alexander: Not only 91 fire officers. There are other persons we would have mentioned within the training course and all that.

Mr. Imbert: All right. Okay. It is all right.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under 02/002/03: Uniforms. Would the Minister be able to indicate—

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Minister be able to indicate how many uniforms will be purchased with this amount of money? And what would the procurement method be to acquire the uniforms?

Hon. Alexander: Member, for as long as we could remember, the Fire Service did not receive any uniforms.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: For as long as you could remember?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah. As long as, sorry, I should correct myself. As long as they could remember—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay.

Hon. Alexander:—they did not receive any uniforms. The purchase of uniforms for the fire suit, footwear, caps, gloves, helmets, coveralls for fire officers. The cost is $13,000 to outfit one firefighter kit. Kit and helmet, boots, jackets, and— [*Member confers with technocrat*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Retardant.

Hon. Alexander: Ah?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am just saying they have to use fire-retardant uniforms.

4.40 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, particular type of equipment needed in order to get the job done. "Can't just go and buy any pants and put dem in it." So, the right equipment that is authorized, uniform that is authorized, to protect both the fire officer in the execution of his duties, and in his bid to save members of the public.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. "So, yuh cyah just buy like ah superman outfit?"

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, could I just ask one other question?

Hon. Alexander: Yes. Ma'am.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What is the procurement method that would be used to acquire the uniforms?

Hon. Alexander: Not many persons in Trinidad and Tobago provide this type of equipment and uniforms. So, we might have to do selective tender.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Des Vignes: On the same item in terms of uniforms, how long does the procurement process take in terms of these particular uniforms?

Hon. Alexander: We cannot answer that just yet, Member, because it has not been done just yet, but we would try our very best to have it done in the fiscal year as soon as possible, so the officers could be equipped and properly uniformed to assist members of the public.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. So, in 2026 there was an allocation of $2.187 million and the revised estimate 1.97, which means some activity would have taken place in terms of the uniforms. What was the activity? Were some purchased? What

happened there?

Hon. Alexander: Yes, I recall some gloves and other things were purchased but not enough. And then, we have an additional—officers being recruited as we speak. We are waiting on the Public Service Commission to hire 150 officers, and then when we came into office we would have also engaged 280 auxiliary fire officers into the regular fire service.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay, so those new officers, they got uniforms?

Hon. Alexander: Not all of them.

Mr. Des Vignes: Not all of them but you said, "no fire officers got uniforms" a little while ago.

Hon. Alexander: That is what I am saying, when you say "uniform"—glove.

Mr. Des Vignes: No, but the new fire officers, "I doh think dey walking around in dey shirt and pants dat dey go to de mall in".

Hon. Alexander: What you are seeing there is things from the past.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. So, $20 million going forward is set to outfit how many fire officers in all?

Hon. Alexander: If you look at the line Item, there are 1,500 fire fighter suits, so we are buying items because one person might have to have two—

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, yes.

Hon. Alexander:—or should have two.

Mr. Des Vignes: But just for the record, Minister, the line Item does not have the amount of fire officers in it. Our document may be different than yours, but just highlighting—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Alexander: "Oh, my paper alone have it?"

Mr. Des Vignes: Well, your own will have that because yours is more detailed as

the Minister, that is why we ask the questions here, Minister, respectfully.

Hon. Alexander: "So, yuh understand what I'm saying?"

Mr. Chairman: All right. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 02/002/22 and 02/002/16, I will start with Contract Employment. In 2026, there was an allocation of $500,000 for Contract Employment, and then a Revised Estimate of $155,000 can the hon. Minister indicate how many employees under the fire service were actually receiving employment from this line Item?

Hon. Alexander: *Dos*. Two.

Mr. Marcelle: After having been allocated at first $500,000 and being reduced to $155,000 are there any vacancies or short fall in terms of the contract staff that the—

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mr. Marcelle: All right. Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Chair. I just want to point the Minister to Standing Order 1, that speaks to the official language of this Parliament—

Hon. Alexander: It is English.

Mr. Gonzales:—and the official language is English, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Therefore, Mr. Chair, the word "*dos*", whilst I understand but the Standing Order speaks to English.

Hon. Alexander: "He forget, he forget, he forget."

Mr. Gonzales: Probably he is dealing too much of people in the detention centre in Arima, you understand? The Immigration Detention Centre.

Mr. Chairman: You know in colloquial Hindi "*dos*" means friend. "You

know—I doh know what dos de Minister was referring to, but in colloquial hindi dos means friend. So I doh know if you know which dos the Minister was referring to is exclusively Spanish. How you know dat? I don't know, but dos, as far as I am aware—"

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: As far as I am aware colloquial Hindi refers to "dos" as "friend".

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I think you are under estimating the Minister. But anyway, let us move on—

Hon. Alexander: Friend.

Mr. Chairman:—Diego Martin North/East, who seem to have lowered his hand a bit.

Mr. Imbert: I supposed to keep it up right through?

Mr. Chairman: It would be a challenge.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: 002: Fire Service; 03: Uniforms. I will ask my questions one at a time. How many active fire officers are there in Trinidad and Tobago that use uniforms, wear uniforms?

Hon. Alexander: All right, 2,744.

Mr. Imbert: And 280 auxiliary fire officers.

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Approximately 3,000 then? Right. You said that one uniform including all the fittings, and other things cost $13,000, and then you said "a fire officer should have two"?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, how many of those things can you buy with $20 million?

Hon. Alexander: So, Member we are buying 1,500 fire fighters—

Mr. Imbert: "In sets, 1,500 sets, boots, hat, all dem ting. Yuh had ah whole list of things, jacket, hard hat, helmet—"

Hon. Alexander: Now, if I finish you will have a better understanding of the—

Mr. Imbert: Oh, no problem. Sorry, apologize, apologize.

Hon. Alexander: All right, 1,500 firefighting turn out suits, 600 firefighting gloves, 1,500 firefighting helmets, 300 safety helmets, 1,000 cargo pants, 1,000 ankle boots, top fire boots, that means the high ones, and that is it.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. And using your figure of $13,000 for the complete kit, all the things you mentioned there, how many fire officers can be accommodated with the $20 million in terms of a complete kit?

Hon. Alexander: At least 1,500 persons.

Mr. Imbert: Right, but that is a single kit not a double as you have suggested.

Hon. Alexander: Single kit.

Mr. Imbert: So therefore, about half of the service would not get uniforms in this fiscal?

Hon. Alexander: Mostly half.

Mr. Imbert: Approximately 3,000 to say 1,500 kits. So, if you give people one instead of two 1,500 officers will not be able to get uniforms.

Hon. Alexander: In a bid to perform their duties some of the officers went so far as to repair their kits.

Mr. Imbert: I gather the answer is yes. Just about half of them will get and half will have to wait. Okay, all right.

Hon. Alexander: Most of the half.

Mr. Imbert: All right.

4.50 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair. I just want to ask the Minister one question on line Item 17: Training.

Hon. Alexander: Firefighters again?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, 002; Training, 17. Minister, in recent times, we have had a number of bomb threats around the country. I think it was somewhere in the region of 11 reported in like about 40 minutes. I know the fire services provided support to the TTPS in the investigation of those matters. One of the things that came out in the discussion is that currently the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service does not have any qualified bomb technicians, which is a very serious matter. I think a senior officer was quoted as having said something as critical as that.

The question, therefore, is whether in the training, where you have received a significant allocation of $4.9 million, if consideration could be given to the training of the bomb technicians for the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, so that they can provide the support to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service on these high incidents of bomb threats taking place in public buildings?

Hon. Alexander: Member, it is something that will be considered. However, understanding that type of training, coming from law enforcement, it will mean that you would have to leave this country to really get the certification that you are looking for as it relates to that specification or specialization.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Alexander: So, it is something I will look at and engage it as soon as I can.

Mr. Gonzales: Yeah. Just to close off on this point, I do not want to belabour it.

It is a very serious matter—

Hon. Alexander: It is.

Mr. Gonzales:—because the TTPS, in investigating reports of bomb threats, they need the support of the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, who in turn would ensure that buildings are cleared so that persons can occupy. You have a situation where the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service does not have any qualified bomb technicians, they will not be able to provide the TTPS with that level of support and therefore, I am asking that consideration be given under this line Item to provide the necessary training to officers.

Hon. Alexander: All right.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Hon. Alexander: And again, it is about Homeland Security working together. So the police, with their equipment and otherwise, and the animals available, they sweep, and the fire service provides that other level of the support just in case.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, based on what you said about the certification being done overseas, is any of this allocation air marked for overseas training at all, or is it all local?

Hon. Alexander: At this time, I understand that it is local. However, fortunately, for us, on many occasions, other countries invite us to come and participate and be certified according to what it is. So, it is a government-to-government approach, and it works well.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Thank you for that. I would like to ask about the Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment, which is 02/002/09. Could you say what assets are expected to be leased, and what is the monthly cost?

Hon. Alexander: 09?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment, $30,000.

Hon. Alexander: Member, it is just really buses from the PTSC to transport the fire officers and personnel to and from things like parades—with the military parades, all of that—different parts of the country.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, all right. Thank you very much.

Hon. Alexander: You are welcome.

Mr. Chairman: 003: Prison Service; 004: Immigration. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: 004/01/12, I am noticing that the original allocation for Materials and Supplies—

Hon. Alexander: Member—[*Inaudible*]—

Hon. Member: Immigration.

Hon. Alexander: "I see you putting up your hand dey. You know you and I have a history of more than and less than, and all kind of thing, right".

Mr. Imbert: No problem, I will be patient with you.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, I know. I am very patient with you today.

Mr. Imbert: Page 456.

Hon. Alexander: Right.

Mr. Imbert: 004: Immigration; Goods and Services; 12: Materials and Supplies. I noticed an original allocation for Materials and Supplies for the Immigration Division—which must consume a lot of materials and supplies—an original allocation of $6.4 million in 2026, but the expenditure was only $210,000. Can you explain what happened there?

Hon. Alexander: Member, this is for the purchase of IT supplies—

Mr. Imbert: Only?

Hon. Alexander:—HDMI cables, extenders and the purchase of passport books—

Mr. Imbert: "Ah ha". Go ahead.

Hon. Alexander: You like that?

Mr. Imbert: No, well, you come to a big item now, passports.

Hon. Alexander: I know, we know.

Mr. Imbert: Go ahead. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Hon. Alexander:—and anything in the core of the Immigration Department.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. So, since this Item is miscellaneous Materials and Supplies for the Immigration Division, including passports, and there was an allocation of $6.4 million in 2026, but the spend was only $210,000, just less than 10 per cent, 5 per cent, 4 per cent, what went on there? How come the money was not spent on all the Materials and Supplies, including passport books that the Immigration Division requires?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the expenditure was actually $7million. The Actual spend.

Mr. Imbert: So, why does this book say $210,000? Was it a mistake?

Hon. Alexander: It looks like an error.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, no problem. So, you are saying that the figure of $210,000 as the Revised Estimate for Materials and Supplies, including passport books—I know there was a terrible shortage last year—is an error? Is the 2027 provision of $210,000 also an error? That is two errors back-to-back?

Hon. Alexander: Yes, Member, I understand that money would be vired into the Vote.

Mr. Imbert: I beg your pardon?

Hon. Alexander: Money would be vired into the Vote.

Mr. Imbert: No, I am not arguing about what you will do. I am just asking, why $210,000, when you are actually saying that you spent $7 million—

Hon. Alexander: Member, technology has hit us at every angle, and so has the Ministry of Homeland Security, as we intend to transition from machine-readable passports to e-passports.

Mr. Imbert: And that will cost only $210,000? So, I am looking at the 2027 allocation now of $210,000.

Hon. Alexander: There is a line Item in the *Development Programme*.

Mr. Imbert: "Ah coming to that. We ain't reach dey yet". I intend to tell the Chair in front that I am speaking on all, all right? "And have meh hand up from de beginning". But go ahead.

Hon. Alexander: "Doh let eight o'clock meet yuh".

Mr. Imbert: I just want to know if Materials and Supplies, this $210,000 expenditure, is an error—because you said you spent $7 million. Is it that you only plan to spend $210,000, or is it another error? That is all. There is no big thing. You just have to say so.

Mr. Tancoo: Allow me, please.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Minister of Finance, sorry.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. The figure $210,000 here does not reflect—as you are very well aware, these are Revised Estimates. Actuals will come forward. At the point in time of printing the books, the payments for several other Items had not yet come in. And therefore, those are not reflected in the Revised Estimates that you have here.

Mr. Imbert: Right, okay, we got that. But what about the 2027 Estimate of

$210,000?

Mr. Tancoo: The '27 Estimate would have been based on what was used thus far at the time of printing the books for 2026, the Revised Estimates at that point in time. As the Minister would have indicated the possibility of virements and the possibility of supplementals—

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: 006—

Hon. Alexander: "He ha more. He ha more".

Mr. Chairman: You still have—

Mr. Imbert: Before you said that, I had my hand up. I am still on 004.

Mr. Chairman: Go right ahead.

Mr. Imbert: 51: Relocation of Overseas Staff, I saw you had an original allocation of $6.375 million , but the Estimate—I cannot even say expenditure anymore—was $339,000. What happened there? You did not relocate the staff again?

5. 00 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: What page are you on?

Mr. Imbert: Same page, 456, 004: Immigration; 51: Relocation of Overseas Staff. I have not moved from the page.

Hon. Alexander: Member, relative to that line Item, we have spent over $1 million.

Mr. Imbert: Over $1 million?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: So, this is an error, as well? This 339 is an error?

Hon. Alexander: It is not an error.

Mr. Tancoo: With the greatest of respect—

Mr. Imbert: It is inaccurate.

Mr. Tancoo:—it is not an error.

Mr. Imbert: It is inaccurate?

Mr. Tancoo: It is not an error. It is an Estimate. And as I indicated just now, these are Estimates and Revised Estimates and at the point in time of printing the books the documentation had not been—

Mr. Imbert: Thank you Minister of Finance, thank you. But the substance of my question was, having allocated $6.3 million for relocation of staff and having spent, whether it is $300,000 or a million, it is much less than $6 million. Was there some issue with the relocation of staff? Is it that you could not relocate all the staff that you planned to relocate?

Hon. Alexander: The Member on the other side, again, lend me your lips, let me hear your question again one more time.

Mr. Imbert: Sure. The expenditure, whether it is $339,000 or a million, as is being said, is still far less than the allocation of $6.37 million. Is it that you had a problem or experienced difficulty in relocating staff or they did not want to come back? Why did you only spend about 10 per cent of what you plan to spend?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the payment of relocation allowance to immigration officers assigned overseas, seven embassies: London, China, Canada, Washington, Miami and New York. That is the million dollars.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, I got that. But you had an original allocation of 6.3. I have accepted that you spent a million and not 339. But a million is far less than 6.3. All I am asking, I know sometimes these officers get lost in these overseas missions, "doh come back" for a long time. Sometimes they do not want to come

back, they give trouble. All I am asking is, is it that the number of persons you plan to relocate and the actual number relocated there was a vast disparity between the two? Is it that you plan to relocate 10 people or 20 people, and you could only do three? What happened?

Hon. Alexander: You know, Member, I recall what you speak. This line Item in Homeland Security we are not about only saving lives, we also saved $5million.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: He saved $5 million. [*Laughter*] All right, all right, take win. Let me go now to 2027. Why is it you only have $339,000 for 2027? Is it that they just repeated what is in the book for 2026 Revised?

Hon. Alexander: I think the Minister of Finance already explained that.

Mr. Imbert: No, no, he explained the Revised; he did not explain the 2027 allocation.

Hon. Alexander: Yes, he did.

Mr. Tancoo: I also explained that.

Mr. Imbert: What was the explanation? I am sorry, I did not hear that. Let me hear, repeat.

Mr. Tancoo: I also explained that the 2027 Estimate would have been based on what was utilized at the point in time in printing the books. The information before us—

Mr. Imbert: So, you are saying this one too?

Mr. Tancoo: Same thing.

Mr. Imbert: All right, same thing. Thank you. All right, no problem.

Mr. Chairman: 005: Fire Service Tobago. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, I am at 005/08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and

Storage. Can you indicate where this building is located? So, I am at 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage. That is 005: Fire Service Tobago; 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage. Where is this building located or facility?

Hon. Alexander: Well, the Administration Building is in Bacolet.

Mr. Gonzales: So that is a rented building for the administration building?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: What is the monthly rent for that building?

Hon. Alexander: $39,375.

Mr. Gonzales: Who is the owner of that building?

Hon. Alexander: I have no idea.

Mr. Gonzales: You would provide that in writing?

Hon. Alexander: I should ask you.

Mr. Gonzales: I did not rent any building.

Hon. Alexander: Exactly. But you were under the Ministry of National Security.

Mr. Gonzales: I am not the Minister.

Hon. Alexander: "Eh"?

Mr. Gonzales: I am not the Minister.

Hon. Alexander: You are not the Minister again, but it was under you.

Mr. Gonzales: So, is it $39,000 a month, Minister?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: $39,000 a month.

Hon. Alexander: And I have another one at Scarborough Fire Station, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Gonzales: Shirvan?

Hon. Alexander: Sherwood.

Mr. Gonzales: Sherwood?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Gonzales: And what is the monthly rental there?

Hon. Alexander: $39,375, also.

Mr. Gonzales: $39,375?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Gonzales: So, the allocation of $709,000 is for the rental of two facilities in Tobago?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 006: Prison Service Tobago; Item 007: Immigration Tobago; Item 008: Immigration Detention Centre. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration, pages 459 to 461. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. Minor Equipment, 01, 001, 002. Actually, Mr. Chairman, I would like to speak about 002 on page 460.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry?

Mr. Imbert: I would like to refer to 002 on page 460, the next page.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, well perhaps you should not have put up your hand so quickly.

Mr. Imbert: No, I should because I take in front.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Chairman: Sorry? You know there is a Trini saying for that, right, but it might be unparliamentary to refer to that Trini saying. So perhaps we should move

now to Item 002: Fire Service.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. Page 460, Fire Service, 002: Minor Equipment Purchases; 01: Vehicles. I noticed that there was an allocation of $11.2 million in 2026. But the Revised Estimate is $6,650,000. Why that underperformance in terms of the usage of the allocation?

Hon. Alexander: Member, the procurement process, it was not very timely.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Alexander: But we will fix that.

Mr. Imbert: I am satisfied with that answer.

Hon. Alexander: We will fix that.

Mr. Imbert: I am satisfied with that answer.

Hon. Alexander: We will fix that.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I would like to move to 003 now with your permission.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mr. Imbert: Sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am also on 03/002/01: Vehicles. Would the Minister indicate what types and quantities of vehicles are planned for procurement with this amount? And which fire stations will be receiving the vehicles? And when will the vehicles be available for deployment?

Hon. Alexander: We are looking at two command vehicles—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Two command vehicles.

Hon. Alexander: —and eight utility pick-up trucks.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Right.

Hon. Alexander: The procurement has not yet started, but they will be procured

this fiscal.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. And could I ask in terms of the actual receipt of the vehicles, do you have an idea once the procurement process is completed, how soon they would arrive here?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we do not want to make any promises or lay things on the line. As soon as we do it, we will be able to probably share in this Parliament as to an update, as the case may be.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Thank you very much.

5. 10 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: 003: Prison Service. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I noticed that a relatively modest sum of $795,000 was allocated under 003/01: Vehicles. What kind of vehicle was that supposed to be?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we have—

Mr. Imbert: This is 2026, eh, original. I am not gone on to 2027 yet.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah. There was a procurement issue with this also.

Mr. Imbert: For what kind of vehicle? A car, a truck, what is it? A prison van?

Hon. Alexander: We had ambulance, tractor, SUVs, 10-tonne trucks, 25-seater passenger buses, two three-ton trucks again.

Mr. Imbert: Is this a US figure or TT? You were buying all of that with $795,000? There is an allocation here of $795,000. You just called out about 20 vehicles for $795,000. What is going on? What was that 795 for?

Hon. Alexander: Mmm?

Mr. Imbert: This 795 here, what kind of vehicle was it for?

Hon. Alexander: Same. Member, we think, and you have to understand the

strategy. So, what we do, we start with the ambulance—

Mr. Imbert: So, the 795 is for an ambulance?

Hon. Alexander:—and then we start procuring things, so by the time it reaches to that level, we will be able to come and get money at a different time.

Mr. Imbert: All right, so it is for an ambulance?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: And therefore, in 2027, you have put the exact same figure. That is also for an ambulance?

Hon. Alexander: Ambulance is needed.

Mr. Imbert: I am just asking.

Hon. Alexander: Ambulance is needed.

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, you could not buy one in 2026? Okay, unfortunate.

Mr. Chairman: 004: Immigration; 005: Fire Service Tobago; 008: Immigration Detention Centre; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 001: Regional Bodies. This is 461 to 463. 004: International Bodies; 005: Non-Profit Institutions; 007: Households. 009—are you on Households? 009: Other Transfers. Port of Spain North. 462 to 463.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Minister, I see under 009—well, 004/009, line Item 15: Settlement of the Arbitration to TSTT for CCTV, and a figure of $112,500,000 being placed there. Is this the full and final settlement?

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mr. Young SC: It is not the full and final settlement?

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mr. Young SC: So, what, it remains in arbitration or negotiation?

Hon. Alexander: No.

Hon. Alexander: Arbitration ended and it was settled at $225million.

Mr. Young SC: So, this is a part payment?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, part payment .

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09, pages 205 to 207 inclusive, Item 004: Social Infrastructure.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: You know, I am seeing him. I know. I am just getting to the point. Yes, Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. In terms of the Prison Service, the Refurbishment of Buildings at the Youth Training Centre, $1 million was allocated. Only $100,000 is showing up in the Revised Estimates. What happened there? New Training Centre, that would be 004, C: 004. Prison Service.

Hon. Alexander: Member, this too was a procurement issue.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. All right. Can I go now to the next Item, which is the Upgrade of the Plumbing of the Extended Remand Facility: 007? $2 million was allocated, only $1.6 million was spent. So, what happened there? Because I am pretty sure that is a direly, desperately needed service, upgrading the plumbing in the Extended Remand Facility. What happened there? This would have already been procured, so what happened?

Hon. Alexander: What would have been procured, Member?

Mr. Imbert: This was a reduction, a 20 per cent reduction from the allocation to the Revised Estimate.

Hon. Alexander: I do not understand the question, Member.

Mr. Imbert: What was responsible for the underperformance in this particular Item in terms of execution?

Hon. Alexander: Member, again, procurement issues.

Mr. Imbert: No, but procurement would have occurred. This is an ongoing thing.

Hon. Alexander: Nah, nah. I think you have your—

Mr. Imbert: It is not ongoing?

Hon. Alexander: You have some issues there.

Mr. Imbert: Or you had some issues with execution?

Hon. Alexander: No. Issues with the procurement.

Mr. Imbert: I am very surprised because I know it is an ongoing project, but it is okay.

Hon. Alexander: All right. Let me see if I can go into it for you. All right. It is the installation of 52 stainless steel combination of panels. The purchase of 52 stainless steel panels with toilet is required to improve sanitary conditions at the Extended Remand Facility, where inmates currently rely on pails.

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, I know that is the project, but you did not spend as much as you should have. So, you are saying it is procurement, not execution. I will take your word for it. I will not argue with you.

Hon. Alexander: And the RFP was only—

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, Chair?

Mr. Imbert: I am not arguing with him.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may, Chair? The project started later than anticipated as a result of the procurement issues raised by my colleague, and therefore, we were not properly able to fully expend the $2 million. We expended $1.6 with the

expectations— As you indicated, the project is continuing, and we have allocated $5.5 million in this year's budget for that purpose.

Mr. Imbert: Who is this contractor?

Hon. Alexander: No contract—"it cyar have no contract if you didn't finish de"

Mr. Imbert: Who is the contractor?

Mr. Young SC: Who is the contractor carrying out the upgrade? There must be a contractor.

Mr. Imbert: Well, you ask them.

Mr. Young SC: Well I know you—

Mr. Imbert: Nah you go ahead.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On 007: Upgrade of the Plumbing and Extended Remand Facility and the planned expenditure of $5.5 million in this fiscal, who is the contractor carrying out this work?

Hon. R. Alexander: The same one.

Mr. Young SC: Who is this same one?

Hon. Alexander: The RFP for this was issued in August.

Mr. Young SC: Ah ha?

Hon. Alexander: No contractor—

Mr. Young SC: So, how did you expend $1.6million?

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, I am not hearing the Minister of Finance. He did what?

Mr. Tancoo: I am assuming that the procured items would have been listed out.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Tancoo: We will have to provide that for you in writing. I do not have that

information.

Mr. Young SC: So, you are saying $1.6 million was procured. We do not know who it was procured by, so now this $5.5 to carry out the work has not yet been awarded?

Mr. Tancoo: Correct .

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, 008: Establishment of an Elders' Complex at Golden Grove Prison. I see that $1.6 million was allocated, but only $650,000 was spent. What is the reason for that underperformance?

Hon. Alexander: Again, no money was spent.

Mr. Imbert: No money at all? So, why do we have Revised Estimate of $650,000? Is that an error?

Hon. Alexander: The Prison Service had a procurement issue for all—

Mr. Imbert: I gathered that. I am talking about the 650.

Hon. Alexander: —their projects, and this was one of them.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Minister, thank you for that.

Hon. Alexander: No money was spent.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. So, you are saying no money was spent on this Item, Elders' Complex at Golden Grove, but there is a figure here in the Revised Estimate of $650,000. So, since you are saying nothing was spent.

Hon. Alexander: It was not spent.

Mr. Imbert: Why do we have—no, why is the Revised Estimate $650,000?

5.20 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Since you are saying nothing was spent.

Hon. Alexander: It was not spent.

Mr. Imbert: Why do we have—no, why is the Revised Estimate $650,000?

Mr. Tancoo: I could answer that, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: Sure.

Mr. Tancoo: Again, these books were printed in anticipation of the end of the financial year. It was anticipated we would have been able to cover this cost. However, no money was spent under this Head.

Mr. Imbert: I know, the books are printed just a week before, so in seven days you expected to spend that? All right, no problem. Could I move on now to another Item? Decommissioning of the Port of Spain Prison. Again, $1 million spent out of a $1.5 million allocation. Two reasons: why is it that you did not spend the full amount, and what is involved in this project where $1 million is allegedly spent, because I am now hearing this may not be accurate?

Hon. Alexander: Member, 50 per cent down payment—

Mr. Imbert: A 50 per cent down payment?

Hon. Alexander:—in the amount of $429,000 for the purchase and installation of three washers and dryers for the Golden Grove Prison.

Mr. Imbert: I think we are in the wrong Item. I was talking about the decommissioning of the Port of Spain Prison.

Hon. Alexander: This is to move the prison from Port of Spain to Golden Grove for persons on remand and all of that.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, so you bought material, fixtures, so that you could relocate people to Golden Grove?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: That is what I see. Okay, well, I have nothing more on prisons, but I have quite a lot on other things. Mr. Chairman, so it is up to you. Over to you.

Hon. Alexander: Just now it is eight o'clock, you know.

Mr. Imbert: Well, it is of plenty divisions, you know.

Mr. Chairman: All right. E. Immigration, F. Fire Service. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. Just one second. Let me just make sure we are all on the same page. All right. Purchase of Vehicles and Equipment for the Fire Service, 001. We had an original allocation of $18 million, but you only spent, assuming this is correct $9.9 million. What caused that?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we would have spent $14.2 million at this time.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, this figure of $9.9 million is inaccurate since you are saying you spent $14.2 million.

Hon. Alexander: It is an estimate.

Mr. Imbert: I know that, but the Estimate is off, because you said you spent $14.2 million.

Hon. Alexander: "Dais wha ah say, yuh want me to tell yuh is ah estimate, and you know?"

Mr. Imbert: All right, no problem.

Hon. Alexander: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: Why do you have a zero allocation for 2027 under this Item, Purchase of Vehicles and Equipment for the Fire Service?

Hon. Alexander: I intend to seek alternative funding for any additional spending.

Mr. Imbert: When you say alternative, could you explain the meaning of the word "alternative"? What does it mean?

Hon. Alexander: Different grants—

Mr. Imbert: Your additional supplementary funding—

Hon. Alexander: Different grants—

Mr. Imbert:—of budget financing.

Hon. Alexander:—via different grants—

Mr. Imbert:—loan financing. What is it?

Hon. Alexander: Different grants and on so.

Mr. Imbert: Pardon?

Hon. Alexander: Different grants. I would look for different places to see if I could get—

Mr. Imbert: Okay, I see, you are looking for a donation. All right, okay.

Hon. Alexander: You have?

Mr. Imbert: Okay, okay, all right. So, let me move on to Refurbishment of Vehicles for the Fire Services Division. Again, $2 million allocated, only $1 million indicated in the book, because you now come to the point that I cannot use these figures, but I have to use it. So you only spent 50 per cent, how come?

Hon. Alexander: Member, procurement issues.

Mr. Imbert: On refurbishing vehicles?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: To buy parts?

Hon. Alexander: "Mm-hmm."

Mr. Imbert: Okay, I see—[*Laughter*] Okay, let me move on then to Improvement Works to Fire Service Buildings. Firstly, I find the allocation in 2026 very low, $700,000, but the actual spend was only $253,000. How come? On all the fire station buildings we have all over the country, you only spend $253,000? How come?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we spent 700-and—

Mr. Imbert: All right, so that number is wrong too, not a problem. Good

explanation. Well, not good, but it is an explanation. So, let us go now to Point Fortin. I am a little frightened to ask this question. Is this number wrong too? You had $2.5 million to buy equipment for the Point Fortin Fire Station, but only $1.4 million is indicated in the book? What caused that?

Hon. Alexander: Member, again 2.8—

Mr. Imbert: "Figure wrong."

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Tancoo: Chairman, may I intervene for the umpteenth time.

Mr. Imbert: No, no. This is the public record.

Mr. Tancoo: For the public record, I wish to clarify that, as is normal, the documentation before us, the *Estimates of Expenditure* and the *Estimates of Recurrent* and the *Development Programme*, et cetera, are prepared way in advance of today's Sitting, months in advance. The former Minister is very well aware of that because this is not the first time.

As a result of which, the Revised Estimates continues to be Estimates. What the Minister is providing to you now, is current data that was not available at the time of researching and publishing the book. That is it, and the Minister is very well aware of that because this is not new. This has happened for every single provision of Estimates to this Parliament since time immemorial. So to try to create the illusion that somehow these books are vague and misleading and misinforming, et cetera, is very unfortunate.

Mr. Imbert: That may be so. That may be so, but a supplementary question. Is there a problem in the Ministry of Homeland Security in providing information to the Ministry of Finance with respect to expenditure because the books are printed

two weeks before?

Mr. Tancoo: The books being printed—maybe that is how you did it when you were present. But the books are prepared; the numbers are collected from Ministries as far as July.

Mr. Imbert: July, and you are reporting for the financial year? That is nonsense.

Mr. Tancoo: You are not aware of this?

Mr. Imbert: No, that is nonsense.

Mr. Tancoo: Well, then you are completely wrong.

Mr. Imbert: Nonsense.

Mr. Tancoo: You had no idea what was going on with you and the Ministry of Finance?

Mr. Imbert: This is terrible. "You collecting data in July?"

Mr. Tancoo: You have no idea what went on with you in the Ministry of Finance?

Mr. Imbert: This is wrong, wrong and terrible, terrible, terrible.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: Were you absent from your office?

Mr. Imbert: Incompetent.

Mr. Tancoo: Were you lost then?

Mr. Imbert: Incompetent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Multi- Sectoral and Other Services. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, I am at 010: Modernization of

E99 Emergency Communication Infrastructure. I see you have, for 2026, an allocation of $10.450 million. You have had a Revised Estimate at—rather an allocation of $8.7 million below the original allocation, and then I am seeing the $10million allocation in 2027. Is that an ongoing project from 2026, and if so, how far are we in terms of completing this project?

Hon. Alexander: So, Member, this project is ongoing.

Mr. Gonzales: It is ongoing?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, and what is the percentage of completion?

Hon. Alexander: We are still completing the procurement.

Mr. Gonzales: Oh, so you are still at procurement, but there is a revised allocation of $8.7 million. How much was expended in 2026, then, if you are still at procurement?

5.30 p.m.

Hon. Alexander: The fiscal closed before the contract was executed.

Mr. Gonzales: What is that, Minister?

Hon. Alexander: The fiscal closed before the contract was executed, so there was no spending.

Mr. Gonzales: Sorry. Minister, did you spend money out of your allocation in 2026 for this Item?

Hon. Alexander: Not for the line Item that you are speaking about.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. So, there was no expenditure in 2026. You have an allocation of $10m illion in 2027. You are saying that you are still in the procurement phase for this project?

Hon. Alexander: Due to the time gap between the initial assessment and the

proposed submission and approval of the project, a new assessment was required.

Mr. Gonzales: What does this project entail?

Hon. Alexander: The modernization of the E999 emergency communication infrastructure to support the operationalization and service delivery required from the Ministry of Homeland Security.

Mr. Gonzales: And where is that facility located?

Hon. Alexander: Pardon me?

Mr. Gonzales: Where is the facility located, the upgrade work that you are proposing to do under this line Item?

Hon. Alexander: We will provide that to you in writing.

Mr. Gonzales: Is it at the Police Barracks?

Hon. Alexander: We will provide that to you in writing.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Item 006: Upgrade of the Machine Readable Passport (MRP) to e-passport.

Hon. Alexander: "Yuh gone back again dey?"

Mr. Young SC: "How da is going back?" That is under the same line Item; the same 06: A. We were just at 010. Now we are at 006. Anyway, you had an Estimate of $3 million for 2026; a Revised Estimate of zero and then nothing provided for in 2027. Is it that the Government has abandoned the upgrade for the machine-readable passport? "Yuh" there, Minister, 006?

Hon. Alexander: Member, with respect to the upgrade of the machine-readable passports—

Mr. Young SC: To the e-passports, right?

Hon. Alexander: To the e-passport, yeah. Procurement has started. We have not yet finalized an arrangement, so we do not know the cost just yet.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, but you have absolutely no money there. So, I mean, if procurement is completed, how are you going to pay for these passports? Because you all gave a commitment since the last budget, in 2026, you all were going to do the e-passports.

Hon. Alexander: Member, you know once the procurement is completed—

Mr. Young SC: "Yuh would come back".

Hon. Alexander: "Eh?"

Mr. Young SC: "Yuh would come back."

Hon. Alexander: No, no, no. We will put money into the Vote for the line Item.

Mr. Young SC: "But how yuh gonna put money?" That is the question. The only way you could put money in a line Item is via this budgetary process or via de mid-year review.

Hon. Alexander: That is what ah mean. I will come back.

Mr. Young SC: Well, that is what I just said, "yuh go come back".

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: Right. So, it is hoped that you all will be upgrading to the e-passports in this fiscal, but it depends on the procurement process being completed, correct?

Hon. Alexander: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: You all have commenced the procurement process?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: How many entities have you all invited to tender?

Hon. Alexander: It is ongoing. We do not want to provide that information at

this time. It is ongoing.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, but how many entities did you—

Hon. Alexander: There are multiple companies who would have submitted proposals and showed interest.

Mr. Young SC: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I will ask my questions one by one—

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, take your time; slow—

Mr. Imbert:—not multiple parts.

Hon. Alexander:—slow, slow.

Mr. Imbert: Of course. What exactly is involved in this exercise of upgrading a machine-readable passport to an e-passport? What is involved?

Hon. Alexander: It is about technology, Member.

Mr. Imbert: I know that.

Hon. Alexander: It is about identifying persons before arrival and all of that. The machine-readable passports are not the ones that we used, like the ones you are using now. The e-passport is an upgrade in modernization and technology.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I will ask the questions again.

Hon. Alexander: Well, I just answered you, you know.

Mr. Imbert: What is the difference between a machine-readable passport and an e-passport?

Hon. Alexander: All right. One is more technically enhanced.

Mr. Young SC: With a microchip or something?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: "Well, yuh coulda say dat".

Hon. Alexander: "Yuh see, I doh want tuh give out all da information—

Mr. Imbert: But everybody knows what e-passport is.

Hon. Alexander:—yuh understand wa ah saying? I doh want tuh give out all da information, but yuh forcing meh hand". "

Mr. Imbert: It is okay, thanks. Let me go to the second part of my question.

Hon. Alexander: "Wais de second part? Tell meh".

Mr. Imbert: How many passports do you plan to convert from machine-readable to e-passport?

Hon. Alexander: We intend to change all, but it will be in a phased approach.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. How many years or months will this take?

Hon. Alexander: We have not yet completed the procurement. From there, arrangements will be made and agreements will be signed as to how many for the month, how many for the day, or how many for the week, or how many for the hour, or how many for the second we will be receiving.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, you do not know. All right. Mr. Chairman, I have other—

Hon. Alexander: Still?

Mr. Imbert:—Sub-Items in 005.

Hon. Alexander: It is almost eight o'clock, eh.

Mr. Imbert: I do not know if any of my colleagues—can I go through all of mine, or shall we wait?

Mr. Chairman: Well, that will be a matter entirely for you. I do not see anyone else—

Mr. Imbert: No, I am asking you, because I do not know.

Mr. Chairman: No, no. You do not have to ask me. You are on the Floor.

Mr. Imbert: "Ah ha tuh look at you. Ah ha tuh look at you". Okay, I observed that there was an allocation of $2 million for the computerization of the head office of your Ministry. Why were you unable to computerize your Ministry in 2026? Because the spend is zero.

Hon. Alexander: Member, again, we had already spent $2 million.

Mr. Imbert: So, this figure—I cannot rely on this figure. It is not a good Estimate, zero. It says zero, eh.

Hon. Alexander: The Minister of Finance already explained to you—

Mr. Imbert: No, no. This is zero. This is not a $1.

Hon. Alexander:—the circumstances under which these things are happening now.

Mr. Imbert: It is zero. Okay, so you did spend some money on computerization. So, this zero figure is very misleading. All right. Then I see Building National and Community Capacity for Climate and Disaster Risk. You had an allocation of $2.75 million. I see zero. Is this zero also misleading?

Hon. Alexander: These numbers are not misleading.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Is this correct?

Hon. Alexander: They were already explained to you by the Minister of Finance. Because of the time these documents were printed—

Mr. Tancoo: Sir, are you on 007? If you read the explanatory notes, you can probably tackle that issue under the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Imbert: But that is 2027. I am talking about 2026. Minister of Finance, with due respect, that note refers to 2027. I just wanted to know what happened in 2026. Did you spend money? You did not spend money?

Hon. Alexander: No money—no money was spent.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Okay, okay, okay, okay. Can we move on now to 008: Upgrade of cyber security in the Ministry of Homeland Security? Original allocation, $2 million, and the book indicates zero. Could you tell me what actually happened, because cybersecurity, especially in your Ministry, is critical?

Hon. Alexander: The procurement process, Member, did not finish.

Mr. Imbert: So, you were not able to—

Hon. Alexander: Spend this fiscal.

Mr. Imbert: Right. You were not able to execute this project, the upgrade of cybersecurity in your Ministry. Okay. All right. Okay.

Hon. Alexander: "Yuh" finish?

Mr. Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund, pages 306 to 307 inclusive. Hon. Members, Item 004 spans two pages.

Mr. Imbert: What were those pages?

Mr. Chairman: Pages 306 to 307 inclusive. Would you like me to repeat, once again, whilst you frantically thumb through your book?

Mr. Imbert: I would like you to give me some—[*Inaudible*]

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: I will announce the project groups. C: Prison Service. And for the benefit of the Member for Diego Martin North/East—this is to be found at page 306—whose hand is up in a semi-Nazi salute.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: One of these days, Mr. Chairman, I am going to deal with your insults.

Mr. Chairman: But you did that.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, please, you know that is wrong. You know that is

wrong.

Mr. Chairman: Come on, let us go, 306.

Mr. Imbert: IDF: Prison Service, C, 001: Construction of a Perimeter Fence. Actually, 002: Perimeter Fence at Golden Grove Prison. Original allocation in 2026, $8 million. Actual figure indicated here—before "alyuh" tell me this figure is not correct—$1.2 million. What happened there?

Hon. Alexander: Member, we spent $1.7 million.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine. Assuming that what you are saying is accurate—

Hon. Alexander: It is, it is.

Mr. Imbert:—that is barely 20 per cent of the figure allocated. What gave the Ministry all this difficulty to get this fence built at this very important prison?

Hon. Alexander: Member, NIDCO is the project manager for the area, for this project, and that is the bill they submitted to us.

Mr. Imbert: Did NIDCO explain why they underperformed?

Hon. Alexander: No.

Mr. Imbert: Well, you should ask them. So, let me move on now to the next Item, which is the Sewer Plant for the Prison Training Centre, and what I see there—this is 003, an allocation of $1 million—a figure indicated in the book of $200,000. What happened there?

Hon. Alexander: NIPDEC is the project manager, and we paid all the bills that they submitted.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, so they only—

Hon. Alexander: Same thing again.

Mr. Imbert:—did 20 per cent of the work anticipated. Do you know why?

Hon. Alexander: No, not at this time.

Mr. Imbert: Well, you should ask them.

Hon. Alexander: All right.

Mr. Imbert: So, let me move on now to Carrera Convict Prison Direct Water System. I see an allocation here. This is 004, $5.2 million, and what is indicated in the book, I am assuming it is correct until I am corrected, $2 million, less than half. What happened at Carrera there with the installation of the direct water system? Why was there underperformance there as well?

Hon. Alexander: Member, there is a revitalization blueprint for Carrera, and we might be moving prisoners away from Carrera in the not-too-distant future, just like in Port of Spain. So, that is why there is a halt on the programme at this time.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, so the project is on hold?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, next Item, 007: Domestic Water Tank, Maximum Security Prison—

Hon. Alexander: "Boy, you ain't tired? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert:—$500,000 allocated, zero spent. "What happen? They doh need water up there"?

Hon. Alexander: [*Laughter*] Where is it? 007?

Mr. Imbert: 007: Construction of a Domestic Water Tank at the Maximum and Security Prison. Allocation, $500,000—

Hon. Alexander: All right, Member—

Mr. Imbert: No, nothing shown.

Hon. Alexander: Member, a project manager has not yet been allocated.

Mr. Imbert: So, it was not done, okay. 008: Upgrade of Plumbing at the Women's Prison, $500,000, zero indicated in terms of actual expenditure. What

happened at the Women's Prison with the plumbing?

Hon. Alexander: If you look at the amount of response that I gave to you, you will realize that the prison service has a problem with procurement, and as a result of that, the same thing applies here.

Mr. Imbert: So, nothing was done? Nothing was spent. Nothing was executed. Am I correct in saying that?

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Alarm System for the Women's Prison: zero spent out of the allocation. What happened?

Hon. Alexander: Which one?

Mr. Imbert: The same thing? No, the Alarm System for the Women's Prison, 009. Nothing is indicated as having been spent or done on this.

Hon. Alexander: Same thing, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Alexander:—the procurement and the issues.

Mr. Imbert: Waste Water Treatment Maximum and Security. The book indicates that nothing was done here. Is that true? Is this an accurate representation? And is the problem the same thing, procurement issues?

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. 011: Perimeter Fence and Lighting, Eastern Correctional Rehabilitation Centre. Only 50 per cent of the allocation, it is indicated, was spent.

Hon. Alexander: Member, you know, we have been going down this road for the entire evening, and I want to tell you that these projects here have been on the books for the last five years. These are projects that I inherited, and you know, it is "whoosh", you expect the magic.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Alexander: You see, so I do not know. I continue to hear you, and I should be asking you, but I cannot.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: I assume that is some sort of editorial commentary, Mr. Chairman. Is that what that is? Because I am just asking projects one by one. There is an allocation in the book—

Hon. Alexander: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert:—and I am going through all.

Mr. Chairman: No, I suppose he is responding in kind.

Hon. Alexander: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: How?

Mr. Chairman: Because you are guilty of gross editorialization.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, please.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no. It is not "please". After the Minister of Finance explained the reason why some of these numbers—

Mr. Imbert: He did not. He did not explain.

Mr. Chairman:—you keep persistently referring to it in a manner which suits your narrative. After, without taking into account what the Minister of Finance says. But that is fine, if you have no more questions in this line Item—

Mr. Imbert: I have lots. And what you just said is not relevant—

Mr. Chairman: Jesus.

Mr. Imbert:—because the Minister has confirmed that the number in the book here is correct, and it is not a Revised Estimate, a good Estimate, a bad Estimate.

He has agreed that nothing was done here, and he is telling me it is a procurement issue. So, I would like to move on, please.

Mr. Chairman: I would be very grateful if you do.

Mr. Imbert: Next one would be Immigration and—

Mr. Chairman: Which we have not called as yet, which I am about to call.

Mr. Imbert: Are we talking about immigration?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you can talk. It is 13 minutes to 6. Bear in mind we cut off at 8. Immigration, 306 to 307.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. 001: Upgrade to the Immigration Detention Centre. Less than 30 per cent of the money allocated was spent. How come?

Hon. Alexander: The contract expired on the 25th of November, 2025. The contract has been negotiated, at this time, for special purposes, state enterprise, and is close to finalization.

Mr. Imbert: No, but that does not explain the fact that there was a $3 million allocation and only a $999,000 expenditure. That does not explain that. All right, it does not explain that. So, since you have given me an explanation that does not really make too much sense, I would like to go on to the next Item. Outfitting of the Immigration Building, San Fernando. Original allocation, $4 million. Actual expenditure, as indicated in the Book, $900,000, less than 25 per cent. What is the reason for the underperformance in this project?

Hon. Alexander: We understand that your Government would have purchased a TSTT building in San Fernando.

Mr. Imbert: A what? A what?

Hon. Alexander: The old TSTT building.

Mr. Imbert: TSTT building, okay.

Hon. Alexander: The ground floor is leaking, the middle floor is leaking, and the top floor. The building is separated from itself. And there are some persons who still occupy the building, in terms of TSTT, that wants to be part of the Immigration Department when the Immigration Department moved there. And we could not have that. So, at this time, we are procuring a different location for the San Fernando Immigration Office to be occupied and to serve the members of the community in south Trinidad.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, so, Mr. Chairman, in the interest of time, I just have one more question.

Hon. Alexander: You really? [*Laughter*]

5.50 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: I have many, but in the interest of time—

Hon. Alexander: Well, "yuh" could ask until 8.00.

Mr. Imbert: No, no. We have other Ministries to examine, so just one.

Hon. Alexander: Ask until 8.00 "nah man".

Mr. Imbert: Zero—well, it is in the fire service, so you get there, Mr. Chairman—when you get to the fire service.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, did you—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, under Immigration, would the Minister be able to say, with the $500,000 that is being estimated here, what principal components of work will be carried out? This is a new project.

Hon. Alexander: That is which one? The Immigration Centre?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: This is the Aripo Immigration Centre. What components of work will be carried out for the $500,000?

Hon. Alexander: The design and construction of an administrative building for the relocation—the administrative section of the Immigration Detention Centre, including the Immigration Secretariat to an area away from the detention space. This project will also involve outfitting the completed structure to ensure efficiency in the daily operation of the IDC. The final phase will involve the installation of IDC infrastructure and equipment. That is basically it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Minister, do you have an idea of what the total cost of this project will be?

Hon. Alexander: Not at this time, Member.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So the $500,000—if you can just say what component of the project would be covered by that.

Hon. Alexander: The design of the infrastructure—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The design—

Hon. Alexander:—is what they are starting with.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: This is the design cost.

Hon. Alexander: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Hon. Alexander: You are welcome.

Mr. Chairman: F: Fire Service. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I said I had one more. What is that.

Hon. Alexander: "I thought yuh full up yuh" [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: I said I had one more. 002: Construction of Point Fortin Fire Station. I see "zero" indicated here. I am assuming that is correct. Why were you unable to start the construction of Point Fortin Fire Station in fiscal year 2026?

Hon. Alexander: Member, from what I am seeing here, this project has been

ongoing for the past seven years. It is seven years.

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Alexander: You would have adjudicated on more than seven times, so I should ask you at this time—

Mr. Imbert: It is quite alright.

Hon. Alexander: Member for Diego Martin North/East—

Mr. Imbert: I will ask a supplementary question.

Hon. Alexander:—what happened to the fire station in Point Fortin?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: I will ask a supplementary question. Why was the $3million allocated for this Item not utilized in fiscal year 2026?

Hon. Alexander: The contractor, we understand, is fixing defects in the building. And after the fixing of the defects, he will be paid.

Mr. Imbert: All right.

Hon. Alexander: "Dat good?"

Mr. Imbert: I said all right.

Hon. Alexander: All right.

Mr. Imbert: Once you give a proper answer.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Minister, I notice that under the Construction of Arouca Fire Station, there is nothing allocated there. Has this project been abandoned? And would you be able to say what is the status of the new Penal Fire Station where the allocation is $2million?

Hon. Alexander: Arouca Fire Station [*Inaudible*] The Arouca Fire Station. We will obviously look for alternative funding for the Arouca Fire Station because we will ensure that Arouca gets a fire station.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We would appreciate that. But can I ask about the new project, the Penal Fire Station? What is expected to be done with the $2million on this new project?

Hon. Alexander: The Penal Fire Station. The relocation of the diesel storage tank and the settlement of invoices with the cost of work completed and so on.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: As a new project?

Hon. Alexander: No, it is not. It is not.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, because this fire station is completed, so it is just to do that.

Hon. Alexander: Yeah, to move these things around and place them in a different—

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

Hon. Alexander: Yeah.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 83 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, thank you very much, and thank you very much to your hardworking public officers, Permanent Secretaries, and all the staff who accompanied them. Thank you all very much.

Hon. Alexander: Chairman, thank you. And on behalf of the Minister of Homeland Security, I want to thank my PSs and their supporting team for what we can only describe as a display of accountability.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Alexander: Thanks again and have a nice day.

Head 84: Ministry of Defence, $461,537,500.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Defence and the Minister in the Ministry of Homeland Security to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister, go right ahead.

Hon. Sturge: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Defence was created in May of 2025 in keeping with the Government's campaign promise to disaggregate and streamline the roles and functions of its predecessor, the Ministry of National Security. The Ministry of Homeland Security and the Ministry of Justice are the other two Ministries disaggregated from the former Ministry of National Security. The Ministry of Defence is responsible for counterterrorism, global security issues, regional security coordination, and securing our borders, including airspace and territorial waters.

Under the remit of the Ministry of Defence are the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force and its formations, the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force, and Lifeguard Services. With the realignment of ministerial responsibility, the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence has been expanded to include national emergency and disaster management through the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management. Additionally, the Ministry has been assigned the National Emblem Committee responsibilities, and this Committee is responsible for safeguarding, regulating, and standardizing the use of our official state symbols. The Ministry is also responsible for the National Mentorship Programme.

Mr. Chairman, as a twin-island state, our borders are both our frontline Defence and an essential economic gateway. In recent years, Trinidad and Tobago has faced increasing threats, including illicit trafficking in drugs, firearms, and human trafficking, as well, in addition to unauthorized entries and regional geopolitical pressures. Mr. Chairman, modern infrastructure and trained personnel

remain critical safeguards for our sovereignty, economy, and our citizens. The initiatives I will outline today are not simply operational improvements; they are strategic measures to secure our nation's long-term defensive posture and stability, and to maintain our sovereignty.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, we are in the process of recruiting across all formations of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force because there is a critical need for force expansion, given our strategic importance arising out of our membership in the Shield of the Americas, as well as what is expected of us, given our geographical significance to the Counter Cartel Conference of the Americas. Mr. Chairman, Cabinet has agreed to the raising of the retirement age for members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force across all formations. We have settled wage negotiations, and the men and women of the defence force would, in short order, see payment of arrears.

Based on information received, we have in the last 18 months commenced audits, and we have introduced systems to prevent the feeding frenzy of the last 10 years, and more particularly to prevent the loss or theft of ammunition. As you would recall 28,000 rounds have gone missing, presumed stolen under the last administration.

When we came into office, Mr. Chairman, we met a coast guard whose assets were severely depleted and compromised, with only two or three of our naval vessels operational, and the weapons affixed non-functional. On a visit to the sub-bases at Cedros and Galeota and others, we discovered that in the case of Cedros, a boat seized during a drug interdiction exercise, a court exhibit was being utilized for surveillance and other purposes. Communication between this base

and the radar centre was via personal mobile phones of officers, which severely compromised our response capabilities, and facilities at both Cedros and Galeota with varying states of disrepair for quite a number of years. There were no vessels at Galeota, and communication issues were largely the same as with Cedros.

Challenges in the air guard and regiment formations were equally disturbing and affected our surveillance capabilities. We have in the last year managed to remedy the issues with communications as well as with issues with our naval assets. In fiscal '27, we tend to prioritize, and remedy the million issues—

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, Minister, Minister, Minister—

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister!

Mr. Chairman: No need to shout.

Mr. Gonzales: No, but he is ignoring.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no, no, no need to shout.

Mr. Gonzales: He is ignoring.

Mr. Chairman: No need to shout. Minister, I am afraid the five minutes is up. Right?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed: That Head 84 stand part of the schedule.

Mr. Chairman: The said sum for the said Head 84, Ministry of Defence, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. These are to be found in the relevant volume at pages 465 to 468 inclusive, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General

Administration; 002: Regiment; 003: Coast Guard; 004: Air Guard; 007: Cadet Force; 008: Lifeguard Service.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, 001: General Administration. This is from 469 to 470. 002: Regiment—469 to 476, all of this, sorry. 003: Coast Guard; 004: Air Guard; 005: Defence Force Headquarters; 006: Volunteer Defence Force Reserves; 007: Cadet Force; 008: Lifeguard Service.

Sub-Head 03—pages 477 to 479—Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration; 002: Regiment; 003: Coast Guard; 004: Air Guard; 005: Defence Force Headquarters; 006: Volunteer Defence Force Reserves; 007: Cadet Force; 008: Lifeguard. Sub-Head 04, 479 to 480: Current Transfers and Subsidies, 001: Regional Bodies. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, you had a question.

Mr. Young SC: One.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Young SC: Under 001: Regional Bodies. Okay. Nothing there.

Mr. Chairman Okay. 004: International Bodies; 007: Households. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, Minister, under 007: Households, I see that the Government has taken a decision to increase, Ex-Gratia Awards by $25,000 for the year. Is that correct?

Hon. Sturge: Yes

Mr. Young SC: So now the Government has taken a decision to have $250,000 for Ex-Gratia Awards. Correct.

Hon. Sturge: In the event they are needed, yes.

Mr. Young SC: Then, when one goes down to 04: CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps, it has dropped from $39.2 million to now just five—as the original Estimate for 2026 to now $5 million for 2027. What is that $5 million for?

Hon. Sturge: The programme is being restructured, and as a result, there may be a need to hire persons to—lecturers and so on, so that that would cover any sort of expenses or incidentals related to that.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, but that would not be able to cover the expenses of a cohort coming in.

Hon. Sturge: It would, if I can give an example, we are not reverting to the previous manner in which the programme was being conducted, where there is housing, there is, and so on, and persons with inflated salaries. So the staff, the teaching staff, they would more or less be subsumed from members of the different formations in the TTDF, and the $5 million would cover those persons who must be recruited from the outside.

Mr. Young SC: Those persons meaning what staff?

Hon. Sturge: Staff, yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, but staff are one thing. The staff have to be able to teach somebody.

Hon. Sturge: Right.

Mr. Young SC: So there is no cost associated with the persons coming. They come for free?

Hon. Sturge: They would come through the Cadet Force.

Mr. Young SC: So it is only going to be—you said at the start that you all were looking at restructuring the programme. You all have already determined that to get into the CCC, you have to come through the Cadet Force?

Hon. Sturge: No, that is one of the options that is being explored. It has not been finalized. Once we have explored that and the initiative is taken to the Cabinet, once Cabinet decides, we proceed from there. If there is no agreement, then we return to the drawing board and see if there is a different way of conducting the programme.

6.10 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: All right.

Hon. Sturge: But the emphasis is on getting rid of the inflated salaries, and so on, that we saw previously.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, when you said the "inflated salaries", you mean the stipend that was being paid to the young people who were part of the programme?

Hon. Sturge: Well, as it stands, there will no longer be a stipend in the new proposal, but that has not yet—

Mr. Young SC: Been determined?

Hon. Sturge:—taken to Cabinet for determination.

Mr. Young SC: All right. And then, similarly, for MiLAT, it has dropped from $17 million to now just $5 million. MiLAT was a programme that was designed to help persons who had had difficulties in schools, et cetera, and to help them to get some level of academic qualification in a sort of boot camp set-up. The Government has decided to scrap that programme as well?

Hon. Sturge: Well, the Government has decided to restructure the programme. The programme that we inherited and which, in any event, was stopped by the previous administration in January 2025, with no intake of students, we are seeking to have these persons come through the cadet force in our new proposal and housed at the camp at Macqueripe Road, and we expect that the expenses would

be, more or less, subsumed into that larger expenditure.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Item 009: Other Transfers. Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. This is Sub-Head 09, and the relevant page numbers in the relevant volume are pages 209 to 211 inclusive. Consolidated Fund, Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, 004/02, which is Defence; A. Coast Guard, and line Item 004, the ISS, Integrated Support Services for the Naval Assets, I see $30 million for this fiscal. Which naval assets are these? Are these the Damen assets? Which ones?

Hon. Sturge: The ones you asked, Damen.

Mr. Young SC: So , these are the Damen assets. How many of the Damen assets are currently serviceable?

Hon. Sturge: All are serviceable.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, good. So, they have all completed the dry docking and other work that was done down in Suriname?

Hon. Sturge: At present, one is in Columbia.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you. And then, at 006: Utilities upgrade of shore supply at Staubles Bay, we had put $3 million initially for 2026, and the Revised Estimate is $1.5 million. Out of that $1.5 million, how much was actually spent?

Hon. Sturge: Apparently, the RFP, which was issued in March of 2026, we were advised by the OPR that we had to update and reissue the RFP.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, for 2027, you have put an Estimate of $2 million, so it is still at the start of the procurement process?

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, Item 004 spans two pages. Therefore, I will also announce the project groups. A. Coast Guard; B. Regiment; C. Air Guard.

Mr. Chairman: Who goes first? Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Minister, I will speak collectively with a number of these Sub-Items: 001, which is a Sewer Interconnection at the Ulric Cross Air Station; 002: Upgrade of Plumbing System at Ulric Cross Air Station again; and 003: Construction and Installation of an Above Ground Diesel Refuelling Station at the Ulric Cross Air Station, Piarco. In 2026, there have been some allocations for some of these Sub-Items. The first one, $2.2 million; and the other, $600,000; $1.5 million; and the other, $100,000. In the Revised Estimate, nothing, and then we see some allocations for this fiscal, starting with $9.1 million, $600,000, $1 million and $550,000. Have those projects started, and what is the reason for the zero consumption or progress that we have seen in 2026?

Hon. Sturge: Can I get the answers one by one?

Mr. Gonzales: Sure.

Hon. Sturge: Right.

Mr. Gonzales: Yeah.

Hon. Sturge: So, the first question is?

Mr. Gonzales: So, the first one, the Sewer Interconnection at the Ulric Cross Air Station, I observed that in 2026, there was an allocation of $600,000, and there was nothing happening, according to the books here, in 2026, despite the $600,000 allocation, and then again, $600,000. What is the status of this project?

Hon. Sturge: It is, more or less, nearing completion.

Mr. Gonzales: It is?

Hon. Sturge: Yes. WASA indicated that the works would be completed under six months' time, so the $600,000 is to facilitate a final payment to WASA.

Mr. Gonzales: What occurred in 2026?

Hon. Sturge: There were a number of issues to be negotiated in terms of the scope of works and the cost to be associated, and thereafter the work started.

Mr. Gonzales: Is that being done in-house by the air guard, or do you have an external contractor or an external agency managing these projects?

Hon. Sturge: The works are being carried out by the Water and Sewerage Authority.

Mr. Gonzales: By the?

Hon. Sturge: WASA.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. The other Item, Upgrade of Plumbing System at the Ulric Cross Air Station, again, in 2026, you had an allocation of $1.5 million, there is nothing in terms of utilization in 2026, and now a $1 million allocation. What was the reason for not having any allocation or utilization in 2026?

Hon. Sturge: We had to revise the scope of works.

Mr. Gonzales: So, in 2026, anything happened at all or there was just a review of the project?

Hon. Sturge: Just a review.

Mr. Gonzales: Just a review. And you are expecting to restart the project in 2027?

Hon. Sturge: I understand it would be restarted and completed in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Gonzales: The same for the Construction and Installation of an Above Ground Diesel Refuelling Station at the Ulric Cross Air Station, Piarco? You had

an allocation of $100,000—

Hon. Sturge: The completion would be subject to us receiving the required approvals from the Airports Authority and the issuance of a Facility Alteration Permit.

Mr. Gonzales: So, what occurred on that project in 2026?

Hon. Sturge: What happened in 2026, there was a bit of toing and froing with respect to the tank specifications, but that has since been settled, the tank specifications and the scope of works.

Mr. Gonzales: Is that project being managed utilizing in-house resources or you are utilizing external resources for this project?

Hon. Sturge: This project will be carried out by the officers at the air guard.

Mr. Gonzales: By the?

Hon. Sturge: Air guard.

Mr. Gonzales: So, it is internal?

Hon. Sturge: Internal, yes.

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

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, down to 004: Establishment of a Military Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Unit for the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard, the TTAG, $5 million. Has the procurement for these drones begun as yet?

Hon. Sturge: No.

Mr. Young SC: How many drones are they seeking to get?

Hon. Sturge: I would rather not answer that question and claim public interest immunity.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, I could understand that. These drones, they will include a training element?

Hon. Sturge: As far as I understand, it is to establish the actual unit, and I believe—[*Minister confers with technocrat*] Yes, it is confirmed that it would also include training.

6.20 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Maintenance?

Hon. Sturge: Just training.

Mr. Young SC: And $5 million is going to be sufficient to get UAVs?

Hon. Sturge: Yes. We are not seeking to have the most expensive, but those which have proven to be efficient.

Mr. Young SC: To be utilized by the Air Guard.

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Because when we get to the Coast Guard, I see some there as well.

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay and then the Purchase of Vehicles and Equipment for Air Guard at 005, $2 million. Has the procurement begun there as yet?

Hon. Sturge: We have just completed the specifications, arrived at what the proper specifications are, so procurement would start in short order.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Young SC: No further questions under that.

Mr. Chairman: D: Defence Force Headquarters. Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Minister, under 002: Establishment of a Military Cemetery and Multipurpose Religious Centre. I am assuming that this line Item is pertaining to the reality that the military cemetery at the Long Circular

Road is filled.

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Has the Ministry of Defence identified a location for the establishment of this New Military Cemetery and Multipurpose Religious Centre?

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: And where is that?

Hon. Sturge: At Macqueripe.

Mr. Gonzales: At?

Hon. Sturge: Macqueripe.

Mr. Gonzales: At Macqueripe.

Hon. Sturge: It is an old cemetery, which was abandoned, I believe, but there is still sufficient space, which can be utilized.

Mr. Gonzales: So have you engaged the Chaguaramas Development Authority?

Hon. Sturge: Yes, and we are awaiting feedback from the CDA, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: You are awaiting feedback from the CDA?

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: So this matter has not been finalized by the Cabinet as yet?

Hon. Sturge: No.

Mr. Gonzales: So is it that after finalizing your discussions with the CDA and the amount of land is identified, that the matter will be taken to the Cabinet for final ratification before you proceed with this project?

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, and so what do you propose to achieve in this fiscal year with this $500,000 allocation?

Hon. Sturge: Well, we anticipate that we would have feedback before the end of

the year, and once that is done and we get Cabinet approval, we intend to, in essence, deal with the designs for the space. Because it is not simply going to be a cemetery, it would also include a Multipurpose Religious Centre.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. No further questions on this Item from me.

Mr. Young SC: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, 005?

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. No, I just think I have to go through the formality. E: Defence Force Reserves; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 211, A: Administrative Services. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, under A: Administrative Services; 004: Acquisition of ILS Services - Cape Class Patrol Vessels, $42 million for this fiscal. For the last fiscal that we are closing off now, 2026, there was $65 million. How much of that was utilized?

Hon. Sturge: I am told that almost every cent was utilized.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, good. So this $42 million is for how long a period?

Hon. Sturge: For a period of two years, fiscal '27 and '28.

Mr. Young SC: '28 and it is for both of the Cape Class Vessels?

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Are both serviceable?

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And this work is being performed by Austal?

Hon. Sturge: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. I have no further [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. F: Public Buildings; G: Equipment and Vehicles. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, Minister. Here I see, which is a good thing, line Item

011: Acquisition of Interceptors for the Coast Guard, $2 million. We had commenced a process where we were working with the United States Government and I had actually signed an agreement with the U.S. EXIM Bank to utilize funds via the U.S. EXIM Bank for the purchase of a number of interceptors for the coast guard. Has the coast guard been able to acquire any new interceptors?

Hon. Sturge: No.

Mr. Young SC: This $2 million is, of course, TT dollars. How many interceptors is it expected would be acquired for $2 million?

Hon. Sturge: Can I not answer that? We do not believe it would be in the public interest to say.

Mr. Young SC: All right. And the scope, because there was a lot of difficulty previously with the proper scope for the interceptors. Has the scope been decided, the parameters of what is required, et cetera?

Hon. Sturge: We are looking at the scope, which was submitted in the past, and I think we are more or less settled on utilizing the previous scope.

Mr. Young SC: You all have not commenced the procurement of visas yet? No. Okay, 012: Acquisition of Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) for the Coast Guard (Drones). We had just looked at, under the Air Guard, UAVs. These are now the UASs, $2 million. Has this process commenced?

Hon. Sturge: We have settled on the desired specifications, and a Note would be taken to the National Security Council, and thereafter procurement issues would start.

Mr. Young SC: All right. And then those specifications, it being the Coast Guard, they would be the specialized ones that could be utilized on maritime patrols.

Hon. Sturge: We believe that it is not in the public interest to give too much about the capabilities.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund; 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 309 to 311, A: Coast Guard, Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 004/02/A/005: Upgrade of Utilities at Staubles Bay. First of all, I am seeing $396,000 in terms of the Revised Estimate for 2026. So firstly, can the hon. Minister indicate what this $396,000 would have accounted for in fiscal 2026, please?

Hon. Sturge: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Marcelle: Your mic. Yeah, 09/004, it is.

Mr. Chairman: 004, it is 005.

Mr. Marcelle: 02/A/005.

Mr. Chairman: It is at page 309.

Hon. Sturge: Upgrade of Utilities at Staubles Bay. What is the question?

Mr. Marcelle: In fiscal 2026, there was a Revised Estimate of $396,000 allocated. Can the hon. Minister indicate what this $396,000 was allocated for and what was executed with same?

Hon. Sturge: I am advised that that sum was spent on electrical upgrades.

Mr. Marcelle: Electrical upgrades. Now, in 2027, we are seeing a drastic increase to $20 million. What are the proposed scopes, generally, for these upgrade works?

Hon. Sturge: There will be an overall upgrade of the utility system, including the freshwater systems, the wastewater systems, and the electrical systems. Also, an upgrade to the HVAC system and the firefighting system at Staubles Bay.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Marcelle: In terms of the procurement process, would it be treated with internally?

Hon. Sturge: NIPDEC will be carrying out these works.

Mr. Marcelle: In terms of the process by NIPDEC, "any advertisement went out just yet for this line Item, or?"

Hon. Sturge: I am told that NIPDEC has started procurement. I do not have the answer to your question, but I believe through an FOI you can seek the answer from NIPDEC.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 004/02/A./007: Upgrade to Coast Guard Stations at Cedros, I am seeing an allocation in this fiscal for $10 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate what would be the proposed scope of works under this line Item, please?

Hon. Sturge: Hon. Member, this facility is a shared facility. It is shared with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Immigration Division, and the Customs and Excise Division. When I visited there in August last year, I discovered that the base was in an extremely dilapidated state, and I returned with the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, who can more or less corroborated that this base is in dire need of repair. There are the types of repairs that are necessary because there are major health and safety issues and risks for the personnel assigned there.

Mr. Marcelle: Guided. Mr. Chair, line Item 004/A./001: Construction of a Junior Rates Dormitory at Staubles Bay. In fiscal 2026, the sum of $1 million was allocated and then it was revised and reduced to $430,000. Can the hon. Minister indicate what was the reason for the Revised Estimate dropping to $430,000 and what works were carried out in 2026 fiscal?

Hon. Sturge: I am unable to. What I can say is that we are awaiting revised proposals from NIPDEC and this revised proposal has to include additional categories of personnel and the accommodation issues and conceptual designs for the dormitory.

Mr. Marcelle: Thanks.

Mr. Chairman: You are through? B. Regiment; C. Air Guard; E. Defence Force Reserves; D. Youth Development. Okay.

Mr. Marcelle: My hand is up.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. For Youth Development.

Mr. Marcelle: Youth Development.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 14/D./001: the CCC Development. In 2026, I am seeing an allocation of $600,000 allocated to the CCC Development and then a revised reduction to $45,000. So before we get to the revised, can the hon. Minister indicate in 2026 what was this $600,000 allocated to in terms of its scope?

Hon. Sturge: That sum was required for upgrade works, but with the suspension of the programme these works did not occur and therefore the expenditure was not incurred.

Mr. Marcelle: What was the $45,160 Revised Estimate used for?

Hon. Sturge: That was not used but transferred to other items of expenditure.

Mr. Marcelle: In 2026, you would have indicated that these upgrades were necessary in terms of the CCC Development. I am seeing in the 2027 fiscal that no allocation whatsoever was made to the CCC under this. Is the intention to close CCC?

Hon. Sturge: The intention is to restructure it using existing plant equipment and

the personnel of the defence force as far as possible.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: That being the end of all the Items.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 84 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, thank you very much, and thank you very much to your staff. If we kept you back, we apologize, but thank you very much. We will move now to Head 85. Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism.

[DR. ALI *in the Chair*]

Head 85: Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, $217,985,600.

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

Hon. Maharaj: Chair, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Standing Finance Committee. The Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism's mandate is to significantly grow and develop the non-energy sector through effective policy, facilitation and influence, in partnership with the private sector.

The Ministry is not pursuing isolated initiatives; we are driving a bold, coordinated reset to unlock Trinidad and Tobago's non-energy economic potential. We will do this through clear strategic objectives: significant growth in foreign exchange earnings; sustained investment for economic growth and diversification; improving the ease of doing business; development of local business organizations; optimization of underutilized assets; improving the quality of national goods, services and institutions; development of the private sector organization of Trinidad and Tobago, which has been completed, and we are in working partnership with them, establishing a national tone that Trinidad and Tobago is

open for business.

6.40 p.m.

These strategic objectives are backed with measurable targets. Export revenue growth of US $2billion within two years and US $5 billion over five years. New investments valued at US $3 billion within two years and $9 billion within five years—and increased the contribution of the tourism sector from 6 per cent of GDP to 12 per cent of GDP. Our focus is positioning Trinidad and Tobago as a premium destination for business, investment, and tourism. Chair, I thank you and look forward to questions from the Standing Finance Committee.

Question proposed: That Head 85 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $217,985,600 for Head 85: Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, page 482. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Member for Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Madam Chairman. 01/001/06: Remuneration to Board Members. There is an increase of $379,500. Minister, can you account for that increase?

Hon. Maharaj: Member, thank you for your question. The only board member paid is TTSEZA under General Administration. We have other line Items for other boards.

Mr. Romain: Minister, how many boards are covered under this allocation?

Hon. Maharaj: One.

Mr. Romain: Which board is that?

Hon. Maharaj: TTSEZA Special Economic Zone.

Mr. Romain: Special Economic Zone? So, the total allocation for board fees is $759,000 for that one board?

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Romain: 001/14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet Appointed Committees, there is an increase of $299,400. Minister, can you speak to that?

Hon. Maharaj: This is—a new committee expected to be approved in the financial year 2027—the National Trade Strategy implementation committee will be approved in the next fiscal year.

Mr. Romain: Could you just provide the Minister a brief summary of what the focus or the purpose of that board would be?

Hon. Maharaj: Could you repeat for me? [*Minister confers with Dr. Gosine*]—The National Trade Strategy comprises a master strategy along with six sectoral and four cross-functional strategies. It is called NTS, has been completed, and has undergone an initial round of review by sector teams. Stakeholders have subsequently submitted their comments, and the sector teams are currently collating and reviewing the feedback for incorporation into the final document. Following the process, the NTS will be submitted to Cabinet for approval in November2026. The committee will be appointed as part of the approval and implementation process.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Minister. 01/27: Gov't Contribution to Group Health

Insurance - Monthly Paid Officers. There is an increase of $191,900. Minister, can you speak to that increase?

Hon. Maharaj: It speaks to medical insurance. An increase in allocation is the result of more officers selecting coverage under the family plan instead of the individual plan. Consequently, the Government contribution cost will increase.

Mr. Romain: How many officers?

Hon. Maharaj: The general administration is 101, consumer affairs are 10, research and planning 10, outreach protection 10, and tourism four.

Mr. Romain: Are there any arrears, Minister, with respect to the contribution to the group health insurance?

Hon. Maharaj: No.

Madam. Chairman: Diego Martin West.

Mr. Romain: Okay, no. Thank you.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chair, through you. I want to go back to the Remuneration to Board Members. The Minister mentioned it was for the Special Economic Zones Board. Can the Minister just briefly outline some of the work done under his tenure and any new developments in terms of Special Economic Zones?

Hon. Maharaj: I can provide that information to you in writing.

Mr. Des Vignes: In writing?

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay, thank you.

Madam. Chairman: Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division; Item 004: Research and Planning; Item 005: Consumer Outreach and Protection Unit; Item 006:

Tourism. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chair. Short-term Employment, Item 22. What sort of functions do these short-term employees carry out?

Hon. Maharaj: The majority of these employees were on contract. The contract has expired, and we have to get Cabinet approval to renew the contracts—so they are short-term in the interim.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay, so the reason I ask that, Minister, is because in 2026, there was an estimated figure in the budget for 1.42, but there is a ballooning of the figure to 6.22 in the Revised Estimates for 2026. So, is it that the contracts expired and the figure ballooned? It does not quite add up, Minister.

Hon. Maharaj: The contracts have expired, and this is the estimation of when the contracts are renewed.

Mr. Des Vignes: No, but this is for 2026. This is not for Budget 2027, so this is not even going forward.

Hon. Maharaj: We are waiting for Cabinet approval, and when we get Cabinet approval, we will have to transfer the funding for it, if I understand correctly.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, the figure is times 6 for the next fiscal—it was 1.4 before—you mentioned the short-term contracts expired. What is the reason for this big expansion, the six-time expansion in short-term employment salaries?

Madam Chairman: Which line Item, Member?

Mr. Des Vignes: Same line Item, Chair, 22. Never changed. I know the Minister is taking a while, but it never changed.

Hon. Maharaj: Contract to short-term.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right, but what is the reason for the expansion in terms of the figure from the year before being budgeted as 1.42? Are there some major activities happening in the Ministry? Help us understand please, Minister.

6.50p.m.

Hon. Maharaj:—[*Inaudible*]—that expired, but this is the Estimate to bring them back.

Mr. Des Vignes: It was $1.42 million and they expired. So, the Estimate to bring them back is six times what it was before, Minister? That is what you are saying?

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes?

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. Let us move on to Item 27: Official Overseas Travel, where there was a budgeted figure of $400,000 at the start of 2026. What would be the reasoning for this overseas travel?

Hon. Maharaj: This is to facilitate the cost to travel overseas as follows: One, Curaçao, where a technical officer is going; Ghana, we expect a technical officer to go; and there is also a WTO conference which, unfortunately, the Minister has to attend in Geneva.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. So, these are usually for conferences. Is it to market the destination?

Hon. Maharaj: Yeah.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, if it is to market the destination, how come there was, basically, half of the amount allocated spent and not the entire amount? Is it that the Ministry is not doing as much trade missions and marketing as they should to

other destinations?

Hon. Maharaj: Well, trade missions are conducted by different organizations. The Curaçao one, it is the third round of negotiations for the Partial Scope Trade Agreement. Ghana, we are negotiating a partial scope agreement. So, we are focused on that.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Maharaj: And trade missions are on another Vote.

Madam Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly. Line Item 02/001/08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. In 2026, there was an Estimate of $8.5 million for rental accommodation and then it was increased and revised to $9.6 million. Firstly, can the hon. Minister indicate what are the offices that are currently being rented in fiscal 2026?

Hon. Maharaj: Nicholas Tower, which is a long lease; and then we have Nicholas Development; Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association, the car park; Chapmans Self Storage; and Tradezone, which is a month-to-month.

Mr. Marcelle: What would have accounted for the increase, from the original allocation of $8.5 million to $9.6 million?

Hon. Maharaj: Tradezone space, for the storage of unserviceable items and other accounting documents, and disposal of unserviceable articles are currently being addressed.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 02/001/16. In fiscal 2026, the Revised Estimate is $10.3 million for Contract Employment. How many employees in 2026 were employed from this $10.3 million?

Hon. Maharaj: We have 103 employed, 52 filled and 44 vacant.

Mr. Marcelle: What steps are being taken in 2026 to see that the 44 vacant posts are filled?

Hon. Maharaj: We will seek Cabinet approval to have them filled.

Mr. Marcelle: So, you need Cabinet approval before advertising all of the vacant posts?

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: Now, in the Short-term Employment, you indicated in terms of the increase. I want to ask, line Item 02/001/22, out of the—in fiscal 2026, the Revised Estimate being $6.2 million, how many employees were employed from that allocation in 2026?

Dr. Gosine : Line Item, what, sorry? 22: Short-term Employment?

Hon. Maharaj: Yeah. There are 57 positions.

Mr. Marcelle: And in 2027, I am seeing a $6.5 million allocation. How many employees do you intend to employ in this fiscal under short-term contracts in the Ministry?

Hon. Maharaj: Seventy-three. In 2026, it was 57.

Mr. Marcelle: So, you only have an increase of $278,000 and you intend to increase this number from 57 to 73?

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: So, with a $278,000 increase, what are these extra positions that would be so minimal for an entire year that you can hire almost 20 workers—16 workers specifically?

Hon. Maharaj: Whose contracts have expired.

Mr. Marcelle: No further question.

Madam Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman, but my question was asked.

Madam Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. 02/001/23: Fees, $347,500 increase. Can the Minister just account for that increase, and what exactly those fees are related to?

Hon. Maharaj: To facilitate payment for existing licences, warranties and IT-related subscriptions. The increased allocations would be used to procure more licensed products as follows: Microsoft licences, SSL certificates, subscriptions, Canva Business, Adobe Creative Suite, CapCut Pro.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Weights and Measures Inspectorate; Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division; Item 004: Research and Planning; Item 005: Consumer Outreach and Protection Unit; Item 006: Tourism. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I know me and my colleague look alike so much. So, Promotions, Publicity and Printing. I see we have $5 million for Promotions, Publicity and Printing in Tourism. What was the reason only $100,000 was spent in terms of this particular Vote in 2026?

Hon. Maharaj: Actually, the figure spent was $809,000.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. So, $809,000; still one-fifth of the amount for Promotions, Publicity and Printing spent. Correct, Minister?

Hon. Maharaj: Yeah.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. No further questions on this from me.

Madam Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: 006/37: Janitorial Services. There is an increase of some $414,000, Minister. Can you speak to that increase?

Hon. Maharaj: [*Inaudible*]—will be used to facilitate payment for the provision of janitorial and hygiene services at La Cuevas, Manzanilla, Maracas, Vessigny, La Brea, River Estate Museum, Water Wheel, Lopinot Historical Complex.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

7.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Consumer Affairs Division; Item 006: Tourism; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001: General Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organizations; Item 007: Households; Item 008: Subsidies; Item 009: Other Transfers. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, under 009: Other Transfers, the Trinidad and Tobago Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, we—the original allocation for 2026 was $35.1 million, $35.2 million roughly. Right? That was then revised downwards to $28.8 million. Has a board been installed as yet?

Hon. Maharaj: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Why not?

Hon. Maharaj: It is in the process.

Mr. Young SC: There has been 19 months, you know, as a private sector businessman, how that would cripple you without a board.

Hon. Maharaj: I know. Well—

Mr. Young SC: Is it that they are not taking you on?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Maharaj: But, "yuh" know, we are working with the team.

Mr. Young SC: You are working with the management team?

Hon. Maharaj: The entire management, senior management team, and we meet on a weekly basis.

Mr. Young SC: Because that body for your Ministry is an extremely important one for the promotion.

Hon. Maharaj: Absolutely.

Mr. Young SC: So, Minister, it also, by there not being a board, what it does, it can, and I suspect it is stymieing a lot of the confirmation of decisions that management may want to take. Is it that they are bringing that directly to the Ministry?

Hon. Maharaj: As I have indicated, we have, from day one, we have the entire senior team of Global Trinidad and Tobago TT working alongside all other heads of agencies and departments, and they meet every week.

Mr. Young Sc: I understand that, but there are administrative matters that usually, it is the Board of Directors that would grant the final approval.

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Of course, you would be aware, having come from private sector, that with a private sector organization such as these, well, meaning a limited liability setup, they are not supposed to, in accordance with the State Manual from the Ministry of Finance, come directly to the Ministers or the Ministry. Their direction is to come from the Board. So, might I respectfully suggest that some pressure be put on wherever it needs to be put for a board to be appointed.

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Right. Thank you.

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And then I look at line Item 40: Operational Expenses, Commercial Officers and Attachés, and I see that no—initially in 2026, $4.5 million was allocated, and then that dropped to a Revised Estimate to $500,740, and now in 2027, there is none. Is it that a Government policy decision have been taken that there are to be no commercial officers and attachés at our embassies, consulates and high commissions abroad?

Hon. Maharaj: This line has been moved to the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, I am glad to hear that. So, you are not aware of how many officers are currently appointed and where?

Hon. Maharaj: No, not yet.

Mr. Young SC: But the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism would have a close relationship—

Hon. Maharaj: Very close, yes.

Mr. Young SC: —with these officers because they will contact the Ministry—

Hon. Maharaj: That is right.

Mr. Young SC:—for information and to be set up with meetings—

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—with some of our manufacturers et cetera.

Hon. Maharaj: We will be consulted every step of the way.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you. So, in ending, I really want to emphasize,

please get that board in place. It has been 19 months, and it is stymieing the potential progress.

Madam Chairman: Malabar/ Mausica.

Mr. Young SC: "Wam with you boi?"

Mr. Romain: Thank you. [*Laughter*] Thank you, Chair. 009/36: Maintenance of Golf Course at Magdalena Grand. Minister, I note that there is no allocation for 2027 for that line Item. Is it that the State intends to abandon those facilities pending sale of the—

Dr. Gosine: Sorry?

Mr. Romain: 009/36: Maintenance of Golf Course at Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort. I note that there was an allocation in 2026 of $1.9 million. There is no allocation there this year. Is it that—

Dr. Hosein: Madam Chair, with your permission, this particular line Item has been moved to the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs, so you would see the allocation being placed there when we get to that particular Head.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Member.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad; Item 011: Transfer to State Enterprises. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, you have a question?

Mr. Young SC: 06: Current Transfers, the next one.

Madam Chairman: Can you repeat?

Mr. Young SC: 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies; 004: Statutory Boards. Sorry, Madam Chair, we can move to those Items now? I am trying to push us along.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, so 006/004: Statutory Bodies.

Madam Chairman: Member, I would need to read a procedure.

Mr. Young SC: Well, that is what I was waiting on.

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under *the Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies; and Item 004: Statutory Boards appears on page 491 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 the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, page 577. Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly. 44-Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 577. Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Young SC: 577, okay. For the specifics.

Madam Chairman: Does your question arise here?

Mr. Young SC: No.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Which book, Member?

Mr. Young SC: Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority, that has been moved from—

Madam Chairman: Member, please allow me to read that one as well. 45- Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority, no allocation.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, why is there no allocation for the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority, something I am sure that was dear to your heart?

Hon. Maharaj: You know, traditionally, the racing bodies are supposed to generate their own income. We know that since in the 1980s, it was bad legislation and—

Mr. Young SC: But okay. It is supposed to, but we also know that it has not been able to sustain itself, and this year a decision was taken to not have any allocation there whatsoever. I am actually looking because I believe it was the UNC Manifesto that actually had the promotion of the Racing Authority and horse racing as a big part of its campaign. So, is it that there is now a Government policy decision to no longer support the horse racing industry?

Hon. Maharaj: Well, the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority is funded by the Betting Levy Board.

Mr. Young Sc: Umm hmm, correct.

7.10 p.m.

Hon. Maharaj: So, you know, we are very hopeful that the new gambling commission—

Mr. Young SC: The Gaming Commission.

Hon. Maharaj: The Gaming Commission or gambling commission will generate the income to support the Betting Levy Board to support racing.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, you are an individual who has been very successful prior to entering the realm of politics. Might I respectfully suggest that you utilize that weight to try and get the racing industry some assistance before it dies totally? Thank you.

Hon. Members: Absolutely.

Madam Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you. Chair, just on the same line item, Minister, because the Arima racecourse is located in the constituency of Malabar/Mausica, and the impact of the lack of an allocation is having, well, consequences with respect to the roads leading to that facility, which falls under that racing authority. And so, we have difficulties in getting that road paved because the racing authority has indicated that that falls under them and they do not have the funding for that. Can I ask the Minister to please look into that situation?

Madam Chairman: Member, is there a question there?

Mr. Romain: Yeah, I am asking the Minister if he can look into that situation with respect to the issue of the roads, because it is a main thoroughfare that leads to a community just beyond the racetrack.

Hon. Maharaj: Yeah.

Hon. Members: Ministry of Works—

Mr. Romain: [*Inaudible*] racecourse—

Hon. Maharaj: I will be lobbying for that.

Mr. Romain: Racecourse—

Hon. Maharaj: I have been lobbied extensively by stakeholders.

Madam Chairman: Any other questions?

Mr. Romain: I would appreciate that, if you could lobby some more, Minister. Thank you.

Hon. Maharaj: Absolutely.

Hon. Maharaj: You know that is close to my heart, right?

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we shall now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, page 213, Consolidation Fund. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. D. Tourism. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chair. Tourism Sites and Attractions Upgrade. We see here $3.5 million was dedicated to that particular Item. The Estimates say $1 million. Was only $1 million spent on Tourism Sites and Attractions Upgrade in 2026? Is that accurate?

Hon. Maharaj: Yes.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, so a third of the amount to upgrade tourist sites was done in 2026, and we have $5 million for 2027. What assurance is there that this $5 million will be put to use to upgrade tourism sites and attractions?

Hon. Maharaj: Yes, we are upgrading. We are focused on—

Hon. Member: Top priority sites first.

Hon. Maharaj: Yeah, the top priority sites first, the ones that attract high-value visitors.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right. No problem.

Hon. Maharaj: And a priority listing.

Mr. Des Vignes: No problem, Minister. I want to go to 005, quickly,

Beautification Works Through Cluster Planting of Poui on Nation's Highways. This was something that the Minister of Finance mentioned in a big way in his budget last year. I am seeing $1 million was allocated, and $820,000 spent. Is this correct?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Des Vignes: No. The Minister said it was an Estimate. So I just want to ask if $820,000 was spent.

Hon. Maharaj: We are partnering with the private sector to take over that project.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. So that is why there is no figure because the private sector is going to take it over.

Hon. Maharaj: Yeah.

Mr. Des Vignes: Where are these pouis on the nation's highways planted right now? Because I see $820,000 was spent.

Hon. Maharaj: We did not.

Mr. Des Vignes: So $820,000 was spent, and they were not planted?

Hon. Maharaj: No. Nothing was spent.

Mr. Des Vignes: Nothing was done, but $820,000 was spent?

Hon. Maharaj: Nothing.

Mr. Des Vignes: That is what we are saying here, Minister? No further questions. No further questions, Chair, on this item.

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chair. Just one quick question, Minister. Under Tourism 001: Tourism Sites and Attractions Upgrade. I think you mentioned that you were going to have a priority listing for it. Would we be able to get that listed

in writing? In writing. We do not need it now.

Hon. Maharaj: I could—

Mr. de Nobriga: No, no. Minister, we would prefer it in writing if you do not mind. I am happy to get it in writing. Thank you.

Dr. Gosine: He has it now if you want it.

Mr. de Nobriga: No, no.

Madam Chairman: R. Support Industrial Development Initiative. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chair. 002: Global Trinidad and Tobago. I am seeing a figure here of $13 million, but less than half of that was spent in 2026, according to the Revised Estimate. Is that accurate? And if so, what is the reason only half of the development was actually spent?

Hon. Maharaj: We actually spent $7.378 million.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. But still less than the $13 million attributed and allocated. Does this have anything to do with GlobalTT not having a board presently?

Hon. Maharaj: No, no. As I indicated, we are working with all agencies, all departments, and nobody is in silos. We are in teams. So, this was in export development, export readiness, investment promotion, film, music, creative industries development, creative industry export promotion, fashion industry development, digital transformation and communication, exporter capacity building, international market access and promotion and film production rebates, as an overview.

Madam Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am on 007: Implementation of an Integrated Digital Infrastructure and TTSEZ's Regulatory Operation. Shall I go ahead? Minister, could you say how many special economic zone licences have been granted by the authority since May 2025?

Hon. Maharaj: Seven have been granted.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry.

Hon. Maharaj: Seven have been granted.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Seven?

Hon. Maharaj: Yeah.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: How have these been granted if there is no Board in place?

Hon. Maharaj: Management reviewed the process and—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Minister, you do know that for the licences to be granted, it is supposed to be done by the Board. So this would have been done ultra vires in law.

Hon. Maharaj: I am not certain it requires Board approval.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Excuse me?

Hon. Maharaj: I am not certain it requires Board approval. I am not certain about that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But there is no Board, and it is the Board that is supposed to grant the licences. So how are the licences being done?

Hon. Maharaj: As far as I understand, there are legal requirements that are met. We can proceed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: As far as you understand.

Hon. Maharaj: Yeah.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. According to the law, that is not how it is supposed to be done. But if you all are doing it that way, I wish you well.

Dr. Gosine: And the Minister grants the licence.

Hon. Maharaj: And the Minister grants the licence.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Through the Board. Not the Minister.

Hon. Maharaj: Asked and answered

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

Hon. Maharaj: We have a whole legal team advising us.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "Well yuh legal team wrong."

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. B. Bureau of Standards; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings.

Hon. Members, we shall now move on to the Infrastructure Development Fund, page 313. Infrastructure Development Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Q. Evolving Technologies and Enterprise Development Corporation Limited.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 85 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

7.20 p.m.

Head 30: Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, $207,284,700

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Baptiste: Madam Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to address these

distinguished members of the Standing Finance Committee to discuss the budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development for fiscal year 2027. I express my gratitude to the hardworking staff that have accompanied me to this Sitting, as well as those in the Ministry, and our stakeholders who make every effort to ensure that we deliver on our policies, programmes, and projects aimed at promoting decent work and enhancing entrepreneurship in Trinidad and Tobago.

I am happy to report, Madam Chairman, that in fiscal 2026, the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development made significant strides on a number of areas articulated in the Workers' Agenda of the official policy framework. This includes labour legislation reform with amendments to the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act; the Maternity Protection Act, taken to Parliament in April and May of 2026, respectively; development of an econometric model for minimum wage determination that lays the foundation for further work in respect of a living wage; and strengthening the labour market information system with the commencement of a number of studies, including on skills mismatch and job vacancies in municipal corporations and protective services.

Madam Chairman, we will continue to address the issues of employment and employability of our citizens in fiscal 2027 with a focus on youth, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. To this end, we will continue our programmes under the National Employment Service, our entrepreneurial training programme for persons who are blind and visually impaired, and implement a new project on youth workplace readiness. During fiscal 2027, my Ministry will also continue to pursue a robust agenda on labour legislation reform, including review

of the Workmen's Compensation Act, Minimum Wages Act and the Employment Exchange Act, as well as finalization of the Employment Standards Bill.

Madam Chairman, we will also be placing significant focus on strengthening the Occupational Safety and Health framework through review of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, and promoting greater awareness of OSH in the construction sector and the operationalization of the statutory functions of the OSH Authority under section 66 of the OSH Act. Additionally, Madam Chairman, as we seek to ensure value for money and efficiency, we are about to embark on a pilot project to enhance productivity in small enterprises through specific interventions.

Further, through the National Enterprise Development Company, we will be strengthening our focus on building entrepreneurial ecosystem to assist entrepreneurs at the point of their need. In closing, Madam Chairman, I look forward to a productive session, and I avail myself to provide the necessary information and clarification required by this committee. Thank you

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed: That Head 30 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $207,284,700 for Head 30, Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, page

206. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly, Madam Chairman. Hon. Minister, 01/001/01. There is an increase of 15,637,700. Could you account for that increase? And could you tell us, and you can send it in writing, what is the current number of permanent, acting, or temporary staff that are paid under this line Item; and could you provide a breakdown of new positions, filled vacancies, promotions, and acting appointments?

Hon. Baptiste: Thank you, Member, for Arima. The first part of your question: The increase in allocation is to pay arrears for public officers arising out of the revised terms and conditions—it caters for 40 per cent of the arrears in cash.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So that is no new appointments—

Hon. Baptiste: No.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—just strictly cash. Okay, thank you.

Hon. Baptiste: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Co-operatives. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. Madam Chairman, under 06, same 001: Remuneration to Board Members. Can the Minister account what accounts for the increase in the allocation, and could you tell us which boards will be funded under this allocation and what amounts are allocated, and of course, the remuneration of the Board members?

Hon. Baptiste: Right, again, thank you, Member. The increase in the remuneration is in relation to—the Boards were not reconstituted for only part of fiscal 2026. In 2027, we are accounting for the full period, for the whole fiscal

period. Therefore, it accounts for the increase. The Boards in question would be the Minimum Wages Board; the Boilers Examiners Board; and the other six being the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee; the National Steering Committee on the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour Trinidad and Tobago; the Standing National Labour Market Council of Trinidad and Tobago; the ILO 144 Tripartite Consultative Committee; the National Productivity Council; and the HIV Workplace Advocacy Advisory Board. In relation to the question of remuneration, we will provide that in writing for you.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: That is fine. Thank you.

7.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Friendly Societies; Item 004: Occupational Safety and Health Authority; Item 005: On The Job Training Programme.

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

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: For?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Right, I need to read the Item first. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. Is that page 208? Yes. Okay. Item 16: Contract Employment, $11,341,500. Could the hon. Minister indicate how many persons are currently employed under this line Item, and how many new persons are anticipated to be recruited for fiscal 2027? There is an increase of $966,000.

Hon. Baptiste: Hon. Member, I heard the first part of your question. The second—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah, okay, I am dealing with the Contract Employment, which is 16—

Hon. Baptiste: Correct.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: The Estimate there is $11,341,500 with an increase of $966,000. So, I am asking, how many persons are currently employed under that line Item, and how many persons are anticipated to be recruited? I have no difficulty in getting that in writing.

Hon. Baptiste: Right. Member, the answer to the first part of your question, we have 40 persons currently employed.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sorry?

Hon. Baptiste: 40, 4-0.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, 4-0. Okay.

Hon. Baptiste: Right. And the second part is—[*Minister confers with technocrats*] The anticipation is to move at least 18 persons, who are on short-term, to contracts, so that is an increase of 18. So, we are to increase by, at least, 18. Yes?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Co-operatives; Item 003: Friendly Societies; Item 004: Occupational Safety and Health Authority. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. Hon. Minister—thank you, Madam Chairman. Okay, so 004, are we there yet? Item 16? Yes? Yes. Madam Chairman, 02/004/16: Contract Employment, $13 million, an increase of $750,000. Could the hon. Minister indicate how many persons are currently employed under this line Item? And basically, same question, how many persons

are expected to be recruited, and what categories of staff are being filled under Contract Employment?

Hon. Baptiste: Member for Arima, the first part of your question, the answer is 25 persons currently employed under contract. And the second part is—[*Minister confer with technocrats*] There is an intention to employ an additional 65 persons on contract.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Occupational Safety and Health Authority; Item 005: On The Job Training Programme.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Co-operatives; Item 003: Friendly Societies; Item 004: Occupational Safety and Health Authority.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 004: International Bodies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad.

Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies; Item 004: Statutory Boards appears on page 215 of the Draft Estimates. However, the detailed examination of these allocations is contained in the *Draft Estimates of the 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 the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly,* page 247.

Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly. 17 - Cipriani College of Labor and Co-operative Studies. 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 now move to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* page 81. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, pages 82 to 83; G. Business Services. Item 004: Social Infrastructure; D. Youth Development. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Item 09—okay, so it is actually on the next page. Item 09/003, New Project, which is $1.5 million, which is—Item 021: LaunchPadTT, $1.5 million, if you could provide some details of that project. That is the last Item, 02: LaunchPadTT, page 82, last one. Have you found it, Minister? It is the last—right.

Hon. Baptiste: Hon. Member, you wanted to find out the—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah, the scope of the project.

Hon. Baptiste: Right. The overall objective of LaunchPadTT is to establish a nationally coordinated incubation and acceleration programme that supports the creation, growth and sustainability of micro and small enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago. The specific objectives are to increase business creation, strengthen business growth, improve access to markets and finance, promote business formalization, strengthen the entrepreneurship ecosystem, and support evidence-

based decision-making. Some of the key activities that we plan to implement in fiscal 2027, one is called activate TT, build TT, a configured learning management system/customer relationship management, and the start-up of a participant pipeline to support later programme delivery.

Hon. Baptiste: It strengthens systems of existing businesses, supporting entrepreneurs in registration, business plans, the start-up process, business advisory, financing, et cetera, until the business gets off the ground. So that is the ActivateTT. Then there is an IgniteTT component, which is a focused pilot project based on assessing a firm and helping it develop and grow. And the last, but not least, is a component that is called BeyondTT, which is aimed at helping firms that choose to expand beyond our shores in terms of ExportTT. So that is a project that is aimed at assessing the small, micro, and medium enterprises and helping them wherever they need help. So, it is really doing an assessment and helping them to grow.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Social Infrastructure; D: Youth Development; Item 005: Multisectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans two pages; therefore, I will also announce the project groups. M: Cipriani College of Labour and Co-op Studies; A: Administrative Services; F: Public Buildings. Infrastructure Development Fund—Item 005, Multisectoral and Other Services. F: Public Buildings.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 30 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, I now propose that we take Head 11 since it is under the same Minister. Thereafter, we will do Head 17 followed by Head 8.

Head 11: Registration, Recognition and Certification Board.

[MR. SINGH *in the Chair*]

Mr. Chairman: All right, Head 11. Minister, are you ready?

Head 11: Registration, Recognition, and Certification Board, $5,542,900.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Baptiste: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board is a tripartite body created via the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01. The Board comprises a chairman, three employers' representatives, three workers' representatives, and two members jointly nominated by the most representative organizations of employers and workers. There is one alternate member to each of the substantive members. The Chairman of the Board is selected by the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago after consultation with such organizations as, in her opinion, are most representative of workers and employers. The duties of the Board are as outlined in section 23(1) of the Industrial Relations Act Chap. 88:01, as follows:

"(a) the determination of all applications…"

Mr. Chairman: Minister, excuse me. Barataria/San Juan, is it that you are hell-bent on disturbing these proceedings?

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Chair, I was not [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Please. Thank you very much. All right, Minister.

Hon. Baptiste: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. "The determination of all applications"—the duties of the Board as outlined in section 23(1) of the Industrial Relations Act, Chapter 88:01 are as follows:

"(a) the determination of all applications, petitions and matters concerning certification of recognition under Part III, including the taking of preferential ballots under section 34(2);

(b) the certification of recognized majority unions;

(c) the recording of the certification of recognized majority unions…

(d) the making of agency shop orders…and the conduct of ballots and proceedings…

(e) the cancellation of certification of recognition of trade unions; and

(f) such other matters as are referred or assigned to it by the Minister..."

The present board was appointed on April 10, 2026, for a period of three years. The Board generally meets once per month, with ad hoc meetings convened as required in order to accomplish its work programme.

The Board has a secretariat, which is headed by a secretary who is the accounting officer. The secretariat comprises 25 public officers who carry out the day-to-day functions of the Board. The role of the secretariat in the performance of its functions and duties in accordance with the Act is to provide consistent, accurate, timely, and useful information to the Board in carrying out its mandate. Mr. Chairman, the work of the Board is critical to maintaining industrial peace in Trinidad and Tobago and continues to keep abreast of the ever-evolving work environment. I would like to thank the current board and the staff of the secretariat for their ongoing commitment to promoting industrial peace and stability in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Chairman, I stand ready and willing to respond to the questions of this Standing Finance Committee. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed: That Head 11 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $5,542,900 for Head 11 Registration, Recognition and Certification Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, which is at page 48. Sub-Head details: Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure at 49; Item 001: General Administration. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, under 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, is this where the secretariat salaries are paid from?

Hon. Baptiste: Simple answer: Yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Is there now a full composition of the RRCB Board in place?

Hon. Baptiste: Member, yes, there is a full composition of the RRCB Board in place.

Mr. Young SC: And they are functioning.

Mr. Young SC: Functioning.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much.

7.50 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 11 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister, to you and your staff and the members of the staff of the Recognition Board. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Head 17: Personnel Department, $46,853,900.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes. It is now 7.53. Minister, thank you very much. You may proceed with your opening statement.

Hon. Smith: Thank you, Chairman, and good evening to colleagues. Mr. Chairman, the Personnel Department occupies a critical place in the machinery of the State. Its effectiveness of government ultimately depends on the people who serve within it. Across Trinidad Tobago, Chairman, approximately 90,000 public officers and employees perform duties that touch almost every aspect of national life from education to health to national security to the administration of essential services. The work of the Personnel Department, therefore, extends far beyond determining issues related to salaries, terms and conditions of employment. It is also, Chairman, critically about supporting a public service in which employees are treated fairly, institutions are properly equipped to perform their duties, and, of course, Chairman, the citizens receive the standard of service they deserve.

The Department carries responsibility for determining and advising upon and negotiating terms and conditions of employment across the civil service, statutory authorities, the teaching service, the police service, the fire service and the prison service, while also treating with matters affecting members of the defence force, daily rated workers, and contracted workers. It additionally provides important support to the Salaries Review Commission and the Human

Resource Advisory Committee. These responsibilities speak directly to the stability and effectiveness of the wider public sector, because when our Human Resources, Chairman, functions our institutions are better positioned to respond to the needs of the people they were created to serve.

Under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, this Government has placed people at the centre of its programmes of work. That commitment must also be reflected within the public service. We want a public sector in which employees understand their roles, are appropriately classified and compensated, have access to fair and transparent systems, and are supported by institutions capable of resolving all issues in a timely and professional manner. This is important as it has a direct bearing on worker productivity, institutional morale and most importantly, the experience of citizens who depend on Government for services every day.

The Personnel Department, Chairman, therefore, continues to address a broad range of institutional relations, industrial relations, human resource matters, including grievances, disputes and proceedings before the Industrial Court. Further, Chairman, the restructuring of the Personnel Department, together with its continued collaboration with the Service Commission Department to address various vacant offices, provides an opportunity to strengthen its institutional capacity and accelerate the advancement of important human resource matters.

For our Government, Chairman, institutional reform must always produce practical results. A stronger Personnel Department should contribute to a more responsive public service, better workforce planning, improved employee relations, and ultimately, Mr. Chairman, better services to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

As we consider, Chairman, the Department's Estimates for fiscal year 2026—2027, and as Minister of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence, this is a critical Department that serves our nation because it serves the people that we represent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Smith: Mr. Chairman, we are focused on delivery because every investment provided by the Government must indeed deliver on its investment.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Smith: This is not simply about the Personnel Department, Chairman, it is about building a public service that respects its employees, responds to the changing needs of Government, and performs at the level of professionalism and efficiency that our citizens rightly expect. This is a standard by which this Government is committed to. This is a standard represented by a government.

Mr. Chairman: Alright, Minister, sorry, your time is up. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $46,853,900 for Head 17, Personnel Department, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We have one more Department to do. It is 7.59 p.m. I propose to put the question because the Minister of Finance deals with EBC. So I propose to put the question. We basically have a minute to put two questions. Hon. Members, unless I am told that there are questions for—

Question proposed: That Head 17 stand part of the Schedule.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 17 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: So, we now move to the Elections and Boundaries Commission, which is Head 08. You have 30 seconds, Minister.

Head 08 Elections and Boundaries Commission, $106,441,900.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you have literally 25 seconds. If you forego your opening statement, I literally have enough time to put the question.

Hon. Tancoo: Chairman, I want to make one statement, only that, again, the Opposition has been unable to keep to the agenda, unable to do their work on the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, we have 10 seconds.

Question proposed: That Head 98 stand part of the Schedule.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 08 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Good night, Members. See you tomorrow at 10 o'clock.

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