HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 23, 2026

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2027) BILL, 2026

[Fourth Day]

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

[*Chairman: Mr. Singh*]

10.00 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Good morning, once again. This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will resume. We go now to Head 15: Tobago House of Assembly.

Head 15: Tobago House of Assembly $2,738,493,500

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, I will invite you to make the usual opening statement.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman. The Tobago House of Assembly is pleased to appear before this honourable committee in fulfilment of its constitutional and legal mandate to advance the economic, social and infrastructural development of Tobago, and of its corresponding obligation to ensure prudent, transparent and accountable management of public funds appropriated for those purposes. In this regard, the Assembly remains committed to strengthening institutional capability, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service delivery, facilitating economic diversification, and enhancing the social and economic well-being of the people of Tobago.

Mr. Chairman, the Estimates before this honourable committee reflect the Assembly's considered assessment of Tobago's developmental priorities, having regard to the prevailing national fiscal constraints, the competing demands on the public purse and the imperative of achieving value for money in public

expenditure. Relatedly, the Assembly recognizes and respects the important oversight function of this honourable committee in the parliamentary consideration of the national estimates of expenditure. We therefore welcome this opportunity to provide the necessary explanations and justifications in support of the allocation proposed for the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the THA, we thank you and the hon. Members of this committee for the opportunity to address these proceedings, and we stand ready to respond to any questions which Members may wish to draw.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 15 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: That said sum for Head 15 is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, which is at page 69 of the relevant volume. Hon. Members, before proceeding further, I wish to indicate that under the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Board & Similar Bodies; Item 004: Statutory Boards appears on page 69 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. Division 01—

Mr. Gonzales: What page?

Mr. Chairman: Page 23, Member. Division 01-Assembly Legislature; Sub-Head 01—

Mr. Gonzales: I am sorry, Chair, just for housekeeping, I know it is mentioned on page 69 of the *Details of Estimates*—

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Mr. Gonzales:—but the more detailed information—

Mr. Chairman: The detailed—is on my page 23.

Mr. Gonzales: Page 23 of the *Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies.*

Mr. Chairman: Yes. So that is where we are going now.

Mr. Gonzales: That is correct for the more detailed—

Mr. Chairman: The general information is at page 69, but the detailed line-by-line items are from page 23 onwards. Right? So, we go now, for the avoidance of doubt and clarity for Members, to pages 23 to 24 inclusive, okay? Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Morning to the staff of the THA. Mr. Chairman, starting with Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there is an increase of $1.8million. Could we indicate how much is for salaries, how much is cost of living, and how many persons does this figure cater for?

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much for your question, Member. I am advised that we will have to provide for you the breakdown because this Head actually consists of several Items, as you indicated, including provision for arrears, and

provision for salaries and cost of living specifically. So, at this point, we will be able to provide it to you—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: You will undertake to provide it?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: No, sorry, I have no more under this Sub-Head, but the next one. So, go ahead.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, so I was about—because I saw you—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sure.

Mr. Chairman:—put your hand down. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, 08: Rent/Lease – Office Accommodation and Storage, there is an increase of just over $2.6 million. Could the Minister indicate the reason for the increase, as well as provide the relevant landlords and periods for the leases and amounts, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I will have to respond that in two parts. The first part is that the Assembly Legislature Buildings had to undergo significant upgrades to its electronic system, plumbing and structure, and there will be a need to source a building that can accommodate both the staff and the Assembly Chamber. A suitable building is being sourced currently. With regard to the provision of the names of the landlords. We will have to provide that for you in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Very well, Minister, thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: Just to confirm, that given the infrastructure works that have to be done in fiscal 2027, there will be a new landlord that will be sourced during fiscal

2027 for provision of support for the THA's operations.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. Minister, could they also provide to us the nature and scope of the works to be done?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure, we could provide.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: It does not have to be today, but if it is submitted in writing, that is fine.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure, no problem. As I had indicated, structure, plumbing and electrical are the major ones. Do you want a detailed scope of works, or just the—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: No, not details, just sufficient to be able to indicate, you know, exactly what is to be done.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: That will be sufficient.

Mr. Chairman: Arima, can I move to Diego Martin West now? Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you, Chair. On the same Item as the Leader of the Opposition asked, do we know who the new landlord is?

Hon. Tancoo: No. As indicated in the presentation just now, the procurement processes are now starting.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: So, we do not have a building or a landlord, therefore, as a result.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay, so it has not quite moved forward yet. I want to move to Item 27: Official Overseas Travel for the Assembly Legislature. Usually, what sort of activities would the THA go to—the Assembly Legislature for official overseas travel?

Hon. Tancoo: All right. This line Item really treats with official travel, as you

indicated—

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo:—for attendance at conferences, regional workshops, et cetera.

10.00 a.m.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, in 2025, the actual spend was $1.3 million, and then it went down to $500,000 allocated in 2026 under the current finance Minister. Then it went up—well, what was actually spent was $750,500. Is that correct, finance Minister? Because I know, yesterday you said the 2026 Revised Estimates may not necessarily be actual. But was it actually $750,500 spent?

Hon. Tancoo: Just for correction, what we would have indicated yesterday is that these are Estimates.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, yes.

Hon. Tancoo: And on occasion, when the—allow me, when the occasion arises, and we can provide the Actual, we will do so.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay, so, $750,500 is not the Actual?

Hon. Tancoo: In fact, I am given the opportunity to provide you with an actual figure.

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

Hon. Tancoo: The actual spend under this line Item is $1.599 million.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay, so we have an understatement there, significant understatement.

Hon. Tancoo: What we have is an Estimate, which will become—

Mr. Des Vignes: Right.

Hon. Tancoo: I will just give you the actual figure.

Mr. Des Vignes: But finance Minister, the Estimate, with all due respect, based

on what you are saying, it is understated, right, simple.

Hon. Tancoo: With the greatest respect, Member, do not correct—I have given you the Actual.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right, okay.

Hon. Tancoo: So, this is not an understatement. This is an Estimate.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right, okay.

Hon. Tancoo: If you understand how the process works, there are Estimates.

Mr. Des Vignes: I understand how the process works.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Finance Minister. If that is the case, with the Actual being 1.5, why is there, in this case, a $1 million decrease for the official overseas travel allocated for the Tobago House of Assembly's Assembly Legislature?

Hon. Tancoo: If I may—

Mr. Des Vignes: Why is there a $1 million decrease based on the figures you just highlighted?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I want to direct you to the top of that column. You will see 2027, and you will see below 2027, there is a word there that I would like you to refer to. It says Estimates.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, I understand that. But our Estimates that we have here are what is usually allocated, assigned, or expected to be spent.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, no.

Mr. Des Vignes: Why then is there a $1 million understatement in the Estimate for 2027? Why is less given there?

Hon. Tancoo: So, the $1 million—you see, you are getting very creative, and I

appreciate that. The $1 million that you are referring to, that difference, is based on the actual figure I just gave to you.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, yes. Correct.

Hon. Tancoo: Good, good. The Estimate—

Mr. Des Vignes: For 2027.

Hon. Tancoo: The Revised Estimate for 2026 went to 750. The Actual is actually 1.5.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right.

Hon. Tancoo: There is a new Estimate.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right. And as we are talking about 2027, why would we estimate less than the Actual as we go into 2027?

Hon. Tancoo: Okay, so—

Mr. Des Vignes: Is it that the Tobago House of Assembly—

Hon. Tancoo: No, no. No, no, no.

Mr. Des Vignes:—Legislature is getting less money from the Minister of Finance?

Mr. Chairman: Member.

Hon. Tancoo: You see, now allow me to explain.

Mr. Chairman: Member. All right. It is a little too early in the day for that kind of argumentative questioning. Okay? Just do it in a calm and dispassionate manner. Okay?

Mr. Des Vignes: Sorry.

Mr. Chairman: And allow the Minister to answer the question. That is all you have to do.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the Member's need to get newspaper coverage, a soundbite for newspaper coverage.

Mr. Des Vignes: There is nothing about that, Minister.

Hon. Tancoo: However—

Mr. Des Vignes: It is just a questions.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Des Vignes: Basic questions you are not answering, Minister.

Hon. Tancoo: Can I? Can I, please?

Mr. Des Vignes: Basic questions.

Hon. Tancoo: Can I answer? Can I answer?

Mr. Des Vignes: Of course you can, Minister.

Hon. Tancoo: Okay. So, like I said, I appreciate the need for you to get a soundbite. However, the facts are that travel last year is not exactly replicated by travel this year. There may have been conferences last year that may not appear this year.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: What is provided in the Estimate, again, what is provided in the Estimate is an estimate that will be supplemented, if need be, above or below the estimate. That is basic. There is no mal-intent as you are inclined to go to. I appreciate the need for the soundbite. But let us—

Mr. Des Vignes: It is not about soundbites, Minister. It is about getting to the facts. It is less than actually was spent. That is all it is. And that is what we are trying to get to the bottom of here.

Hon. Tancoo: And I have given you an answer.

Mr. Des Vignes: Chair, respectfully, question asked and answered.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Des Vignes: It is less.

Mr. Chairman: You have made your point.

Mr. Des Vignes: No problem.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I am on Item 02/16 Contract Employment. I see in the Estimate there is an increase of $300,000. Could you tell us, in light of, hon. Minister, the assertion that there are contract cuts at the THA, what jobs or what contracts will be covered by this $300,000 figure?

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you, thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Scotland SC: It is an increase.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much for the question, Member. I noticed you pre-empted your question—not pre-empted, but in your run-up for your question, you suggested something about cuts in contracts—

Mr. Scotland SC: It is an assertion there are cuts in contract employment. So, I see that there is a $300,000—I am not saying yay or nay to there, I am just saying that is the assertion.

Hon. Tancoo: Okay.

Mr. Scotland SC: Can you tell us what jobs or what contracts will be covered by that $300,000 increase? What are the contracts?

Hon. Tancoo: Okay, so that is fair. And just to be clear, there could not be a cut in contracts if there is an increase in allocation. But based on the technical information being provided to me here, a regularization and rationalization of additional positions for the Assembly legislature is currently being conducted by the MSU. Based on the current progress, 15 new—that is, additional positions—will be added to the cadre of contract officers in the first instance at approximately

$200,000 per month. It must also be noted that there is no contract staff attached to the Office of the Minority Leader, which would have incurred an annual cost of about $511,113.60. So, the savings there would be used to absorb the additional staff.

Mr. Scotland SC: So, there have been no—tell us, would these positions be advertised for all—

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Scotland SC:—in Tobago?

Hon. Tancoo: The positions will be advertised.

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Chairman, I am on Item 02/22: Short-term Employment. Again, I see there is an Estimate increase of $150,000. Could you tell us what the names are, or what are the jobs that will comprise these Short-term Employment? Can you provide that to us, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure. So, the increase is actually $150,000.

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: All right. So, currently there are 24 persons employed on short-term positions. Monthly expenditure for short-term positions is estimated at $225,000, with a projected annual expenditure of $2.7 million. This sum is expected to be reduced as some are to be converted to contract positions. The specific nature of the job varies across the Legislature and includes positions such as Business Operations Assistant, et cetera. So, there is a wide variety of job positions that this fills.

Mr. Scotland SC: Have these positions been advertised already?

Hon. Tancoo: No, they have not.

Mr. Scotland SC: When will they be advertised?

Hon. Tancoo: I think once the budget is passed, then they will have the financing to be able to do their advertisements, et cetera.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: So, within fiscal 2027.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 24. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007: Households. Division 02: Office of the Chief Secretary, pages 25 and 26, inclusive. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, 001: General Administration, Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. Hon. Minister, could you indicate? We have moved from a Revised of $8.8 million to an increase of $190,206,800. Could you account for that increase please, that huge increase?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure, thank you very much, Member, for your question. Bear with me for one second. Right. This increase provides for the settlement of salary arrears owed to all public officers in THA following the conclusion of negotiations, so it is an anticipated conclusion. The balance provides for the salaries of current officers, including the salary increase effective January 1, 2026, and staff supporting three new divisions that have been established in fiscal 2027, going forward. There are 46 established posts, 23 filled, 22 filled in an acting capacity, and one vacant.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Could you tell us what the three new divisions are? And could you also give us an indication in terms of what would be for COLA and what would be for Salaries?

Hon. Tancoo: For the three specific divisions, or for all the divisions?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: No, no, no, just to list the three divisions. I do not want

all the staff. You said there are three new divisions, so I am just asking—

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—what are those three, if you have it?

10.20 a.m.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, there were the changes in titles and changes in names but in the rest of the details under THA that we are going to examine today, we will be examining all of the new ones.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. But you are not able to tell me at this stage what are the three. So that is what I was asking if you are able to tell at this time what are the three new divisions?

Hon. Tancoo: The increase, the breakdown?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: No, just the names. In other words, you have a structure, as I understand it, and you now have added three new divisions. So I was just asking if you could indicate what are the names of these three divisions, if you have them?

Hon. Tancoo: So one would be Youth Empowerment and Sport, one would be Strategic Planning and Development, and the other would be Environment, Climate Resilience and Energy. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

Mr. Chairman Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert That same line Item, would these three new divisions be under the Chief Secretary? Yes or no? No?

Hon. Tancoo: Right. So, no, it is not directly under the Chief Secretary. The Chief Secretary is its own division.

Mr. Imbert Okay. So, since they are not under the Chief Secretary, why are they included in the Chief Secretary's allocation?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure. Good question. The funding is provided under the Chief Secretary, as we are now going to roll out the establishment of the other divisions.

Mr. Imbert So, because these are new, you put the money there. That is the answer?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Chairman Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chair. This figure, as the Minister of Finance would know, is obviously one that would bring attention to this Parliament, especially as it is a 2,000 per cent increase. Based on this, you mentioned the three new divisions. You mentioned back pay. Can you tell us what is the amount specifically attributed to staff for the Office of the Chief Secretary from this amount? What is the Actual amount for the staff wholly and solely of the Chief Secretary? Is that we have given the Chief Secretary more staff? Let us understand that. What is the amount?

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much for your question, Member. Now, we would have to provide that information for you in writing.

Mr. Des Vignes So you do not have that. Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: 007: Public Administration, Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, kindly, Mr. Chairman. Minister, there is—in Salaries and COLA, there is a decrease of $650,000. Could you share the reason for that decrease, please?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman [*Inaudible*] y number. 01, I think you are referring to.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, it is the first Item 007/01. Yes, to the end, $650,000 decrease.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you. Based on the explanation I have, is that funding was actually provided in line with the 2026 expenditure. The current allocation provides for about $440,000 a month for some 71 staff members.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: In other words, you have sufficient to cover so that?—okay.

Mr. Chairman: 011: Planning; 012: Land Management; 013: Labour; 016: Department of Environment, Climate Change and Energy. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, 26 to 33. 001: General Administration. Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Which one?

Mr. Gonzales: My hand up for Goods and Services.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, I thought you wanted—

Mr. Des Vignes: Chair, hands were up since 02.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, it is Goods and Services. So Goods and Services.

Mr. Gonzales: 02.

Mr. Chairman: 02, yeah, that is where we are.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. I thought you had moved on.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So we now go into 001: General Administration. **Mr. Gonzales:** Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: So the relevant pages for all Members are 26 to 33. General Administration spans pages 26 to 27. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Chair. Minister, under this line Item 04: Electricity, I observed that in 2025 there was an allocation of $2 million—Revised Estimates,

2026, 600 and there is a 50 per cent decrease—100 per cent, 300. Can you explain the reason for this $300,000 decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. Again, thank you very much for your question, Member. The decrease reflects the settlement of T&TEC arrears in fiscal 2026, when about $973,000 was paid. The 2027 allocation, therefore, provides for the electricity charges at the Hochoy Charles Administrative Complex, the Roxborough Administrative Complex, the Spring Garden Office Facilities, and Quarters 34. We believe that the current allocation would be sufficient for covering the electricity rates at that.

Mr. Gonzales: Thanks for that response, but does that allocation cater for the new electricity surcharge for some big consumers of electricity in Trinidad Tobago, as announced in your budget?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the electricity surcharge that you are referring to, this would have been in this budget?

Mr. Gonzales: In this budget.

Hon. Tancoo: That electricity surcharge if you would recall, refers specifically to residential customers.

Mr. Gonzales: Customers over 300,000 kilowatts.

Hon. Tancoo: Over 3,000 kilowatts.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: Per session—

Mr. Gonzales: So would this fall under—

Hon. Tancoo: This would not be residential institution. This will be listed as commercial.

Mr. Gonzales: If I point you to Sub Item 10, Office Stationery and Supplies.

Hon. Tancoo: Um-hmm.

Mr. Gonzales: Again, you look at the previous years: $600,000. 2026, Revised Estimate, $900,000. 2027, you have gone down to $600,000, a decrease by $300,000. Can you indicate the reason for that decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. Thank you for your question, Member. The decrease reflects $300,000 included in the 2026 revised allocation. So you would have seen the revised go up from the Estimate of 600 in 2026; we increased to $900. That increase reflects the increased allocation to support the setup of new offices, including the Office of the Secretary and the Division of Legal Affairs. Having spent that money in fiscal 2026, we do not need to spend that money in fiscal 2027, which is why the allocation at this point is $600,000, and the expectation is that that allocation would be sufficient for the needs under this Head.

Mr. Gonzales: And that is consistent with the request made by the THA for this line Item.

Hon. Tancoo: Well, I will tell you this. All Ministries, all entities, or statutory boards would have provided what they would have required, and based on the financial exigencies that we have, based on the state of the accounts that we are in, we would have provided as best as possible what we needed. We believe that the $600,000 is in line clearly and cleanly with the requirements of the THA under the line Item Office Stationery and Supplies. So we believe that this would be sufficient to cover the needs of THA at this point.

Mr. Chairman: Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, same 02: Goods and Services, Rent, Lease, Accommodation 08. There is—well, $5.6 million.

Could you provide any information as it relates to the lease, the period, the cost, and the landlord? And that information can be submitted.

Hon. Tancoo: I willprovide that for you in writing as required.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you, Chair. We move to Item number 16: Contract Employment. Minister, by chance, do we have the Actual figures, because I see the Revised Estimates here is $17,000. Do we have the Actual for this particular Item or no?

Hon. Tancoo: Contract employment?

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, Sir.

Hon. Tancoo: Sixteen.

Mr. Des Vignes: Sixteen is the Actual amount?

Hon. Tancoo: No, hold on.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay

Hon. Tancoo: Let me just verify what the extra amount is. [*Minister confers with technocrat*] We do not have the Actual figure at this point.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay, so we will just work with the Revised Estimates of $17 million. Given that the Revised Estimate was $17 million, why is there a $2 million decrease at the THA, in the Office of the Chief Secretary? They expect to have less contract employees in 2027?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, thanks again for the question. The decrease reflects a transfer of contract officers to three new divisions whose remuneration will now be met from those divisions' own Votes. The allocation provides for contract officers generally within the OCS, including 31 officers engaged in fiscal 2026, to staff the

new offices of the Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Chief Secretary, and Chief Administrator. So the short answer is, because we are shifting staff to the new divisions, they would not be counted here, and that would account for the decrease.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. Tancoo: Most welcome.

Mr. Des Vignes: In terms of training, we have a reduction in training of $1.2 million, what was the reason for this reduction in training cost?

Hon. Tancoo: Again, thank you for your question. The decrease reflects the completion of the Tobago Public Procurement Lab, which took place from the 26th to the 27th of November, 2025, and would have fallen into fiscal 2026, a one-off event that benefited all divisions of the THA at a cost of close to $1 million. The 2027 allocation therefore provides for priority programmes within the 2027 training plan. So, again, the decrease that you would have identified would have come about because there was a one-off training event in fiscal 2026, which would not need to be catered for in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Des Vignes: And 22: Short-term Employment, we see the $500,000 decrease, is this because of moving to the three other divisions? Is this because a project was completed? What is the reason for this particular decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: It will be, as you suggested, the transfer of 41 short-term staff to new divisions.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. Thank you, Minister. I want to go quickly to 66, we see a decrease of 2.78 for the Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. In 2025, it was $5 million, and the Revised Estimate says it is around $5 million for 2026, but in 2027 it is down to $3 million. What is the reason for that particular $2.7 million decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much for your question again. The decrease reflects additional funding provided during fiscal 2026 for the THA's flagship events. The 2027 allocation therefore provides for the THA's programme of official events, including Tobago Day, Independence Day, Republic Day celebrations, Public Service Week, the Christmas luncheon for senior citizens, Executive Council meetings, and the Tobago investment conference.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right.

Hon. Tancoo: We believe that the allocation in 2027 would be sufficient to meet those needs.

Mr. Des Vignes: So the same functions, but less money?

Hon. Tancoo: No. There was a one-off event. I just specified it there.

Mr. Des Vignes: Which one?

Hon. Tancoo: I did not specify it, but there are different events that would have happened that are not catered for this year.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: The ones I listed out are actually for the 2027 allocation.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. No problem, Minister. Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: I was just advised, it was the 50th anniversary celebration of Republic Day that would have catered for, and, obviously, that would be in fiscal 2026.

Mr. Des Vignes: Understood, Minister.

[Dr. Ali *in the Chair*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Next Item, Information.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Information. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, 16: Contract Employment, there is a decrease of $1 million, could Minister indicate the reason for that decrease, please, 002/16: Contract Employment?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure. Just give me a second, let me confirm with the technocrats. [*Member confers with technocrat*] Yes, Member, the allocation was provided in line with the 2026 expenditure, so that would account for the difference.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Could Minister indicate how many persons are employed under this line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: One, contract positions; 28 are filled with 13 currently vacant.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: And there is expectation for the other positions to be filled, and with the allocation that is here, to be able to cater as well for the positions that are not filled?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that the THA is aggressively pursuing the filling of those vacancies, but they believe that sufficient allocation is now in place for their requirement. As always, should additional be required, they will come back for mid-year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly, Madam Chairman. Minister, again, same line Item, 002/22: Short-term Employment, there is a decrease there of $400,000, could the Minister indicate the reason for that decrease, please, and the number of persons employed under that line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I do not have the number of persons employed there, but the decrease reflects the transfer of officers from short-term employment to contract employment in fiscal 2026.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So would the THA be able to indicate how many

contract positions then exist?

Hon. Tancoo: We would provide that for you in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So I would be grateful for that to be provided. Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you, Member.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Public Administration. Item 008: Tobago Emergency Management Agency. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Minister, 008, line Item 16: Contract Employment, there is an increase there of $1 million, could the Minister indicate the reason for that increase and how many persons that would cater for?

Hon. Tancoo: Okay. So the information I have before me should answer the question. The increase provides for a current wage bill of about $600,000 a month. There are 65 contract positions; 40 are currently filled, with 21 vacant, including 15 CERT positions.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Finally, Minister, again, line Item 36: Extraordinary Expenditure, there is a decrease of $3.1 million, can the Minister indicate what exactly is classified as an Extraordinary Expenditure?

Hon. Tancoo: Okay. So, generally, those would have been matters which would not form part of the regular expectation, so it would be natural disasters, et cetera. In this particular instance, the addition that you would see in the Revised Estimate was an additional provision for the clean-up of the oil spill that took place in 2024. So this decrease, as you suggested, is as a result of a $3.15 million increase in the

Estimate for 2026. And therefore we would not expect that to transfer into 2027, which is why you would see a lower figure in 2027.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So is it that, as it relates to the oil spill, we can assume that the clean-up is completed, because you are saying that you no longer have to put this additional $3.1 million?

Hon. Tancoo: You would see there is an Estimate of $2.1 million still there, and that is because we still have bills coming in and that have to be audited, et cetera.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So this Item is really to deal with the oil spills and other—

Hon. Tancoo: And other emergencies, yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: As it relates to the same, Tobago Emergency Management Agency Security Services, can the Minister provide us with the companies who are employed to provide security services and the quantum?

Hon. Tancoo: We will have to provide that for you in writing. Are you interested in the name of the entities?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, please. Thank you. The name as well.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Information Services Department. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly, Madam Chairman. Minister, there is an increase of Contract Employment of $500,000, can the Minister indicate what additional persons would be employed, and for what time period and positions, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure. Again, the notes that have been provided for me, the increase provides for the current wage bill, following salary increases for two officers and one new recruit, and for the filling of vacant positions, including an Information

System Support Specialist, a Data Specialist, an IT Analyst Programmer, and three ICT Technical Officers. There are 20 contract positions, 12 of which are filled, and eight are vacant.

10.40 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: Planning. Member for Arima

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Under Contract Employment, there is a decrease of $1.7million. Could the Minister indicate the reason for that decrease and if any impact at all on the Planning Division?

Hon. Tancoo: So, Member, there is no allocation for the Planning Division at all. So, what has been listed as a decrease would actually be—because there is no Estimate for 2027. That will be because this was transferred to the Division of Strategic Planning and Development with effect from the 18th of March. So, there is no allocation for 2027.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 012: Land Management; Item 013: Labour. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. Minister, there is an allocation there for Contract Employment. Could the Minister provide the various positions for that under Labour for Contract Employment? I can receive that in writing.

Hon. Tancoo: We will provide that for you in writing, Member.

[MR. SINGH *in the Chair*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I do not have anything else under that Item. I do not know if anybody else has.

Mr. Chairman: Item 014: Occupational Safety and Health; 015: Urban and Regional Planning Department; 016: Department of Environment, Climate Change

and Energy. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. Under Item 16: Contract Employment, there is a decrease of $2million. Can the hon. Minister—I see it is transferred. So, would that be the reason for that decrease—

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Member.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—for the Department of the Environment?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Member, it will show up later on in the discussion. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03, pages 34 to 36; 001: General Administration; 002: Information; 007: Public Administration; 008: Tobago Emergency Management Agency; 010: Information Systems Department; 011: Planning; 012: Land Management; 013: Labour; 014: Occupational Safety and Health; 015: Urban and Regional Planning Department. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Oh, no. I am under Current Transfers and Subsidies. So, next Item. Sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Can I move ahead then? I would imagine. Item 016: Department of Environment, Climate Change and Energy.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, pages 36 to—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Chairman, I indicated I had one under—

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Current Transfers.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. I am going to call it now.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sure. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman:—37 inclusive; 005: Non-Profit Institutions, page 36.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Item 04/005: Contribution to Non-Profit Organisations, can the Minister indicate the persons who benefited from this Item for the anticipated period of 2027, and what would be the criteria to make that application?

Hon. Tancoo: Are you asking, Member, for a listing of the NGOs?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: Okay. So, we do not have that at hand. But we will provide that for you in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 009, may I ask on that, or do you want to wait until we get that?

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, 04/009.

Mr. Chairman: That is the next one.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Item 009: Other Transfers, page 37.

Mr. Imbert: Right.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, 009/04, I noticed there was a provision of $25 million for Farmland Development in Tobago, of which only, according to this document, $15.8 million was spent. I see the 2027 Estimate is now $2 million, a reduction of almost 90 per cent. Is it that Farmland Development is no longer a priority in Tobago?

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you for your question, Member. I am sure that you would be

very glad to hear that Farmland Development continues to be a priority for the residents of Tobago and for the THA. The 2027 allocation that you are so concerned about reflects the programme's current stage of implementation. All required approvals for the Lammy Road Estate, including WASA drilling requirements, and a certificate of environmental clearance have been obtained, and the oversight committee has proposed an independent verification of completed works and the cost to complete and guide the way forward. The allocation provides for the surveying of agricultural estates, that is, Richmond, Indian Walk and Courland, the purchase of surveying tools, equipment and utilities, and road and drainage work on these estates.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. But can you explain why the 2027 provision is only 10 per cent of the original 2026 provision? That is why I asked if it is no longer a priority. It is $25million original in '26; $2 million in 2027 for Farmland Development.

Hon. Tancoo: I have just explained—

Mr. Imbert: Is it that all farms have been developed?

Hon. Tancoo:—that it is a work in progress. I explained to you what was done, and what is to be done in 2027.

Mr. Imbert: It had been cut over 90 per cent. That is why I am raising it.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Can I go now to Buccoo Integrated Facility, the 2026 Estimate was $6.5 million, original; the 2027 is now $2.6 million, more than a 50 per cent reduction. Is that also low priority, Buccoo Integrated Facility?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you are operating on a false premise, specifically with the "also not a priority". I indicated that your last question, farmland development, continues to be a priority. Buccoo Integrated Facility continues to be a priority,

which is why there is an allocation. We have a revised spend of $6 million and we have a proposed spend—

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask what was the Revised.

Hon. Tancoo: Can I finish? May I?—or do you have another question based on what was asked already?

Mr. Imbert: My question is specific to the original 2026 Estimate and the Estimate for 2027. The 2027 Estimate is less than half of the 2026 provision for the Buccoo Integrated Facility. I would like to know why has the allocation been cut by more than 50 per cent?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you are being mischievous with numbers.

Mr. Imbert: What do you mean?

Hon. Tancoo: There is an Estimate, and there is a Revised—we had this conversation yesterday.

Mr. Imbert: Between the Revised—

Hon. Tancoo: We had a conversation yesterday.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I will wait for you to finish.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, allow me, please.

Mr. Imbert: I will wait for you to finish.

Hon. Tancoo: We had a conversation yesterday. This is a facility in which you will spend money. Once that money is expended for the achievement of a particular purpose, we do not need to spend money on that particular purpose again because it has already been established. This is a continuation of a trend to establish this Buccoo Integrated Facility. The decrease that you are suggesting for the 2026 allocation, money was spent on the boardwalk expansion—and this is from the Revised—and repairs, fencing, landscaping and sprinkler repairs. As I

indicated, those have already been spent, and therefore, it does not need to be spent again in fiscal 2027. The fiscal 2027 allocation provides for the operational costs of the facility, including utilities, janitorial, security, landscaping and other contracted services, and routine maintenance of the pavilion boardwalk and the irrigation system. To summarize, this is to operationalize what was already spent in 2026.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Could I ask a follow-up question?

Mr. Imbert: You go ahead. You go ahead.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: My follow-up question—just to be clear, Minister. So, are you saying that whatever infrastructural work that needed to be done on this facility is completed, and what you are doing now is the operational aspect?

Hon. Tancoo: No, Member. There is still some work to be done. What I am suggesting is that there is quite a bit of infrastructural work that has already taken place; the boardwalk, et cetera, have already been established. There are some infrastructure support services that are required to be done—the security and janitorial services, et cetera—and this allocation is sufficient to cover that. So, there is not a decrease in expenditure, except in the sense that there is no need to spend money on items already delivered.

10.50 a.m.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So Minister, can we then ask you to provide the outstanding scope of works for whatever needs to be done and that can be provided in writing.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure. That will be provided for you in writing. I have just been

passed a note to confirm that some of the improvement works that were done for this facility were also done in-House which will explain why the $6.5 became $6 million as a Revised Estimate.

Mr. Imbert: If I use the Revised Estimates, the reduction is 53 per cent. So are you saying that significantly less infrastructure work is required on the Buccoo Integrated Facility in 2027?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, just for clarification, if in fiscal 2026, a physical structure was done then there is no need in fiscal 2027—

Mr. Imbert: Or you are answering my question.

Hon. Tancoo: There is no need in fiscal 2027 to allocate money for the physical structure to be built and that is all that has happened. A structure was built and now we are allocating the money for the operationalization of the structure, that is very simple.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, no more work required on that facility.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I explained again, I think maybe you are not hearing well. So allow me again, please.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*] I am hearing you perfectly.

Hon. Tancoo: Well, if you are hearing perfectly and you are repeating the question—

Hon. Member: He is not listening.

Mr. Chairman: No.

Hon. Tancoo: You are wrong. You are misinformed, and you will continue to be so.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I think we have answered that. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Same 009/07, can the Minister indicate what would

be—there is an increase under Studley Park Enterprise Limited, $5.5 million. I see that is transferred now to Public Infrastructure as it relates to the scope of works, but I imagine it can be raised under that, save and expect if you have an idea for—

Hon. Tancoo: No, Member. Member, you are wrong. This was transferred from the division, so this is now coming into the Office of the Chief Secretary.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, fine, so could you indicate what is the scope of works, please? How that 5.5—

Hon. Tancoo: Sure.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—will be spent?

Hon. Tancoo: I would to provide some greater detail for you, but this is the allocation provides for the operational costs of the Studley Park Enterprise Limited. I do have—in fact, the technical staff of the THA is extremely efficient, so I can provide that for you at this point. The Studley Park Enterprise Limited, which is the special purpose vehicle provided here, is mandated to act as an agent for its sole shareholder, the Tobago House of Assembly, to develop, extract, process and commercialize the resources and approximately 42.34 hectares of state land at Studley Park, Tobago. This funding will be used to pursue sustainable growth initiatives by strengthening core quarry operations, modernising production capabilities, expanding downstream products and services, and developing local and export markets.

Critical drivers of this growth include modernizing and upgrading the quarry infrastructure, and plant and production systems to increase the aggregate production capacity, improve processing efficiency, strengthen equipment reliability and reduce downtime. The 2027 allocation will also be used to expand the downstream products and services by implementing a structured programme of

diversification that prioritizes commercially viable opportunities that increase the value obtained from andesite, aligned with changes in the market.

The funding will also be applied towards pursuing commercially viable regional export opportunities, supported by reliable supply, competitive products and effective logistics that maximise foreign currency earnings. So that will explain the allocation and the intended allocation of $5.5 million to Studley Park Enterprise Limited.

Ms. Beckles: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Division 03: Finance Trade and the Economy; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, for the benefit of Members, pages 38 to 39, inclusive, 001: General Administration; 002: Finance and Accounting; 003: Customs; 004: Inland Revenue, 013: Co-operatives, page 39, Sub-Head 02: Good and Services, pages 39 to 45, 001: General Administration.

Hon. Member: My hand is up.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I know. I know.

[*Device goes off*]

Mr. Chairman: Who has that phone on?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Please turn off your phones. General Administration, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Could the Minister explain what is 001/36, what is the purpose, intention, outcome, rationale for that? That is part one of my question, Extraordinary Expenditure, what is that?

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you for your question, Member. Member, I am advised that this Sub-Item is used as a suspense account to facilitate reallocation of funds from

recurrent to DP, in keeping with the Executive Council of the Tobago House of Assembly directors as necessary. It is used to lodge allocations, move from divisions to supplement the DP Vote, to facilitate THA's priority development projects in accordance with an approved Executive Council of the Tobago House of Assembly Minute. The Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy was chosen as the controlling Division for the custodian of funds and to ensure divisions act promptly in compliance with the approved ECM to accomplish the mandate as discussed therein.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Could we get a list of what this was spent on in fiscal 2026? Because the original Estimate was $50,000. The Actual spend being shown here is $7,150,000 and you are telling us that this is to supplement expenditure in other divisions. Could we get a breakdown and a list of exactly what that $7.15 million was spent on? Because there is no other explanation in these Estimates for that huge expenditure.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, I will provide that for you in writing.

Mr. Imbert: This is quite concerning.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Finance and Accounting, 003—sorry.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, Wages and C.O.L.A., there is an increase there of $565,700. Could the Minister provide the breakdown, Wages and C.O.L.A., and the number of persons that fall under to benefit from this Item, please.

Hon. Tancoo: Just help me along, Member, which Head are you on?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Right, 002: Finance and Accounting, 02.

Hon. Tancoo: You are under Goods and Services?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: I am not seeing a 02 allocation here.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Unless if we are not there as yet. Minister is that—what page we are on?

Hon. Tancoo: We are now on page 40.

Mr. Chairman: We are now on 40.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. All right.

Mr. Chairman: I myself was looking for it and could not find it.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. No problem.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, we go to page 41 now. 003: Customs 004: Inland Revenue; 008: Budget Division; 012: Consumer Affairs; 013: Co-operatives; 015: Financial Literacy Secretariat; 018—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: 018?

Mr. Chairman: Communications Unit?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Communications Unit?

Mr. Chairman: Pages 43 to 44.

Ms. Beckles: Yes, 018/16: Contract Employment. There is an increase of $1.5 million. Could the Minister tell us what the existing positions are and what are the likely new positions to be created?

11.00 a.m.

Hon. Tancoo: So just give me a few minutes while we get the information for you, Member. So, Member, I can give the numbers in terms of the number of public officers: In fiscal 2026, we had 182 positions, of which 81 were vacant—sorry, in Actual 2026 we had 182, with fiscal 2027, 81 positions vacant. I believe the intention is to fill the vacant positions, but I could provide some more detail for you in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 019: Economic Management and Research Unit; 021: Strategic Sector Support Unit; Item 022: Business Development Unit. We go now to Sub-Head 03, pages 46 to 48. Minor Equipment Purchases, 001: General Administration; 002: Finance and Accounting; 003: Customs; 004: Inland Revenue; 008: Budget Division.

012: Consumer Affairs; 013: Co-operatives; 015: Financial Literacy Secretariat; 018: Communication Unit; 019: Economic Management and Research Unit; 021: Strategic Sector Support Unit; 022: Business Development Unit. Sub-Head 004: Current Transfers and Subsidies, pages 48 to 49; 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Well, Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask on 009, so I will wait, but under 04. Non-Profit Institutions is 005. I have questions on 009.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, 007—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: Right, okay.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Under 005, again, Non-Profit Institutions contribution, can I request the list of persons that have been fitted in 2026 and expected to benefit in 2027? And I can receive that in writing.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we have a list of institutions that would benefit in 2026, but we can provide this to you in writing. It is quite an exhaustive list. With regard to 2027, I do not think we will have a list yet because this is a process by which they apply, and then this funding is distributed.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So, the provision of the list is fine.

Hon. Tancoo: The 2026 list?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure. We have it here if you.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sure, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 007: Households, 009: Other Transfers. Diego Martin North/East, pages 48 and 49.

Mr. Imbert: 009/28, could the Minister explain why the allocation for 2027 is $5 million less than the allocation for 2026 for Project Financing Repayments?

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]—26—

Mr. Imbert: 26, 26, sorry. Projecting Financing Repayment moves from $10 million to $5 million cut by 50 per cent Project Financing Repayment.

Mr. Tancoo: The allocation in 2026 was $10 million. The allocation in 2027 is $5 million. This is for the sinking fund established with the aim of meeting the bullet payment of the $165 million bond financing when it becomes payable in fiscal year 2027. So, this is for that purpose.

Mr. Imbert: So, $10 million is no longer required in 2027?

Hon. Tancoo: $5 million has been provided in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: I saw that. I am just asking why it is half of the 2026 allocation.

Mr. Tancoo: $5 million has been provided in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: I saw that. I am asking why, not if, not when.

Mr. Tancoo: It is an incremental accumulation in a way to provide payment.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, may I move on to another line Item, please? 29: Tourism and Hospitality Sector Support. The 2026 Revised Estimates for this critical area of support in Tobago, which is a tourism economy, have been cut in 2027 by 80 per cent from 5million to $1million. Could you explain why?

Hon. Tancoo: As the Member would be aware, the purpose of this fund is to provide continuous support for the Tourism and Hospitality Sector. $5million was

allocated in fiscal 2026 for some initiatives that are already taking place, and further $1 million is being allocated in fiscal 2027 as support.

Mr. Imbert: My question is always why. Not if. I could see it. I could see that it dropped from $5 million to $1 million.

Hon. Tancoo: Member.

Mr. Chairman: I think you need to be fair.

Hon. Tancoo: Member.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, he is not answering my question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Why was this cut?

Mr. Chairman: I think the Minister is.

Hon. Tancoo: Member.

Mr. Imbert: No, he is not. Why did you cut this by 50 per cent. Tourism and Hospitality Sector Support?

Mr. Chairman: Well, you can disagree, but I think he is.

Mr. Imbert: He is not answering.

Mr. Tancoo: Again, while I understand the Member needs to get a soundbite.

Mr. Imbert: Not a soundbite. You need to be heard by the people in Tobago.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, and I really want the people of Tobago—

Mr. Imbert: Cut tourism support by 80 per cent.

Hon. Tancoo: Can I please respond? I really want the people of Tobago to hear, especially given the newfound love that my colleagues opposite seem to have for Tobago. There is an allocation that was provided. I do not know if the Member expects that the payment already made will be made again this year for things that have already been provided. Just like before, funding was provided for specific

activities and specific initiatives. Those initiatives are not automatically going to be the same initiatives that will take place in fiscal 2027. The Member is aware of that, but it is playing to a public gallery that is now, quite frankly, empty in the present but listening in Tobago. It is an illusion to say it is a cut and drastic and crisis will happen.

Hon. Tancoo: Ask a question. Do not respond.

Mr. Imbert: My question is, do you think that Tourism and Hospitality Sector Support in Tobago this is a support to people in the sector deserve an 80 per cent cut in 2027?

Mr. Chairman: Alright.

Hon. Tancoo: Member asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Tancoo: Asked and answered. I want to be very careful, Member. I want to be very careful with the spin that you are trying to create.

Mr. Chairman: Alright.

Hon. Tancoo: Moneys in fiscal 2026—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Tancoo:—unsuccessfully. Moneys in fiscal 2026 was expended, and new initiatives will take place in fiscal 2027. So, this Government has already spent $5 million last year with the help of THA in identifying initiatives under the Tourism and Hospitality Sector Support, and a further $1million has been allocated for this year. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. I have a follow-up. Minister, could you then provide us with the initiatives that you said took place in 2026? You said

there are going to be new initiatives in 2027 for that $1 million, so could you provide us with what you did in 2026 and what you did in 2027? I am happy to have it in writing. Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: I will be very anxious to provide the same for you. Thank you very much, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Next Item 30. Could you explain, for the benefit of the listening public, what the Loan Guarantee Programme is in Tobago?

Hon. Tancoo: Absolutely. The Loan Guarantee assist small and micro enterprises to access the small and micro enterprises to support their getting access to financing from commercial banks for the purchase of equipment, stocks and operating expenses. At present, a guarantee of 80 per cent of the loan amount has been provided to the participating banks at the national banks of Trinidad and Tobago, Republic Bank and First Citizens Bank.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, so why is it being cut by 30 per cent in 2027?

Mr. Tancoo: Again, Member, the same loan guarantees that existed and were funded in 2026 may not be the same loan items that would be funded in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, no problem. Less for them in '27. May I go to 31, please?

Mr. Tancoo: You see, you are editorializing again.

Mr. Imbert: I speak facts.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no. I want to agree with you. Less money is provided in 2027. More was provided in the 2026 budgets for different loan guarantees. The loan guarantees in 2026 are not going to be the same as in 2027.

11.10 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: It is going to be less. All right, no problem.

Hon. Tancoo: The number—Member, move on, please.

Mr. Chairman: All right, yes.

Mr. Imbert: 31. Could you explain what the Tobago Development Fund is? Tobago Development Fund, 31. What is it for? How is it used? How do you access it? Who disburses money out of this fund?

Mr. Chairman: How many questions are you asking?

Mr. Imbert: No, it is—one question, it is a general definition.

Mr. Chairman: A general compendious question.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you know why I am asking these questions.

Mr. Chairman: No, you asked about six questions. I want to know which one you want answered.

Mr. Imbert: To help the Minister explain what it is for. Stop trying to stop me.

Mr. Chairman: Nobody is trying to stop you. Could you stop being so petulant.

Mr. Imbert: You are trying to stop me.

Mr. Chairman: Stop being such a petulant—

Mr. Imbert: I am being insulted again.

Mr. Chairman: "Nooo", you are being petulant.

Mr. Imbert: I am being insulted.

Mr. Chairman: No! Stop being so petulant.

Hon. Tancoo: So, for clarification, the Tobago Development Fund operates under the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy, and it is committed to driving Tobago's economic growth and social development by helping people, businesses and communities turn ideas into opportunities, whether you are an aspiring entrepreneur, an established business owner, a community group or an organization looking to make a difference, the Tobago Development Fund is there

to provide support for their journey. What they do, is that they provide loan—there is a loan guarantee programme which allows access to funding, business and technical support, establish strategic partnerships and empower community engagement. If you check online, you will find a complete breakdown of what it actually does.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, since this Fund is set up to do all those wonderful things, to help entrepreneurs; to help small businesses; to help establish businesses; to develop and grow, why did you cut it by 33 per cent in 2027?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: Member, if I may, you have become very predictable in your narrative. Unfortunately, you are wrong again. Member, in fiscal 2026, there was an Estimate of $10 million. I am proud to say that working with the Tobago House of Assembly, we were able to increase that to $15 million.

Hon. Members: "Wooo." Great. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: We are again adding to that $15 million last year with another $10 million allocated this year.

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

Mr. Imbert: Supplementary question. The allocation last year was $15 million, the allocation this year is $10 million. Why have you provided less, 33 per cent less for this critical thing?

Mr. Chairman: Asked and answered

Hon. Tancoo: Member, as of fiscal 2026—

Mr. Chairman: Minister, Minister, sorry, asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: No, he did not answer; he did not answer.

Mr. Chairman: Let us move on. Asked and answered, unless you have another

question. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: I did not put up my hand. I did not put up my hand.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Division 04: Food Security (Formerly - Food Security, Natural Resources. The Environment and Sustainable Development), pages 50 to 52. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration; 002: Agriculture. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sorry. Thank you. Mr. Chairman. Minister, under 002/02, there is an increase of $13.8 million for COLA and Wages. Could the Minister indicate, including leave pay, could you indicate what part is for wages, what part is for COLA, and how many persons would benefit from this Item?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, this increase is to facilitate the implementation of the revised rates effective September 2026, caused by the implementation of the revised collective agreement at PD Circular 4 of 2026, dated 19 August, 2026. The increase would facilitate payments of wages and arrears to over 900 workers. In terms of the disaggregation between wages and COLA, we will have to provide that for you in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: 003: Marketing. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister 003/02: Wages and COLA. Again, 02, there is an increase of $4 million. Could you indicate how many persons would benefit? And again, what would be for COLA and wages? Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you again. One hundred workers will benefit from this. This is because the rates were increased by 10 per cent effective September 2026, due to the implementation of the revised collective agreement I mentioned before.

With regard to the breakdown between wages and COLA, that specific breakdown, in terms of how much is spent on wages as opposed to how much is spent in COLA, we will have to provide that to you in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 004: Natural Resources and Forestry; 005: Fisheries, (Formerly, Marine Resources and Fisheries); 006—Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Did you—

Mr. Young SC: I had put up my hand as you were rushing through it. It was really under Natural Resources and Forestry. But that—it is fine. You can move on.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. 006: The Environment. Sub-Head 02, pages 52 to 56; 001: General Administration. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Are you on page 52?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. Goods and Services, 22, $600,000 decrease. Could the Minister indicate the reason for that decrease, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you want a clarification as to why there is a 2,000—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. That decrease of $600,000 under Short-Term Employment. Could you indicate how many persons are presently employed in that—

Hon. Tancoo: All right. So, the initial allocation was for the provision, the expenditure on 22 persons who are currently employed in short-term positions. I do not have a revised figure, but this provision is for 22 persons.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Are they all on contract? Everyone there is on contract employment? Would that be for the average of a year or less?

Hon. Tancoo: It is on contract.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Or less than six months?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. It would be less than that.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you, Chair. Extraordinary Expenditure. What was the Extraordinary Expenditure in 2025, that warranted the $2 million Actual expense?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I do not think we can go back to 2025. The opportunity to investigate 2025, took place last year when we came in. So, for this section we will be looking at the 2026 and 2027 numbers.

Mr. Des Vignes: Minister, with all due respect, to ascertain the reasoning behind figures going forward, we also need to look backwards. This is a financial exercise.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I appreciate you may not be aware of how the committee operates. Chair, you want to intervene and assist the gentleman?

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. I had recourse to check the *Hansard*, because I myself was a little concerned about that, the references to years gone by. And it appears—

Mr. Des Vignes: Chair, it is to get a better understanding of the reasoning for the figures going forward. That is why I asked the question.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin West, could you hang on a second. I am trying to explain what has happened in the past and references to *Hansard*, where the Member for Diego Martin North/East took the identical point, and it was upheld. So, the issue that the examination is now, in the present. The 2025 figures, off the table. It is for the same reason that was articulated in the past, and it is in *Hansard*. I did check it, okay. But should you require 2025, I am sure Port of Spain

North/St. Ann's West would give you some guidance and Port of Spain South as to how to get that. All right. So let us move on. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

11.20 a.m.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, taking up from where the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Arima, on pursuing that line of examination, Minister—line Item 16, sorry, Contract Employment, I noted a decrease of $1.3 million here, which seems to be across the board. But what is interesting is, from what I have seen, this is under The Environment, and the Forestry Division, if I can call it that, was transferred, the work to be done, under this Environment. So, is this the central government's continued cutting of employment for the people in Tobago under Contract Employment? Why $1.3 million? And do not come with the 2025, $3.5 million, because as we have just said, now more responsibility has been put under this particular division.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am looking at Contract Employment under Goods and Services. I do not know if we are in the same space or place. Under Contract Employment, Goods and Services, I think the numbers will not support—so, let me be very specific: Goods and Services; General Administration; Contract Employment, the figure here is $8.2 million, amd certainly not the 6—whatever you are referring to. So, I think you are on the wrong space and place.

Mr. Young SC: What I was on is 002.

Hon. Tancoo: No. Well, we have not gotten there yet. I appreciate your enthusiasm for the people of Tobago.

Mr. Young SC: Understood. Well, now you know what is coming.

Mr. Tancoo: "Bring ting".

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So, 002: Agriculture.

Mr. Young SC: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Port of Spain North.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. So, a part of Tobago's economy is this important green economy of agriculture. And as I was just saying, last year, Tobago was quite happy with a Revised Estimate of $53 million, which was the same as what was provided, but this year now, it has been cut by $1.3 million. Let us start with this: How many persons are employed in this particular division of agricultural contract employment?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I will have to provide that information for you in writing.

Mr. Young SC: How many vacancies currently exists?

Hon. Tancoo: Same.

Mr. Young SC: Same thing?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So, will this $1.3 reduction affect the employment of anyone?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we will have to provide that for you in writing. We do not have the numbers available to us at this point.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 003: Marketing; 004: Natural Resources and Forestry; 005: Fisheries; 006: The Environment.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 56 to 57 inclusive; 001: General Administration; 002: Agriculture; 003: Marketing—we are on pages 56 to 57, Arima—004: Natural Resources and Forestry; 005: Marine Resources and Fisheries.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, pages 57 to 58; 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: 05—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: 57.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Again, Minister, can I ask, there is a—can I request the list for the 2026 period as it relates to persons that benefitted?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Under 001.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Member. You want that in writing?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, please.

Hon. Tancoo: Will do

Mr. Chairman: 007: Households. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you very much. 007/003, Food Box Initiative, there was a revised allocation in 2026, and in 2027, the Estimate there is $1 million. There was a decrease of $6 million for that Food Box Initiative. Could the Minister indicate why there would be a decrease of $6 million for that line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that the Actual expenditure in fiscal 2026, under this line Item, was $68,682. As a result, this project is under review.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So, is it that that reduction has to do with some conclusion that the Food Box Initiative was not functioning properly, that particular project, and you said they are going to revisit it?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Could you, are you able to tell us what exactly is the Food Box Initiative?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure. The Food Box Initiative was developed to provide vulnerable families in Tobago with a box of nutritious, locally-produced food items, fostering healthy eating habits, supporting local farms and promoting

sustainable agricultural practices. The project is under review.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: And that is a very good project. So, I am surprised that that project did not function effectually last year. Let us hope that there is some improvement. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Tancoo: You are welcome.

Mr. Chairman: 008: Subsidies. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. The Tobago Agricultural Society, there is a decrease of $900,000 and there was $1 million allocated in 2026. Could the Minister indicate the reason for that reduction to the Tobago Agricultural Society?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I was advised that the Actual expenditure is available at hand, and the Actual expenditure in 2026 was actually zero. So, this project too will be—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Actual expenditure—

Hon. Tancoo: Actual expenditure—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—was 0?

Hon. Tancoo:—under this line Item was zero.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So, is it that the Agricultural Society made no request to the THA?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, just hold on, please. I think I may have provided you with some incorrect information.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sure.

Hon. Tancoo: In fact, it is Tobago Apicultural Society, not Agricultural Society.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, and there was no request from the Apicultural Society for

allocation in 2026.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: There is a provisional put in for 2027 as a result of that.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. Under the Tobago Agroprocessors Incentive, there is a decrease of $1.9 million. Minister, could you tell us what is normally the incentive that would be given under this particular line Item, and could you indicate whether it is a case of nobody requesting under that Item? That is 008/08.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Member, I will have to provide that for you in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sorry?

Hon. Tancoo: I will have to provide that for you in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: In writing, okay.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Go ahead.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Under the next Item, Other Transfers.

Mr. Chairman: 009: Other Transfers. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, there is a decrease in the Tobago Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme of $8 million. Could the hon. Minister indicate what would be the reason for a reduction of $8 million? And could you say whether it is a policy decision?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am pleased to advise that the policy direction is that has

been transferred. This Head, this Sub-item—sorry, has been transferred to another one of the new divisions. It is the Environment, Climate Resilience and Energy.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, are you able to say which division this has been transferred to?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, yes, I just said it. Environment, Climate Resilience and Energy.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

[DR. ALI *in the Chair*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. Madam Chairman, 05: Tobago, Agribusiness Development Company (TADCO). There is a reduction there of $2 million. Minister, can you indicate the reason for that reduction, please?

Hon. D. Tancoo: Member, I do not have the reasoning for the reduction. I can tell you what it is, but I do not want to guess why there was a reduction.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay so—

Hon. Tancoo: So basically, TADCO is a statutory body to strengthen food security, expand agro-industrial capacity, et cetera. The figure I have is that an expenditure of $9 million was the Actual figure spent, which coincides with the Revised Estimate. There is a projected spend in 2027 of $7 million. Just to state, though, that this is based on an application, and it is not going to the same persons who would have applied in 2026, who would also be credited in 2027. During 2021 and 2026, TADCO has done a substantial amount of work and as a result of which has continued to attract subvention from the Government by the THA for this purpose.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, thank you, Minister. Minister, could you then

provide us with the list of applicants and the amounts received therefore, and I can receive that in writing.

Hon. Tancoo: All right, okay, we will be able to provide you with the list of applicants, salaries and beneficiaries in 2026, but we will have to wait until the end of 2027 to provide a similar one 2027, if that is okay.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, just for the 2026 period, not 2027.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure, thank you very much, will do.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Just one last Item there. 09: Tobago Agri-Technology Services Ltd. I see there is a reduction of $1.3 million. Could the hon. Minister indicate the reason for that reduction, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Yep, sorry, Member. There was actually an increase in 2026. We went up by 150 per cent for the allocation in 2026, and therefore we believe that this new allocation of $2 million would be sufficient to meet the needs of the requirements of the initiative itself, Tobago Agricultural Research Initiative (TARI). Similarly, with the other programmes, some of these initiatives represent actions that would have taken place, and what we need to do is to supplement the action rather than recreate the same investment. If you understand.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So, Minister, I may have—there are two Items, there is 06 and 09. Was that answer for 09, because I know I said it first and then after I went to 06.

Hon. Tancoo: Minister, the initiative would have been started. There was a preliminary Estimate. For example, for 06: Tobago Agri - Technology Services Ltd. There was a preliminary Estimate of $2.5. There was a revised Estimate upwards of $4.3, and now there is an Estimate of $3 million for 2027. Initiatives

that would have taken place in 2026, would not need to take place in 2027. So, you see a continued allocation, although the allocation would not be of the same value because it is a different spend. That same explanation also fits for 09: Tobago Agricultural Research Initiative (TARI), so money already spent. This is to continue the supplementation of that project.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, Minister, can I kindly ask, and it can be submitted in writing, what sort of research that would have taken place by the Tobago Agricultural Research Initiatives, and also what would be the benefits under the Tobago Agri-Technology Services Limited.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Member, I could provide a detailed list. My colleagues from Tobago are very well informed. We actually have the list here, but in the interest of time, I will provide that information for you in writing. Thank you so much.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Division 05 - Tourism, Antiquities and Creative Industries, formerly, Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transformation. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, pages 59 to 60. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Tourism; Item 007: Culture. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 60 to 62. Item 001: General Administration. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Moving to Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. I know this is one of the things that is crucial for the Tobago House of Assembly, especially this particular division. As we know, Tobago Carnival is coming up, and it is important for the Promotions, Publicity and Printing. We see a $600,000 Revised Estimate in 2026, but in 2027 we are down by 400,000 to $200,000. What is the reason for this particular decrease in allocation?

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Member. I also share your concern for the promotion of Tobago's activities. I appreciate that the PNM is concerned. The Tobago Festivals Commission has been established for this particular purpose, which is why we have a basic line Item, but there is more coverage for the Items that you so described under the Tobago Festivals Commission, which is a special purpose vehicle specifically established for the promotion of Tobago's festivals and activities.

Mr. Des Vignes: Understood, Minister, but this particular Item, even though it may not be for those specific Items that I outlined, we are seeing a decrease from $600,000 to $200,000, a decrease of $400,000.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, that is because there is a separate entity that has now been created to do exactly that.

Mr. Des Vignes: Minister, with all due respect, the Tobago Festivals Commission was not created this year. It has been around a little while.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I did not say it was created this year. I said it was created for this purpose, and this is the purpose that it is following, which is the promotions and on so on that would normally fall under this line Item, which is why there was a nominal Item here.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Transportation; Item 007: Culture. Member for Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 007/16: Contract Employment. In 2026, $4 million was allocated to this division for Contract Employment. I am seeing a Revised Estimate of $3.5 million. Firstly, can the hon. Minister, how many persons were employed under Contract Employment in 2026 in this division?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that we would provide you with that information in

writing, Member.

Mr. Marcelle: Can the hon. Minister also indicate what was the Actual spend under that line Item in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: I will get that for you in writing, Member.

11.40a.m.

Mr. Marcelle: And lastly, I am seeing that, although in 2026 $4 million was allocated to this Item, in this fiscal that figure was cut by $2 million and reduced to $1.5 million. What is the rationale for this cut?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the information I have here is that this allocation is consistent with the expenditure trend in 2025 and 2026.

Mr. Marcelle: Is there going to be any loss of jobs in relation to contract employment under this Division?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, from what I was advised, no.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 007/90: Folk and Arts Festivals. I am seeing that $1.8 million was allocated in 2026, and the Revised remains at the same. Can the hon. Minister indicate, firstly, in 2026, what was the actual amount spent in 2026 under the Folk and Arts Festivals?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, thank you for the question. I will have to provide that for you in writing.

Mr. Marcelle: I am seeing that there is a cut of $1.2 million under this line Item, being reduced from $18 million to $600,000. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the rationale for this cut?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, again, we will have to provide for you in writing.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 007/94: Tobago Indigenous and Traditional Art Academy. I am seeing that $2.8million was allocated in 2026; a Revised Estimate

indicates that it was $2.6 million, a cut of $200,000. Firstly, can the hon. Minister indicate what the Actual spend was in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we will have to provide some specific details in writing. However, as you would appreciate, a significant sum of $2.6 million was spent in 2026, with an additional sum provided for the continuation of the Art Academy of $2 million. So, this is in fact an addition to what was spent before.

Mr. Marcelle: Alright. I am seeing a reduction from the last fiscal being allocated, 2.8 to this fiscal 2027 reducing to $2 million; a reduction of $800,000. Can the hon. Minister indicate what was the rationale for this cut?

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]—Tobago Indigenous and Traditional Art Academy you are describing?

Mr. Marcelle: Yes, I am asking what was the rationale for its cut.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure, no problem. This was an Item that started in 2026. In 2026, $2.6 million was allocated. So is this to—the Tobago Indigenous and Traditional Art Academy was established in 2026 with an initial injection of $2.6 million.

Mr. Marcelle: What were the works and initiatives carried out in 2026 with this?

Hon. Tancoo: Very good question. Now, I will have to provide that for you in writing. But I just want to emphasize that the $2.6 million that was spent in 2026 will not be the same requirement into 2027, because some infrastructure, some administrative structures, et cetera, would have been put in place, and is now being supplemented by an additional $2 million.

Mr. Marcelle: What is the intended scope, or the scope of works, or initiatives for 2027 with the $2 million allocation?

Hon. Tancoo: We will have to provide that for you in writing, but thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Minister.

Madam. Chairman: Item 008: Antiquities. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 63 to 64. Item 001: General Administration. Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am clarifying. Are you on page 65 now?

Madam. Chairman: Page 63, Item 001: General administration.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Later question, sorry.

Madam. Chairman: No problem. Item 002: Tourism. Item 006: Transport. Item 007: Culture. Item 008: Antiques; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 64. Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Line Item 02: Assistance to Cultural Groups. Minister, $1 million was the Revised Estimate in 2026, and in 2027 we see half of that being allocated for Assistance to Cultural Groups. What is the reasoning for this cut, Minister?

Hon. Tancoo: Alright. Member, I have no additional information, so we will have to provide that for you in writing.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Minister. Just moving down to National Days and Festivals: $1 million allocated in 2026, and again, cut by 50 per cent to $500,000. What is the reason for this particular reduction in allocation for National Days and Festivals for Tobago?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the information I have is that less than $1 million was used in fiscal 2026, but I will be able to provide for you the specifics as to what was spent, and therefore, what would be expected to be spent in 2027.

Mr. Des Vignes: Just for clarity, Minister, do we have the 2026—what was

actually spent?

Hon. Tancoo: No, I do not have it at hand.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, you will provide that in writing?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, I will.

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

Hon. Tancoo: You are welcome.

Madam. Chairman: Item 007: Households. Item 009: Other Transfers. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Through you, Madam Chair, Minister, we can understand that Tobago's tourism economy is critically important to the citizens of Tobago, and the business and the economy of Tobago. In 2026, the Revised Estimate says $50 million was given to the Tobago Tourism Agency Limited. Now, we see in 2027, $40 million being allocated to the Tobago Tourism Agency Limited, which means it is $10 million less. What is the reason for the decrease in allocation to Tobago Tourism Agency Limited?

Hon. Tancoo: Hold on for one second while I confer with technical people. [*Minister confer with technocrats*] Member, I can confirm that we did, in fact, provide $50 million in 2026 to the Tobago Tourism Agency Limited, and an additional $40 million is being provided for the Tobago Tourism Agency Limited in fiscal 2027. However, I cannot provide for you the breakdown or any assessments as to why there is a decline.

Mr. Des Vignes: Minister, if possible, in writing, we would like to possibly get the breakdown of what that really accommodates. So let us move on to 21: Tobago Festivals Commission Ltd. In a previous answer, Minister, you mentioned that the Tobago Festivals Commission would do the advertising, et cetera. So, we

went from a $39 million Revised Estimate in 2026, and in 2027, there is a decrease of $2 million for Tobago Festivals Commission. What is the reason for this decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. Member, you will be familiar because you are looking at the same figures that I am looking at, but the viewing audience may not have them. That the Estimate for Tobago, under this heading, the Tobago Festivals Commission was, in fact, $28 million.

Mr. Des Vignes: Originally.

Hon. Tancoo: In fiscal 2026, we actually spent—the Revised Estimate is $39 million, and therefore, the $37 million spend that we are looking at in fiscal 2027 is actually $9 million higher than the original Estimate. So, it is not a cut. We have spent $39 million at the Tobago Festivals Commission Ltd., and we are now spending an additional $37 million in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Des Vignes: Minister, I mean no disrespect with what I am about to say, but, with all due respect, the money for the Tobago Festivals Commission is for Tobago festivals, such as Tobago Carnival. These events are recurring events. They are not one-off events, and then they disappear, and they do not happen the following year. Tobago Festivals Commission is getting $2 million less than they needed in 2026, in 2027, no matter how we dance and spin it, it is a cut from what they actually needed, Minister. My question is: Why is there a reduction—if we know that in 2026, Tobago Festivals Commission needed $39 million—why is there a cut to $37 million? That is the question.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you. Member, I am advised that the reason for the hike in 2026, the Revised figure in 2026, is that there were significant liabilities that needed to be cleared. Those were cleared in fiscal 2026 and therefore are not

present in the fiscal 2027 allocation. I assure members of the viewing audience and listening audience, especially in Tobago, that Tobago Festivals Commission Ltd and Tobago festivities and festivals, generally, are being adequately funded under THA and the partnership with the current Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

11.50 a.m.

Mr. Des Vignes: Minister, I just want to dig a little further into what you are saying, right? You are saying that there were still amounts owed because of the amount allocated in 2026. Just to highlight, in 2025, when the Members on this side were in office, the amount allocated was $37,200,000. The original allocation under you as finance Minister was $28 million, which was obviously significantly less. Just to note. Just taking into account the cost of living and everything else, the amount you gave to the Tobago Festivals Commission was $39 million. So, if there were arrears, Minister, it is because what was allocated was not enough in 2026. That is what we are seeing here. The figures tell a story, Minister. No disrespect, but the figures tell a story, and it is clear.

Madam Chairman: Allow the Minister to answer.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, and I agree, the figures do tell a story. The story that the figures tell, Member, as I just indicated, is that there were arrears which have been resolved and we are now providing $37 million to the Tobago Festivals Commission. If you are interested in finding out when the arrears were accumulated, then I will be honoured to provide you with that information.

Mr. Des Vignes: No problem, Minister. $2 million cut, nevertheless. Moving to 22.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, if I may continue—

Mr. Des Vignes: Moving to 22—

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, hold on, hold on. You are commenting on the same Item. You want to hit and run?

Mr. Des Vignes: No, I am going to Item 22, Minister.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, no.

Mr. Des Vignes: You answered the question.

Hon. Tancoo: It was $2 million—

Mr. Des Vignes: You answered the question, Minister. I respect your answer. Thank you for your answer. Item 22: Tobago Performing Arts Company. We know the TPAC has been doing amazing work. They were actually hired to perform on a cruise very recently. There was the Revised Estimate of $8 million, and the original allocation was $8 million as well. But now we see T-P-A-C, or TPAC as it is more affectionately called in Tobago, they have been given $1 million less for 2027. What is the reasoning for that?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, this would be one of those wonderful occasions where I am able to provide to you some specific information, some updated information. This would be Head 22: Tobago Performing Arts Company. Redirect me to the line Item, please.

Mr. Des Vignes: Sorry, Minister.

Hon. Tancoo: 22?

Mr. Des Vignes: 22, 22.

Hon. Tancoo: Okay.

Mr. Des Vignes: TPAC.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I will have to provide that for you in writing. I do not have an update for that.

Mr. Des Vignes: No problem, Minister, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: The previous Item, Festivals Commission, the Actual expenditure in 2023 was $35 million. The Actual expenditure in 2025 was $37.2 million. Why would you, as Minister, allocate only $28 million in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the Revised Estimate in 2026 is $39 million. But since the Member brought me back to this, let me provide some clarification that was just provided to me by the technical staff. Significant liabilities were cleared in the last fiscal, that is 2026. The Actual spend for fiscal 2026 was $44,192,000. So, therefore, arrears, substantial arrears, were created during the previous fiscals which were cleared this year. As a result of which, the $37 million provided this year will be sufficient to continue the operations of this entity.

Mr. Imbert: That does not answer my question in any form or fashion. I asked, why did you allocate $28 million in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: As you are well aware, I have said it enough times in here, Member. I do not know if there is a medical reason that you should be looking at. I have said it a million times in here already for this Session. These are Estimates. Then there are Revised Estimates. You choose to ignore the Revised Estimate and deal with the Estimate. That is a matter for yourself. However—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Tancoo: However, I urge you to focus on the other part, which was that there were significant arrears that were built up, that were spent, and therefore this year I am proud to advise that under this Head, $37 million has been provided.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: That was not my question.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you are deliberately ignoring numbers. There is a Revised Estimate. Focus on that for a matter.

Mr. Imbert: You cut the allocation by $9 million in 2026. Why?

Hon. Tancoo: There is—no, no, no, no, no, no, no. You see, Member, Chairman—Madam Chair, the Member is deliberately misleading the national community out of spite and mischief. Here are the numbers—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: Here are the numbers—

Mr. Imbert: I have to reply to that.

Hon. Tancoo: Here are the numbers.

Mr. Des Vignes: Madam Chair—

Hon. Tancoo: If you have the numbers in front of you—

Mr. Des Vignes:—48(6), he is imputing improper motives—

Hon. Tancoo:—and you choose to ignore it—

Mr. Imbert: I have to reply to that.

Mr. Des Vignes:—on the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: I have to reply to that.

Mr. Des Vignes: That is not what this Parliament is about, that behaviour.

Madam Chairman: Let me clarify this, okay.

Hon. Tancoo: I apologize—hold on, I apologize and withdraw, if I may. Let me clarify. The Member is absolutely aware. Let the national population determine for themselves what the purpose is. The Member is absolutely aware that there was an Estimate and the books in front of him, if he is so inclined to look at, have a

Revised Estimate, which he chooses to ignore for his own intents. A Revised Estimate. The Member is rowing his own boat, going in his own misdirection. There is also an addition of $37 million for this fiscal, a Revised Estimate. If you want to live in the past, Sir, that is a matter for you. We are moving forward.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, first, I must object to that characterization of "spite and malice". I have stated facts. The original spend in 2025, or the Actual spend, was $37,200,000. You knew that, yet you only allocated $28 million. I just want to know why.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, if you had asked that question last year, it would have been relevant. You see, this year, when you have the revised figures in front of you, you are being mischievous.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: Sorry.

Mr. Imbert: You could say what you want to, you know.

Hon. Tancoo: I am doing that.

Mr. Imbert: And you are being ridiculous. You are not—

Madam Chairman: For absolute—

Mr. Imbert: You are dodging something.

Madam Chairman: For absolute clarification—

Mr. Imbert: You are dodging.

Madam Chairman: For absolute clarification, right? We are looking at the Revised Estimate for 2026, which is an increase from $28 million to $39 million.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: I am just repeating in a much simpler way.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, you should not be entering this.

Madam Chairman: I am not.

Mr. Imbert: You should not be entering this.

Madam Chairman: I am not doing that. I am just repeating it—

Mr. Imbert: Yes, you are. You are entering.

Madam Chairman:—in a much simpler way for you to understand.

Mr. Imbert: No, no. No, no, no, you are entering.

Madam Chairman: I am not entering.

Mr. Imbert: You are entering.

Madam Chairman: I am not entering. I am reading—

Mr. Imbert: You are not supposed to enter.

Madam Chairman:—the figures that all of us have in front of us. You may have a problem understanding—

Mr. Imbert: So—

Madam Chairman:—and I am clearly just repeating it for the clarification of not just yourself, but for the public.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I have a supplementary question. Are there arrears from fiscal 2026 that are carried over into 2027?

Hon. Tancoo: There are still arrears outstanding to be supplemented.

Mr. Imbert: And yet "yuh" cut it by $2 million. No problem. That is fine.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Division 6: Education, Skills and Innovation (Formerly - Education, Research and Technology). Subhead 01: Personnel Expenditure, pages 65 to 66. Item 001: General Administration. Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly, Madam Chairman. With regard to line Item 01, through you, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I notice an increase of $1 million. Could the Minister explain the increase?

Hon. Tancoo: Right. Member, thank you for your question. I am advised that this is for the payment of acting allowances and increments.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Are there any vacancies under this line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: If there are vacancies under Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Are there vacancies in the categories of persons paid under this line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: There are vacancies, ma'am.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could you tell me how many vacancies and how many workers are actually employed, and how many positions there are?

Hon. Tancoo: We will have to provide that information for you in writing.

12 noon.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So just to clarify, the number of positions, the number that is actually in positions and then the number of people. Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]—sure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: With regard to line Item 05: Government's Contribution to N.I.S., I noticed a decrease of $100,000 here. With the increase in NIS payments, why is there a decrease under this line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the answer I have received is that this is in keeping with last year's expenditure trend.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Last year's expenditure was one $1.1 million, and so it is $100,000 less. So that is exactly why I am asking the question.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, yes, I understand. Last year's Revised Estimate is 1.1, and we are looking at a figure of $1 million this year. So, I understand the question.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Do you have an answer to the question?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised, we will have to provide that information for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: You will provide it in writing.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: Sorry.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, you are speaking a little softly.

Hon. Tancoo: I apologize, I thought I had said that, sorry.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So, we will get that in writing.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Good. I want to move on to 08. I notice that there is an allocation for Vacant Posts. Could you tell me how many vacant posts are to be filled?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we will have to provide that for you in writing. It is a very small sum, so I expect it will be very—maybe one or two individuals but I will get the specifics for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: All right. So, we would appreciate that in writing. Thank you very much for the commitment. With regard to line Item 14, I notice the expenditure went up from 2025 to 2026. It is maintained at that level now. My question is: In terms of the Cabinet-Appointed Committees, was there an increase in Cabinet-Appointed Committees in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Give me a second while I confirm. [*Minister confers with technocrats*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sure.

Hon. Tancoo: All right. Member, I am advised that there are no new Cabinet-appointed committees in 2026 and in 2027.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So then, why would the expenditure have gone up from 2025 into 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: I cannot answer for 2025, but there have been no new Cabinet-appointed committees in 2026, and no new—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Did the rate—okay, sorry.

Hon. Tancoo: And no new ones projected for 2027.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Did the rate that was be paid to Cabinet-appointed committees go up in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Not to my knowledge.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay, so can I ask, please, for a list of the Cabinet-appointed committees and the payment to them? Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: We do have the list, but we will provide that for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: You will provide it in writing? Thank you very kindly.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Primary Secondary and Vocational Education. Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly. With regard to line Item 01, through you, Madam Chair, could you tell me the reason for the decrease of $76 million?

Hon. Tancoo: Right. So, Member, the reason for what appears to be a decrease is because there was in fact in fiscal 2026, in the mid-year review, an additional sum of $79 million was added, which is why you would see an increase from the

Estimate to the Revised Estimate and therefore, that arrears, having been paid off, is not factored in for this year.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So, the Estimate in 2026 and 2027 remain the same.

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Are there vacancies in the categories of staff that are paid under this line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: We would provide that for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: The staff is telling me that they have it, but there is a bit of a challenge—[*Inaudible*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, there are vacancies here?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is there any intention to fill those vacancies?

Hon. Tancoo: Tobago has the same challenges we have. It depends on the Teaching Service Commission, and they are aggressively pursuing the Teaching Service Commission to fill those vacancies.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Has any provision been made to be able to pay additional staff if those vacancies are filled?—with the highest of hopes, of course.

Hon. Tancoo: I think that would fall elsewhere but—Member, I will have to confirm that for you. We know that there are vacancies. I do not know if this provision covers consideration for those vacancies.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, one would hope because if there are vacancies in teaching staff, then one would hope that provisions are made to be able to pay, and one would expect the Teaching Service Commission would supply. So, it does not

appear that any provision is made because the allocation is the same. So, I am looking forward to the information that you send in writing.

Hon. Tancoo: Yeah, Member, just a clarification. There was an increased allocation and expectation at the start of 2026. The $79 million would have been more than the $76 million that would have been paid—$79 million dollars was paid. So therefore, within the $162 million that we had as the Estimate in fiscal—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, I am sorry, but I am having real trouble understanding what you are saying.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure. So, in fiscal 2026, at the start, there was an Estimate of $162 million—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: "Mm-hmm".

Hon. Tancoo:—which would have factored in the possibility of some increased staffing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: "Mm-hmm".

Hon. Tancoo: That did not happen. In fact, the increase that went up by $79-odd million, that was—$79 million was spent.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am sorry. In the Estimate in 2026, you are saying, there was an increase over what?

Hon. Tancoo: No, the Estimate in 2026 would have factored in some consideration for filling up some of the vacancies.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. How much was it then?

Hon. Tancoo: We will have to get that figure for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So, you are saying—

Hon. Tancoo: That is why the figure in 2027 is similar, but it also includes provision for filling of some of the vacancies.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: But you do not know how many?

Hon. Tancoo: I do not have the figures.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And you do not know how much of that $162 million was actually used to pay current staff in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: If I do the math, I could probably guestimate because there are $79 million less than the $238,000, but I can get some specifics for you.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I do not know what the $79 million—what is the $79 million referring to?

Hon. Tancoo: $79 million was paid in arrears, so the Revised Estimate of $238,000 reflects an addition of $79-odd million, which would have been paid in arrears.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: We went down to $162 million, which is similar to the $162 million in the original Estimate, but that considered some—there was some consideration there for additional staff that may have come on board—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: But you are not sure how much.

Hon. Tancoo:—that have not yet come on board.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And for 2027, you are not sure how much of that $162 million is dedicated to getting new staff—

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—to fill the vacancies.

Hon. Tancoo: No, I will have to provide that for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And they will provide that in writing. Appreciated. With regard to line Item 02: Wages and C.O.L.A., I see that is a new Sub-Item. Could you explain what that would refer to?

Hon. Tancoo: Right. So, based on the note that has been shared with me, this is a new Sub-Item, and it includes provision for the payment of wages and COLA to hourly, daily and weekly-rated, permanent, regular and casual workers assigned to schools and trade centres.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is that a new assignment, or how is it now coming into this budget? Is that new staff?

Hon. Tancoo: Yeah, it is new staff, but there was a previous—it was catered for elsewhere, and they are now putting it formally on the—[*Inaudible*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, they have now come into this division.

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. With respect to line Item 04: Allowances, I note that there is a decrease of $1.6 million because there was a very large expenditure in 2026. Could you explain why the expenditure was so high over the Estimate in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Okay. So, there was an expectation of a higher figure in 2026, which is why we had a revised that went a bit higher. But we now have the Actual for 2026, and the Actual for 2026 is $1.1 million. So, this will coincide with the Estimate for 2027 of $1.1 million.

12.10 p.m.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am sorry, I am just clarifying. Under the 2026 Revised Estimates, you have a figure of $2.7 million, are you saying that that is a wrong figure, an incorrect figure?

Hon. Tancoo: I am saying that, yes. I am saying that there was an expectation based on what was trending. There was an expectation of a higher figure there, but we have the Actual now, which is $1.1 million.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, Minister, this is very concerning to me. If you are saying that you put a figure—a figure was put in here into the budget documents, that was an expectation of $2.7 million, how could it be an expectation of $2.7 million?

Hon. Tancoo: This simply means that there would have been an over-budgeting at that point.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No. Sorry, Minister—

Hon. Tancoo: That is what it means.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, I am sorry, but I do not understand. You had a 2026 Estimate of $1.1 million, the Revised Estimate is $2.7 million, which means that you would have expended $2.7 million. That would have been recorded.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, that is not what it meant. It meant—and I just gave you the Actual figure for 2026. So you are looking at the Revised. I give you an Actual figure of $1.1 million just now.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: How would the Actual figure for the Revised be less than what is printed in the booklet? I could understand if it is more, because bills would come in after. So I am clear on understanding that. What I do not understand is how could a figure of $2.7 million end up here as being expended and it is actually less than what is expended? What would that $2.7 million have been predicated on?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, these are Estimates, I just gave you the Actual.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No.

Hon. Tancoo: The Actual is $1.1 million.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, that is very concerning to me, because it suggests that there are serious inaccuracies in these budget documents that we are

examining here. I mean, I have been in the Parliament for—this is my twelfth budget, and I can tell you that it is very unusual. I would say, I have never seen it before, that a budget Estimate, Revised Estimate is actually more than what is Actual. I have seen the less for sure, because bills would come in after, but that is a very concerning thing because it means you have an incorrect figure here.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Member. Member, I am equally concerned, because this suggests that there would have been more money put in than actually used under this—[*Inaudible*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: More money spent? No, Minister.

Hon. Tancoo: No, Ma'am. Ma'am, respectfully, I appreciate the fact that you are a veteran and you have been here for 12 years, but if the Actual figure, which I just gave to you, is $1.1 million—if the Actual figure is $1.1 million, but the Revised Estimate, because the Actual is the Actual. That is how much money was actually spent, and the Revised Estimate—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, I have never seen an Actual figure that is less than the Revised Estimate. I have never seen that.

Hon. Tancoo: Well, I thought that you would be glad to hear.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, I am not glad to hear. I am very concerned. It suggests that something is wrong. How would $2.7 million end up here if those bills were not recorded by the THA?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I think you are missing it; $1.1 million is the Actual spend, and it is the same $1.1 million that is budgeted for fiscal 2027.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No. No. No. It even has a decrease of $1.6 million registered here, Minister of Finance. This should give you great concern as well.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, allow me to clarify—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It means that inaccurate figures are coming in.

Hon. Tancoo: Allow me to clarify, please, if you may?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, sure.

Hon. Tancoo: I just specifically said that I have given you Actual figures, provided to me by the representatives and the technical staff from Tobago, of $1.1 million. That is an Actual figure. You are still housed; you are still located at a Revised figure. I gave you the Actual. I am telling you again that the current figure for 2027 is in line with the Actual.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister of Finance, I accept what you have said, but I am saying that it is very concerning, because it means that there is an error in this book, a significant error of $1.6 million in this line Item.

Madam Chairman: Minister, can you clarify that?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, yes, yes, yes, willingly. Member, if you look at the front of these books, it says—I would not hold it up for display—*Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly 2027*, which is what we are looking at. At the top you see "Estimates", "Revised Estimates", I have given you an Actual figure. The books provide Estimates and Revised Estimates. I have provided you with an Actual figure for fiscal. The Actual takes precedence over any Estimate.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, I am not dealing with the fact that you are giving me an Actual, you know, what you are doing **is** giving me an Actual. I am saying that if your Actual is lower than the Revised Estimate, then there is either an error in your book or an error in your budgeting process, because these Revised Estimates are based on bills which have come in. So if there is an error, it means that there is an error somewhere in the Finance division of the particular Ministry or division,

or it is with the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you are working too hard.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could I finish?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Because as we all know, and you know it too, that it is unprecedented for a Revised Estimate to be in the booklet and you do not have an increase in that if you are giving me an Actual. It means that what would the $2.7 million have been predicated on? What bills would it have been based on?

Hon. Tancoo: Member—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: What payments would have been made to come up to $2.7 million to allow that to be in the book, Minister?

Hon. Tancoo: Can I intervene? Member, you have an Estimate and you have an Actual—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, your Estimate is wrong, and that is what I am trying to say.

Hon. Tancoo: Allow me please. Can I please?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Your Estimate is wrong.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, can I finish?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Just admit it is an error.

Madam Chairman: Allow the Minister to answer, please.

Hon. Tancoo: I have allowed you to finish, can I? Member, you have an Actual figure. I know you are disappointed that the figure is not higher, however, it means that there was a saving—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In the wrong process. If it is an error, just say it is an error.

Hon. Tancoo:—under this line Item, Member, of moneys that have not been spent.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, no, no, no, no, no, it is not a saving.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you are interrupting again.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: But I am not being allowed to finish, you know.

Hon. Tancoo: Because you are wedded to your misconception.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: You are insisting on going on this road, and it is either an error, Minister—if it is an error, it is an error.

Madam Chairman: The question has been asked multiple times, the same answer—

Hon. Tancoo: Member, it is not an error. It is an Estimate, and I gave you an Actual.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is a wrong Estimate. Minister, I move on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: It is an Estimate.

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: On this same line Item. A couple of days ago—

Madam Chairman: Do you have a question, a different question, Member?

Mr. Imbert: This is a question.

Madam Chairman: I am just asking if you have a different question.

Mr. Imbert: Of course.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: On the same line Item.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: A couple of days ago, Minister, in trying to explain the huge disparity between the Revised Estimate and the original Estimate in Homeland Security, you said that the Revised Estimates are based on—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: I have five minutes to make my point. You said that Revised Estimates are based on bills that came in in July, and you did not have information for August and September, and therefore you explained why the Actual spend was higher than the Revised, because the Revised only accounted for expenditure up to July. So, in this case, the Revised Estimate, following your logic, has to be expenditure up to July, and therefore how come in August and September the figure is lower? What went on there, you got wrong bills? What happened?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, asked and answered.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: Asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Tancoo: No, I am not going down that story again.

Madam Chairman: I believe this line Item has been sufficiently exhausted. Can we move along? Do you have another question, Member for St. Ann's East, on a different line Item.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Which line Item?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Line Item 05, please. Let me pray that the figures I am seeing here are correct, Minister. With regard to line Item 05: Contribution to NIS, I notice a decrease of $2 million, but NIS rates have increased recently, so I am questioning why this decrease would be recorded here, if it is in fact a decrease.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that the Actual expenditure under this line Item is $11,902,251, which will be significantly less than the projected Estimate in fiscal 2026, and even less than the expenditure in 2027.

12.20 p.m.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, I am clarifying. The 2026 Estimate under NIS was $13 million. The Revised Estimate was $16 million—

Mr. Imbert: Up to July, eh.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—which would have been bills up to July. Are you telling me in this instance, again, that the Revised Estimate is less than $16 million?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, repeat the question, please.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The Actual Estimate is less than the $16 million that is revised in this booklet?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, how did the figure of $16 million end up in the booklet?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, these are Estimates. They are projections of expenditure. I just gave you the Actual figure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: But these are Estimates based on bills that would have been recorded as received and paid up to July.

Hon. Tancoo: No, Ma'am. These are Estimates. These are projections that are made—

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

Hon. Tancoo:—Based on circumstances that have not materialized. But these are projections. These are Estimates. As a result, I understand your concern. Estimates mean that the number could go higher or lower or be the same. In this instance, we are looking at—forgot the figure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, I am asking, these Revised Estimates that are here, what are they based on? These would have been based on expectations and projections of activities and employment.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: They are not based on bills?

Hon. Tancoo: They are based on several things. They would have been based on some bills, those previous expenditures for the years gone forward, the proposed plans of the entity for hiring, et cetera. That would have given us a projection. Are you not aware of how—ask your colleague next door—Estimates are conducted, Ma'am?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, the 2027 Estimates would be projected based on your employer yields and that kind of thing. But the 2026 Revised Estimates would be based, by any Minister of Finance, including you, having said here in the Parliament, that they are based on bills which would have come in and been paid. Therefore—

Hon. Tancoo: And projections.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am not finished. Revised Estimates are usually, or in some cases, they may be lower than the Actual because between the time that the bills would have come in and the budget documents were prepared and the time of the reading now, you would have more bills coming in. So, therefore, how in those circumstances—this is the second Item where the Revised Estimate is incorrect. It is not underestimated. It is incorrect.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, are you finished?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am finished.

Hon. Tancoo: For the last time, in translating, an Estimate is a figure based on a trend of some sort. But it is an estimate. A Revised Estimate is a revised estimate. The number could go up or down. It could be higher than the Estimate or lower than the Estimate or actually in line with the Estimate. I have just given you the figure—the expenditure under this line Item. The Actual expenditure is

$11,902,251. That is the Actual figure. I know you are disappointed that it is not more, which means that you would have had the opportunity to say that the deficit was suddenly increased. In this instance, it is lower. In every single situation where we have Estimates, there are going to be some higher, and there are going to be some lower. In this case, this one is lower. In the one before, the other one was lower. In some of the others to come, there may be higher as well. I hope that you are just as enthused.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, your accounting is as creative as your language.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And as inaccurate.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you so much.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Unfortunately.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you so much.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The country will see.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I think that sort of commentary is unwarranted. But anyway.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Mr. Chairman, this is unprecedented in this Parliament.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. But this is to—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is unprecedented and very concerning.

Mr. Chairman: Member—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: While we may—

Mr. Chairman: I am speaking. This is to ask questions, not to provide a running commentary on your interpretation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And get correct answers.

Mr. Chairman: That is—whatever the answer is, if you want to—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Oh. So, the answer could be incorrect? That is what you are saying.

Mr. Chairman: Member, could you just listen for a moment, please?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I have listened. I have listened ad nauseam.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I am speaking now. Could you just listen? Whether you believe in whether the answer is correct or not, this is not the forum to engage in a tit-for-tat and a back-and-forth never-ceasing argument, you know. If you want to demonstrate whatever you believe might be the inaccuracy of an answer, you have other forums to do so, you know.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Certainly.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So, am I to take it that I can move on to the next Item?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I beg your pardon.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Please, do.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. That is very kind and gracious of you. Item 003: Library Services. 004: School Feeding Programme. St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly. With regard to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, could I find out—there is an increase recorded here. Hopefully one can trust the documents. Could I ask the reason for the—alleged, maybe—increase?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the explanation that I am being provided with is that the proposed allocation in 2027 is consistent with the allocation in 2026, and with expenditure trends.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, the Revised Estimate in 2026—I feel very afraid to

ask—was $400,000. So, less was supposedly spent in 2026. Am I correct? Is there an Actual figure? Is it higher? Is it lower?

Hon. Tancoo: The Actual figure as provided to me is $450,881.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Higher, which is normal.

Hon. Tancoo: It is.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: As I indicated, some will be higher, some will be lower, and some will be spot on.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No. No. All are supposed to be higher. But we will move on.

Mr. Chairman: Item 007: Tobago Council for Handicapped Children - Happy Havens School; 008—are you on 007?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Eight.

Mr. Chairman: Tobago School for Deaf, Speech and Language Impaired. St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly. Under line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances, could you explain the decrease in this line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. I can. The decrease is based on a projected employment that was supposed to happen within 2026. That has not happened. So, we would have expected in 2024—so, you will see an increase in the Revised.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Increase, yes.

Hon. Tancoo: That would have been based—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Increase in the Revised. Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That is normal.

Hon. Tancoo: That would have been based on an expectation of some sort of

employment which did not happen. So that the Estimate for fiscal 2027 remains the same as the Estimate for fiscal 2026.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, the increased employment that was anticipated for 2026 did not take place?

Hon. Tancoo: The increased expenditure that was projected did materialize.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: But you have recorded here an increased expenditure.

Hon. Tancoo: We have a projected—

[*Confers with technocrat*]

The Actual was $1,149,354. This came about because of the attrition of staff and shortfall filled from contract employment. So, the expected increase in expenditure was treated with by virtue of attrition of staff and shortfall filled via contract employment.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, yet another instance where the Revised Estimate is an incorrect figure.

Hon. Tancoo: Yet another instance where the Estimate was higher. The budgeted figure was actually higher than the expended figure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No. The budgeted figure was 1.4. The Revised Estimate is what would have come in based on bills.

Mr. Chairman: Member, instead of engaging in an argument, do you have another question on this line Item?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Not on this one.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 67 to 70; 001: General Administration. St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly, Chairman. Under line Item 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, I noticed that there is an Increase of

$900,000. Could the Minister explain that increase?

12.30 p.m.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, sorry. Member, thank you for your question. The information I have is that the rent/lease of the Division's building and car park, right—so this Head treats specifically with the rent/lease of the Division's buildings, car park and the settlement of outstanding invoices in the amount of 892,000—for September 2026. The Actual spend was $8.5 million.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So the Actual was higher than the Revised?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So what exactly was the Actual figure?

Hon. Tancoo: $8,504,460.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So all the arrears have been cleared off from 2026, they have been cleared off?

Hon. Tancoo: That is correct.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So the figure in 2027 is $500,000 more than was estimated in 2026. Why would that be required?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the figure in 2027 is $6 million. So $6 million, we believe is sufficient to cover the Rent/Lease: Office Accommodation and Storage for this entity in fiscal 2027, that is why the figure is there.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Right, but what I asked is, your 2026 Estimate was 5.5, your 2027 Estimate is 6, so it is $5000,000 higher. So I am asking why it is higher?

Hon. Tancoo: It is a budgeted figure, Ma'am, it is an Estimate.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So why was it estimated $500,000 lower in 2026 then? Is there an increase in rent, a new building, what?

Hon. Tancoo: All right. So I am advised that we will provide any clarification for

you in terms of the numbers as to the reason for the $500,000 increase in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So then what will have to be provided will be the buildings that are leased and the cost?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Thank you. Under line Item 16: Contract Employment, I see a decrease of $2 million. Could you explain this decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, bear with me for a second while we are trying to find — so Member, I am advised that during fiscal 2026 some additional Contract Employment took place, which would increase the initial allocation. But we do not believe that we would have need for that in fiscal 2027 as contracts are ending.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, this is not Short-term Employment so if additional persons were taken on in Contract Employment, those persons were taken on for what periods?

Hon. Tancoo: Well—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Seeing that they are not there now.

Hon. Tancoo: Well, we will have to provide that for you in writing. They are not projected to be there in fiscal 2027. Or, those services would not be projected in fiscal 2027. I am sure you are aware that this may not necessarily be an individual—

[*Member confers with technocrat*]

Right, so just by way of clarification, some of those contract staff will not be available in 2027 because they have been reassigned based on the realignment of the various Divisions.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So I will appreciate then, a list of the positions that were paid in 2026 and that are being paid in 2027 and any vacancies in those two

fiscal periods please.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you. With regard to line Item 27: Official Overseas Travel, I note that there was extraordinary expenditure, will there seemed to be, in the Revised Estimate, there seemed to be about $225,000 more spent in 2026 over what was allocated in 2026 as well as what is allocated in 2027. Could there be an explanation for why this Revised Estimate was so much higher? If indeed it was higher, because I guess it could be lower.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the figure I have, the Actual expenditure is $246,355 which is broadly in line with the fiscal 2027 Estimates. The explanation I also have is that measures were implemented in keeping with fiscal constraints, which is why we did not reach the revised figures.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could I ask what would have been the projected expenditure that would have caused this figure to be so high? Was there a trip that was planned and cancelled? What exactly would have—because I mean the figures could not be pulled out of a hat, so what they were they projected against?

Hon. Tancoo: The figures are not provided were not pulled out of a hat.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I know that. I know the Minister of Finance is much more systematic than that.

Hon. Tancoo: However—sorry?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I know the Minister of Finance is much more systematic than that. So say they could not be out of a hat. So what would it—

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you. So we would have to provide some clarification as to if there was any trip that was proposed and anticipated and not undertaken.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay, I would appreciate that information in writing.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Much appreciated. On line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. I note that there is a decrease of $200,000. Again, there is a large expenditure recorded in the Revised Estimates of $500,000 and that was against an expenditure that was an allocation of $100,00 in 2026. So $100,000 allocated $500,000 is the Revised Estimate and you have a 2027 Estimate of $300,000. Could you explain why there was such a high expenditure in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the increase was projected based on the Division's contribution to the Assembly's 45th anniversary celebrations. That would have been—

Dr. Gadsby- Dolly: And was it actually spent?

Hon. Tancoo: No, actually less was spent. I am sorry, you would be disappointed to hear—

Dr. Gadsby- Dolly: Certainly, not. Intrigued.

Hon. Tancoo:—expenditure under this Head was actually a total of $336,113.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So there is an increase in the allocation in 2027 as opposed to 2026. Why is this increased if the extraordinary expenditure was in 2026, why do we need 200 more in 2027.

Hon. Tancoo: There is no 200 more. Member, there is no 200 more, you know. The Actual expenditure, including the Assembly's contribution to the Assembly's 45th anniversary celebration was $336,113.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: That is broadly in line with the projection for 2027.

Dr. Gadsby- Dolly: When is the 45th celebration, in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby- Dolly: Well, that was your explanation as to why the Revised Estimate was higher than the allocation in 2026. But the Estimate in 2027 is $300,000.

Hon. Tancoo: Because we are not going to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the Assembly in 2027. So that cost—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister.

Hon. Tancoo:—does not apply.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: In 2027, the Estimate is $300,000?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby- Dolly: Am I correct in seeing that?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby- Dolly: And in 2026, the Estimate was $100,000.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: And I am asking, the Estimate in 2027, why is it $200,000 higher than in 2026?

Mr. Imbert: Because they do not have a 45th anniversary.

Dr. Gadsby- Dolly: Because you do not have a 45th anniversary, that was in 2026.

Hon. Tancoo: It is because the expenditure trend is more than the $100,000.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Because the what?

Hon. Tancoo: I am not saying—the expenditure trend is higher, more was spent last year. So what I am suggesting, Ma'am, the increase is not just for the Assembly's 45th anniversary celebration, there were other factors which contributed—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, that is why, I am sorry—

Hon. Tancoo: There are other factors which contributed to the increase. Those

other factors which contributed to the increase are also reflected in the $300,000 fiscal proposed for 2027.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: That is the question I am asking, you know. Why is the allocation in 2027, $200,000 more than it was in 2026? That is what I have been asking here for a few minutes.

Hon. Tancoo: Because we have an expectation that they will spend more based on their trend from last year.

Dr. Gadsby- Dolly: Well, what? What exactly is the trend? What is it allocated to be spent on? What are the projections?

Hon. Tancoo: So, Member, we will provide for you—hold on. I am just advised that there will be a new initiative in fiscal 2027, which is called the Tobago Specific Curriculum Conference, which will be undertaken in Tobago and which will attract part of this funding.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you. Finally.

Hon. Tancoo: Most welcome.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Minister, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Primary School, Secondary and Vocational Education. Member for St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under line Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence, I note a decrease of $300,000 here. Could you explain the decrease?

12.40 p.m.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much for your question. My colleagues from Tobago have advised me that this figure reflects payment for all travel allowances due to monthly-paid officers. The reduction was specifically due to reduced travel

reported as officers incorporated technology in communications with schools.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, the $900,000 expended under 2026 in the Revised Estimate, were there any arrears that were paid out of that, and are there any arrears that have to be paid in this fiscal year?

Hon. Tancoo: There were no arrears under this Head, Ma'am.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No arrears?

Hon. Tancoo: No.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Would less travelling result in less ability to monitor schools and these institutions in the way they are required?

Hon. Tancoo: No. Based on the explanation provided by my colleagues from the THA, the use of other types of communications, virtual conversations, et cetera, means that this is less needed for physical travel.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Line Item 16—16 is under this same one, right?—Contract Employment, I notice a decrease of $6 million here; a large decrease here. Could you explain this decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the explanation provided is that this Head deals with payments of salaries for monthly-paid officers employed on contract for a minimum period of one year as agreed by the Executive Council. There was some attrition due to educators transitioning to permanent posts under the Teaching Service Commission, and that would account for the reduction.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: How many teaching staff are paid under Contract Employment? That is an interesting arrangement.

Hon. Tancoo: We will have to provide that for you in writing, Ma'am.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. This was totally due to that? Are there other factors? Is there a reduction in Contract Employment being done under this line Item?

Hon. Tancoo: No.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could I ask for the number of positions that are paid under this?

Hon. Tancoo: We will have to provide that for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I would also like to see the number of vacancies that are in these positions, thanks.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, will do.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Line Item 37: Janitorial Services. I notice a decrease of $4.9million. Could I be provided with an explanation as to this decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: Bear with me for a few minutes while we get the answer, Ma'am. [*Minister confers with technocrat*] Ma'am, the explanation provided is that improved continuous maintenance has reduced the overall cost associated with janitorial services in schools.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Are contractors hired to do these janitorial services? Is it contractors that you are hiring?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, has there been a reduction in the payment to the contractors? The contracts themselves cost less?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that there is a combination of staff and contractors that provide janitorial services at primary and secondary schools and vocational centres.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So, is there less staff, or are there less contractors, or are the contractors being paid less?

Mr. Tancoo: No, I think what the explanation just provided, if I may repeat it, is that there was improved continuous maintenance, which has reduced the cost

associated with the janitorial services at the schools. So, it is not that there was a reduction in the number of providers, et cetera. It was just a better maintenance structure that was put in place.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: What are the better maintenance results that give you a $5million saving?

Hon. Tancoo: Less need for continuous cleaning.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, then you have a reduced scope for the contractors, or a reduced scope for the staff?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that we will have to provide for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So, what I would like to know is who the contractors are, the names of the contractors, the amounts of the contracts, and the number of staff, and the amount that goes to the staff, please.

Hon. Tancoo: Sure.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: If I may ask for the Security Services, under line Item 43, a reduction of $3.7 million, could the Minister explain that reduction, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, I am grateful for your question. The installation of CCTV cameras in schools has reduced the number of physical security officers required to monitor premises, and that would account for the decline.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, what would be the reduction of security guards? How many would you have been reduced by?

Mr. Tancoo: We will have to provide that for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. So, if I can get that, how many security guards. So, are there any companies that are hired under this?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Has the number of companies been reduced? Happy to know

Tobago seems to be quite safe. Excellent.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we will have to provide for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, the number of firms and the contracted amounts paid to these firms, and then the number of officers and the contracted amount paid to the officers. Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Chairman: 003: Library Services; 007: Tobago Council for Handicapped Children - Happy Haven School; 008: Tobago School for the Deaf, Speech and Language Impaired.

Sub Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 70 to 71; 001: General Administration; 002: Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education; 003: Library Services; 007: Tobago Council for Handicapped Children - Happy Haven School; 008: Tobago School for the Deaf, Speech and Language Impaired.

Sub Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, pages 71 to 72 inclusive; 005: Non-Profit Institutions; 006: Educational Institutions. St. Ann's East,

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly, Mr. Chair. Under line Item 03, I see Trade Centres with a reduced allocation, and it is reduced by $3million. Could the Minister explain this reduction, please?

12.50 p.m.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you for your patience, Member. I am advised that the wages component of this segment has now been moved to Wages and COLA. So, there have been a wages component listed under Trade Centres, it is now moved to Sub-Item Wages and COLA.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers. Division 07 - Community Development and Social—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Chair, sorry.

Mr. Chairman: You were on—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: My hand was raised in 007/01, please. I just have one question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, go ahead.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The School Feeding Programme, I see an increase. It is interesting because we do not have a similar increase in Trinidad. So I would love to know the rationale for the increase of the School Feeding Programme by $5million in Tobago.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that there is an increase in the provision for breakfast and lunch based on an increased request for the service.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, they increased the request in Tobago for school feeding that has resulted in an increase in allocation. I think that is very noteworthy. Thank you very kindly.

Hon. Tancoo: You are welcome.

Mr. Chairman: 009: Other Transfers. St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman. With regard to line Item 01, I see Basic Grants have decreased by $1.5 million. Could the Minister tell us what these grants are for and why it has decreased by $1.5 million?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that these are the grants for the denominational schools. I do not have a rationale yet for why there is a reduction, but we would get that information for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I am having a little trouble hearing the Minister clearly. These are the grants for denominational schools—

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: —and the reason for the decrease you will have to get it in writing?

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Could I ask again, another decrease in grants, Grants to Necessitous Students, line Item 06, Attending Public Schools. Why would the Grants to Necessitous Students Attending Public Schools be decreased by $750,000?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we will have to provide that information for you in writing because there was an increased projection. This is the same as the Estimate for 2026, but there was an increased projection, which does not seem to have materialized for 2027. So, I would provide some information for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I would appreciate that because I am sure Tobago would love to know why those grants are increasing, and there is also a decrease in the transfer to Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute, a decrease by a $1 million. Why is that?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we will have to provide that information for you in writing as well.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It would also be very interesting to know, if it is permitted, what was requested and what was given. And with respect to line Item 08: Tobago Information Technology Limited. I see yet another decrease by $1 million. What would be the reason for accounting that decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: So, my colleagues from Tobago would provide that information in writing as well.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. We look forward to those bits of information. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Division 07 - Community Development and Social Protection, pages 73 to 74; 001: General Administration; 002: Community Development. St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly. Under line Item 02: Wages and COLA, there is an increase of $8.5 million in this particular line Item. Could the Minister explain that increase?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we will have to provide that information from Tobago for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: 008: Sport; 009: Youth Affairs; 010: Social Services. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 75 to 79, inclusive; 001: General Administration; 002: Community Development; 007: Youth Energised for Success; 008: Sports; 009: Youth Affairs; 010: Social Services; 011: Probation Services.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 79 to 81; 001: General Administration; 002: Community Development; 007: Youth Energised for Success; 008: Sports; 009: Youth Affairs; 010: Social Services; 011: Probation Services.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, pages 81 to 83; 005: Non-Profit Institutions. St. Ann's East.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman. Under line Item 16: Regional Complexes. There is a decrease of $1million in this allocation. Could the Minister explain that decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, my colleagues from Tobago will provide that information for you as well in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Appreciate it. And under line Item 33: Electoral District Development Fund. There is a decrease of $1.5 million in 2027. Could the Minister explain this decrease in the Electoral District Development Fund?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that the establishment of the Tobago Development Fund would attract some of the projects that would have normally been undertaken under this line Item.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The establishment of the—

Hon. Tancoo: Tobago Development Fund.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: When was that established?

Hon. Tancoo: Last year.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: During 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Could you tell me what the Actual expenditure in 2026 is? It is revised there at $2.5 million, but I realized I cannot trust that figure.

Hon. Tancoo: We will have to provide that for you in writing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, the Actual figure for 2026 expended you will provide? And the reduction is because the Tobago Development Fund will take up some of the projects usually done here?

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: We propose to take the lunch break now. Thank you all.

[*Mr. Chairman confers with Mr. Tancoo*]

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

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

Mr. Chairman: Good afternoon, everyone. Okay, when we took the break, we were about to move—we were on Sub-Head 04, and we were about to move to Item 007: Households, page 82, for those who—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. For those who wish to refresh their memory. 009: Other Transfers; Division 08: Public Infrastructure and Transportation (Formerly Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development), pages 84 to 85; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration; 002: Maintenance of Roads; 003: Maintenance of Buildings; 004: Transport; 007: Mechanical Workshop; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 85 to 89; 001: General Administration. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. Goods and Services, Item 16, there is a decrease there of $1.46 million. Minister, are you able to tell us what is the reason for that decrease, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, my colleagues from Tobago will have to provide us with that information in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, but even if it is in writing, they are not aware of what it is for? I mean—no?

Hon. Tancoo: I would not have that information, no.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Maintenance of Roads; 003: Maintenance of Buildings.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Roads?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: There is a decrease of $8.7 million, 002/009: Rent/Lease - Vehicles and Equipment. Could you indicate what is the reason for that$8.7 million decrease, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Member. I am advised that it is the intention to purchase vehicles, and as a result of that, they would not have to rent all these vehicles that would have been rented and leased in the last fiscal.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So, is this Rent/Lease—is this a building involved as well?

Mr. Tancoo: No this would be vehicles.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Oh, strictly vehicles.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: 003: Maintenance of Buildings; 004: Transport; 007: Mechanical Workshop; 008: Transportation; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 89 to 90. 001: General Administration; 002: Maintenance of Roads; 003: Maintenance of Buildings; 004: Transport; 007: Mechanical Workshop; 008: Transportation. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, pages 90 to 91; 005: Non-Profit Institutions; 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers; Division 10: Health and Wellness (Formerly Health, Wellness and Social Protection); Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, pages 92 to 93; 001: General Administration; 002: Hospitals; 003: Health Centres; 004: Public Health and the Environment; 005: Social Services; Sub-Head 02/001: General Administration. Arima?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, please. Item 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, there is a reduction of $3.2 million. Can the Minister indicate what is the reason for that reduction, please?

Mr. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that the allocation was $24 million. The total projected for the year approximates $24 million, so we believe that that would be sufficient. It may be that the previous year included some allocation for arrears. But based on what I have in front of me here, the projection approaches the $24 million projected expenditure. This is for the

Kurt and Cheryl Salandy Records Centre, located at No. 12 Piggott Street, Scarborough, Tobago.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So, that you are saying there that that allocation is sufficient?

Mr. Tancoo: Member, the figures are very close. So, there is a small difference in the total projected, which will either be— So there is a small difference between the total and projected as of today's date, which could be made up via virement or supplementation.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. I did not get—

Hon. Tancoo: The locations?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I did not get what you said it is for.

Hon. Tancoo: Or, sorry.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: If you could just repeat.

Hon. Tancoo: It is for two independent locations, that is the—it is called independent locations—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo:—for the offices. One is called Independent Properties Ltd. This is for the Head Office located at No. 7 Montessori Drive, Glen Road, Tobago. And there is a Kurt and Cheryl Salandy Records Centre located at No. 12 Piggott Street, Scarborough, Tobago.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. Minister, so could you just provide the landlords in those cases and the terms of the lease, and I can take that in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay. We will provide the landlord and the term of the lease in writing for you, Member.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Hospital; 003: Health Centres; 004: Public Health and The Environment. 005: Social Services.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. There is a decrease, 16: $10.2 million. Is that because of the transfer to Development and Social?

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. Fine thanks.

Mr. Chairman: 007: Probation Services; 008: Litter Eradication Programme; 009:Gender Affairs; 010: Emergency Medical Social Assistance; 011: Employment Assistance and Workforce Wellness; 012: Health Assistance and Grant Administrations; 013: Health System Governance and TRHA Oversight; 014: Tobago Public Health Observatory; 015: Tobago Wellness Prevention and Health Promotion.

Sub-Head 03, pages 100 to 102, Item 001: General Administration; 003: Health Centres; 004:Public Health and the Environment; 005: Social Services; 008: 008: Litter Eradication Programme; 009:Gender Affairs; 010: Emergency Medical and Social Assistance Unit; 011: Employment Assistance and Workforce Wellness; 012: Health Assistance and Grant Administrations; 013: Health System Governance and TRHA Oversight; 014: Tobago Public Health Observatory; 015: Tobago Wellness Prevention and Health Promotion.

2.40 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Pages 102 to 103. Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Non-Profit Institutions, 005.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: 06: Special Social Programmes, a decrease of $1,800,000 what really would that be, a special social programme?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that we would have to provide that for you in writing as well.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, but what is it? What is a special social programme?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that it relates to interventions with persons who may be in troubled situations.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: And that is reduced by $1.8 million. Okay. Do they have any reason why they would reduce that programme?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised as well that some of these have been transferred to the Division of Community Development and Social Protection.

Mr. Gonzales: It was transferred to?

Hon. Tancoo: The Division of Community Development and Social Protection.

Mr. Chairman: 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Before, there was Emergency Cases Fund just above the Community Residence for Adolescents, a decrease of $2 million. Just above, Mr. Chairman, Households.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. So, those Items listed there, that would be 04, 06, 07, 08.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, Community Adolescents.

Hon. Tancoo: And 10 have all been transferred to the Division of Community Development—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: That whole entire thing. Okay, sure. All right, thanks.

Hon. Tancoo: "Yep."

Mr. Chairman: 009: Other Transfers. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, please. 07: Tobago Regional Health Authority, the sum of $510,255,500. Could the Minister indicate what would be the reason for that massive decrease?

Hon. Tancoo: So, this seems to be an area where we would need to supplement later going forward. We expect that the Tobago House of Assembly, based on conversations we have had with them, would vire money within their various Heads, so that we will have to come back at a later point in time and supplement this allocation, should the need arise.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, on this same line Item, page 103, 07. The Tobago Regional Health Authority is the primary provider of health care in Tobago. The allocation has been cut by 70 per cent/65 per cent. How are they going to manage in fiscal 2027?

Hon. Tancoo: The response I just gave, Member, is that we expect, having had conversations with the Tobago House of Assembly on this very same Item, that the Tobago House of Assembly will review its current allocation and they have options of virement, transfers or come back to the Ministry of Finance for a supplementation.

Mr. Imbert: So as part of the solution to this problem, you are saying that TRHA

will reduce expenditure in other Items.

Hon. Tancoo: I am saying that the Tobago House of Assembly will engage in a review.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, so you are saying, as a solution, the Tobago House of Assembly must take money that is allocated elsewhere for important things?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: But I just want clarification, as one of the things you said is that they will take from their other allocations to make up this $500 million shortfall.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you have asked that question. The Member before you has asked that question; I have provided the answer.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, I have another supplementary question. If the pattern of expenditure, the known expenditure on the Tobago Regional Health Authority was of the order of $700 million for many years, why did you only provide $250 million or thereabouts?

Hon. Tancoo: I provided the answer, Member.

Mr. Imbert: What is the answer?

Hon. Tancoo: I provided an answer.

Mr. Imbert: Was it an error?

Hon. Tancoo: I have provided—yes.

Mr. Imbert: It was a mistake by the Ministry of Finance?

Hon. Tancoo: It was, yes.

Mr. Imbert: I see.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you, and I have already provided a response.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: They now must take from the other allocations. Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you had the opportunity to raise all the questions before with the others—

Mr. Imbert: Okay, okay.

Hon. Tancoo:—and I have clarified them all.

Mr. Imbert: It is okay.

Hon. Tancoo: I have indicated here what the solution is.

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member of Arouca/Lopinot

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, the allocation for 2027, the $239.7 million, my question is how far into this fiscal year would that allocation assist the full running and operation of the TRHA?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I have provided an answer to this question already. I have indicated that the Tobago House of Assembly, based on the conversations we have had with the Tobago House of Assembly, will look at its allocation, and they have options. There is the possibility virements; there is the possibility of supplementation.

Mr. Gonzales: I know. I hear that. But I am asking about the Actual allocation of $239.7 million.

Hon. Tancoo: Just to clarify the answer, I am 100 per cent certain that the Tobago Regional Health Authority will have sufficient funds allocated to it between now

and the mid-year review to cover all of its expenses.

Mr. Gonzales: All right. One last question, Mr. Chair. What has been the request of the THA for the supplementation?

Hon. Tancoo: I do not have that figure. I will have to get back to you in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Division 11 - Housing Settlements and Public Utilities (Formerly - Settlements, Public Utilities, and Rural Development). Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Page 104 onwards. 001: General Administration; 002: Settlements; 004: Electrical Inspectorate. Sub-Head 02, pages 105 to 107. 001: General Administration. General Administration.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, I observed that for Street Lighting, 42, there is a decrease in the allocation by $1.5 million. Is that the line Item that normally the THA would utilize to pay T&TEC for its street lighting bills for the lighting of streets in Tobago?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: So that is a recurrent cost that you pay to T&TEC on an annual basis?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Now, if I were to draw your attention to the previous allocation of $4 million in 2026, revised allocation of $4 million, 2027, the pattern does not hold. It is not consistent with what perhaps might be the annual cost for street lighting in Tobago. My question is whether that $2.5 million in the allocation would be sufficient to pay for the annual cost of street lighting in Tobago.

2.50 pm

Hon. Tancoo: Member, there were substantial arrears attracted last year.

Mr. Gonzales: Say again.

Hon. Tancoo: There were substantial arrears, which were reviewed last year. We believe that the Vote of $2.5 millionis in keeping with the previous Vote. You are looking at the Estimates and the Revised Estimates, but it resembles the Actual. Should additional funding be required, we will come back in the mid-year.

Mr. Gonzales: So, in that $2.5 million allocation, how much of the $2.5 million is for the settling of outstanding arrears?

Hon. Tancoo: We will have to get back to you with that information in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 002: Settlements; 004: Electrical Inspectorate; 005: Rural Development. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 107 to 108; 001: General Administration; 002: Settlements; 004: Electrical Inspectorate; 005: Rural Development. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 108; 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers.

Division 15- Strategic Planning and Development, page 109. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration; 002: Strategic Planning. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 109 to 112; 001: General Administration; 002: Strategic Planning; 003: Spatial Planning; 004: Strategic Development. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 112 to 113; Item 001: General Administration; 002: Strategic Planning; 003: Spatial Planning; Item 004: Strategic Development. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 113; Item 007: Households.

Division 16- Environment, Climate Resilience and Energy. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 114; 001: General Administration; 002: Environment, Climate Change and Energy; 003: Forestry. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 115 to 118; Item 001: General administration. Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Goods and Services, 02, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Pages 115 to 118.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah, 115, Minister, 02/09: Rent/Lease- Office Accommodation and Storage. Could you provide the information in relation to the landlord, the lease, the period and the cost in writing?

Hon. Tancoo: I think you cited the wrong Sub-Item.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sorry?

Hon. Tancoo: You are looking at 08: Rent/Lease- Office Accommodation and Storage?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: Okay. I think you mentioned 09. And you would like to get the—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Landlord, the term of the lease and the value.

Hon. Tancoo: Landlord, value and term. Okay, sure.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: We will provide you it in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Environment, Climate Change and Energy; 003: Forestry; 004: Marine Resources. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 118 to 119; Item 001: General Administration; 002: Environment, Climate Change and Energy; 003: Forestry; 004: Marine Resources. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers.

Division 17- Youth Empowerment and Sport, page 120. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; 002: Sport; 003: Youth Affairs. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 121 to 123.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Yes?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. Item 02/08: Rent/Lease- Office Accommodation,

increased by $2 million. Can I ask for the same information: The landlord, the time, the period of lease and the cost, please? In writing is fine.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that there is no landlord at present because there is no office identified at present. They are going through a procurement—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Oh, so there will be a procurement process?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, fine.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Sport; 003: Youth Affairs; 004: Youth Energized for Success. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 124; 001: General Administration; 002: Sport; 003: Youth Affairs; 004: Youth Energized for Success. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 125; 005: Non-Profit Institutions.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Chairman, I was asking Current Transfers and Subsidies—

Mr. Chairman: Yes, that is where I am.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, thank you, sure. Item 02, which is Assistance to Sporting Organisations, is that it now exists under Youth Empowerment?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Because I am seeing it is transferred from—

Hon. Tancoo: From, yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So, what would be the criteria for a sporting organization to apply for assistance under this Item?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, there are written criteria, which we will provide to you in writing.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Item 007: Households.

Division 18- Legal Affairs. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 126; 001: General Administrative. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administrative; 002: Advisory; 003: Commercial; 004: Legislative Drafting; 005: Litigation. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 128; 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007 Households.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme* at page 26 Pages 27 to 28. Item 001: Pre-Investment, A. Administrative Services. 002: Productive Sectors, I. Production and Marketing, at page 28.

Hon. Members, Item 003: Economic Infrastructure spans seven pages. Therefore, I will also announce the project groups. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. B. Extension Services, D. Fishing, E. Forestry, F. Land Management Services, H. Research and Development. Arima?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Mr. Chairman, just above 463, which would just be the one that you just passed—sorry, my hand was up—which was the Agriculture Access Roads, which is $2 million. If the Minister could provide us with a list of the roads done in the last fiscal as well as, if available, those to be considered in this fiscal. Minister, 463. Yes? Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Tancoo: We would provide the same in writing.

Mr. Chairman: A. Electricity. A. Drainage and Irrigation. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair. Chair, I want to crave your indulgence, and that of the Minister, to just pose a collective question, because

there are a number of projects in A and D, and I do not propose to go through each one of them. So, that is why I am craving your indulgence in the interest of time. Minister, there are a number of projects here in the Consolidated Fund under Drainage and Irrigation and Tourism.

These projects have been around for some time, and you have made some allocations. They are very small allocations for each individual Item. My question to you is whether or not any of these projects here are new projects that you are just starting up, or they are old legacy projects that are at various stages of completion, and the allocations that you have made here in A and D are to continue and/or to complete many of these projects. I mean, the question can apply for each one of them, but I prefer, in the interest of time, to ask a generalized question on all of these projects.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, also in the interest of time, several of these are old projects. They are all continuing. I am advised that we are also hoping that a couple of them will be completed in fiscal 2027. So, the answers to all your questions are yes. It is a combination of legacy projects continuing and some to be finished.

Mr. Gonzales: So, again, one question—it would apply to all. The allocations that you have made for each of these Items, what is the expectation? That in fiscal 2027 we expect to see some finalization, or completion of these major infrastructure projects that the PNM had started in Tobago?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, then I will have to answer them one by one. So, there is some expectation that we will get to very advanced positions towards completion. As I said, as you have accepted as well, some of these are legacy projects that have been around for a long time and are on the edge of completion, and some of them

will require some continuous funding before we can get there.

Mr. Gonzales: One more.

Hon. Tancoo: So, we do expect that some may be completed—

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo:—and some may go into the next fiscal.

Mr. Gonzales: Do you still have contractors employed on these projects?

Hon. Tancoo: Again, it is a combination. I am expecting that there will be some contractors in existence because some of those projects are rolling. There is some in-house work being done by the THA on some of these projects as well. Some may require new contractors to be sourced depending on what is to be done in this fiscal. But to give you a clearer identification, I would have to go through line Item by line Item.

Mr. Gonzales: That makes sense.

Mr. Chairman: D. Tourism, G. Business Services. D. Roads and Bridges. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Chair. So, again, similar question to the Minister. A number of projects under Roads and Bridges. I will not go through them. They are quite exhaustive. You have made several allocations in these areas for the various Heads, and my question is, how far is the THA in the completion of these various projects in Tobago?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, as you yourself have mentioned, these are multiple projects, so therefore they will be in multiple stages of completion. If you so desire, my colleagues here do have the information. We can provide it to you in writing. But each one of these will have a different status in terms of where it is at and a potential for completion. Each one will have a different one.

Mr. Gonzales: Are you satisfied, Minister, based on the information and personnel that are available at your disposal at this point in time, that the allocations that you have made for the individual projects are sufficient to move the projects forward towards closer, if not completion?

Hon. Tancoo: I think the Estimates were done based on the trend, as opposed to completion of the individual projects. Some, like I said, you will see larger numbers than others. Those are what will be requiring more attention to be placed on them. And some are smaller numbers, which may simply mean wrapping up completion works, neatening up, et cetera. But each one of these will have a different perspective in terms of time and resource requirement. I cannot give you a lump sum response, except to say that these are the figures that we are working with at this time.

Mr. Gonzales: Again, you have made several allocations to the individual Heads, various projects. Just to protect the interests of the taxpayers, of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, is your Ministry willing to conduct an independent audit or oversight mechanism to ensure that these projects are on time? That there are no cost overruns, there are no delays in completion, so that these allocations that you are making, the taxpayers' money, in the allocation that you have made, are fully protected, and that the projects move towards completion?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, we have been working very closely with the Tobago House of Assembly, and I am comfortable with their level of assessment and their level of evaluation to ensure that taxpayers' monies are protected, and that we get value for money.

Mr. Chairman: H. Sea Transport. 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 36 to 46. This Item spans eight pages. Therefore, I will also announce the project groups.

B. Primary.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes?

Mr. Gonzales: Question to the Minister. Minister, a number of projects again. You have made a lot of allocations to the individual Heads, albeit small, when you take into consideration each of the Items, but they are quite significant when you tally all of them. So, under B. Primary, a number of educational institutions, et cetera, no need to go through them individually. Are you satisfied that the allocations that you have made in this fiscal year will drive or move the projects closer to completion, having regard to the amount of time that they have been on the Development Programme?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: So, you are satisfied that the allocations that you have made—

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales:—will move the projects to completion?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: C. Secondary, E. Special Education, G. Educational Services. A. Hospitals, B. Medical and Dental Centres. Arima?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, thank you. Minister, B/404: Construction of New Health Centres, could you identify those possible health centres to be constructed?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that these are not really to construct new establishments, but to upgrade and expand.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, so that Item should really read upgrade of health centres, not Construction of New Health Centres. That is what you mean?

Hon. Tancoo: I think it is just a continuation from the fact that they were

constructed under this Head, and they were just expanding and continuing the line Item.

3.10 p.m.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So, are they able to tell? Indicate which of the health centres they are likely to upgrade then.

Hon. Tancoo: We will provide that for you, inviting member.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, good.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. C. Public Health Services; D. Land Development; A. Culture; C. Sports; A. Community Development; C. Welfare Services; D. Youth Development; 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, pages 46 to 49. Multi-Sectoral Services and Other Services span four pages; therefore, I will also announce the project groups: A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings; G. Equipment and Vehicles.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 15 ordered to stand part of the schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: We apologise; I hope you get your flight.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, thank you. Head 16, in the interest of moving things along, Central Administrative Services, Tobago.

Head 16: Central Administrative Services Tobago, $31,423,600.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister to make a brief opening statement.

Hon. Morris: Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services Tobago, OPM-CAST, plays a pivotal role in delivering government services to the people of Tobago by providing essential administrative, financial, and meteorological services. OPM-CAST is also an important nexus, bridging national Ministries and the agencies with the Tobago House of Assembly, civil society, and the island's communities.

At present, Central Administrative Services Tobago, CAST, comprises General Administrative Services and the Meteorological Services Division. The Met Services Division provides real-time, accurate and reliable localized weather and climate data and forecasting for sustainable public sector and private sector development.

Among its administrative functions, CAST also plays a key facilitative role in ensuring the budgetary allocations from the Ministry of Finance to the THA are received in a timely manner, as well as to bring all revenue collected in Tobago into account.

Through the provision of essential administrative and meteorological services, OPM-CAST is therefore instrumental in ensuring that the policies, programmes, and initiatives of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly are effectively implemented in Tobago.

In this regard, in fiscal 2026, OPM-CAST has made strategic investments to improve its service delivery, and in doing so, continues to execute programmes, projects, and activities geared to developing the resource capacity of the OPM-CAST. Thank you very much.

Question proposed: That Head 16 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: I propose just to read the Heads quickly. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, pages 71 to 72. 001: General Administration; 002: Trade and Industry; 005: Meteorological Services; 007: Registrar General. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration; 002: Trade and Industry; 005: Meteorological Services; 007: Registrar General. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; 001: General Administration; 005: Meteorological Services. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 005: Non-Profit Institutions; 007: Households.

We now go to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme* at page 51. 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings; G. Equipment and Vehicles.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 16 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Head 61 Ministry of Housing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Just as a warning to Laventille West and Diego Martin West, any damage to those tables, you will be billed accordingly.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chairman, the Minister is here, can we start, please, time is running.

Mr. Gonzales: Can we start? The Ministry has collapsed, what is going on?

Mr. Young SC: What is going on?

Mr. Gonzales: It is three Ministers there.

Mr. Young SC: And an Executive Chairman. Let us start.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Gonzales: We need back the time.

Mr. Imbert: We have to get back the time.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Young SC: "All ah dis is extra time to be added on, eh."

Mr. Chairman: The Minister is here so let us go.

Head 61: Ministry of Housing, $870,052,000.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Housing to make a brief opening statement.

Hon. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon to my fellow committee Members. It is really an honour to appear before this august Committee. My other colleagues will be joining me as I speak to examine the Ministry of Housing proposed allocation for fiscal 2027.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Lee: I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister for her leadership and continued commitment to housing and community development. I also thank the hon. Minister of Finance, in front of me, for supporting these priorities while navigating the country's financial constraints. The hon. Prime Minister's mandate is clear, "We must do more with less". For this Ministry, that means using available resources more effectively, eliminating waste, and pursuing partnerships that deliver better housing outcomes without placing unsustainable demands on the public purse. The Ministry's allocation and

the approach through which we intend to implement our programmes, aligns with our mandate. The lower provisions for the Development Programme provision reflects a change in approach, not a retreat from our housing commitment.

We must measure success by the results we achieve, rather than simply by the size of our allocation. A significant portion of the recurrent provision is committed to existing loans and bond obligations. We are working closely with the Ministry of Finance to manage these commitments, ease debt servicing pressures, and create greater room for investment in homes and communities. Mr. Chair, this Government inherited a myriad of challenges at the Housing Development Corporation (HDC), stalled developments, construction deficiencies, contractual disputes, cost overruns, unpaid obligations, and a sustainable debt burden.

These failures have affected families awaiting homes and residents of existing communities. We will not minimize those problems or allow them to become an excuse for inaction. We will address defective works, strengthen oversight, protect residents, and hold those responsible to account through the appropriate processes. This Government will fix what is broken and get housing delivery moving.

Together, Tobago, Chair, will also benefit as part of the partnership among the IDB and the Ministry of Housing, and the Tobago House of Assembly. Infrastructure works will be facilitated to support the housing development at Courland Tobago. This reflects our commitment to ensuring that Tobago shares in the opportunities created through the programme. Tobago's development is the nation's development.

Chair, for the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited and Port of

Spain Shopping Complex Limited, our priority is stronger governance, clearer responsibilities, and better coordination with other Ministries. Further, programme funding must be supported by appropriate oversight, costed activities and readiness to implement, rather than duplication of effort and expenditure. Mr. Chair, doing more with less must mean delivering more value for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It means completing homes, restoring confidence, improving existing communities, and building partnerships that support sustainable development. We recognize the scale of the challenges inherited, but we are determined to resolve them and deliver better outcomes for families across both islands.

Finally, Mr. Chair, I wish to thank the Ministry's officers here this afternoon and agency representatives for their work. My team and I stand ready to assist this Committee and look forward to constructive deliberations. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed: That Head 61 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $870,052,000 for Head 61: Ministry of Housing 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*, and we go to Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, at page 321 of the relevant volume. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Oh, sorry. Well, I looked down, I did not see you.

Mr. de Nobriga: Her hand was up. Her hand was up the entire time, Mr. Chairman.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: As you started, Mr. Chairman, my hand was up.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Go ahead, Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I am on 001/01. There is an increase of just over $7 million, Mr. Chairman, would the Minister be able to indicate what portion of that $7 million is attributable to filling vacancies to new positions, to salary adjustments, and to acting appointments? I have two other questions after that on this same line Item.

Hon. Lee: With respect to that first question, Mr. Chair, through you, to the Member, based on what she has asked, I have to verify that and get back to you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: In writing?

Hon. Lee: Yeah, sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Hon. Lee: In due course.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Minister be able to provide us with the approved establishment and the actual staffing complement, and vacancy rate for fiscal 2026, and the projected same matters for 2027?

Hon. Lee: Sure. I will verify that and I will have to get back to you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Could you tell us how much of the allocation relates to retroactive salary payments or settlement of outstanding negotiations?

Hon. Lee: Well, part of the portion is allocated for what you just asked. So, as far as the breakdown of this, I do not have it right now, but I can get that for you in due course.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: In writing?

Hon. Lee: For when?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: In writing?

Hon. Lee: In writing, sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Hon. Lee: I love to write to you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Well, that is true, but still.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. In 2025, there was a sum of $10.9 million that was spent under this line Item; in 2026, $9.1 million was allocated, however, in 2026 it was revised to $13.3 million. Firstly, can you indicate, please, Minister, what was the reason for the Revised Estimate for 2026 under this line Item?

Hon. Lee: Well, thank you, Member. That Revised Estimate for 2026 had to do—[*Minister confers with technocrat*] According to what I am told, there was a $20,000 advance payment to public officers in December 2025, in accordance with the Comptroller of Accounts, Circular No. 2 of 2025. That would have accounted for the revised figure.

Mr. Marcelle: Minister, from this line Item, the salaries of Ministers and/or any ministerial secretariat staff are paid from this line Item?

Hon. Lee: Ministers only, Member, not their staff.

Mr. Marcelle: In light of this Ministry having three Ministers, hon. Minister, could that account for the significant increase from $9 million to $13 million within the fiscal, any part attributable to the same?

3.30 p.m.

Hon. Lee: No. The three Ministers' salaries would have been allocated and estimated in the 2026 figure. The account for the Revised amount system is really

that $20,000 advanced payment to public officers.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you. I think the Member for Trincity/Maloney had her hand up.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Under 03 of the same Sub-Head, Minister, there is an increase of $3,000 for Overtime. I understand that despite the fact that one of your colleague Ministers has his own driver, the Ministry's driver is being used to transport one of your colleagues. Does this account for the increase in Overtime?

Hon. Lee: I do not understand that mischief you are trying to allude to there. But I am not aware of what you have stated there. All my colleagues have their own drivers, including myself.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Right. I know that. But one of the Ministry's drivers—

Hon. Lee: I do not think our drivers get overtime.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—is being used by one of your colleagues. So, I am asking, if as a consequence of that, you had to increase the Overtime—

Hon. Lee: No, I do not think that is right because I did not approve any overtime for any Minister. I did not approve.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I did not ask if you approved it.

Hon. Lee: Well, I am telling you that did not happen.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am just asking if this resulted in this—

Hon. Lee: No. Well, we will verify that with you if you want me to verify it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Thank you very much.

Hon. Lee: That is fine.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration.

Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, 02/001/09: Rent/Lease- Vehicles and Equipment. I see in 2025, the Actual spend was $93,100; 2026, an Estimate given that remained the same, of $122,000. Can you tell me what that covered? Let us start with that.

Hon. Lee: Which one? The $122,000?

Mr. Young SC: Yeah. Line Item 09, 2026, Revised Estimate.

Hon. Lee: Right. The $122,000, it covered two multifunction BH C360i copiers from Busy Business Systems that we inherited, assigned to the ERPU and Accounts Unit in the Ministry of Housing. That total annual was $60,750.

Mr. Young SC: So, two photocopying machines?

Hon. Lee: Two multifunction—

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Lee:—that were there all the time—

Mr. Young SC: Understood.

Hon. Lee:—from Busy Business Systems. I did not arrange—and then three multifunction BH C458 copiers, again, from Busy Business Systems, assigned to the HR department, legal department, and operations unit in the Ministry of Health. That tallied $97,200. So that total was $157,950.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Were any motor vehicles rented under this?

Hon. Lee: No, Member.

Mr. Young SC: In 2027, it has gone up to $98,000. Are any motor vehicles being rented under this?

Hon. Lee: No, I think the additional $98,000 that we might have gotten an increase in would have been some arrears that we had identified, but it has nothing

to do with the—

Mr. Young SC: Arrears to pay—

Hon. Lee:—copiers.

Mr. Young SC:—past services provided under this heading?

Hon. Lee: Yeah. But nothing that has to do with any rental of vehicles. There is no allocation or—[*Inaudible*]—that we will be renting any vehicles.

Mr. Young SC: Under line Item 13: Maintenance of Vehicles—

Hon. Lee: Yeah. Sure.

Mr. Young SC:—how—right. You are there? Maintenance of Vehicles, how many Ministry vehicles are there currently that are serviceable?

Hon. Lee: We have four: PDT 5657—that is the number—TEC 3693, PEC 1809—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Lee:—and PEC—

Mr. Young SC: I am glad that your colleagues on your side seem to think it is a joke.

Hon. Lee: No, but I am—

Mr. Young SC: So, I am dealing with you—

Hon. Lee: No, I am giving—

Mr. Young SC:—not the one who was very quiet yesterday.

Hon. Lee: All right. Member, I understand we have—

Mr. Young SC: So, let us start over. How many motor vehicles before you give us the particulars of the vehicles?

Hon. Lee: Four vehicles—

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Lee:—that have been there. They are very aged vehicles.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Lee: I will give you the number.

Mr. Young SC: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I mean it is Maintenance of Vehicles we are on, not purchase of vehicles.

Hon. Lee: PDT—so, we have four vehicles.

Mr. Young SC: All right. Out of those four vehicles—

Hon. Lee: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—how many are currently being utilized by any of the Ministers in the Ministry?

Hon. Lee: The only time a Minister would utilize any of those vehicles would be on official duty.

Mr. Young SC: Official duty for Ministers under your Ministry includes going out to make social media videos?

Hon. Lee: Well, I am not aware of that. I know the Ministers—

Mr. Young SC: You are not aware?

Hon. Lee:—go out on housing issues that require their attention. They might require utilizing a Minister of Housing vehicle. That is standard procedure.

Mr. Young SC: Right. The "Ministers", plural.

Hon. Lee: Yeah. Any one of—

Mr. Young SC: Do you utilize a Ministry of Housing vehicle when you go out?

Hon. Lee: No.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, you do not. So, which of the—do the other two Ministers utilize a Ministry vehicle when they go out?

Hon. Lee: I will have to verify that and get back to you, because I do not keep

account of who goes out.

Mr. Young SC: Are you aware that there is a Cabinet decision with respect to the ministerial use of vehicles? Has your Cabinet cancelled that Cabinet decision, that Ministers are not to use Ministry vehicles? I am not aware of that. I will check into that and get back to you.

Mr. Young SC: Please do. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am on 02/16: Contract Employment.

Hon. Lee: Item 02/16.

Mr. Scotland SC: I am speaking about people who have been on legitimate contracts at the HDC for upwards of eight years. My instructions are that hundreds of them from the Port of Spain South area, when their contracts came to an end within the last year or so, the contracts have not been renewed without any justification, without any notice.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Hold on. Do you have a question that relates particularly to this line Item? I think you need to frame it—I am not—but frame the question.

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, I will do it immediately. I have noticed a drastic drop in the Estimates for Contract Employment, which went from $4.18 million in 2025, $5 million in 2026, and was halved to $2.35 million in 2026/2027. I am going back now to put this in the context. I am talking about persons, legitimately employed, real people in Trinidad and Tobago. I am not talking about short-term contracts. I will come to that. Is this reduction in the Estimates a consequence of hundreds and thousands of people legitimately employed under contract employment, thousands

of people at the HDC and—

Hon. Members: Thousands?

Mr. Scotland SC: It may amount to thousands—their contracts not being renewed?

Hon. Lee: Chairman, through you, I do not know where my good friend is going with all of this. But let me just give you the answer. The reason why there was a reduction, in 2026, the decrease due was primarily attributable to the transfer of a programme from Housing to the Office of the Prime Minister, which is the Home Improvement Grants programme. So, all those officers who were on contract in that unit, they were transferred to the Office of the Prime Minister. That is why you saw a decrease in this allocation, the Revised Estimates.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Lee: "Doh take on what Trincity/Maloney"—

Mr. Scotland SC: I am taking proper advice, as Tunapuna did with his PS when he was giving evidence.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Scotland SC: Proper advice. Go on.

Hon. Lee: That is the reason for the decrease that you saw in the revised figure for 2026. That unit that carried a number of individuals went to the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Scotland SC: So, under this heading, can you tell us—so, the amounts were transferred. Were the actual human beings who do the work, were those persons transferred also? Because those are not —

Hon. Lee: I do not know if you do not understand. I mean, I want to be kind to you. I do not understand that.

Mr. Scotland SC: Please. Be charitable.

Hon. Lee: So, if we transfer the moneys there, would the bodies not also go too?

Mr. Scotland SC: No. It does not necessarily follow. I am asking you a direct question.

Hon. Lee: Well, underneath me, the bodies go. Underneath me, the bodies go wherever the money goes.

Mr. Scotland SC: I am asking you a direct question. I just want an answer for the committee. Are you saying that the persons were also transferred with the moneys?

Hon. Lee: Repeat what you just said there.

Mr. Scotland SC: Are you saying that the money was transferred—we understand that. I am asking you a direct question. Were the actual human beings, the occupants—I am not talking anything heuristic here, you know. I am talking about people who have lost their jobs at HDC. Were these persons here—

Hon. Lee: No, no, no.

Mr. Scotland SC:—were they actually transferred?

3.40 p.m.

Hon. Lee: Chairman, we are not dealing with HDC here, you know, I mean, he is a bit confused.

Mr. Scotland SC: The Ministry.

Hon. Lee: We are dealing with the Ministry of Housing allocation.

Mr. Scotland SC: The Ministry of Housing. I am talking about the Ministry of Housing.

Hon. Lee: So I do not understand.

Mr. Chairman: That is what I thought.

Hon. Lee: If he reads his document, he will understand what I am saying.

Mr. Chairman: Well, that is what I thought. Are you dealing with HDC or are you dealing with the Ministry of Housing?

Mr. Scotland SC: With the Ministry of Housing. People who worked at the Ministry of Housing, were they actually transferred?

Hon. Lee: Well, I just gave you the answer, I told you yes.

Mr. Scotland SC: How many contracts for persons—

Hon. Lee: Asked and answered.

Mr. Scotland SC:—working at the Ministry of Housing were not renewed during this fiscal?

Hon. Lee: There was nothing about not renewed, Member. If somebody's contract comes to an end and they decide not to be re-employed, "I cyah—we cyah ting that".

Mr. Scotland SC: So in this hard time—

Hon. Lee: **"**We cyah force them to be re-employed".

Mr. Scotland SC:—you are telling us that a person's contract came to an end—

Hon. Lee: And, Chairman, let me just tell this Member, I and any one of my Ministers do not get involved in this employment.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Scotland SC: Well, well—

Hon. Lee: We do not. That is why I have a PS, I have administrative officers, HR, I do not get involved. We do not get involved.

Mr. Scotland SC: Well, your PS is here—

Hon. Lee: We set policy.

Mr. Scotland SC:—to give you the information.

Hon. Lee: Chairman, I do not know if he used to do that at his Ministry, but we

set policy.

Mr. Scotland SC: Are you washing your hands like Pontius Pilate? Answer the question.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Member for Port of Spain South, no, no, no, no, no. I think you have asked that, it has been answered. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Minister. Under line Item 16: Contract Employment. Is this the Vote that is used to retain communications officers at the Ministry?

Hon. Lee: Yeah, on contract, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. So it is this one and not short-term, right?

Hon. Lee: Pardon?

Mr. Young SC: It is this Vote, this line that is being used to retain communications officers at the Ministry of Housing?

Hon. Lee: Correct?

Mr. Young SC: How many communications officers are there currently? Where my NP and UNIPET?

Hon. Lee: We have two positions and one is filled, presently. The other one is—

Mr. Young SC: Who is it filled by?

Hon. Lee: No, no. Two positions for in the community—

Mr. Young SC:—and one is filled.

Hon. Lee: And one is filled.

Mr. Young SC: Right. And the filled one—

Hon. Lee: And there is a vacancy for another one.

Mr. Young SC: And the filled position, who is the person in post?

Hon. Lee: I inherited him when he [*Member confers with technocrat*] Phillip Joseph.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Hon. Lee: He was there when we came in 18 months ago.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Lee: "Ah?"

Mr. Young SC: "Doh take on yuh friends", you know, they will get in trouble. And those are the communications officers. Are there any social media officers there, or anybody else who assists with the communication?

Hon. Lee: No, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Nobody else? No videographers?

Hon. Lee: No, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Under, Short-term Employment, same questions. Are there any videographers?

Hon. Lee: What line Item is that, Member?

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, 22.

Hon. Lee: "Ah?"

Mr. Young SC: 22.

Hon. Lee: No short-term employees in communication that refers to Short-term Employment.

Mr. Young SC: All right.

Hon. Lee: So there will be no one that you would have asked for, a videographer.

Mr. Young SC: Understood. Back up to 16 now, Contract Employment. Ministerial support staff are paid out of this line Item?

Hon. Lee: Yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Are the Ministers utilising their ministerial support staff positions?

Hon. Lee: As far as I am aware. Me, personally, I still have vacancies I have not filled.

Mr. Young SC: "Yuh like me". And then the other two Ministers.

Hon. Lee: They would have their staff that—

Mr. Young SC: They have?

Hon. Lee: They would have their staff that they are entitled to employ.

Mr. Young SC: Under this line Item.

Hon. Lee: Yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Can we please get a list of those staff that are assigned to the Ministers or their ministerial staff under this line Item provided? You could provide that in writing?

Hon. Lee: Sure.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: On item 22: Short-term Employment. I have noticed a—

Hon. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: 22.

Mr. Scotland SC: Short-term. And I am speaking here about—

Mr. Chairman: 22, Minister.

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, people working at the Ministry of Housing on legitimate short-term contracts. Is it that this decrease, I have noticed a decrease from $3.5 million to $2 million in Estimate 2027. What has accounted for that drastic

decrease?

Mr. Chairman: I think that has been asked and answered.

Hon. Lee: Yeah.

Mr. Scotland SC: No, this is—

Hon. Lee: There was—

Mr. Scotland SC:—not Contract Employment.

Hon. Lee: Chair, just to explain, there was also staff that were in that same HPFI unit, the home improvement unit, that was also part of that. Some was in the contract; some was in short term.

Mr. Scotland SC: Some were on contract, transferred to—[*Inaudible*].

Hon. Lee: Some were in contract, some were in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Scotland SC: I understand that now. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Minister, there were at least four.

Hon. Lee: What Item?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am on Contract Employment, sorry.

Hon. Lee: Which line Item?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: 16: Contract Employment. There were at least four persons in the Communications Division and you said that there is only one person there now. Were the other persons—

Hon. Lee: That is—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—who were there not renewed, or were they relieved of their positions?

Hon. Lee: I have been informed their contracts came to an end, Member, and those positions will be are out to be advertised, those positions.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Could you say where they are being advertised?

Hon. Lee: I have the ads here, Member. It is on the Ministry's website. I can read it out if you want.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, just—

Hon. Lee: And also on Employ—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: If you could please tell me when—

Hon. Lee: "Ah?"

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—when that went out and when it closes.

Hon. Lee: The Manager of Communication's own went out—well, I am seeing the closing date here is Sunday, October the 11th. I do not know [*Member confers with technocrat*]. It would have been the week before.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, but those contracts came to an end several months ago, so, you have only now sent out the ad.

Hon. Lee: Yeah. Because we were doing less with little.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 02/001/08, Rent/Lease: Office Accommodation and Storage. Hon. Minister, there was an indication earlier in the year concerning the possibility of the Ministry of Housing, together with the HDC, moving to the Edinburgh Towers. I am seeing that there is a continuation of the $3.6 million allocated for rent. Might I assume, firstly, that this is in relation to the rental of the Ministry of Housing Head Office at South Quay, Port of Spain?

Hon. Lee: Well, Member, first, I do not know where you got that information from about the Ministry moving somewhere. But presently, the arrangement—and my colleague there from Trincity/Maloney and also Arima would be aware that the

Ministry of Housing rents from HDC, who are the tenants of the building at South Quay. So the Ministry of Housing—

Hon. Member: Sub-tenants.

Hon. Lee: "Ah"?

Mr. Marcelle: Are sub-tenants.

Hon. Lee:—are sub-tenants.

Mr. Marcelle: Yeah.

Hon. Lee:—from the Ministry of Housing, HDC. So that portion of rent that is here is the allocation that we pay for a floor on that HDC office. And we are hoping, you know, I think we have gotten notice to move, so I will put that on notice.

Mr. Marcelle: When does that notice take effect?

Hon. Lee: As soon as we find alternative arrangements.

Mr. Marcelle: All right. Do you intend to have this move within this fiscal?

Hon. Lee: I am hoping so.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So then you will move to the Edinburgh Towers?

Hon. Lee: I do not know where you got that information from.

Mr. Chairman: That is an impermissible question.

Hon. Lee: But—

Mr. Chairman: All right. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 007: Households. Nobody has raised—009: Other Transfers. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: No, I will give way to my colleague Trincity/Maloney, then I will come back.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Under 009/01, I noticed an increase of $39.4 million. This is—

Mr. Chairman: Three.

Hon. Lee: 333?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Page 323.

Hon. Lee: 323?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: 009/01: Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation, HDC.

Hon. Lee: Yeah.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I notice an increase of $39.4 million. Would the Minister be able to indicate how much of the increased allocation will be directed toward maintenance of existing housing stock and how much would be directed towards construction of new units?

Hon. Lee: Member, like you seem to forget what you used to do at the Ministry of Housing. This allocation that we have received here, like the other allocation underneath you and your previous Ministers, is really to repay loans that you all would have taken.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Lee: So, the seven—let me—and the Member is fully aware. Mr. Chairman, let me just explain this figure for you. I have it broken down in detail. The $731,739,800 that is being allocated to HDC—out of that figure, Mr. Chairman, there is a monthly subvention that HDC gets to support some of their salaries, and

the Member is aware of that: $2.7 million. So, $2.7 million by 12 is $32.4 million that comes out of this allocation of 731 to help pay salaries in HDC, wait. So, there is a balance of about $700 million that is broken down by loans that they took that we have to repay. I will call out the loans. You want me to call out the loans? All right. ANSA Merchant Bank. A loan that they took for $475 million—

Mr. Young SC: Call the years. Call the years.

Hon. Lee: Eh?

Mr. Young SC: What years?

Hon. Lee: The year? [*Minister confers with technocrat*] ANSA Merchant Bank: The loan was taken on the 11th of October 2021, $475 million. I do not think we were in Government. You were in Government. Another loan, Republic Bank Limited, 19th of May 2020, $650 million, that you took. Another loan, Republic Bank, 6th of January 2023, $1 billion, that you took. ANSA Merchant Bank, on the 18th of September 2023, $700 million that you took. You want me to go on?

Mr. Young SC: But you are calling out the loans. The original loans—

Hon. Lee: Right, so the payments—

Mr. Young SC:—and this is $700 million you are saying for payments.

Hon. Lee: So, the payments are due throughout the next fiscal.

Mr Young SC: Payments of principal, payments of interest? How much payments in total?

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Who is asking the questions, you or Trincity/Maloney or you?

Hon. Lee: Chairman, can I go ahead? For example, the ANSA Merchant Bank—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: May I ask the Minister with regard to the repayment—

Hon. Lee: Yes, Ma'am.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—how much is going to principal and how much is going to interest? When do the loans come to an end, and are any of these loans a roll over?

Hon. Lee: The loan that has to be repaid that you all took out from Republic Bank was $650 million on the 19th of May, 2020, in this fiscal year, we are paying back $67,464,788.23 that applies to principal. The interest portion of that is $21,000,417.125, which gives you a total of $88,881,888.48. That is one loan that you all took out that we have to pay back in this fiscal year, a portion of it, right?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: A portion?

Hon. Lee: Yeah, well, you cannot pay back everything in one shot. That is how you took the loan. You want me to pay back the $650 million?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, the amount is $731 million—

Hon. Lee: Well, that is one loan.

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

Hon. Lee: You know how many loans "allyuh" take out?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Go ahead.

Hon. Lee: Okay. ANSA Merchant Bank.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We did not take it for ourselves.

Hon. Lee: ANSA Merchant Bank.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It was to build houses.

Hon. Lee: On the 11th of October 2021, a $475 million loan that you all took out. And you know, one of the loans you all took out was to pay back smaller, medium contractors, and you did not pay them. Oh, man, oh gosh. So, the ANSA Merchant Bank loan that was taken on 11th October2021: The payment this year will be $67 million—principal—857,142.86; the interest is $18,257,812.50, giving you a total repayment on that loan alone of $86,114,955.36; this is for the ANSA

Merchant Bank of $475.

There is another Republic Bank loan that you all took out for $1 billion to pay outstanding liabilities and funding the construction of new housing units; well, that is still "eh" happening. On the 6th of January 2023, the payment for this fiscal year is $50 million principal, interest $45,000,912. I will tell you why. I will tell you why. $50million is principal; hear is the interest. Is this correct? $45,912,054.80, the grand total of $95,912,054,80 and the reason why that is so hefty is because of the payment plan that you all structured.

There is another one. ANSA Merchant Bank, on the 18th of September, 2023, that you all took out for $700 million, and the principal payment this year is $100 million for principal; $15 million is interest, giving you a total of $115 million on that particular loan. A Scotiabank loan taken on out the 8th of February 2024; $500 million. The principal payment for this year is $500 million and principal and the interest is $14,871,232.88. It gives you a grand total of $514,871,232.88 and I can continue. If you want me to send you a listing of this, I will be fine.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I will be grateful to get a listing.

Hon. Lee: Of course, not a problem.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Also, to get the details of all the loans.

Hon. Lee: Did you not take that when you left?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I did not take anything when I left.

Hon. Lee: Oh gosh. Oh Lord. I thought you had all those things.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I only took my good name with me when I left.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, I would be grateful to get this in writing, please,

Minister.

Hon. Lee: "Well then Leonce must be take it then."

Mr. Chairman: All right, let us move on. There is no need for that. Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On Item 009/11: Port of Spain Shopping Complex. I have noticed a reduction in the Estimates from $7 million in 2025, when the People's National Movement was in charge, to $5 million this year, a reduction of some $2 million. Now, hon. Minister you would agree with me that the Port of Spain Shopping Complex that falls under the Ministry of Housing comprises of three malls. There is one on 32 Charlotte Street, one on 41 Independence Square, and there is one under construction at 43 Independence Square. Could you tell us what has accounted for this reduction from 2025 to $5 million?—when you yourself, in the budget debate, stated that everything has gone up in this country. What has accounted for this $2 million reduction in the allocation for these facilities in the heart of the capital city?

4.00 p.m.

Hon. Lee: Chairman, through you, the Port of Spain Shopping Complex—they received monthly subventions for their operating costs. That has continued. Within the Port of Spain Shopping Complex there is a site that is supposed to have a construction of a new mall there; at 43 Independence Square. That has been halted for now. And an investigation is ongoing with NIPDEC on that particular construction, and that would account partly for the Revised Estimate of $5million.

Mr. Scotland SC: You said that the complex—

Hon. Lee: When did I say that?

Mr. Scotland SC: You just said it has been halted for now.

Hon. Lee: Okay.

Mr. Scotland SC: Not when you just said that.

Hon. Lee: I do not know.

Mr. Scotland SC: You just said it.

Hon. Lee: Sorry. Okay.

Mr. Scotland SC: When you came, this complex was in train; the work was actually going on. It is now 19 months. How long are you going to take to do and complete an investigation to either continue the project or give us a reason for the cessation of the project? How long is this investigation going to take?

Hon. Lee: Well, Chairman, through you to the Member, the project company that is responsible for that particular construction is NIPDEC, and we have been working closely with NIPDEC, who are responsible for what is taking place on that construction site, and we await a report from them. I cannot give you a time frame, Member, but I could get back to you in due course.

Mr. Scotland SC: In due course in writing. And the other $5million, do you think that that sum—

Hon. Lee: Which other $5 million?

Mr. Scotland SC: Well, the $5 million that does not include any new works. Do you think that that sum is sufficient for those malls that are in the heart of the City of Port of Spain?

Hon. Lee: Well, even the malls that are operating, Member, through the Chairman, we are also—there are a lot of repairs that have to be done, so there is an investigation going on what needs to be done. Even the relocation of some of the tenants that exist there now, it is a work in progress and the work continues.

Mr. Scotland SC: So, are there boards in place for these malls that are existing?

Do they have—

Hon. Lee: The Port of Spain Shopping Complex, they had a board in place.

Mr. Scotland SC: Had?

Hon. Lee: Let me finish, let me finish. Up to September they had a board in place that we inherited; we did not get rid of them. So, their tenure came to an end, so a new board will be in place, shortly.

Hon. Lee: In due course.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister under 01, you said that a $2 million subvention will come out of this $731 million—

Hon. Lee: Which—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry. Under 009/01.

Hon. Lee: Are we going back?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am not going back. We are on the same Head. We are on 04—

Hon. Lee: Which page are you on?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The same page, 323—

Hon. Lee: 323?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Hon. Lee: Which line Item?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We are under Current Transfers and Subsidies; we are under 009: Other Transfers; 01: Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation.

Hon. Lee: I thought we exhausted that question?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No. Not exhausted as yet. Shall I go ahead now?

Hon. Lee: Sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. You said that a $2 million subvention will come from this $731 million-plus for HDC.

Hon. Lee: $2.7 million monthly.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Monthly?

Hon. Lee: Monthly.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Given that, would you be able to say how—

Hon. Lee: You knew that. You know that, right?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes. I do.

Hon. Lee: Well, okay.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Well, would you be able to say, in those circumstances, how much revenue is expected to be generated by HDC through mortgage payments, rental income, sale of units and other income streams?

Hon. Lee: For which year?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry?

Hon. Lee: Which year?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: For 2026/2027.

Hon. Lee: A lot, a lot.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: A lot. Your answer to my question is, a lot?

Hon. Lee: With the new board and new chairman, a lot.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: A lot. Okay. Could I ask for a lot of this in writing?

Hon. Lee: Well, I do not know where line Item comes in. I am a bit confused.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, no, no. Mr. Chairman—

Hon. Lee: No. This is about—Chairman, this is about accounting for—

Mr. Chairman: Expenditure.

Hon. Lee:—expenditure $731 million—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Trincity/Maloney.

Hon. Lee:—and I just gave her how the money is being allocated.

Mr. Chairman: Right, Minister. Let the Member ask her question, please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, my question was, based on the fact that the Minister indicated that out of this $731 million there is a monthly subvention to HDC—

Hon. Lee: To pay salaries.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—of $2.7 million.

Mr. Chairman: Right. And my question to you is this—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: My question to the Minister, based on the fact that the subvention is $2.7 million, would the Minister be able to say how much revenue is expected to be generated by the HDC other than the subvention?

Mr. Chairman: All right. I heard you on that, and I think it is an impermissible question for the simple reason that the Minister gave a clear and unmistakable answer to the purpose of subvention. I do not see how revenue generation arises from a subvention that is used to pay salaries. So not allowed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Hon. Lee: She will get the audited financials that come—

Mr. Chairman: All right. Do you have another question, Trincity/Maloney?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, no, we do not, not on this.

Mr. Chairman: Malabar/Mausica has a question.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 009/11: Port of Spain Shopping

Complex. Minister, is any of this allocation to cover premiums to property and casualty insurance for the properties that fall under the Port of Spain Shopping Complex?

Hon. Lee: Member, I am sure that that would be part of the operating expenses, but I do not have it. I could find out for you.

Mr. Romain: All right. So can you also—

Hon. Lee: I know you love insurance but—

Mr. Romain: Yes. Can you also indicate if these properties are currently insured?

Hon. Lee: Say that again?

Mr. Romain: Can you also indicate if these properties are currently insured?

Hon. Lee: The two malls?

Mr. Romain: Yes. East Side Plaza and New City Mall.

Hon. Lee: Well, I would assume that good management, they would, but I would verify that and get back to you.

Mr. Romain: Thank you. And whether or not they have any outstanding claims under those—

Hon. Lee: I will verify and get back to you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Okay, 011—

Mr. Young SC: 011/16.

Mr. Chairman: Transfers to State Enterprises. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister 011: Transfer to State Enterprises, line Item 16: East Port of Spain Development Company Limited. Hopefully by now you know it is a special purpose company set up to assist Port of

Spain North, Port of Spain South, Laventille East/Morvant, Laventille West and environs. Very important role to play. Out of the $14,000,400 that was allocated for 2026, how much was spent?

Hon. Lee: Based on the Revised Estimate figure that you are seeing there—

Mr. Young SC: Yeah. It is the same as what you originally used.

Hon. Lee: Approximately—well, you know, revised is approximate, right?

Mr. Young SC: Yeah.

Hon. Lee: $14,000,400? And basically, this is—

Mr. Young SC: How much was spent?

Hon. Lee: This is personnel expenses for East Port of Spain Company.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. So how much of the $14.4 million was spent?

Hon. Lee: Based on my information here, close to $14,000,400.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Is there a board currently in place?

Hon. Lee: There is no board currently in place, and we are making arrangements to have a board in place.

Mr. Young SC: So, for 19 months there has been no board at East Port of Spain Development Company Limited? Correct?

Hon. Lee: Repeat your question, Member.

Mr. Young SC: The last board of the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited resigned, as is the tradition, after April 28, 2025. There has been no board in place since May 2025, correct? And by there having no board in place at East Port of Spain Development Company Limited, it has affected the operations of this very important special purpose company. Are you aware of that?

Hon. Lee: I would not say that.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. Lee: I would not say that.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, well good. So out of the $14.4 million you say was spent in the last fiscal, approximately, how much of that was spent on infrastructural projects by East Port of Spain Development Company Limited?

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: You said so, you said you disagree.

Hon. Lee: I disagree because it did not affect the operations of the organization, because we still spent close to $14.4 million.

Mr. Young SC: Agreed. And my question is now—

Mr. Lee: And out of that—

Mr. Young SC:—out of that $14.4 million how much is infrastructural projects?

Hon. Lee: Out of these operational expenses of subvention, projects do not come out of this Vote.

Mr. Young SC: Really?

Mr. Lee: Yes, this is for operational expenses of the company: To pay salaries, to pay health insurance, lease, computer expenses, maintenance and repairs. It is not here for projects.

Mr. Imbert: What?

Mr. Young SC: Minister, the subvention given to the East Port of Spain Development Company, is it that you are telling us and the country that that subvention does not include money for infrastructural projects?

Hon. Lee: Maybe if you look at the PSIP, you might see something there. Under the subvention that is here—

Mr. Young SC: Uh-huh.

Hon. Lee:—it is solely for the operations—

Mr. Young SC: It is only for the administrative side of the East—

Hon. Lee: That is right. That is what I have been told.

Mr. S. Young: That is what you have been told?

Hon. Lee: And that is what is in front of me.

Mr. Young SC: All right. Because you see, when you go straight across from 2025 included, it is the same $14.4 million. We have just established for the last 19 months, there is not a board in place.

Hon. Lee: "Mm-hmm".

Mr. Young SC: I can tell you as well that for the last 19 months, there is not a full executive staff in place. So, therefore—but you told us very clearly that $14.4 million, or very close to it, has been spent.

Hon. Lee: Correct. Based on what—

Mr. Young SC: So, how is that possible?

Hon. Lee:—on what I am seeing here .

Mr. Young SC: Based on—correct, on the information being provided to you.

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: So, if when there was a full board in place, a full administrative staff in place, et cetera, $14.4 million was being spent, it is now a fact there are less bodies in post there, and you are saying no infrastructural projects fall under this. What then is the $14.4 million being spent on?

Hon. Lee: I know where the Member is getting at. I would have to investigate their bank statements to see if there are excess funds in their bank statements.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Same line Item. Is it a fact that there has been no board there for the

last year and half?

Hon. Lee: But that was asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: So, it is a fact?

Hon. Lee: I do not know if—

Mr. Imbert: No, he said that. I did not know if you confirmed it.

Hon. Lee: "What trouble is dis boy?" Chairman could you help me answer the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: It was confirmed? Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Is that consistent with the Companies Act?

Hon. Lee: If it is consistent with the Companies Act?

Mr. Imbert: I am asking you. I am not stating—

Hon. Lee: I am not a lawyer, so I will not be able to answer that.

Mr. Imbert: You do not know that there are severe legal consequences?

Hon. Lee: I will have to investigate. I will have to verify.

Mr. Imbert: You do not know this?

Hon. Lee: Are you a lawyer?

Mr. Imbert: You do not know?

Hon. Lee: Are you a lawyer?

Mr. Imbert: According to the Companies Act—

Hon. Lee: I do not know the Companies Act.

Mr. Young SC: I can give you the free advice. That means that the company is in breach of the Companies Act because there is a minimum of—

Mr. Chairman: All right. Members.

Mr. Imbert: I am not finished.

Hon. Lee: Chairman, they are looking for a soundbite—

Mr. Chairman: All right. You are getting into an argument about that and the legal niceties—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: Nobody is arguing. Nobody is arguing. Who is preparing the financial statements and signing off on the accounts, and that sort of thing, if there are no directors?

Hon. Lee: I will verify that and get back to you.

Mr. Imbert: You have to check and find out?

Hon. Lee: Yes, in due course.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Chairman, 011/16: East Port of Spain Development Company. Hon. Minister, in 2025, $14.4 million was spent—actually spent by the East Port of Spain Development Company. Can you indicate how many persons were employed and paid from this $14.4 million in 2025?

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]—you would have to address your mind to this year's—I think you are offending the rule about going back. I think—we all accept that. Right? So, formulate a new question.

Mr. Marcelle: Chairman, in 2026, there was $14.4 million allocated, and the Revised was also $14.4 million allocated. Can you indicate, one, at the start of fiscal 2026, how many persons were employed at the East Port of Spain Development Company?

Hon. Lee: I do not have that information on me, Member, and I will get back to you. I will verify it. I want to be accurate with what I give you.

Mr. Marcelle: Can you indicate whether any employees had their contracts terminated in fiscal 2026?

Hon. Lee: Terminated? Not that I am aware of.

Mr. Marcelle: Have you—do you have any information, and can you confirm whether any employees who were on month-to-month contracts in the East Port of Spain Development Company were not renewed within fiscal 2026?

Hon. Lee: I will have to verify that and get back to you, but I am not aware of that.

Mr. Marcelle: Can you indicate—

Hon. Lee: Maybe the CEO who is there might be able to.

Mr. Marcelle: Can you indicate how many vacancies there are at the East Port of Spain Development Company in this fiscal?

Hon. Lee: I will verify and get back to you on that.

Mr. Marcelle: Is there any intention to fill any of these vacancies in 2027 fiscal?

Hon. D. Lee: Well, right now, Member, we are doing an evaluation of East Port of Spain Development Company, and we will—and when that evaluation is over, we will then be able to get a better place to say what is the amount of employees or staff required.

Mr. Marcelle: Who is doing this evaluation of East Port of Spain Development Company?

Mr. Lee: Internally.

Mr. Marcelle: Is it a committee that was set up by your good self?

Mr. Lee: No, no, no. I do not get involved.

Mr. Marcelle: Who are the members—

Hon. Lee: This is an investigation that is going on by the Ministry of Housing.

Mr. Chairman: All right, let us move on. Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Minister, through you, Chairman, you know that same line

Item 011/16: East Port of Spain Development Company, I have noticed that the figure of $14.4 million is there. You indicated that some aspects of the moneys were spent for Recurrent Expenditure, et cetera, but you understand that this special purpose company was also created to do programmes with the young people of east Port of Spain. You agree with me, Minister, that that was part of the purpose of the East Port of Spain Development Company?

Hon. Lee: I do not agree. But if you say—

Mr. K. Scotland SC: You do not agree—hold on.

Hon. Lee: East Port of Spain was set up, as your Members would have said, for the area of east Port of Spain. It was not specific to any particular person or demographic.

Mr. Scotland SC: Hon. Minister, you are the Minister in charge of the East Port of Spain Development Company, and you do not know that part of the mandate of this company was to promote educational and cultural, social development of the young people, including construction skills in training and other youth programmes? You do not know that, hon. Minister?

Hon. Lee: I never said I did not know that. I said it is not their entire mandate.

Mr. Scotland SC: No, I did not say it was their entire mandate. I said part of the mandate—

Hon. Lee: Okay. Okay. What is the point? What is the point?

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]—on expenditure?

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, I am. How much of this $14.4 million was spent, if any at all, on the development of young people who reside in east Port of Spain, and particularly within the catchment area of Morvant, Beetham Estate, Sea Lots and Laventille?

Hon. Lee: I do not have that information. I would get it from East Port of Spain Development Company and get back to you.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Minister, you indicated in terms of the review of East Port of Spain Development Company ongoing now, might I ask you whether there is any intention whatsoever in this fiscal to close the East Port of Spain Development Company?

Hon. Lee: I cannot answer that at this point of time. We have an evaluation going on.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Sub-Head 06, page 324, Current Transfers to Statutory Boards & Similar Bodies; 004: Statutory Boards. I think I just have to—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: I think just to make Members clear, those boards have been transferred out of HDC. We will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, Consolidated Fund, on page 146. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund; Item 004; D: Housing Estates. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, under 004/08/D.075, the figure there is $30 million. Mr. Chairman, the PSIP indicated that the $30 million would be for the continuation of the Rehabilitation and Maintenance of HDC Rental Apartments or Housing Units. And I would like to find out from the Minister, how many rental apartments and housing units are expected to be rehabilitated and maintained out of this sum of $30 million?

4.20 p.m.

Hon. A Lee: What is the second part of the question? The what?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is the first part.

Hon. Lee: I know the first part.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: How many rental apartments and housing units are expected to be rehabilitated and maintained out of this $30 million?

Hon. Lee: I will have to verify. I want to be accurate with you, so I will verify with HDC and get back to you in writing.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Could you say which housing units and rental apartments are the ones that will be maintained?

Hon. Lee: Will be maintained?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes. Which areas? Because, Mr. Chairman, the rental units in the 21 apartments in Maloney have not been maintained for the last 19 months. Nothing. None have been maintained in Port of Spain. None have been maintained in Diego Martin. None have been maintained in South Trinidad.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I think—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I would like to know where these maintenance works will take place.

Mr. Chairman: I think the Minister is consulting to see whether he can give you an answer now.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I would appreciate that.

Mr. Chairman: Whether he will—

Hon. Lee: Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Minister?

Hon. Lee: Underneath their tenure, Chairman, they left HDC owing a lot of debt,

right. So, money has been an issue for HDC, raising funding. So, what we are doing with HDC and this new board is that we are trying to generate income to be able to and utilize some of this $30 million to utilize all those sewer plants that you left in decay. So, there are a lot of ills that took place at HDC that have to be corrected. So, it will be corrected.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, but I still need to know how many will be done in this fiscal because nothing was done in the last fiscal.

Hon. Lee: No, I would not say nothing was done.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Well, you would not say that, but I am saying that.

Hon. Lee: A lot was done.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Because we are well aware of what has happened.

Hon. Lee: I will get back to you on what was done this fiscal, and what we will be doing next fiscal.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Will you give us a list? I would appreciate that. Could you also tell us who the contractors are who would be doing this work?

Hon. Lee: For this fiscal?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, please.

Hon. Lee: Okay, well, the fiscal now start. "We ain't get the money yet."

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay I am asking and you said some work was done last year?

Hon. Lee: Your contractors.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No contractors?

Hon. Lee: Your contractors.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I do not have any contractors.

Hon. Lee: Alright. I will get that information to you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Alright, so could you give us that list, please?

Hon. Lee: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I am not finished.

Mr. Chairman: I thought you were.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am not.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Could you say the average cost of rehabilitation per unit? Would you be able to give us that information?

Hon. Lee: I would not be able to give you that information right now, Chairman. So, I will have to get back to you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, you will give us that information.

Hon. Lee: Yeah. The average cost for the—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The average cost, yeah.

Hon. Lee: It is difficult to give an average cost because of the different locations and different specs of work, Chairman.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, I am not asking for proposed works.

Hon. Lee: We will try our best to see if we can accommodate her.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Minister said that work was done. I am asking for the average cost. That is work that has been completed.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, whereas the Member for Barataria/San Juan is implying that we will give contractors the cost. I am not asking for proposed cost. I am asking for work that was done.

Hon. Lee: I want to assure you that our average cost was much cheaper than your average cost.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Maybe but—

Hon. Lee: I am not sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—and what about California Stucco?

Hon. Lee: I do not know who that is. That is a state in America.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is a state in America? Ask the Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, Minister. There is no need to allow this to degenerate into this, you know.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Minister be able to tell me if there is a backlog of work to be done—

Hon. Lee: When you say a backlog of work?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—on the rental apartments.

Hon. Lee: There will always be a backlog of work, Ma'am. You know that. You were there. You never did anything.

Mr. Hosein: Aye!

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Scotland SC: "How much house yuh build"?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: How many houses—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

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

Mr. Young SC: Ready?

Mr. Chairman: Take down the shouting, take down the shouting.

Hon. Member: "Calm yuhself".

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, are you finished? Trinity Maloney, are you finished?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Not quite, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, would the Minister be able to indicate—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Scotland SC: Ashwagandha.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Minister be able to indicate whether there will be new units—

Hon. Lee: What line Item is that?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry?

Mr. Chairman: What line item is that?

Hon. Dr. Lee: "Doh make up a line item eh."

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am still on Housing Estates.

Mr. Chairman: Rehabilitation and Maintenance—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—of HDC Rental Apartments and Housing Units.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I do not quite understand how new housing—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Rehabilitation and Maintenance and Housing Units. I am just asking.

Mr. Chairman: Well no, I do not understand, bearing in mind the sentence contains "Rehabilitation and Maintenance," it seems to me that there is a disconnect between that and Construction of New Units. All right. No need to editorialize from the sidelines.

Mr. Scotland SC: Nooo.

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

Mr. Young SC: Minister, under the same line Item, 08/D/075, you have an Estimated $30 million to be spent in this fiscal. Might I ask if on the programme

for expenditure, it includes Chafford Court, The Harpe, Belmont Terrace, and St. Francois Valley planning? Please.

Hon. Lee: No. Based on the information, Member, our priority right now is some sewer treatment plants that need urgent, urgent attention. It is a public health risk—

Mr. Young SC: Of course.

Hon. Lee:—throughout Trinidad. And if there is some funding available, we will get to your area.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, I understand.

Hon. Lee: I cannot promise you at this point in time. I am very honest—

Mr. Young SC: I understand. Well, I appreciate the honesty. And I understand, of course, the prioritization of spend when you have limited funds. I also understand that public health is one of the top lists of priorities, as is safety. Is it that you are telling or you are being told, because I know you are being told by the HDC representatives here, that this $30 million allocation is going to be spent completely on the rehabilitation of the sewerage throughout Trinidad and Tobago at these HDC sites?

Hon. Lee: I said the priority right now, based on the information, is taking place in the sewer treatment plants throughout the HDC sites, throughout Trinidad.

Mr. Young SC: Understood.

Hon. Lee: Not Tobago—but throughout Trinidad, that is a major health hazard in some of your colonies.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I saw it. I saw, like, Corinth, et cetera.

Hon. Lee: Some of your colleagues' constituencies—.

Mr. Young SC: There is raw sewerage the roads et cetera.

Hon. Lee:—like San Fernando East that we are trying to, and certain parts of the East-West Corridor in Trincity/Maloney, Arouca/Lopinot, your colleagues' areas that those HDC sites are [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Minister, I understand that, you know.

Hon. Lee: And I am saying to you, if there is funding available—

Mr. Young SC: After that.

Hon. Lee:—we will treat all those—not even—we will treat the urgent needs require, during the fiscal year of 2027.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, so I understand that. Is it now that you are saying that you will treat with the most urgent needs throughout—because it is all over. It is all over.

Hon. Lee: But everything is urgent all over.

Mr. Young SC: There is HDC communities all over Trinidad.

Hon. Lee: As you are well aware, Member, everything is urgent for everybody, and we will try to satisfy them as best as we can.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, well, let me ask this, because your management and the Executive Chairman seem to be well aware.

Hon. Lee: No, there is no Executive Chairman. Let me correct that, there is no Executive Chairman.

Mr. Young SC: So, the management seems to be very aware of priority, urgent needs that need to be dealt with throughout Trinidad.

Hon. Lee: And that did not happen today as we speak. It happened—

Mr. Young SC: Understood.

Hon. Lee:—a few months ago.

Mr. Young SC: Agreed. And as you made the point a short while ago, when you

came in, you met outstanding money to be paid, et cetera. It is the exact same thing when we came in, in 2015. We met hundreds of millions of dollars to be paid. Almost over $1 billion. But anyway, out of this $30 million, has the management of HDC already scoped projects and costed projects for a list of prioritization?

Hon. Lee: I am sure they did. Let me just confirm.

Mr. Young SC: Ask them.

Hon. Lee: I am sure they did, because they are a very efficient bunch of people. That is what they do all the time, Member.

Mr. Young SC: So, have they done it?

Hon. Lee: Of what?

Mr. Young SC: Have they done a priority—

Hon. Lee: Of where?

Mr. Young SC: Of all HDC. I am not asking you. I am not focused on Port of Spain as yet, I am asking if they have prioritized.

4.30 pm

Hon. Lee: Member, as you are well aware, construction is a continuous thing that they do. They have a unit that continuously goes out to scope work. There is even a rapid response unit. They get calls in for particular areas of HDC that have problems, and they go in on a daily basis. So, it is a continuous process, Member, as you will be aware, and the Member for Trincity/Maloney is well aware of that.

Mr. Young SC: Alright, well, I will end by asking this question. I will end on this line Item, by asking this question, Minister: Would you kindly ask—I am asking through you for those who are prioritizing these works, because, of course, with aged communities, aged apartment buildings, et cetera, like those I have

listed: Charford, Harpe, Belmont Terrace, as well as St. Francois Valley Road, very aged infrastructure—that they be given some prioritization. Thank you.

Hon. Lee: I will assure you of that.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain South.

Mr. Scotland SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under line Item 09/075: Housing Estates; Rehabilitation and Maintenance of HDC Rental Apartments and Housing Units and your allocation of $13 million for fiscal 2027, correct, Minister? I have seen that on the 21st of July2026, one of your Ministers passed down Alexander Street, and went up to the Canada apartments and indicated to the country that the HDC is going to rehabilitate the Canada apartments. Is there any intention with this $30 million allocation here that has the rehabilitation of the apartments in Canada for 2027?

Hon. Lee: I will have to verify and get back to you.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Scotland SC: That same Minister, he passed another "Alexander Street", because we want back—

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain, asked and answered.

Mr. Scotland SC: Sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Asked and answered.

Mr. Scotland SC: I withdraw the "Alexander Street," sorry. No, he went down Foster Quevedo, and he went back down to Duncan Street.

Mr. Chairman: Come on, let us, let us—

Mr. Scotland SC: No, Foster Quevedo is a place where he had to pass. Is there any allocation for the Duncan Street apartments rehabilitation, as promised by that

Minister who is in your Ministry with an HDC platform when he promised it?

Hon. Lee: As you say, Duncan Street, there was a sewer problem outside Duncan Street that the Mayor of Port of Spain called me this morning about—and that is to tell you how I respond, I took his call, and the HDC with WASA is sorting that issue.

Mr. Scotland SC: You are doing us no favour. You are doing your job. Answer "meh" question now, please.

Hon. Lee: Well, I just answered it.

Mr. Scotland SC: Are there any plans in the $30million allocation to do rehabilitation or maintenance work of the buildings on Duncan Street?

Hon. Lee: I will verify that particular building and get back to you.

Mr. Scotland SC: That same Minister went to the old St. Joseph Road Apartment, particularly—

Hon. Lee: Mr. Chairman, this is not about a Minister. This is about a line Item here.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Scotland SC: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, under the line Item Rehabilitation—

Hon. Lee: The Minister that he is referring to—

Mr. Chairman: Can we—

Hon. Lee:—this does not go to him directly.

Mr. Chairman: In the interest of saving time, are you prepared to accept the statement of the Minister that he will verify what this money is set aside for, and he will get back to you?

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Chairman, with your intervention, I am reluctantly prepared—because, Mr. Chairman, I will tell you why. This was a promise made

with someone with the ostensible authority who said that they would do this. So, I am prepared to take it in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Alright, alright. You and I both know that ostensible legal authority carries a peculiarly nuanced legal meaning. So let us not get into that.

Mr. Scotland SC: Yes, it does, and he fits the bill.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I am not so sure about that.

Mr. Scotland SC: But I will—or he does not, but I will take what you said, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I am not so sure about that.

Mr. Scotland SC: Mr. Chairman, I will take it in writing, please. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Do not try to get into an argument on legitimate expectation and statements of public authority, and unequivocal statements, and whether they had authority.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no. "Doh" even begin to go there. "Doh" even begin to go there. It is such a nuanced area of law. All right, let us go. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Under the same line Item, Mr. Chairman, with regard to maintenance in the Maloney area, all the garbage bins have been removed. Would the Minister be able to indicate how soon we will either get back garbage bins in that area, or the so-called concrete bins, where rats are now residing, would be built?

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, I think we are taking—I think we have squeezed all the juice out of this dry orange.

Hon. Members: No.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, yes, yes.

Hon. Members: No, no, no, no.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Mr. Chairman, I am here representing Trincity/Maloney.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, I understand that. I accept that. I accept that.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: And, Mr. Chairman, as a consequence of that, I would like to get an answer to that particular question.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, can I just remind you what the line Item says: Rehabilitation and Maintenance of HDC Rental Apartments and Housing Units.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: I understand what you are saying. Perhaps the question could be framed differently. Perhaps you can ask the Minister whether or not the $30million subvention here, any part of that is allocated to replacing the bins. Then the question will become permissible. But to simply—

Mrs. Robinson Regis: No, Mr. Chairman, that is exactly what I asked.

Mr. Chairman: No, you did not.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Perhaps not using the same words and nomenclature that you used, but that is exactly what I asked.

Mr. Chairman: Well, Minister.

Hon. Lee: I will enquire about the garbage bins or the concrete bins, as you said, to see how—because, as you described, it is a health hazard.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: It is a health hazard. I do not know if Keith—

Hon. Lee: So, I will verify with HDC and get back to you.

Mrs. Robinson Regis: I would appreciate that. I do not know if Keith Tent

Rentals, who is now collecting garbage, is the one who is doing it. I do not know.

Mr. Chairman: You see? What is need for that? That is why we—you know, come on, we could get along—

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: We still have quite a bit of way to go, right? So, if we continue to do that—

Mrs. Robinson Regis: Mr. Chairman, I am aware of that. But, Mr. Chairman, allow me to be a Member of Parliament, "nah." Allow me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney, I am not entirely sure how your duty as a Member of Parliament includes what you just tried to do, but we shall remain nameless. But can we just move along? E. Settlements. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 232: Housing Grants. I am seeing there an original allocation of—well, in terms of actually spent in 2025—was $7million. There was an Estimate of $12million, and in 2026, Revised to be zero, understood that the grant would have stopped or have been transferred. But I am seeing in 2027, there is an Estimate for $200,000under the Housing Grants. Can the hon. Minister indicate what is the intended purpose for this $200,000under the Housing Grants?

Hon. Lee: Well, Member, as you are aware, that unit or that facility was at the Ministry of Housing. It was relocated or transferred to the Office of the Prime Minister, and it has been transferred back to the Ministry of Housing. I know we only got, so far, $200,000, and I am sure when the unit comes back and it gets back up and running, if there is a need, based on applications, we will revert at mid-year review, and hopefully the Minister of Finance will be in a better position to assist this particular line Item.

Mr. Marcelle: Alright. Line Item 236: Regularization and Regeneration of Communities in Greater POS Region. Hon. Minister, first, I want to just enquire whether under this Sub-Head, the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited would have—

Hon. Lee: Member, that line, Item 236, does not exist. There is no funding there. So, I do not think I could answer a question there.

Mr. Marcelle: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, whilst no money was allocated in this fiscal for it, it remains a part of budget documents, and therefore, I am entitled, based on that line Item being there, for the Minister to kindly indicate whether it belongs to the East Port of Spain Development Company or not.

Mr. Chairman: It has nothing to do with it.

Hon. Lee: There is no expenditure.

Mr. Chairman: There is no expenditure on it. You may explore a different avenue in a different forum, but there is no expenditure. So, there is nothing to examine.

Mr. Marcelle: But that is the exact point: Why is there no expenditure to the East Port of Spain Development Company?

Mr. Chairman: Well, that is what I am telling you. You may have a remedy in a different forum. G. Other Services. Laventille West.

4.40 p.m.

Mr. Marcelle: No, I thought you were moving on to 14/A, so I kept my hand up for that.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Community Development. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Chairman: Unless you want to defer to your Senior, Mr—

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 02: Social and Economic Programme for East Port of Spain. Hon. Minister, I note in 2026 a sum of $2 million was allocated for this line Item, and this, of course, was under the East Port of Spain Development Company, correct?

Hon. Lee: Correct.

Mr. Marcelle: I am seeing a Revised Estimate of $2 million in relation to that said line Item. Can the hon. Minister indicate: One, firstly, in 2026, how much money was actually spent under this line Item in east Port of Spain?

Hon. Lee: Member, I myself see a revised figure of $2 million here, and I will have to get back to you on what that revised figure was about.

Mr. Marcelle: Can the hon. Minister indicate—

Hon. Lee: I do not have the necessary information on me right now.

Mr. Marcelle: Can the hon. Minister indicate what scope of work or what projects were carried out in fiscal 2026—

Hon. Lee: Sure.

Mr. Marcelle:—from this line Item?

Hon. Lee: Sure. I do not have it with me right now, but I will get back to you.

Mr. Marcelle: Can the hon. Minister indicate whether, under this line Item, all outstanding bills were paid under this line Item by the East Port of Spain Development Company in fiscal 2026?

Hon. Lee: I will find out for you.

Mr. Marcelle: I am seeing that zero dollars was allocated for this line Item to the people of east Port of Spain and the East Port of Spain Development Company. What is the rationale for same?

Hon. Lee: What is the rationale?

Mr. Marcelle: For cutting the funding to putting it to zero dollars, no allocation whatsoever to east Port of Spain to do projects, so I am asking—

Hon. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Marcelle: I am asking what the rationale is for same.

Hon. Lee: Our rationale right now is that we are doing an evaluation of east Port of Spain and again, if there are projects that require funding, my good Minister of Finance will assist as time requires.

Mr. Marcelle: Is that the same position in relation to the Regeneration of Communities - East P.O.S. Region or is there an attention to completely—

Hon. Lee: Chair, what line Item is that?

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 004: Regeneration of Communities—

Hon. Lee: No, no funding there in 2026.

Mr. Marcelle:—in the East Port of Spain—

Hon. Lee: You would have asked the same question last year, and I gave you the answer.

Mr. Marcelle: Hon. Minister, you indicated in terms of your review that line Item 002 may continue in terms of the reassessment. I am asking if that is on the table as well in relation to the Regeneration of Communities?

Hon. Lee: I will have to get back to you on that.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Chairman: 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. A. Administrative Services, F. Public Buildings. Trincity/Maloney, 148.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, under F/001, would the Minister indicate which Ministry offices will be refurbished from this allocation?

Hon. Lee: The Ministries—say that again? Repeat the question.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What is the refurbishment work to be done?

Hon. Lee: What is the—?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Refurbishment work to be done—

Hon. Lee: Where is this?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—under this allocation.

Hon. Lee: What line Item is that?

Mr. Chairman: Page 148.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: There is an increase—

Mr. Chairman: F/001.

Hon. Lee: Oh, page 148?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: There has been an increase of $2.7 million. Can you say what refurbishment work is to be done?

Hon. Lee: Chair, just help me. What page are we on?

Mr. Chairman: We are on 148.

Hon. Lee: 148? Sorry, okay. Yes, Member, the $6.3 million?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yeah. What is the work to be done?

Hon. Lee: The works to be done will be to assist in the refurbishment of the Ministry's offices.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Laughter*] I know. But could you give me a detailed breakdown of the works to be done, please? And by whom?

Hon. Lee: I will have to get back to you on that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry?

Hon. Lee: I will have to get back to you on that. I do not mean—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And by who? You will get back to me.

Hon. Lee: I do not think the acting PS brought that detailed scope of work.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Thank you very much. And could I ask, with regard to the P.O.S. Shopping Complex - Renovation to New City Mall, which is 020, I noticed that the sum of $200,000 is the Revised Estimate for last year, but there is nothing for this year. Can you indicate why?

Hon. Lee: Because I had said in my budget contribution that Port of Spain New City Mall, which is 43—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Independence Square.

Hon. Lee:—Independence Square is on hold presently pending the outcome—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, nothing at all is allocated.

Hon. Lee:—pending the outcome of what NIPDEC tells us.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Infrastructure Development Fund. Item 004: Social Infrastructure, page 277. E. Settlements. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, can you say under this Item where the E. Settlements, 230: Accelerated Housing Programme and I will ask the same question for 231: Affordable Housing Programme.

Hon. Lee: No, you cannot ask that question.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I noticed that there is no allocation for either of these line Items. Can you indicate why?

Hon. Lee: Well, as I said in my opening remarks, Member, HDC has now changed and tried not to be a drain on the Treasury of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And with the accelerated Housing Programme, while in the past we used to get some sort of funding from the Government, the HDC model now is to

generate their own funding to continue this Accelerated Housing Programme and Affordable Housing Programme.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay, so—

Hon. Lee: So, we just have to have hope and wait, and you will see.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Could I ask, therefore, if you will be generating your own income? And given the fact that the Chairman of the HDC had indicated that squatters in HDC units will be regularized, has this occurred so that you can get rental—

Hon. Lee: That question does not arise, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: That does not arise on that Item, Member.

Hon. Lee: She is trying to be cute again.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman—

Hon. Lee: Tricky.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—the Minister said that they would be generating their own income. I am asking—

Mr. Chairman: Yes, but that does not arise on this line Item.

Hon. Lee: It does not arise.

Mr. Chairman: You have a different forum to ask that question.

Hon. Lee: Chairman, we found a lot of houses they abandoned, and we collected revenue.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I do not know what you are answering, but—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, could I ask therefore—

Hon. Lee: No.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I cannot ask?

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Scotland SC: "A-A!"

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right, Mr. Chairman, can I ask you to ask the Minister—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—whether there will be a list provided to us of where these new Accelerated Housing projects will take place.

Hon. Lee: But, Chairman, I read it out individually, the locations, and she took copious notes in my budget contribution. I am not going to do it again. Go back in *Hansard*, and you will get it.

Mr. Scotland SC: What?

Mr. Marcelle: What?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Scotland SC: You are becoming petulant.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman, through you, given the fact that this process is for us to examine things in detail, may I ask, through you—

Mr. Chairman: To examine expenditure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: May I ask through you if the Minister will give us a list of the areas where they expect to proceed with Accelerated Housing in Trinidad and Affordable Housing in Trinidad, if the Minister would give us a list even if he has to take it from the *Hansard*.

Hon. Lee: I have no problem with that. I will provide it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Lee: It is public record.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So, A. Community Development. 005: Multi-Sectoral

and Other Services, page 278. F. Public Buildings.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yes?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: May I go ahead?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. F. Public Building, 278?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: 001: Port of Spain Shopping Complex. Mr. Minister, are you willing to answer this question?

Mr. Marcelle: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Can you say what this $3 million is expected to be spent on? Especially given the fact that you said you are doing investigations?

Hon. Lee: As you know, it is a projection. It is an Estimate, as you are well aware. You were in the Ministry of Planning, all right. And when this line Item came up, in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Finance and Planning, good sense between us said that we would allocate some sort of funding. Maybe we might have owed, and I think we might owe some funding to the contractor who started the project, so there is an allocation. We might not utilize all $3 million at this point in time, but as prudent management, we decide to put $3 million.

4.50 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That was so prudent.

Hon. Lee: It is prudent.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, that was very prudent.

Hon. Lee: But you were the Minister of Planning.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Lee: You were the Minister of Planning.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Any more questions on this line Item?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, you do not have much time to think about it. So—

Question put and agreed to.

Head 61 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you very much, to the staff.

Hon. Lee: Chair, I would just like to thank my colleagues, the Acting PS and the HDC officials, who have been waiting here since 11.30 this morning, patiently. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

[DR. ALI *in the Chair*]

Head 18: Ministry of Finance $5,268,413,700.

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: Hon. Members and colleagues of the Committee, good day. I thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear in relation to Head 18: Ministry of Finance. The role of the Ministry of Finance is complex and multifaceted. Its principal core function is economic management, together with the development and implementation of fiscal policy. This overarching function includes fiscal forecasting, budget formulation and execution, debt management, cash management, public financial management and tax administration. It also includes

oversight of state enterprises and statutory authorities. The Ministry has other responsibilities as well. These include payroll management, internal audit and the administration of pensions and gratuities.

In furtherance of these objectives, the Ministry comprises a number of key divisions and units. They are the Treasury Division, the Customs and Excise Division, the Inland Revenue Division, the Economic Management Division, the Budget Division, Debt Management Division, Central Audit Committee, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency, the Strategic Management and Execution Office, and the Investments Division.

Madam Chair, the Ministry also functions in an advisory capacity to other Ministries and public sector agencies. This advice covers budget execution, financial management and debt management, amongst other matters. In carrying out these functions, the Ministry safeguards the financial resources of the State, maintains fiscal discipline, and ensures that public funds are managed responsibly and transparently.

The priorities of the Ministry support the Government's national agenda. That agenda is to foster fiscal stability, encourage investment, accelerate economic growth and improve the standard of living of citizens. In support of that agenda, the Ministry is focused on four areas. The first is the modernization of revenue administration. This involves improving the systems and processes through which the State assesses and accesses and collects taxes, so that they operate consistently and efficiently. The second is the strengthening of tax compliance. Effective compliance measures help to ensure that taxes due are paid and that the tax burden is fairly shared amongst taxpayers. The third is the reform of the public financial management. This relates to the planning, control and reporting of public

expenditure, and to the systems that support sound financial decision-making across government. The fourth is the building of efficiency and accountability across the public sector, including the state enterprises that fall within the Ministry's oversight.

Madam Chair, these priorities are intended to work together. Sound revenue administration, effective compliance and disciplined financial management are necessary conditions for a stable fiscal position. A stable fiscal position is in turn necessary for sustainable economic development.

I now turn to the allocation. The allocation under Head 18 for fiscal 2027 is, as you indicated, $5,208,195,308. This allocation is intended to support the operations of the Ministry and to advance the reforms I have described. These reforms are directed at strengthening the fiscal position of the country and creating the conditions for sustainable economic development. I wish to thank the office of the Ministry for their assistance in the preparation of the Estimates and for their attendance here today.

Madam Chair, I thank you, and I stand ready, together with my team, to respond to any questions the Committee may have in relation to Head 18.

Question proposed: That Head 18 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $5,268,413,700 for Head 18: Ministry of Finance is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure,* the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Board and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly,* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates* of *Recurrent Expenditure*, page 82. Sub-Head 01: Personnel

Expenditure, pages 82 to 87; Item 001: General Administration. Diego Martin North/East.

5.00 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Well, I found a few questions. [*Laughter*] So, 001/06: Remuneration to Board Members, there was an original allocation of $30,000, and I am assuming that the Ministry of Finance Revised Estimate is correct, at zero, what was the intention with the original allocation of $30,000 for board members?

Hon. Tancoo: Minister, this is a provisional sum in the event that a board was established under the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: So, no boards were established?

Hon. Tancoo: No.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Similarly, Item 14: Renumeration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees, there was an original allocation of $45,000, zero expenditure, what was that all about?

Hon. Tancoo: No board was established—

Mr. Imbert: It was just Cabinet-appointed committees?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: And there was not any holding over from the previous year, or anything like that?

Hon. Tancoo: There were none holding over from 2025, however, in 2026, Cabinet made provision for three—

Mr. Imbert: This is ’26 I am talking about, 2026. I am talking about original 2026, Revised 2026.

Hon. Tancoo: So, Cabinet, in 2026, made provision for three committees, but none have been established as a draw on the Treasury at this point.

Mr. Imbert: Alright. So there is a Cabinet decision?

Hon. Tancoo: So there is a provision for three, yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. But it has not been operationalized yet?

Hon. Tancoo: They have commenced meetings, we have just to make payments in 2026.

Mr. Imbert: They have not been paid yet. Okay. Alright. Could you, for the benefit of the listening public, explain, under 24, why you have a direct charge in general administration in the Ministry of Finance, $300,000?

Hon. Tancoo: So, Member, as you are aware, direct charges are not part of the appropriation under the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. Imbert: No, but there is an amount there, $300,000, original allocation; $240,000 Revised, what is it for?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that there is, but it is not part of the appropriation.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, but it is in the Estimates, and we are examining the Estimates. I just want you to advise the listening public why we have direct charges under this particular line Item, because it is repeated elsewhere? What is a direct charge and what is it doing there?

Hon. Tancoo: The explanation would be the same. [*Minister consults with technocrat*] So, I was advised that direct charges, as you are aware are funded via the —

Mr. Imbert: Funded?

Hon. Tancoo:——[*Minister consults with technocrat*] So, Member, because it is expenditure of the Government, it is contained in the Estimates. But—

Mr. Imbert: Let me help. A judge's salary, for example, is a direct charge.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: It is a direct obligation on the Consolidated Fund, but you do not have judges in general administration in the Ministry of Finance, so why do you have an allocation for direct charges? That is all. What category is this?

Hon. Tancoo: Simply because it is an expenditure under the—

Mr. Imbert: What category of public officer is this?

Hon. Tancoo: Under the Treasury Solicitor's office.

Mr. Imbert: Treasury Solicitor. Okay. That is all you had to say. Alright. I am good there, Madam Chairman. You take all that time to tell me.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Budget Division. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Item 04: Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers, the original allocation in 2026 was $1.4 million, the Revised was $600,000, so that is a 57 per cent reduction, how come?

Hon. Tancoo: Item 01 or 04?

Mr. Imbert: Item 04.

Hon. Tancoo: Alright.

Mr. Imbert: Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers, a reduction of 57 per cent in that Sub-Item.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. I am advised that the figure in the Revised went down because we did not get acting approvals.

Mr. Imbert: Alright. So you had some staffing issues.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, staffing issues, acting.

Mr. Imbert: You were not able to get people into positions, or employ people in the Budget Division. Alright.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: That is it for that, 002, for me.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Customs and Excise Division; Item 004: Inland Revenue Division. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Now, Minister, you made a lot of—"Ah doh know how to put it". [*Laughter*] You said you were staffing the Inland Revenue Division, filling vacant posts, and so on, but I noticed that under 04, again, Allowances – Monthly Paid Officers, was down by 54 per cent, how come, since you are filling out every post in the Inland Revenue Division, according to you?

Hon. Tancoo: Alright. So, Member, the reduction you see is based in comparison with the Revised Estimate, however, the Revised Estimate includes provision that would have been made for partial payment of arrears in December. And, therefore, what you would see now is—

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no, that is not what I am saying. No. No. No. Original $2.2 million, Revised $1 million; reduction, $1.2 million, again, was it staffing difficulties?

Hon. Tancoo: Sorry, my apologies, you are on 04?

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, 04, yeah, Inland Revenue Division.

Hon. Tancoo: It is the same issue. The provision—

Mr. Imbert: Staffing problems?

Hon. Tancoo: Same issue, the provision made for the—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: I see, you were not able to fill all the posts that you had hoped to fill.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Alright.

Hon. Tancoo: These are specifically for the chairman, the commissioners, the assistant commissioners, and so on. Those positions have not been confirmed.

Mr. Imbert: I notice on 23, a similar reduction; again, is it inability to employ

those persons who fall under direct charges, same Inland Revenue Division, 004/23? Yeah, same problem?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, same issue. Inland Revenue Division, I am being advised, has a substantial amount of lawyers under them.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Treasury Division; Item 008: Investments Division; Item 010: Valuation Division. This one is transferred to the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs.

Mr. Imbert: Supervisor—no, sorry, go ahead. Go ahead.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal; Item 014: Financial Intelligence Unit; Item 017: Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Now, this is a little bit of concern. The original Estimate for salaries in the Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency was $900,000, but the Actual spend is only $220,000, just 25 per cent. Is there a problem with staff in the Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency?

Hon. Tancoo: According to the notes provided to me, the decrease from the Estimates that you have seen for—

Mr. Imbert: It is a decrease, not an increase.

Hon. Tancoo: The decrease that you would have seen, based on the Estimate for 2026 and the Revised Estimate, was as a result of the retirement of two senior officers.

Mr. Imbert: And the posts were not filled?

Hon. Tancoo: The posts have not been filled, but there is provision for it to be filled in 2027.

Mr. Imbert: That is alright. That is alright.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: I am just looking at 2026 at this point now. So, go ahead, go ahead.

Madam Chairman: Item 018: Procurement Unit.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, I have a question on that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I am noticing a significant reduction in 04: Allowances – Monthly Paid Officers in the Procurement Unit. Is it that your Procurement Unit is suffering similar challenges with respect to staffing?

Hon. Tancoo: The increase that you would have seen—

Mr. Imbert: Decrease.

Hon. Tancoo: Sorry. Which decrease are you speaking of?

5.10 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: $1.2 million was the original allocation; Actual spend $450,000; 04: Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers; Procurement Unit, 018.

Hon. Tancoo: The same issue, Member. We were anticipating [*Inaudible*] approvals which did not materialize in that fiscal.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: But we are hopeful that they will materialize in fiscal 2027. So, a factor has been provided for it.

Mr. Imbert: All right. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 88 to 98, Item 001: General Administration. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, 001/12: Materials and Supplies. You had an allocation of $650,000 but only spent $250,000. Why is that?

Madam Chairman: Can you repeat the line Item, Member?

Mr. Imbert: Line Item 001/12.

Madam Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Sub-Head 02/001/12.

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]—Member, was between Estimate and Revised Estimate again.

Mr. Imbert: You are sure right. These are the easy questions, by the way.

Hon. Tancoo: Yeah. [*Inaudible*]. I am advised that this is based on increased efficiency. We had a reduction between the Estimate and the Revised Estimate.

Mr. Imbert: "They did not need paper and all dem kind ah ting? Ink and all ah dat."

Hon. Tancoo: There would have been some additional supplies procured.

Mr. Imbert: You were very efficient.

Hon. Tancoo: We did not need to procure as much of them in 2026.

Mr. Imbert: All right**.** Okay. No problem. That is all right. Same Item and Sub-Item, 02/001/17. I see a 37 per cent reduction in Training. Was that efficiency as well?

Hon. Tancoo: No. I am advised that we did a lot more in-house training.

Mr. Imbert: I see. I see. Interesting. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Budget Division—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, just on 01/001. Apologies. I am observing 001/58. You had an allocation of $200,000 for medical expenses. You only spent $50,000. How come? There was a lot of healthiness in the Ministry during the period?

Hon. Tancoo: No, Member. As you would be aware, this is an allocation that is based on need and desire. Therefore, if it was not accessed, it would not have been counted.

Mr. Imbert: Nobody got sick? All right.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Budget Division. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Now, we just heard that you have some staffing challenges in the Budget Division. But I am observing under 002/16, you had an original allocation of $2 million for Contract Employment, which is used to deal with vacancies, but you only spent $850,000. That is, you know, a reduction of 57.5 per cent. So, why did you not employ people on contract employment in fiscal 2026, in the Budget Division, when we both know there are severe staff shortages there?

Hon. Tancoo: All right. So, Member, as you would know, these are very specialized fields. Some of the contracts came to an end during the period. But these are very specialized fields. We are procuring them as we speak.

Mr. Imbert: You had some procurement challenges.

Hon. Tancoo: It is.

Mr. Imbert: I see. Okay. Can we go to 002/22 Short-term Employment? The Actual spend was just 50 per cent of the allocation, again, in the Budget Division, which is very short-staffed. Did you have procurement challenges there as well?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. As you would be aware, again, this is a specialized field, requiring a special kind of training and experience.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. All right.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Customs and Excise Division. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Item 003/03, I notice you had an allocation for uniforms of $2.5 million for customs officers, but you only spent $1.2 million, less than 50 per cent. What happened? You could not get uniforms for the customs officers?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, as you were seeing from the Revised Estimates, some provision was made. But we have signed a contract, I believe this week, so that in fiscal 2027, we will be providing additional support.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, you had procurement challenges.

Hon. Tancoo: It has to be properly sourced.

Mr. Imbert: I see.

Hon. Tancoo I am sure you appreciate that.

Mr. Imbert: It is all right. "Well, I not there anymore". Item 003/04. You had an original provision for $2.2 million and a Revised spend of $1million for electricity. There would have been a surcharge on commercial business customers, and so on. What happened there? Was the original Estimate for electricity charges for Customs and Excise an overestimate? Or did you not pay the bill? Or you have arrears?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that for all electricity, telephone, water and sewerage rates, the following statement will be relevant.

Mr. Imbert: "Ah did not say water. Ah just say electricity".

Hon. Tancoo: Allow me.

Mr. Imbert: "And ah skip over water", and electricity, which is—anyhow. Go ahead.

Hon. Tancoo: So, for all under these Heads, over the period, bills were not received on time, which accounts for the reduction in the fiscal 2026 Revised

Estimate. The fiscal 2027 Estimates are, therefore, to settle the outstanding arrears—

Mr. Imbert: They have arrears.

Hon. Tancoo:—and to cover annual charges.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. All right.

Similarly, in Customs, Office Stationery and Supplies, original allocation, $1.4 million, Actual spend only $400,000 in 2026. That is almost a 30 per cent implementation rate or 71 per cent reduction. What happened? "Customs doh need stationery supplies"?

Hon. Tancoo: Same explanation as previously, Member.

Mr. Imbert: What is your explanation?

Hon. Tancoo: The explanation previously given—

Mr. Imbert: What was that?

Hon. Tancoo:—is that there were some savings. Because some of the work was done previously. So that we do not have those issues.

Mr. Imbert: So, did not need paper and so on?

Hon. Tancoo: They have had sufficient to cover their needs as they go forward.

Mr. Imbert: I see. I see. What about Materials and Supplies, 12/003, Actual spend $1 million, allocation $1.8million. That is a 44 per cent reduction. They did not need materials and supplies either?

Hon. Tancoo: So, again, the allocation was sufficient. The $1.8 million was sufficient.

Mr. Imbert: They were efficient? They were very efficient.

Hon. Tancoo: Very efficient. Yes. Yes. Yes. So, we have had an increase.

Mr. Imbert: The Estimate was not efficient. The Division was.

Hon. Tancoo: We had an increase. They did not use as much as they expected. We had an increase—

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Tancoo:—for this fiscal as a result of having to purchase additional dog food, narcotic testing kits, evidence bags, and various items for the units at Customs and Excise.

Mr. Imbert: They did not need that in ’26? All right.

Hon. Tancoo: They had sufficient, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: Could we go now—I do not—let us not turn to arguing. Item 003: Maintenance of Vehicles. Now, you would agree that transport is very important for customs officers to go all over the country, to transit sheds, and ports of entry and so on. The original allocation to maintain your fleet, which, I assume, is an ageing fleet, was $1.5 million, but you only spent $600,000. That is a 60 per cent reduction. Why?

5.20 p.m.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I had the same conversation with you prior, this morning and yesterday. These are estimates—

Mr. Imbert: No. no.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no. These are estimates—

Mr. Imbert: I am not accepting that from Finance.

Hon. Tancoo: But these are estimates—

Mr. Imbert:—you would have up-to-date figures.

Hon. Tancoo: I may, but these are estimates compared to revised estimates—

Mr. Imbert: No, but you cannot give yourself bad figures.

Hon. Tancoo: These are estimates and we are looking at revised estimates.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I just want to ask you again. Now, I do not accept that the Ministry of Finance would give itself bad information. Maybe Ministries would be late, but you would not be late with yourself.

Mr. Young SC: Unless—

Mr. Imbert: So I am assuming—

Mr. Young SC: Unless the Minister in the Ministry is setting him up.

Madam Chairman: This is not a conversation.

Mr. Imbert: No, hold on. This is my introduction.

Mr. Young SC: Unless—

Mr. Imbert: I "doh" know. I "doh"—

Madam Chairman: If you are—

Mr. Imbert: I am talking.

Madam Chairman: Okay, but your Member is interrupting.

Mr. Imbert: No, but you can talk to him.

Madam Chairman: I am not speaking to you, I am speaking to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, sorry. I am so sorry.

Madam Chairman: It is not a conversation. He has his mic on and he is speaking to you.

Mr. Imbert: I thought you were "boufing" me.

Madam Chairman: No.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: You are free to ask your question.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah. You need to look after the vehicles in Customs and Excise Division, come on. You had $1.5 million, you only spent $600,000. So hopefully

2027 will be better.

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]—the revised spend for 2026 and we are projecting $1 million more in 2027 to address the fleet consisting of 49 vehicles.

Mr. Imbert: Hopefully it will be better in—

Hon. Tancoo: Hopefully, yes.

Mr. Imbert: Hopefully. Again 003/96: Fuel and Lubricants. Now, I assume when these Estimates are done, it is Finance after all, that you are on the ball, it is fairly accurate. So the original allocation for Fuel and Lubricants was $700,000. The Actual spend was only $300,000, 57 per cent less. What happened there? The vehicles were down; they could not drive, they were not using fuel, or they have arrears.

Hon. Tancoo: So Member, I am advised that we would have spent close to $300,000 on Fuel and Lubricants. We are making an increased provision to $600,000 in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, but if your original was 700, I assume that there was some accuracy associated with that and now you are saying you are putting back $600,000 in 2027, but the spend in ’26 was 300. You are putting double the amount.

Hon. Tancoo: Again, it is—

Mr. Imbert: What is going on there?

Hon. Tancoo:—an estimate and we have a revised estimate and now we have an estimate again.

Hon. Imbert: Well, you cannot be giving yourself bad information. I do not accept that.

Hon. Tancoo: This is not bad information, Member. This is how the estimating—

Mr. Imbert: It is okay.

Hon. Tancoo:—and budgeting practice works.

Hon. Imbert: It is all right. It is all right. We could go to the next. Oh, you are—

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

Mr. Young SC: Line Item 61: Insurance. Minister, in 2025, this is the Customs and Excise Division. In 2025, Customs and Excise spent $660,621 on insurance. There then was a provision of $1.5 million for 2026, a Revised Estimate and I am quite concerned listening to the former Minister of Finance for nine years, about these Estimates. But anyway, the Revised Estimate, $1.5 million in 2026. How much was actually spent in 2026, according to your best information?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I do not have an actual figure. We have close to what was it, $1.5 million.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, and Minister, what insurance would have been covered by Customs and Excise Division for this $1.5 million, up from $660,000 the year before, so an additional 900.

Hon. Tancoo: We are not going back to fiscal 2025, Member, we are looking at 2026.

Mr. Young SC: All right, but fiscal 2025, according to these books was $660,000 spent, so in 2026, what was $1.5 million spent on in insurance?

Hon. Tancoo: In fiscal 2026, we would have spent money on insurance for vessels, three vessels at $160,000. The life insurance for 102 officers, four mobile scanners, insurance—

Mr. Young SC: When you say vessels, you mean marine vessels?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. Life insurance for 102 officers, four mobile container

scanners at $3.6 million and six drones.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you. And now in 2027, we are being asked to approve $5 million in insurance, an increase of $3.5 million in insurance. What is that expectation?

Hon. Tancoo: This expectation is to continue the insurance for Customs and Excise Division vessels. More to date, the *Defender* vessel is serviceable but not in use and requires a new harness system and this is expected to be completed by the end of October 2026. So therefore, that will come on board and then there is the *Spirit* vessel and the *Trident* vessel all of which are now—

Mr. Young SC: The *Spirit*, not meaning the fast ferry, *T&T Spirit*, another vessel called the *Spirit*.

Hon. Tancoo: No.

Mr. Young SC: Right, but are any of these new assets?

Hon. Tancoo: No.

Mr. Young SC: So it is the identical assets as before. So before it was $1.5 million now, we are being asked to spend $5 million with no additional assets—

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, no.

Mr. Young SC:—being added to the insurable base.

Hon. Tancoo: There are additional assets as I said before.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, what are the additions, right?

Hon. Tancoo: The ones that I described before.

Mr. Young SC: Right so, the scanners, et cetera.

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: Let us just focus? What are the additional assets for this $3.5 million.

Hon. Tancoo: That will be spent in 2027? The insurance—

Mr. Young SC: Yeah, well to be to be spent because in 2027 you have allocated $3.5 additional million. So my question, is, what are the additional assets being insured for $3.5 million? If there are no additional assets why has it gone up by $3.5 million?

Hon. Tancoo: I am just advised that the scanners, et cetera, that I mentioned before, part payment was in 2026 and we are now catering for the full payment for the full year.

Mr. Young SC: So for the full year, so the annual. So before it was a prorated insurance?

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: Who is the insurance provider?

Hon. Tancoo: Risk Management Services Limited. They have been in insurance for quite a while.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Inland Revenue Division. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: 004/05: Telephones. Now, telephones, of course, would be very important for the Inland Revenue Division, I mean taxpayers calling the whole day, every day. The original allocation was $5 million, but only $3.7 million was spent, a reduction of 1.3. Is it that the Inland Revenue Division is in arrears to the telephone company?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, as I tried to indicate when we were speaking about electricity earlier, the same would apply for electricity, telephones, and water and sewage. A lot of bills are still outstanding because we have not yet received those

bills from the relevant providers.

Mr. Imbert: So the actual spend might be more.

Mr. Tancoo: We have factored in an average cost and proposed payment for arrears.

Mr. Imbert: No, I am talking about for 2026. "Yuh" had $5 million.

Hon. Tancoo: That actual spend is, yes—

Mr. Imbert:—"yuh" spend 3.7 million.

Hon. Tancoo: No, it is a Revised Estimate of 3.7.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, but it is you to you, so it "hadda" be correct, "cyah" be wrong. Okay, I will move on to 12: Materials and Supplies. Again, Materials and Supplies would be critical for the Inland Revenue Division, paper, ink and all their consumables and so on. You had an allocation of 1.8 million, but you only spent 650,000, that is a 64 per cent reduction. How come?

Mr. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that several bills came in late September and therefore were not included in the Revised Estimate figure.

Mr. Imbert: All right.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Treasury Division; Item 008: Investments Division; Item—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]—Treasury Division, it was important.

Madam Chairman: On which one?

Mr. Imbert: Treasury 05, it is important. You are going very fast, Madam Chairman. So can I talk—

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Treasury Division.

Mr. Imbert: 15: Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment. What would this Equipment be? That is part A of the question.

Hon. Tancoo: Under the Treasury Division.

Mr. Imbert: Well, that is where we are on 005: Treasury; 02/005/15: Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment. I would like to get an idea of what is this equipment that is being repaired and maintained in the Treasury Division.

5.30p.m.

Hon. Tancoo: The financial year 2026 Estimates caters for the payments of outstanding arrears which were not materialized. These payments have been brought forward for the financial year 2027: The increase in annual cost for iHRIS Oracle maintenance and PeopleSoft Payroll maintenance; the GPS maintenance contract, that was recently sorted out; the vault and safe repairs for all Ministries; and maintenance kits and parts for heavy-duty printers.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: That would account for the allocation for Repairs—

Mr. Imbert: Well, I just wanted to know what the equipment was. Because that was part A of the question. The allocation for 2026 was $3.5 million, but the spend indicated here is $800,000, a shortfall of $2.7million on equipment for the Treasury Division, and you are saying that bills came in late. That is the answer?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: So, the equipment was maintained to the tune of $3.5 million?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, and the bills did not come on time.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are saying that $3.5 million was spent or committed or incurred in fiscal ’26 on equipment for the Treasury Division? That is what you are saying?

Hon. Tancoo: I am saying, Member, that we are awaiting bills.

Mr. Imbert: Well, now you are saying something different. Okay. All right.

That is it.

Madam Chairman: Item 008: Investments Division. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, 008: Investments Division, line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. I see the Actual spend under Other Contracted Services for 2025 was $22,118. You then provided $6million in 2026. But the Revised Estimate was just $100,000. What was it expected for the $6 million in 2026, under Other Contracted Services, line Item 28, page 94?

Hon. Tancoo: Under Other Contracted Services, Member?

Mr. Young SC: What was that, sorry?

Hon. Tancoo: Under Other Contracted Services?

Mr. Young SC: Other Contracted Services under 008: Investments Division.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, provision was made for associated costs for winding up of non-operative companies, costs related to companies approved for winding up by Cabinet and fees for special audits. There are some 23 such companies at varying stages of winding up. It did not happen in 2026, but provision is made for same—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Right, so you had provided $6 million to deal with the winding up of certain state companies.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Were those Cabinet decisions taken in that fiscal year then? The fiscal between '25 and '26?

Hon. Tancoo: I will have to verify and get back to you.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I would assume so because you only had $22,000 the year before, and now, for 2027, you have provided $36 million, $35.9 million more than

was spent in the last fiscal year.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: This $36 million, what is intended with this $36 million?

Hon. Tancoo: Same issue. We have made substantial progress on the winding up of some and therefore, we are considering those, and the bills for those, and bills for the rest of those that are due to be wound up. There are 23 of these companies

Mr. Young SC: So, under Other Contracted Services, this line Item, you are utilizing this money solely for the purpose of the winding up of certain state companies?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, it is not only for winding up companies. It includes selection of strategic business partners, the audit of state enterprises, the engagement of consultants providing expertise not residing within the Central Audit Committee, and similar types of activities.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. What are the companies that are being wound up under this?

Hon. Tancoo: You want the list of the 23 companies, Member?

Mr. Young SC: Is it a list of the 23 companies?

Mr. Tancoo: A list of 23 companies that we are currently pursuing.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Can you just tell us what the new ones are that a decision was taken on since May 2025?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, all of these companies were in progress, I think, when I assumed office. The winding up of all of these companies was in progress.

Mr. Young SC: Now I am a lot more confused. So, if all were in progress when you took office in May 2025, the winding up of these 23 companies, you are saying that it was only $22,000 spent in 2025, provided $6million for it, you only

spent $100,000, and now you are saying $36million under this Item, and you are saying for strategic partnerships as well. Strategic partnerships with whom?

Hon. Tancoo: Other agencies that will provide support for the Central Audit Committee and so on.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, this is really for the provision of—additionally, audit services?

Hon. Tancoo: In addition to other services, yes.

Mr. Young SC: Yeah, but what other services under Investments?

Hon. Tancoo: In addition to—well—[*Inaudible*]—including consultants. But the consultants will be a variety of consultants.

Mr. Young SC: When you say a "variety of consultants", an intention to retain consultants and utilize this line Item to pay for those consultancy services?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, it will include audit software—

Mr. Young SC: Consultancy services in what areas?

Hon. Tancoo: Investigations, auditing, training.

Mr. Young SC: And they are being retained out of the Ministry of Finance?

Hon. Tancoo: Outside of the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Young SC: No, no, correct. But the Ministry of Finance will be the client retaining these consultants, as opposed to, for example, the Attorney General's Office?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: I have a question.

Mr. Young SC: Last question.

Mr. Imbert: Go ahead. Go ahead.

Mr. Young SC: Have you all shortlisted who the consultants are?

Hon. Tancoo: No, we have not gotten to that.

Mr. Young SC: Have you all decided what are the scopes of work to be provided by these consultants?

Hon. Tancoo: Not yet.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: When one looks at the Estimates, one sees, as my colleague has indicated, that the expenditure on this particular line Item, Other Contracted Services in the Investments Division, was just $22,000 in 2025; $100,000 in 2026. But now you are projecting expenditure of over $30million in 2027. What is responsible for this explosion in productivity? You went from $100,000 to $34 million. How are you managing that?

Hon. Tancoo: I want to correct the record. There was in fact one new entity that came in for winding up. That would be CEPEP Company Limited. The reason for the explosion, as you described it, is because several of these entities have remained on the books for decades. I will give you one example. BWIA West Indies Airways Limited is still on the books to be wound up. So, there are multiple companies that are to be wound up. Unfortunately, over the years, those companies—the winding of those companies were not aggressively pursued. They are being aggressively pursued now.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, but one of the years, over the years, was 2026—

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert:—where only $100,000 was spent, and part of the years too was 2025, where you were in office for almost half the year. Yet, $22,000 in ’25; $100,000 in ’26, how are you going to explode into a $34million expenditure?

Hon. Tancoo: I am sure that you will understand.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, $36 million, sorry, in ’27.

Hon. Tancoo: I am sure that you will understand—

Mr. Imbert: You are very optimistic.

Hon. Tancoo:—that we inherited the—

Mr. Imbert: You are very optimistic.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, yes.

Mr. Imbert: From $100,000 to $36 million?

Hon. Tancoo: Optimistic. Well, I thank you very much.

Mr. Imbert: You are very optimistic.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Imbert: Very optimistic.

[MR. SINGH *in the Chair*]

Mr. Chairman: I think the Member is satisfied with the answer you have given. Port of Spain North/St Ann’s West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, in answer to my colleague, you just mentioned the CEPEP Company, and the winding up of the CEPEP Company. Has such a decision been taken?

Hon. Tancoo: To wind up CEPEP?

Mr. Young SC: Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Does this $36 million include, as you have with voluntary winding up, which I assumed all of these are—does this include the payment of the liabilities of the companies being wound up? A provision for the payment of liabilities?

Hon. Tancoo: A provision for—yes.

Mr. Young SC: It does? And how much has been provided for CEPEP?

Hon. Tancoo: I will have to get back to you with that information.

Mr. Young SC: Would you get back to me in writing, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, I will.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: 010: Valuation Division; 011: National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal; 014: Financial Intelligence Unit. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: 014/22: Short-Term Employment. Before I ask my question, does the Financial Intelligence Unit have staffing challenges like many other departments and divisions/units in the Ministry of Finance?

Hon. Tancoo: The short answer is, yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So how come there was a 23 per cent reduction in expenditure in 2026, based on the original allocation for short-term employment in that Financial Intelligence Unit since they are short of staff?

Hon. Tancoo: Again, Member, these are not average employees. These are highly specialized areas that we are looking at, and therefore the procurement of those individuals takes a little bit longer than I expected.

Mr. Imbert: All right, okay, if you say so.

Mr. Chairman: 017: Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: 017/28: Other Contracted Services. What was that original allocation of $3.15 million intended for in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Just give me a minute, I am trying to collate two separate documents.

Mr. Imbert: I beg your pardon?

Hon. Tancoo: Just give me a minute, I am trying to collate two separate documents.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, okay. You need some time.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the 3.15 would have included provision—well, this Head is to provide payment to the World Bank, reimbursable advisory service agreement for capacity building between World Bank Group and the Ministry of Finance and consultants including technical and professional services. Settlement of outstanding payments for 2026, is what has been provided in the 2027 Estimate. There was an expectation that there would have been several consultants who would have come in in fiscal 2026, which did not materialize.

Mr. Imbert: So that is responsible for the million-dollar reduction?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Alright. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: 018: Procurement Unit. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, 98 go 101; 001: General Administration; 002: Budget Division; 003; Customs and Excise Division. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: 003: Customs and Excise Division, Minor Equipment; 02: Office Equipment. Original allocation half a million dollars. Revised allocation just $100,000; 80 per cent reduction. What happened there? Did they not need the equipment anymore?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, there was a procurement issue here as well. This was for the purchase of new to replace obsolete computers, laptops and other related accessories. And there were procurement issues in 2026, which resulted in the non-acquisition till 2027.

Mr. Imbert: All right.

Hon. Tancoo: We would have acquired some of these items in 2026, but the bills came in 2027.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: 004: Inland Revenue Division; 005: Treasury Division. Deigo Matin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Now, Minister, as you know, the Treasury Division is kind of the engineer room of the Ministry, and I see that under 04 a million was allocated for Other Minor Equipment, but only $200,000 was spent. What caused that, a reduction of 80 per cent?

Hon. Tancoo: Very important Sub-Head. Literally, it is for minor equipment. Things like cell phones, kettles, smart TVs, et cetera. There was an initial provision of $1 million as you indicated. However, we spent slightly less than that, because we still have bills outstanding for which we expect to receive in 2027. However, I just want to repeat, these are for things like smart TVs, kettles, cell phones, and those kinds of items.

Mr. Imbert: All right.

Mr. Chairman: 008: Investments Division; 010: Valuation Division, page 100; 011: National Insurance Appeals Board Tribunal; 014: Financial Intelligence Unit; 017: Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. I am on page 101; 018: Procurement Unit. We are now moving to Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, at page 101. This is to be found at pages 101 to 104, inclusive; 001: Regional Bodies. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I am raising my hands slowly. I noticed under 001/01: Contribution to the Caribbean Development Bank, original allocation $15,820,000, zero

expenditure. Now, you will get a visit from the CDB, you know. So, could you explain why you did not pay this $15.8 million to the CDB?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am advised that this is a provision that is paid for by promissory note and we have been paying it by promissory note over the last five years as you would be aware of—

Mr. Imbert: Because it is nil. You have nil in the book.

Hon. Tancoo: Sorry?

Mr. Imbert: You have nil in the book.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. So, we have to pay this by promissory notes, and this is a provision in case the notes are called.

Mr. Imbert: You will get a visit. Okay, no problem. I noticed also under 001/06: CARICOM Regional Organization for Standards and Quality, an original provision of $1.5 million, only $1 million given to them. How come?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, this is a recurring fiscal payment, close to about a million dollars.

Mr. Imbert: But your original provision is $1.5 million.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: But you only spent $1 million. Why is that?

Hon. Tancoo: On the basis of an expectation of paying more than one period of time. But the funding as we have it now is close to about $1 million for membership contribution per annum.

Mr. Imbert: All right. 001/07. Now this one, the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre, CARTAC, is one of a number of—it is actually 10 of them, IMF regional technical assistance centres. Very, very important to the Government and the Ministry of Finance, in particular. They provide a lot of technical help. I

noticed the original allocation for CARTAC in fiscal 2026 was $1.7 million. You only spent $700,000. "What happen, yuh done with CARTAC"?

Hon. Tancoo: Absolutely no. And, Member, as a matter of fact, we continue to pay in instalments to CARTAC $100,000 per year, based on a letter of understanding dated October 2023. The Government continues to contribute to CARTAC.

Mr. Imbert: Right. But there was an original allocation of $1.7 million.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: The Actual spend was only $700,000.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. The Actual spend is in keeping with the requirement that they have.

Mr. Imbert: So, the original allocation was too high?

Hon. Tancoo: The original allocation was more than we needed to spend.

Mr. Imbert: It was too high.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: I see. All right.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Commonwealth Bodies; 004: International Bodies; 007: Households. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: 103, yes.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: You want to go ahead?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*] Thank you, Minister. 007: Household Items—sorry, Households. 42: Settlement of Legal Claims, State Enterprises. I mean, it has been consistent, well, when I say consistent, in 2025 there was a spend at $19.1

million. There was a provision for $20 million in 2026, but no spend. What is this meant to cover? Settlement of Legal Claims, State Enterprises. Seeing it? Line Item 42.

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Well, first of all, what is this line Item meant to cover?

Hon. Tancoo: This line Item was meant to cover settlement of legal claims in which the State has a liability.

Mr. Young SC: No. This. No. No. No. You see, if you look further down, we will get there in a short while under Treasury Division, so you better ask; that is my suggestion.

Hon. Tancoo: The Heading is clear. Settlement of Legal Claims.

Mr. Young SC: It says for State Enterprises, it is not against the State. A State Enterprise, for example, is a body—

Hon. Tancoo: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—a limited liability company, as you know, you know, your corporation sole owned by the State. So, is it that the Ministry of Finance is paying, for example, a legal claim brought against Caribbean Airlines?

Hon. Tancoo: This is a specific legal claim.

Mr. Young SC: Which is what I am asking, Minister. So, if we put aside the smugness, let us just—who is this to settle, which State Enterprise? How do you decide which State Enterprise is the Ministry of Finance is going to step in against? To indemnify claims against?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, to respond to the allocation—

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: —if you want.

Mr. Young SC: Please.

Hon. Tancoo: But the policy decision.

Mr. Young SC: All right. So, let us look then, seeing that you cannot respond more than the allocation. $20 million was provided in 2026.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Okay, but nothing spent in 2026. How come?

Hon. Tancoo: There was a settlement with regard to the HDC arising out of an outcome of negotiations from a Mootilal and Sons Contract Ltd.

Mr. Young SC: You see this is what I expected. Right, go on.

Hon. Tancoo: There is a 2027 provision is for the award—

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, and nothing was paid in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Not to my information.

Mr. Young SC: Right. And now, in 2027, the same $20 million. So, is it just for the settlement to Ramhit?

Hon. Tancoo: In this particular instance? Yes. There is a $20million provision.

Mr. Young SC: For a settlement to Ramhit?

Hon. Tancoo: Just for this one.

Mr. Young SC: For HDC, okay. You want to—I have another.
question.

Hon. Tancoo: This was since—

Mr. Young SC: My colleague in Diego Martin North/East

Mr. Imbert: The original $20 million allocation for Settlement of Legal Claims and State Enterprises: 42. Why was that provision put in? Why was there a provision of $20 million? It is not $2. It is a big amount, $20 million. What was the plan? What was the intention?

Mr. Young SC: To pay Ramhit.

Hon. Tancoo: $19 million was paid prior. This $20 million is for a provision to be paid. This has nothing—

Mr. Imbert: No. In 2026, the original provision under this Item, Settlement of Legal Claims, State Enterprises, was $20 million. That is a large sum of money. What was that $20 million original provision intended for?

Hon. Tancoo: I just read out the very specific. Do you want me to repeat it?

Mr. Imbert: 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: It was intended for what?

Madam Chairman: The Minister has read it out.

Mr. Imbert: No. He said 2027.

Mr. Chairman: No. It is the same thing. He said it was carried forward. If you were listening carefully.

Hon. Tancoo: It was carried forward.

Mr. Chairman: He said that the settlement did not materialize, so the sum was just simply carried forward.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, what State Enterprise was that?

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: Now the name, according to what I have here, is Mootilal and Sons.

Mr. Imbert: Sure. There are 53 State Enterprises at least. How do you decide, you as Minister decide, which State Enterprise you will settle, which claim in a fiscal year?

Hon. Tancoo: You are asking for policy?

Mr. Chairman: Policy. Yes.

Hon. Tancoo: Policy? Member, I will have to get that and provide that to you.

Mr. Chairman: Not only that. I think there is another avenue for that. Insofar as policy is concerned, this is about expenditure. This is a different policy. There is a different avenue. You know that.

Mr. Imbert: I have a different question then, since you are bringing up that argument. And I think all interests should be declared.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, yours as well.

Mr. Imbert: I have no interest in this, so all interests should be declared. But anyway, Minister of Finance, you said it was intended for a claim for a particular contractor in one State Enterprise. Why did you pick that State Enterprise for 2026?

Hon. D. Tancoo: Member, as I tried to explain to you prior, this is not something that I picked. This predated my engagement in the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: So that was there since 2024?

Hon. Tancoo: There was a prior—

Mr. Imbert: For Ramhit?

Hon. Tancoo: There was a prior payment in 2025.

Mr. Imbert: There was a provision for Ramhit in 2024? Okay if you say so.

Mr. Young SC: A payment in 2025 does not mean that that came in during the January to April 2025 period. It then had from May all the way to September 2025. This is news to us.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I will get the specific dates.

Mr. Young SC: You would get the details for us?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Would you also put in that who the lawyers are for Ramhit?

Hon. Tancoo: I can provide—whichever payment is being made here I can account for that.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: How the payment is made to lawyers, et cetera, is not my responsibility.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 07: Debt Servicing, page 106 to 108.

Mr. Young SC: We reach, no, no, no. What about Treasury Division and then you go.

Mr. Imbert: "He not seeing that there?"

Mr. Young SC: Correct. 007: Page 103; 007: Treasury Division, and now going to line Item 04.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: No, my mistake. We were supposed to go to Item 009. Yes sorry, my mistake. I jumped ahead. My apology. Other Transfers.

Mr. Young SC: No, not that. Before you go to 009, Mr. Chair, we are still under 007: Households, and now Treasury Division: 04: State Liability and Proceedings Act, Chap. 8:02. As I was just telling the Minister before, when he said this is for payment of claims against the debts, judgments against the State, so I said we will get to that at 04.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah but that was line 007; no one asked any question again.

Mr. Young SC: But you were asking questions under 07, and we were dealing with line Item 42.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I am going to—

Mr. Young SC: And I have indicated that I had a question I wanted ask on 04.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I am going to permit it.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, line Item 04, I think this is the line Item you were referring to a short while ago. State Liability and Proceedings Act, Chapter 8:02, section 27(3). And this is where judgments against the Attorney General's Office, against the State, constitutional claims, et cetera, police officers who judgment have been given against, et cetera, go.

I see in 2025 the actual spend by the State for payment of judgments, judgment orders against the State, was $56 and a half million. 2026, based on that, I assume an Estimate was provided for $57 million. However, I see that the 2026 Revised Estimate is $140 million, just about $90 million additional dollars added, which is a huge jump from the $56 million previously. Would you please provide a breakdown of the judgments under that $140 million, please?

Hon. Tancoo: The breakdown Item by Item or one by one?

Mr. Young SC: Well, I think you could just put the court matters, the order and the amounts.

Hon. Tancoo: You want it now?

Mr. Young SC: You have it there now?

Hon. Tancoo: It is a substantial list.

Mr. Young SC: Well I will take a copy of it yeah.

Hon. Tancoo: No. I either voice it now or provide it to you in writing at a date.

Mr. Young SC: Provide it in writing, but seeing that you have it, because I know how this provide by writing may go. "I will provide it in writing", and it never surfaces. But seeing that you have told us that you have a substantive list—

Hon. Tancoo: I do.

Mr. Young SC: I would like a copy, please. Thank you.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: And then I see now, in 2027 you have halved it, and you are going with $70 million.

Hon. Tancoo: That is a projection.

Mr. Young SC: Yeah, because this is difficult to estimate, not knowing what may come, all right. And then if under the same 007, Mr. Chairman, I then go down to line Item 41, award of high costs—Award of Costs—sorry—re: High Court judgments. Again, traditionally, the State has not sought—well, no, let me phrase that. Is this the payment of costs awarded against the State?

Hon. Tancoo: The 2027 allocation?

Mr. Young SC: No, line Item 41.

Hon. Tancoo: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: Is it the payment of costs awarded against the State? Cause again, I see a jump from $421,000 in 2025 to an Estimate of $700,000 in 2026, but $15.4 million were paid. Do you have a breakdown of that $15.4 million?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Would you also provide that in writing, please?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, I will.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much.

Mr. Imbert: Nothing in 2027.

Mr. Chairman: 009: Other Transfers, Diego Martin, North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Chairman, there are some very disturbing things here. I see under 009/41 Business Stimulus Programme, very important programme, $5

million was allocated at the beginning of fiscal 2026. The spend was zero. What happened there? Has that programme been abandoned, the Business Stimulus Programme?

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: I am just asking if it has been abandoned.

Hon. Tancoo: It has not been abandoned, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Then why was the spend zero?

Hon. Tancoo: The spend was zero because there have been policy decisions required to put this fund in effect. The fund was first announced by yourself in Budget 2018. But nothing was put in place to operationalize the fund. The fund is now being operationalized in fiscal 2028.

Mr. Imbert: So, nothing happened in ’26?

Hon. Tancoo: Nothing happened under your tenure in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, ’22, ’23, ’24, and half of ’25.

Mr. Imbert: You could say all that. I am asking about ’26.

Hon. Tancoo: I did.

Mr. Imbert: You could ask about 2010 too, you know. I am asking about ’26.

Hon. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Chairman, I am asking the Minister why there was a zero expenditure on Business Stimulus Programme in 2026.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, it was not for the same reason that you did not put in place anything in 2020.

Mr. Imbert: That is what you say. That is not accurate.

Hon. Tancoo: Nothing was put in place. The allocation was not used.

Mr. Imbert: That is not accurate. I also have a question on 42: Fiscal Incentive

Programme for Farmers. Original allocation: $100 million. Actual Spend, $30 million and my question has two parts. Why the underperformance of this programme for farmers, 70 per cent less than what was allocated, $70 million not spent? And how does this dovetail into the new incentive programme that we heard about from the Minister of Agriculture yesterday? You have two fiscal incentive programmes for farmers now in two different Ministries?

Mr. Imbert: Member, as you are well aware, the Ministry of Finance under this Item is the provider of funding to the Ministry of Agriculture. So you should have championed under the Ministry of Agriculture the breakdown of what this fund was used for.

Mr. Imbert: That is not my question. There is an allocation in the Ministry of Agriculture for Fiscal Incentives for Farmers.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Now I see another allocation in the Ministry of Finance for Fiscal Incentives for Farmers. I am asking whether you have two fiscal incentive programmes running and why, if the Minister of Agriculture, as he said yesterday, he has all his incentives, why is the Ministry of Finance doing this?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I can account for what is from the Ministry of Finance. I cannot account for the Ministry of Agriculture. However, this incentive for farmers, Fiscal Incentive for Farmers Programme, did not originate under this tenure. In fact, it was created by your good self.

Mr. Imbert: That is not my question. Why did you spend only 30 per cent of the allocation for farmers?

Hon. Tancoo: Again, these are estimates. Again, these are estimates.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Hon. Tancoo: Again, these are estimates and funding has been provided to the Ministry of Agriculture to the value of $30 million in fiscal 2026, to increase to $50 million in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine. Thanks. Can I go to 47 now, Mr. Chairman?

Hon. Tancoo: Sure.

Mr. Imbert: Are you the Chairman now?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: Okay. 47: Small and Micro Enterprise Support. $10 million was allocated; none was given to small and micro enterprise businesses. How come? Zero spend on Small and Micro Enterprise Support.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am pleased to advise you that this work is currently in progress. We expect to initiate the distribution of support under this entity in fiscal 2027. However, it should be noted that this was part of a fiscal package presented by the Member of Finance then in 2022, which would have been you. Unfortunately, nothing was done since 2022 to operationalize this support for small and micro enterprises.

Mr. Imbert: I expect you to say that with everything.

Hon. Tancoo: However, in fiscal 2027, all the requirements have been made so that we can now ensure that small and micro enterprises will receive support from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: My question was, why did you not provide Small and Micro Enterprise Support in 2026, you had an allocation of $10 million?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, unlike you, who established this in 2022 and did nothing

with it for several years, we would have spent 2026 evaluating, re-evaluating, assessing, and putting the infrastructure in place—

Mr. Imbert: I see, so nothing was put in place.

Hon. Tancoo:—to ensure—not nothing was done. Nothing was done under your tenure, which is why I inherited it and which is why it is being fixed now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine. So, nothing was done in 2026.

Hon. Tancoo: Nothing was done since you put it in place.

Mr. Imbert: Sure, sure. Can I go to 50?

Hon. Tancoo: That is the reason again why you were removed from office.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, okay. May I go to 50, Mr. Chairman? I guess he will give the same answer for all. Junior Achievement Programme, $6 million allocated in 2026. Actual Spend: $390,000, a 93 per cent underperformance. Why?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, again, as you will be aware, because this started under your tenure, this falls under the Ministry of Education. You could probably get some more information from the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Imbert: I see. 52. Minister, you made a big song and dance in the last budget about an employment fund of $475 million, that would employ so many people, including all the retrenched CEPEP workers. You spent zero. You gave a reason, that you had to get legislation, even though there is already legislation in the system with respect to Employment Fund. You spent nothing. How come?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, if you were paying attention during the budget debate, you would have been advised, and if you were not advised, you would not have been paying attention. You are advised now that this fund has been moved to the Ministry of Works and Transport and to the Ministry of Rural Development and

Local Government.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, but not at the beginning of 2026. At the beginning of 2026 and in the middle, because I asked this in the mid-year review, you said the reason why you were not spending money, you needed legislation. How come for the whole 12 months you could not put legislation in place? You bring legislation on all kinds of things. ZOSO, all kinds of things. But this, to spend $475 million to help poor people? Anyway, I do not expect a proper answer. So, with your leave, Mr. Chairman, I would go on to 009/11 with your leave. Whenever you are ready, Mr. Chairman, I would like to go to 11.

Mr. Chairman: 011: Transfers.

Hon Member: 11?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Imbert: There was an original provision for the Infrastructure Development Fund, which funds the PSIP, Development Programme, et cetera, in the country, stimulates economic activity, employs people, and creates growth. There was an allocation of $1.4 billion in the Infrastructure Development Fund in 2026, but you only spent $850 million. You did not spend $553 million on Development Works in 2026. Why?

6.10 p.m.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: Item 009, yes. We are still on page 104. Item 009/11, Infrastructure Development Fund, a 40 per cent underperformance.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I highlighted this during the budget. I indicated that there were issues with procurement, and as a result, the spend was less than projected for fiscal 2026.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Can I go now to 009/17, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. The Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses is a very innovative programme introduced in 2024 to increase the participation rate in tertiary education—at the time, it was 11 per cent, and after GATE was introduced and funded, the participation rate in Trinidad and Tobago in tertiary education grew to 60 per cent. It is a very, very important programme. I noticed in 2026, you allocated $450 million for GATE, but only spent $380 million. You did not spend $70 million on GATE in 2026. How come?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, again, this is one of those line Items, which would probably best be interrogated under the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training .

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, you are sending me to the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. All right. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Sub-Head 07: Debt Servicing, pages 106 to 108 inclusive; 001; Interest- Local Loans.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]—I noticed a significant reduction in Debt Servicing. Could the Minister explain why there was a substantial reduction in the Debt Servicing?

Hon. Tancoo: What is the line Item, Sir?

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I will give you an example. Caribbean Airlines Limited—27—Shareholders' Loan.

Hon. Tancoo: Caribbean Airlines has been moved to a different Head, as you could see under the explanation.

Mr. Imbert: Is that why it was not paid?

Mr. Chairman: All right. This is a different Head. It is Civil Aviation.

Mr. Imbert: Well, that is fine. But was this paid?

Mr. Chairman: No, you will have to ask Civil Aviation that, I am afraid.

Mr. Imbert: I will have to ask Civil Aviation that?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: I see. All right. Well, I will. That is coming up tomorrow. And then 10: National Infrastructure Development Company. What happened there? Why do we have $60million in 2027?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: Item 10, NIDCO.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am not seeing no 10. I do not know if I am on the wrong page.

Mr. Imbert: 10 is the number after nine.

Hon. Tancoo: I am seeing 24. I am curious as to where you are seeing 10.

Mr. Imbert: Page 105.

Mr. Chairman: 106. We have passed 105. We are on page 106 now.

Mr. Imbert: You are coming off Debt Servicing, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: No, we are on debt servicing.

Mr. Imbert: Well, it is all—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, Debt Servicing is at 106, 07, at the bottom, a few lines from the bottom of the page. Perhaps you need some assistance for someone to find it for you?

Mr. Imbert: You skipped 04 and 06?

Mr. Chairman: No.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, yes.

Mr. Chairman: No.

Mr. Imbert: What happened to 04 and 06? You did not call them out, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I did.

Mr. Imbert: 04 and 06?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Seriously? Caribbean Airlines is there under Debt Servicing, $84million, and you are saying it is transferred to Civil Aviation. I will ask tomorrow, but—

Mr. Chairman: All right. So—

Mr. Imbert: But, Mr. Chairman, I did not hear you call 04 and 06.

Mr. Chairman: Well, the Procedural Clerk—if you could take down your decibel level a little bit, and perhaps allow me to explain, I will, rather than, you know, constantly adopt this posturing. I will explain it to you. The Procedural Clerk has explained to me that there is a procedural rule for it, which will be fulfilled in time.

Mr. Imbert: Can you explain?

Mr. Chairman: It is the Statutory Boards, which come in a different book. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Imbert: I see. So, you will get back to that?

Mr. Chairman: In due course.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much for your graciousness. We are on Debt Servicing; Item 001—should I move on, or are you still there?

Mr. Imbert: No, it is okay. I will deal with Caribbean Airlines tomorrow.

Mr. Chairman: Well, so be it.

Mr. Hosein: You said that three times.

Mr. Imbert: I will say it five times.

Mr. Chairman: Jesus Christ. Must you always get the last word in?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, why is the Member for Barataria/San Juan getting involved?

Mr. Chairman: I am not concerned about the Member for Barataria/San Juan. I am always concerned about you and this glorified sandbox behaviour of getting the last word in.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I am an elected Member. I am allowed to speak.

Mr. Chairman: You are not allowed to speak freely like that.

Mr. Imbert: Well, you could stop me from speaking if you want, you know.

Mr. Chairman: No, I cannot. Break the rules and I will.

Mr. Young SC: Gentlemen, gentlemen—

Mr. Chairman: But for the meanwhile, you observe the rules.

Mr. Young SC: Gentlemen, let us get back to the people's work, please.

Mr. Chairman: If he would only allow me to and stop behaving like a petulant child, always having to get the last word in. 009: Interest on Overdraft.

Mr. Imbert: You are being insulting again.

Mr. Chairman: Item 009: Interest on Overdraft. Do you have a question on that? 011: Principal Repayment - Local Loans. Do you have a question on that?

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; Item 004: Statutory Boards appears on page 106 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 191.

Mr. Chairman: 07- National Lotteries Control Board.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Page 191. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Young SC: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, go ahead.

Mr. Young SC: Item 02/001.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Dealing now with the National Lotteries Control Board, I see here that in 2027, under Contract Employment, there is an increase—I am not sure if this is quite right, but I see there is an increase of $3.3million. I saw in 2026, there was an original Estimate of $4.2million, Minister—are you with me? Line Item 16—but is it that nothing was spent in 2026 under Contract Employment?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I will get that detail and come back to you.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. And then—

Hon. Tancoo: I will provide it to you in writing.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, you will find out whether anything was spent?

Hon. Tancoo: And specifically what it was, yes.

Mr. Young SC: And then I see, under Other Contracted Services, line Item 28, of

course, this being NLCB, National Lotteries Control Board, there was a $3.5 million spend in 2025, a budget allocation of $9.2 million originally in 2026, but only $2.6 million was spent, and now it has gone further up to $11.3 million. Can you say what it is they intend to expend under this line Item, $11.3 million, and an increase of $8.7 million?

6.20 p.m.

Hon. Tancoo: Based on the information in front of me, I believe that what we have—the provision was made for a consultant to be hired to assist in developing an RFP for a lottery service provider.

Mr. Young SC: A consultant to assist in the development of—?

Hon. Tancoo: An RFP, a Request for Proposals with regard to a lottery service provider.

Mr. Young SC: For so much money?

Hon. Tancoo: No, there were other factors as well. There were NLCB 18 service provider contracts—

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Tancoo: Nine more than fiscal 2027, so this will be—sorry, nine more in fiscal 2026.

Mr. Young SC: But Minister—

Hon. Tancoo: These contracts were converted to—

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, go on.

Hon. Tancoo:—CPO-approved contracts. Sorry.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, sorry. So, a consultant to develop an RFP for what was it?

Hon. Tancoo: Well, it just says a lottery service provider.

Mr. Young SC: But NLCB is the lottery—they have a third party—

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: —that provides that lottery service.

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: I think it used to be GTECH—

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—or something like that, and then they changed the name. So, they are looking to go out—

Hon. Tancoo: For tendering.

Mr. Young SC:—for tendering?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And they need a consultant for so much money to be able to provide such an RFP?

Hon. Tancoo: It is a specialist area, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: And they would have had to go out to do—even before the RFP for the provider, they would have had to come up with terms of reference, et cetera. And that too is a specialized area.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So, you had to hire a specialist to tell you what to go out and look for as a specialist?

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03.

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, I am just looking. 02 carries over to page 192.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: I see here money for prizes. Okay, thank you. Nothing under 02. When we reach 03.

[MS. ALI *in the Chair*]

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03, page 192. Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

58 - Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Commission. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 197. Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, 02/001/16. I noticed that there was an allocation of $30 million for Contract Employment in the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Commission in fiscal 2026, but only $8 million was spent. What is the reason for that?

Hon. Tancoo: Anticipated staffing would have accounted for the $30 million Estimate.

Mr. Imbert: So, the operationalization of the Gambling Commission was a little slower than anticipated.

Hon. Tancoo: Correct.

Mr. Imbert: And that would also account for the shortfalls in expenditure in other Contracted Services, Fees and Security Services and so on?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: All right. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Tobago. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers

and Subsidies; Item 007: Current Transfers and Subsidies. 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.

Hon. Members, we now move to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme,* page 55. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Members, Item—my apologies, Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. 005/06/A/014: Upgrading of Information Technology - Inland Revenue Division. Now, again, Minister, you spoke a lot about the wonderful things you are doing for the Inland Revenue Division in terms of staffing and technology and so on, but I noticed that, just like Recruitment of Staff, we have a problem here. The original allocation for Upgrading of Information Technology in the Inland Revenue Division was $8 million, but you only spent $4 million. That is only 50 per cent. What happened there?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, I am glad that you asked. You see, Member, a lot of time was spent doing assessments and evaluation of what we had and what we needed. The Member would be aware that when I came into office, shortly after he demitted office, the Board of Inland Revenue was operating under GenTax version 9, when the rest of the world had long since moved on. Version 9 was completed under the former administration in 2015.

From then to when we took office, nothing was done to upgrade GenTax. GenTax is now moving to version 26. So, the time frame that we are looking at was spent doing assessments and evaluations, et cetera. And we have already commenced moving GenTax from version 9, where you left it, to version 26,

which is current.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. So, the reason why you had a 50 per cent underperformance is that you underestimated the amount of work involved.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, no. We—

Mr. Imbert: What happened then?

Hon. Tancoo: We had to structure this properly. So, we are engaging in the upgrade at this point. We would have had some bills that have not yet come in, that will come in subsequently, which is why the Estimate for 2027 is substantially higher.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Alright. Can I go now to 27: Development of a Document System for Pensions and Central Registry. You had an allocation of $1 million. You spent $100,000. That is a 90 per cent underperformance. What happened there? That was GenTax too?

Hon. Tancoo: No, it was not, but the problem was the same. Very little was done under the previous regime.

Mr. Imbert: That was my fault too?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, it was actually.

Mr. Imbert: Because you could not perform in ’26. That was my fault?

Hon. Tancoo: That was your—

Mr. Imbert: All right.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: This was your fault as well.

Mr. Imbert: All right, no problem.

Hon. Tancoo: This is the business that we are speaking about.

Mr. Imbert: Fine, fine.

Hon. Tancoo: You are very well aware that you failed. You are very well aware.

Mr. Imbert: You could actually just press a tape recorder and say it was your fault.

Hon. Tancoo: But it would be, and that is the unfortunate truth.

Mr. Imbert: So, alright. So, you could not perform in 2026, but it is my fault? Okay.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you did not perform.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Can I—

Hon. Tancoo: We are trying to fix a problem that you created.

Mr. Imbert: —go to 31, Madam Chairman? Networking of Treasury Building in fiscal 2026, a year totally controlled by the UNC, from October 1st, 2025 to September 30th, 2026. UNC totally in the driver's seat, but you only spent $100,000 out of $1 million to network the Treasury Building, another underperformance of 90 per cent. Is that my fault too?

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, it was.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, no problem.

Hon. Tancoo: No, no, no—

Mr. Imbert: That is fine.

Hon. Tancoo: —no, no, Member.

Mr. Imbert: It is my fault.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, you under-resourced the Treasury—

Mr. Imbert: In 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: You under-resourced the Treasury.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine.

Hon. Tancoo: It is impossible to hire competent staff immediately upon operationalization.

Mr. Imbert: All right, all right, all right. Okay. Fine, can I go to 50: Upgrade of Information Technology Infrastructure? You had an allocation of $1 million in 2026 under your Government. You only spent $300,000, 70 per cent underperformance. That is my fault too?

6.30 p.m.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, it was Member.

Mr. Imbert: Alright, no problem. That is fine.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, it was. I am heartened to say yes, it was—

Mr. Imbert: That is okay.

Hon. Tancoo:—and that an appropriate allocation has been made to execute an improvement in 2027.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Thank you. Can I go to 65, Madam Chairman?

Hon. Tancoo: Are you sure you want to?

Mr. Imbert: Upgrade of security in the Ministry of Finance? You had an original allocation in 2026 under the UNC, total control of everything, but you only spend $1 million. An under performance of 67 per cent in terms of upgrading security of the Ministry of Finance in fiscal ’26. That is my fault too?

Hon. Tancoo: The state of the security at the Ministry of Finance was your fault, Member, and I am proud to say that we are putting things in place to ensure that the—

Mr. Young SC: You upgraded the security.

Mr. Imbert: It is 2026, you know.

Hon. Tancoo: This is not—no, but you are aware—

Mr. Imbert: 2026.

Hon. Tancoo:—the security system is not simply a button you press, and you buy in the hardware. There is a structure that has to be put in—

Mr. Imbert: Okay, okay, fine.

Hon. Tancoo:—and it has to be stamped and resourced appropriately.

Mr. Imbert: I want to move on to another line Item, 066. Now, do not tell me this is my fault. Purchase of security cameras for Customs and Excise. In fiscal 2026, you had an allocation of $2 million. You spent $200,000 and 90 per cent underperformance. That cannot be my fault.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, the absence of security cameras—sufficient security cameras—is your fault. Was your fault. However—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: You did not do it in 2026.

Hon. Tancoo:—however, may I finish?

Mr. Imbert: You did not do it in 2026.

Hon. Tancoo: I want to refer you back to what we had said yesterday and today. These are Estimates. The work is in progress. Bills are still coming in.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*] He estimate for the cameras and he "eh" put. All right, no problem. Inspection Scanners, Customs, allocation $19 million, Actual spend $5 million, underperformance of 74 per cent.

Hon. Tancoo: I am proud to say.

Mr. Imbert: What is the explanation for that?

Hon. Tancoo: I am proud to say that the inspections, scanners, et cetera, that we are pursuing, we have already spent $5 million, and we propose to spend more.

Again, these are highly specialized pieces of equipment. You do not go into a hardware and buy them off the shelf.

Mr. Imbert Whatever. Can we go to 069? Indexation for Monthly Paid Retirees. You originally intended to spend $1 million to help monthly paid retirees. You only spent $200,000. Why? Must be my fault too. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Tancoo: Well, there certainly was none when you were there. This is a new project. So, Member, the 2026 was utilized in establishing the requirements. The procurement processes, et cetera, have been completed. The successful consultant, Bacon Woodrow & De Souza Limited, have been engaged, and we are now pursuing the formal establishment of this entity.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. 70: Occupational Safety and Health Requirements, Security Upgrade for Inland Revenue, original allocation, $4 million. You only spent $890,000, a 77 per cent underperformance. Why?

Hon. Tancoo: Right, Member, this is because during the period we were doing the assessment, the physical security risk assessment, and annual risk assessments were conducted. The reports were submitted identifying deficiencies and recommending improvements. The procurement evaluation for proposed upgrade has been completed, and we are pursuing the confirmation of the award of a contract.

Mr. Imbert Okay, 71: Upgrade of Security Treasury Building, allocation $2 million. You spent zero. You did no upgrade. Why?

Hon. Tancoo: I believe I just explained that, Member.

Mr. Imbert For this one? This is 071. It is not 070, is 071.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, Member. Again, here there was a procurement issue.

Mr. Imbert No problem.

Hon. Tancoo: May I?

Mr. Imbert: Okay, I accept that.

Hon. Tancoo: The procurement processes have been completed, and we are well on our way to implementing and fulfilling this objective in fiscal 2027, which includes the upgrade of CCTV camera systems, upgrade of video management software and integration of analytical software, and CCTV access control systems. So all of these are specialist areas that require specialist procurement facilities and special procurement systems. We have spent 2026 putting those things in place so that we could safely procure the relevant items.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. 116, Refurbishment Works to District Revenue Offices. Now that is not a specialist Item. You had $2.5 million allocated to Refurbish District Revenue Offices; you spent zero. Why did you not refurbish the District Revenue Offices in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Hold on, let me just find the information. I am so grateful for you asking these questions.

Mr. Imbert: I can tell you the page, you know, if you want.

Hon. Tancoo: Yes, patience. I want explanations.

Mr. Imbert: I can tell you the page, you know. If you want assistance with that, page 56, F. Public Buildings, 116, Sub-Item, spent zero to refurbish District Revenue Offices in 2026. How come?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that some work was in fact done under Recurrent Expenditure. These are proposed to be greater, more detailed works, and we would have spent time going through the assessments—

Mr. Imbert: Planning.

Hon. Tancoo:—and planning.

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Tancoo: But some work was in fact done. The evaluation of the specifics that have to be completed—

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Tancoo:—has taken place, and we are proposed to start construction on refurbishment works in fiscal 2020.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. 120, Refurbishment of Treasury Building, very important building, $1.5 million allocated, zero spent. How come?

Hon. Tancoo: Hold on.

Mr. Imbert Was the same issue, was the same issue.

Hon. Tancoo: Right. So, I am advised that $700,000 was, in fact, spent in September 2026 for some furniture and refurbishment works. Contract was awarded for workstations, which is another $900,000, which will actually be expended in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: I see.

Hon. Tancoo: So work was done at the end of fiscal, which would come into payment for fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: Your own building 124, the building that you work in. Upgrade of Physical Infrastructure Finance Building. Original allocation $2 million to upgrade that building. Very important. You only spend $200,000, 90 per cent underperformance. Why?

Hon. Tancoo: Well, I am glad, Member, that you appreciate the need to do refurbishment and upgrade at that building.

Mr. Imbert: "Just doh let Padarath know eh". [*Laughter*]

Hon. Tancoo: I am glad that you appreciate the need, because for many years this has not been done.

Mr. Imbert "Just doh let Padarath know".

Hon. Tancoo: I am grateful to see that a substantial amount of work was done in fiscal 2026. Bills are outstanding. These are revised figures. Bills are outstanding, and a further upgrade is going to take place in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: 126, Refurbishment of Customs Regional Training School. $1 million allocated, zero spent. Why? That is 126.

Hon. Tancoo: Hold on, why do I not have that?

Mr. Imbert It is alright; I do not have much more. I do not have many more. I say I do not have much more. Just letting you know.

Hon. Tancoo: Oh, that is all right. You feel free to ask. This is your time to shine.

Mr. Imbert Sure. So how come you only spend zero on the training school for Customs?

Hon. Tancoo: So 129 is the one you identified, Member?

Mr. Imbert: 126, I "eh" reach 129 yet.

6.40 p.m.

Hon. Tancoo: All right, that is the Refurbishment of Customs and Excise Regional Training School. Member, substantial work is required here. Assessments were, in fact, completed. I believe that a contractor has been sourced. A contractor has been identified and work is to commence. There is a substantial amount of small works, the gutting of the guard booth, the painting of walls, clearing and cleaning of gutters, et cetera. But again—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: So no physical works were done in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: Some works were done in 2026. The bills have to be—

Mr. Imbert: But they do not appear here.

Hon. Tancoo: Because, Sir, those are estimates, revised estimates. We have outstanding bills.

Mr. Imbert: I "doh" believe you are not giving yourself up-to-date information. It is okay. Can I go to the 129?

Hon. Tancoo: The Canine Unit.

Mr. Imbert: How come you did not upgrade the Canine Unit facility? A million dollars was allocated, you spent zero, why?

Hon. Tancoo: Well, actually, the intention is to replace the current—I am so glad, as a dog lover myself, that you are concerned about the dogs, eh.

Mr. Imbert: You are glad I am asking why you spent no money on this? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Tancoo: No, I am glad that you are concerned. I am presuming you are concerned about the dogs, and I am very glad for that.

Mr. Imbert: I must be.

Hon. Tancoo: I am a dog lover, as I said.

Mr. Imbert: I must be.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, there are several pieces of construction to take place here. The objective is to replace what exists. We have not yet begun the work because this is, again, procurement issues.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Infrastructure Upgrade of the Container Examination Station (CES) at Port of Spain, 130, you only spent $750,000 out of an allocation of $2 million, how come?

Hon. Tancoo: Procurement issues here—

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Tancoo:—which is why only $750,000-odd was spent. There are some bills outstanding, but we did not utilize the full $2 million. We expect that the contract has not yet been signed, but we will be signing and continuing the works in 2027.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. Now, you will agree, Minister, that vehicles and equipment for the Customs and Excise Division are very important to deal with smuggling, and so on. You had an allocation of $1 million for that, you spent nothing, how come?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, again, thank you for your question. I am advised that three Toyota pickups were in fact procured. The bills have not yet come in for fiscal 2026—

Mr. Imbert: I see. All right.

Hon. Tancoo:—so we would have to pay them in fiscal 2027.

Mr. Imbert: Last one. It is all right, I have plenty more, but I will just give you one more. Item 004 on page 56, L. Customs and Excise, Acquisition of Trained Drug-Detector Dogs for Drug Interdiction. To go into the Canine Unit you did not build, you had $390,000 for special drug-detector dogs, you bought no dogs, how come?

Hon. Tancoo: I am advised that we are doing in-house, in-puppy—

Mr. Young SC: In puppy?

Hon. Tancoo: Sorry—

Mr. Imbert: "What you said? Wha going on with de dogs? It say you buy no dogs."

Hon. Tancoo: So, Member, there are two aspects of this, one, imported dogs, and one is local dogs. We are doing inbreeding locally so that we could source these dogs and replacements going forward, so we are using our locally bred dogs as

well. These dogs have to be trained.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are waiting for the dogs to grow? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Tancoo: We are waiting for the dogs to be properly trained and, yes, grown.

Mr. Imbert: All right. All right. Okay. That is it.

Hon. Tancoo: I could provide real details—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: I will ease you up now. It is all right.

Hon. Tancoo: Customs and Excise: a canine puppy programme, currently has four locally bred puppies enrolled, and they are training. Thank you so much, Member.

Madam Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund, page 233, Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, A. Air Transport.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Point of clarification and 001, Air Transport, how come this expenditure is showing up in the Ministry of Finance Estimates on the Tobago airport terminal building?

Hon. Tancoo: Member, as you know, the Ministry of Finance supplies the funding, but the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviationis the client, and the executing agency is NIDCO. The Ministry of Finance just supplies the funding.

Mr. Imbert: That is what you were told?

Hon. Tancoo: That is what I was told.

Mr. Imbert: You were told the Ministry of Finance was not the client for the construction of this building?

Hon. Tancoo: The client at this point is the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation.

Mr. Imbert: For what, for the operationalization? What about this money spent in 2026?

Hon. Tancoo: I think, when the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviationcomes tomorrow, you can request that information from them.

Mr. Imbert: "Nah, but I know it was ah finance. It was ah finance project." So you are supposed to know that.

Hon. Tancoo: I was not aware that the Ministry of Finance builds airports. We finance the airport.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 18 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities.

Hon. Tancoo: Member, while we wait on the relevant persons from Pensions and Gratuities, allow me to use the opportunity to thank the staff, technical, permanent secretaries, et cetera, from the Ministry of Finance for their support here today, and, as well, my colleague, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities, $1,000,000.

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Tancoo: Madam Chair, I think the national population knows what pensions and gratuities are, what the unit, therefore, is involved in. It is clear from the name of the unit. Therefore, we hold ourselves available for questions that Members may have.

Question proposed: That Head 20 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $1 million for Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the

following Sub-Head and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, page 121. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 20 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Tancoo: Allow me as well to thank the head of the Treasury, Ma'am, the person in charge of Pensions and Gratuities, and thank your technical staff for joining us as well.

6.50 p.m.

Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence $1,423,562,500

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to all colleagues. Madam Chair, I want to thank you especially for the opportunity to present an overview of the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence's proposed expenditure for fiscal year 2026/2027. The Ministry recognizes the importance of managing public resources responsibly and ensuring that the investments entrusted to it support the effective functioning of Government and deliver tangible benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

For fiscal year 2026/2027, Head 31, in particular, provides approximately

$1.447 billion, comprising $1.351 billion in Recurrent Expenditure, $72.25 million under the *Development Programme* through the Consolidated Fund, and $23.5 million through the Infrastructure Development Fund. This represents, Madam Chair, an overall increase of approximately $37.7 million over the 2026 Revised Estimates. Madam Chair, these provisions support the Ministry's broad mandate across public administration, government technology and infrastructure. It also supports digital transformation, of course, artificial intelligence, connectivity and the modernization of the public service. Our priority is to ensure that these resources translate into a more efficient public service, stronger institutional capacity and improved access to government services for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and, of course, the wider ecosystem.

Madam Chairman, a significant component of the Ministry's Recurrent Expenditure is the provision of $198.28million for national information and communication technology, an increase of significance, of over $40 million over the 2026 Revised Estimate. This allocation, Madam Chair, supports technology services and operational requirements that underpin the Government's wider ICT environment.

Alongside these essential services, the Ministry is advancing programmes of digital transformation, aimed at government processes, strengthening institutional capabilities and improving overall service delivery. In addition, an allocation of $26 million is provided for the implementation of the Digital Transformation Agenda, supporting institutional strengthening, the digitization of services, the development, of course, of the digital economy and the enhancement of national cybersecurity capabilities. A further $10million is to be allocated to government

digital transformation initiatives, including the Electronic Human Resource Management, to improve workforce information planning and organizational performance across the public service. In addition, Madam Chair, 50 government services will also be supported with the wider development of what we call the OneGov programme, TTPass, TT X-Road interoperability and TTPay, a tell-us-once approach to good governance. These initiatives are intended to reduce duplication, improve coordination across agencies and make interactions with the Government more convenient.

A commitment to transformation must also extend to ensuring that citizens can participate in/benefit from the digital economy. The Ministry has allocated $6million to digital society programmes, which include the TTWiFi service in underserved communities, providing training through LearnTT, offering scholarships under the Jane scholarship programme and extending the reach of access centres across Trinidad. A further $5 million is allocated to LearnTT. The programme currently provides over 6000-plus licences across programmes, such as Coursera, Google, LinkedIn Learning, et cetera. Through its rotation model, this has the potential to impact over 59,000 learner training opportunities annually. This is quite significant in our advancement of upskilling our public servants and the general society. More than 26,000 expressions of interest have been demonstrated based on the demand for these types of opportunities. Through the leadership of our Prime Minister, we continue to invest in the digital skills of our people.

The Ministry is also strengthening a wider approach to digital society and our country's readiness for emerging technologies through a $5 million allocation

of what we call the "future-ready nation". This programme supports digital skills and workforce development, including the AI Academy and broader artificial intelligence capability building. The Future Ready TT programme has expanded from its initial pilot at the Ministry, from 500 licences in the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence to now over 10,000 users with access to tools, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly and a wide range of AI-based tools and initiatives. Thirty-eight AI champions have been established across 15 Ministries, departments and agencies. This is in support of our movement of the digital divide to reduce the skills gap and, of course, to strengthen our institutional capacity across the Ministry. These initiatives reflect both the importance of preparing public service and the wider population to adapt to technological change, and wider planning innovation in the ways that strengthen productivity and improve service delivery.

Ultimately, Madam Chair, the Ministry's responsibility is not simply to administer its allocation, but to ensure that expenditure supports clear priorities and meaningful outcomes. We are an outcome-based government. We remain committed to prudent financial management, effective programme implementation and accountability for the resources provided. Madam Chair, the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence stands ready to account for these provisions under Head 31 and to assist the committee in its examination of the Estimates. I thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 31 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $1,423,562,500 for Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence 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 217. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Minister, 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, we see that there is an increase of $12,144,359. Can you please indicate what is responsible for that?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. Chair, through you, this increase is to accommodate 145 filled positions, and also to accommodate salaries and COLA as identified and, of course, back pay for the same.

Mr. Romain: Minister, how many persons would have been hired by your Ministry in the last 12 months? New hires.

Hon. Smith: Member, I am advised that we have hired about roughly 50 new persons.

Mr. Romain: Were any of those persons hired under the National Recruitment Drive?

Hon. Smith: We are speaking specifically about the Ministry's recruitment, Member.

Mr. Romain: Yeah. But under the—we were told by another Minister that any Ministry could hire. Did your Ministry hire anybody under the National Recruitment Drive?

Hon. Smith: Member, it may have been a subset of that, yes.

Mr. Romain: Of the 20,000 or so vacancies that were advertised under the recruitment drive, how many were applicable to your Ministry?

Hon. Smith: Can you identify the line Item with relation to the recruitment drive?

Mr. Romain: No. Well, we are still under 01, the salaries and so on.

Hon. Smith: The recruitment drive initiative, can you identify the line Item specific to that?

Mr. Romain: Under the Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, we are dealing with—it is a follow-up question to the previous question I asked you with respect to the number of hires.

Hon. Smith: Member, what I am alluding to is that I do not think that is quite applicable here. So, if you have another question, I will be happy to answer.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Romain: 01/001/14, I see that there is no allocation for Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. Is it that these committees have been disbanded?

Hon. Smith: Member, we do not have any Cabinet-Appointed Committees.

Mr. Romain: So the $250,800 that was originally allocated in 2026 was for what?

Hon. Smith: This is estimated, Member.

Mr. Romain: But I imagine there was an anticipation that you would have expected.

Hon. Smith: There is always an anticipation. You can only anticipate, Actual is not expected.

Mr. Romain: Right. So you have now abandoned any committees being

established, Cabinet committees under your Ministry?

Hon. Smith: Member, I would charge you to utilise your adjectives a bit more responsibly.

Mr. Young SC: What is going on here?

Hon. Smith: I would not use the word "abandon."

Mr. Young SC: Well, we are not interested in what he would use, you know, the Member is asking a question.

Hon. Smith: Member for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's West, Member for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's West, I do not think—

Mr. Young SC: Member, I am speaking to Madam Chairman. I am not speaking to you, yet. Right.

Hon. Smith: Let your colleague answer his question.

Mr. Young SC: Well, "now ah go start to speak".

Hon. Smith: Let your colleague answer his question.

Madam Chairman: Any other questions? Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services—

Mr. Romain: Chair, I am still asking questions under this line Item.

Madam Chairman: Can you identify the line Item, please?

Mr. Romain: The same 14. So I am asking the Minister, when this allocation of $250,800 was made in 2026, was there an intention to establish Cabinet-Appointed Committees?

Hon. Smith: As per the responsibility of the Ministry, I am sure there is always an anticipation of committees that will be established; none were established.

Mr. Romain: So is there an intention to revisit that at any time?

Hon. Smith: The question has been asked and answered, Member.

Mr. Romain: All right. 27: Gov't Contribution to Group Health Insurance - Monthly Paid Officers. I see that there is a decrease of $10,000. What would account for that decrease?

Hon. Smith: Member, this was an Estimate in 2026. So we are now reflecting on the Actual.

Mr. Romain: Right.

Hon. Smith: Yeah.

Mr. Romain: So just, let me—how many employees would this have covered?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. I do not have that detail with me at the moment, but I am happy to provide it.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Hon. Smith: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services Division. Member for Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: 005/05: Government's Contribution to N.I.S. Minister, I see there is an increase of $49,400. Is that increase as a result of new hires?

Hon. Smith: This is a combination of new hires as well as NIB contributions which were from the previous year.

Mr. Romain: Does it anticipate the increase in NIS contribution rates that is due in January?

Hon. Smith: Yes, it does anticipate said increases.

Mr. Romain: Would you be able to tell us how much of that $49,000 is to cover that?

Hon. Smith: Happy to provide it in writing it to you.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Public Management Consulting Division. Member for Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: 006/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, I see there is a decrease of some $255,000 in that allocation. Can you speak to that?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. With respect to the PMC Division, again, this is related to the vacant posts that we expect to fill in future.

Mr. Romain: How many vacant posts?

Hon. Smith: Again, I can provide the details to you in writing.

Mr. Romain: Thank you. 05: Government's Contribution to N.I.S. I see there is an increase of $180,000. How many persons does that anticipate to cover?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. All of these Items, they flow into each other. So as a result, the NIB payments will also go up.

Mr. Romain: All right.

Hon. Smith: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Public Service Academy; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 219 to 223; Item 001: General Administration.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: I am just calling out the Item. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Line Item 15: Repairs and Maintenance, 2025, $2.6 million was spent. You had an Estimate of $7 million for 2026. A Revised Estimate of $5 million, which was double what it was in 2025. How much

was spent?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. I am advised that the Actual expenditure was about $2.5 million.

Mr. Young SC: So you spent $2.5 million, which was the same thing that was spent in 2025. And what was it spent on?

Hon. Smith: Member, this would have been a combination of things such as photocopying machines and ice machines, water dispensing machines, preventative maintenance items and so on.

Mr. Young SC: Photocopying machines and what, ice machines?

Hon. Smith: Yeah, a few of these items that—

Mr. Young SC: For $2.5 million?

Hon. Smith: Well, there are quite a number, 23 photocopying machines, 4 ice machines, 10 water dispensing machines, so the quantum would add up.

Mr. Young SC: Right, and you have now gotten again a $5 million allocation for 2025. Now, this is a fairly new Ministry and now you are getting a $5 million for Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment. When we looked at other Ministries, that is a lot more money than they were provided with. What are you expecting to spend this on in this fiscal?

Hon. Smith: Yeah, well, even though it is a new Ministry, Member, in name, a big portion of the Ministry is Public Administration.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Smith: And as you know, the public administration actually accounts for about 70 per cent of the recurrent expenditure. So a lot of these Items are Items in the buildings that we manage and support and the expectations are the same. We

are looking towards managing and maintaining the assets of the Ministry.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, cool. 16: Contract Employment. So, Contract Employment, there was a spend in 2025 of about $9.3 million. You got $25 million, which is a significant increase, one and a half times, at least, of what you had in 2025, you spent, and then the Revised Estimate was $25 million. How much did you actually spend under Contract Employment in 2026?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. The Actual expenditure was around $18 million, $18.5 million.

Mr. Young SC: And this was on the Public Administration side?

Hon. Smith: Well, it is one Ministry, so we "doh have" Public Administration—

Mr. Young SC: Well, that is what I was going to ask.

Hon. Smith: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: So now that you have both Public Administration, as well as AI, previously that was the Ministry of Digital Transformation, you now have that merged. You spent $18 million, which was double what was spent in 2025. What is expected for 2027? Okay, let me back up. How many vacancies do you currently have under contract?

Hon. Smith: Yes, Member, thank you for the question. Vacancies at the moment are around 304.

Mr. Young SC: How many are you expecting to fill?

Hon. Smith: These are long-term contracts, specifically, 304 long-term contracts.

Mr. Young SC: Right, but it is vacant.

Hon. Smith: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: You have 304, and these are contracts, so this is not the Public

Service Commission. So out of that, in the next fiscal, this fiscal, 2027, how many of the 304 vacancies are you intending to fill?

Hon. Smith: Well, the intention is always to hire all, you know, that is the intention.

Mr. Young SC: Well, you "cyah hire" all, because if you have spent $18 million with what you already have, you only have an additional $7 million. I am sure the 304 cannot be filled for $7 million.

Hon. Smith: Many of these things, Member, are subject to the organisational review. You know, you would have mentioned the combination of the Ministries. Again, it is a new Ministry, so a lot of those positions that have life, we need to look at and consider and see what other short-term arrangements can be made.

7.10 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: There is a push towards more digitization, and this Ministry has been given a very special name: Artificial Intelligence. How many of the contract workers do you currently have fall under the division or the side of the Ministry dealing with artificial intelligence and digitization, et cetera?

Hon. Smith: As you know, Member, it takes a while for the structure to catch up with the changing positions and so on.

Mr. Young SC: So how many are employed now?

Hon. Smith: Well, I am giving you some context. So, it is almost impossible to advance the positions that you want specific to the name change. What we have been doing is looking at what the benchmarks are for this specific Ministry, and where we can, we have applied that as the logic for one additional resource and additional human resources in those specific areas. So, it is an ongoing process. It

is a work in progress, and we are hoping that, working with the CPO and the other agencies that we can get a better line structure to the Ministry purpose.

Mr. Young SC: So, all of that is the context. My question is very specific one—because you would be able to look at the positions and know what positions are on the public admin side—the traditional public admin side—versus those that are specific to the digital side, the artificial intelligence side. How many are over on that artificial intelligence side, digital transformation side?

Hon. Smith: I would say we do the assessment based on where the resources are needed.

Mr. Young SC: Is it that there is not a number?

Hon. Smith: No, there is definitely a number.

Mr. Young SC: What is the number?

Hon. Smith: I could provide it to you in writing, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Alright. Other Contracted Services, line Item 28. There was a spend of $2.4million in 2025 when it was Public Admin. That then went up under Contracted Services to $35million, a provision of $35 million for 2026. I see a Revised Estimate for 2026 of $12.6 million. How much was actually spent? The 12.6??

Hon. Smith: Well, Member, you know better than me. It actually is around 12.6.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I know better than you because I read the book in front of me. It says 12.6.

Hon. Smith: There is no need for the additional rhetoric.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: What was that expended on?

Hon. Smith: A combination of software technology, licenses, et cetera, all in an approach to advance the digital society, the digital government agenda of the Ministry.

Mr. Young SC: Would this have included, for example, the renewal of the Microsoft licences across the government services, those sorts of licenses?

Hon. Smith: Yeah, and they would include those. They would also include a couple other that we would have inherited LinkedIn, Coursera**,** Google.

Mr. Young SC: So, the licenses fall under this other Contracted Services?

Hon. Smith: Once the agency has been engaged, it will then move to Contracted Services, yes.

Madam Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 16: Contract Employment. Minister, what would be the recruitment process for filling the vacancies in this line Item?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for this question. What would be the recruitment process?

Mr. Romain: Yes.

Hon. Smith: We would recruit, and we would advertise for those posts.

Mr. Romain: Right. Any of the vacancies under this line Item fell part of the 20,000 that were under the National Recruitment Drive?

Hon. Smith: Sir, I think we have covered your questions on the National Recruitment Drive already.

Mr. Romain: No, you asked me to ask it under another line Item. So, I am asking under another line Item.

Hon. Smith: Asked and answered. Asked and answered. Thank you.

Mr. Romain: No, it is not answered. I am asking. Any of the vacancies under this line Item, were they part of the 20,000-plus that was advertised under the National Recruitment Drive?

Hon. Smith: Member, if there is an expectation by you to engage me in a juvenile conversation.

Mr. Romain: Minister, might I remind you that you are a guest in this House?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Smith: I must say, Member, if this is how you treat your guest, I understand why you are on that side of the Table.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Smith: If this is the hospitality you give to guests.

Mr. Young SC: "Dominic, this is de fella you beat?"

Mr. Romain: Correct. Correct.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Item 002: General—Item 002—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: If we continue with trivial comments, I will continue moving on. I will only respond to constructive questions.

Mr. Des Vignes: No, Madam Chairman, by no means—

Madam Chairman: I did not ask for any feedback.

Mr. Des Vignes: Not that. We are just saying.

Madam Chairman: Let us continue on Item 001: General Administration. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West had his hand up first. I will get to you.

Mr. Young SC: Madam Chairman, I thought you moved to—you did say 002,

right?—So that is where I am.

Madam Chairman: Your colleagues were in protest—

Mr. Young SC: To go back.

Madam Chairman:—so I kindly revert to him.

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, I do, yes, I do.

Mr. Young SC: No, no, you had under General Administration.

Mr. Des Vignes: General Administration, just one quick question.

Mr. S. Young SC: Indulge him.

Mr. Des Vignes: May I, Madam Chairman?

Madam Chairman: Sure. I said sure.

Mr. Des Vignes: Or sure, I thought you said no. Item 27: Official Overseas Travel, can the Minister say how many trips this $750,000 spent covered?

Hon. Smith: Member, thanks for the question. I do not have the specific number of trips here, but what I can say is that the attendance would have been for organizations that we have partnered with, or members of—they include things like the ITU, the CTU, and other specific ministerial engagements.

Mr. Des Vignes: Well, Minister, it is a big jump from $66,000 in 2025, so apparently there is a lot of flying happening with this Ministry in 2026. You mentioned going to different conferences that we are a part of as a country, but how come the allocation is $400,000 in 2027? Is it that we are no longer part of some of these organizations? We do not plan to go on those trips? Why the decrease there?

Hon. Smith: Thank you for the question, Member. It is under the remit of the Ministry to determine which conference, which organizations provide on an

importance to the agenda of the Ministry, so this would fluctuate from time to time. Also note that this allocation is for the Ministry. So given that the Ministry, as you said, is a new Ministry we are delving into the realm of artificial intelligence. It is a requirement for us to upskill our public servants and have them meeting and speaking to the persons that potentially are engaged in this particular area.

Mr. Des Vignes: Just asking, can the Minister provide in writing what the trips were?

Hon. Smith: When you say what the trips were, can you?

Mr. Des Vinges: For the 750—you spent 750?

Hon. Smith: I would have given you some broad headers in terms.

Mr. Des Vinges: I know, I understand, Minister. I am just asking if we can get in writing what the trips were so we can understand the details.

Hon. Smith: That is no problem.

Mr. Des Vinges: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and Other Functions. Minister, I see that you had Revised Estimates of $1.25 million in 2026. Can you tell us how much of that was spent?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. Of the 1.75, we would have spent $1,438,000.

Mr. Romain: How many conferences were hosted under this that spent?

Hon. Smith: Around eight conferences.

Mr. D. Romain: Okay. Would you be able to provide us with a detail of the

spend of each of those seminars in writing?

Hon. Smith: No problem, Member.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: National Information and Communication Technology. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Line Item 23: Fees, how much of the $60 million was spent in 2026?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. I am advised that around $40million.

Mr. Young SC: This fee is for what?

Hon. Smith: It covers a broad range of activities, Member. Microsoft enterprise solutions—

Mr. S. Young SC: This is where—what is it? So, these are the licensing fees here under this line Item?

Hon. Smith: I do not want to broad brush it, but I am going to give the other items as well. There is also Endpoint Protection, subscriptions, Smartsheet subscriptions, YTEPP learning, LinkedIn Learning, Oracle software services, and keep in mind as well, Member, we provide these services for the whole of Government.

Mr. Young SC: I know the whole of Government. But when we were having a conversation before under Other Contracted Services, you all mentioned licenses there, but this is where I know we normally pay for licenses, and as you say, it is across all Ministries and government services. So, there is duplication of that. I am sure you all would not make that error. So, what is it? Is it paid for here, or is

it paid for under contracted services?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. As you know, Microsoft provides quite a suite of services, so under LearnTT, which is one that you referred to earlier, that is more skills-based training.

7.20 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: I did not refer to any programme.

Hon. Smith: Well, you made the distinction, Member, you made the distinction. You are asking whether or not if this is all of government. I am giving you the separation so you will understand. One is based on learning activities, skills development and training. The other one is based on Microsoft Enterprise Solutions, which is for government.

Mr. Young SC: So, this one is Microsoft Enterprise? The one before was the learning facilities.

Hon. Smith: You can make that distinction, yes, sure.

Mr. Young SC: I could what?

Hon. Smith: You can make that distinction, Member, sure.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thanks. Now, you have got an increase for the next fiscal. We have gone up to $100 million under Fees. What is this additional $40 million for?

Hon. Smith: So, Member, a lot of this would be to advance, again, the digitization agenda of the Ministry. As I mentioned before, we are looking to reduce the skills gap for the public servants, increase opportunities for workforce development, training, et cetera. And this increase supports the agenda of the Ministry around three main pillars: digital society, digital economy, and, of course, a more

connected public service.

Mr. Young SC: For $40 million? And that is the digital world, this is not physical infrastructure, because physical infrastructure would not fall under fees. So, this is pure digital, an additional $40 million for pure digital?

Hon. Smith: I mean, are you suggesting that—

Mr. Young SC: No, I am asking a question.

Hon. Smith: I am trying to understand if it was hardware, if it would have been a different cost structure in your mind.

Mr. Young SC: Hardware, meaning what?

Hon. Smith: Is it that because it is digitization you feel it should be less?

Mr. Young SC: Fees will not include physical infrastructure.

Hon. Smith: This is based on, Member—

Mr. Young SC: It would include data centres, et cetera. So, I am trying to ascertain for the people what the $40 million is for under fees.

Hon. Smith: This is for expanded services, Member. So, with these solutions you want to scale, and you are scaling so that you can catch more persons in the system and train and develop. So, this covers our agenda of expanding the service to all of public service.

Mr. Young SC: Line Item 28, because under National Information and Communication Technology. That is a division now in the Ministry?—National Information and Communication Technology, 002.

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you. That is just a Sub-Head of expenditure.

Mr. Young SC: Right. And under line Item 28: Other Contracted Services, there was an Estimate of $105 million in 2026, a Revised Estimate of $90 million. How

much of the $90 million was actually spent?

Hon. Smith: Member, we actually spent $109 million.

Mr. Young SC: All right, so you spent $109 million. What was that spent on?

Hon. Smith: Member, the primary use of that is to support our GovNeTT infrastructure. That is partial payments to TSTT and Fujitsu, which holds all of our government data and infrastructure.

Mr. Young SC: Including the Cloud? Cloud comes under here?

Hon. Smith: Including Cloud, yes.

Mr. Young SC: You went $109 million this year. The $90 million for next year is going to be sufficient, or you will vire, you will come back, what will you do?

Hon. Smith: The reason for the projection is because we had arrears that ran over. So, this is now a more accurate estimate.

Mr. Young SC: So, this should keep you level?

Hon. Smith: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. No further questions under this, for me. I see my colleagues. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you, Chair. When the Minister mentioned fees, he mentioned Coursera, he mentioned the AI and other elements that are available throughout the public service, currently. Those things are available to public servants across all Ministries at this point in time?

Madam Chairman: Line Item, Member.

Mr. Des Vignes: I did say it, Madam Chair, 23: Fees. Because the Minister mentioned Coursera, et cetera, when he was answering my colleague.

Hon. Smith: Yes, Member. So, again, this programme falls under the LearnTT initiative. The Coursera-specific ones, again, it is for skills development and training, that is available for all public servants.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right. So, is there any element of ascertaining which courses are being used, any data gathering in terms of understanding, how many users are onboarding and participating and learning?

Hon. Smith: So, to answer your question, Member, yes, there is analytics behind the software, so we can filter and disaggregate the types of courses that persons are pursuing. But we have also, in our partnership with Coursera, identified what are the gaps in our skills development as a public service, and we have aligned the courses that we recommend for the public service to those specific areas.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay, great. So, is there any element of data gathering, understanding what the users require?

Hon. Smith: The requirement is to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, one. The requirement is to have the willingness to do the programme and complete the programme.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right. But not just Coursera. We are talking about all the elements in the LearnTT. Is there any data gathering to understand the actual users?

Hon. Smith: What I can tell you, which is telling, is that we had an over-subscription.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right.

Hon. Smith: And we had over 26,000 applications. We were only able to fulfil, I think, 3,000-plus in the pilot. So, this suggests that persons want to be skilled, they

want to be trained, they are interested in the Ministry and the Ministry's activities, and they want to be able to relate to the Ministry in terms of its agenda and its workflow.

Mr. Des Vignes: But are we understanding any habits in terms of gathering the data?

Hon. Smith: I thought I answered that, yes.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, you are gathering data.

Hon. Smith: Yes. The vendor has a system, an administrative system, a dashboard where we can analyze that information.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. Thank you, Minister, for establishing that in LearnTT, you all are gathering data.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Access Centre; Item 004: Information Communication Technology Division; Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services Division; Item 006: Public Management Consulting Division; Item 007: Public Service Academy; Item 015: Strategic Services Division; Item 020: Modernization and Service Improvement Division; Item 012: Information and Communication Technology Services Division.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 224 to 225; Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Access Centre; Item 004: Information and Communication Technology Division; Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services Division; Item 007: Public Service Academy; Item 021: Information and Communication Technology Services Division.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 003; United Nations Organizations; Item

007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers. Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 01: TT Connect Service Centres. Minister, I see there is an increase in allocation of $3.3 million. Could you please just speak to that increase?

Hon. Smith: Member, thank you for the question. We are expanding the TT Connect Services to more communities, more persons, et cetera. So, the increase reflects that.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. 03: Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 257; 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; Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund; Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. page 88; F. Financial Services; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings. Infrastructure Development Fund; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 31 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Smith: Madam Chair, I just want to thank the public servants who would have participated in the process for their hard work and support. Thank you.

7.30 p.m.

Head 06: Service Commissions $104,096,600.

Madam Chairman: I now invite Minister of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair, once again, for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Service Commissions Department. As we all know and are aware, the Service Commissions Department is the secretariat for four constitutionally enshrined service commissions and provides administrative and technical advisory services to enable the commissions to carry out their constitutional functions. The Service Commissions have been carrying out its functions with integrity, professionalism, competence, expediency and diligence, and has filled approximately 4,000 offices throughout the public service during the period of September 2025 to September 2026.

The Teaching Service Commission also falls under this particular department. It continues to ensure that its mandate of equipping schools with academic leaders and teaching staff are met. They have partnered with key stakeholders, bringing about a cohesive and collective approach to improving the education system in Trinidad and Tobago. The Judicial and Legal Service

Commission continues to ensure that the judicial and legal framework of the nation is both robust and equipped, with competent and suitable persons. The Public Service Commission, in addition to achieving its mandate, has intensified its efforts with other key institutions, ventilating ideas for enhanced coherence and long-term consolidation of strategic human resource management in the public service. The Police Service Commission, unique in its existence, continues to forge ahead to manage with leadership of the Police Service.

The plans for all the commissions for the fiscal year 2026/2027 include an aggressive approach to filling key positions across the public service, enhancing policy, enacting policy change through the revision of the regulations, increasing operational efficiency, continued stakeholder engagement and ensuring discipline in the public service. The Service Commissions Department is therefore pivotal in ensuring that the commissions succeed in achieving its mandate. The current allocations received will ensure that the department would be able to produce the trajectory of success that we expect. The commissions, through its secretariat, stand committed to doing just that as part of and based on the remit to provide a public service to benefit all of our citizens and future.

Question proposed: That Head 06 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $104,096,600 for Head 06: Service Commissions 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 Development Programme*.

We shall now considered The *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure,* page 29. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 13; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General

Administration; Item 002: Tobago Services; Item 003: Public Service Commission; Item 004: Teaching Service Commission; Item 005: Judicial and Legal Service Commission; Item 006: Police Service Commission. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 34; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme.* Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 11; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 06 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Hon. Smith: Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity again, and I want to thank the public servants out of the Service Commissions Department for all their assistance. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Head 23: Office of the Attorney General $337,003,700.

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Attorney General to make a brief statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Jeremie SC: Thank you, Chair. The allocation for Head 23: Office of the Attorney General for the financial year 2027 is before this Committee this evening. Before we begin, I should like to recognize the public servants and administrative staff who have prepared these submissions for this exercise. I thank them for their continued service to the Office and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The responsibilities of the Office of Attorney General as the principal legal adviser to the State and a guardian of the public interest are well accepted. Those responsibilities include the provision of legal advice and representation to

Ministries and state enterprises, the management and defence of civil litigation, legislative drafting, law reform and international cooperation in criminal matters. The divisions carrying out this work include the Civil Law Department, the Central Authority, the Anti-Terrorism Unit, the Law Reform Commission, the International Law and Human Rights Unit, and, of course, the budgetary allocations also support the independent Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

In June, I addressed the substantial outstanding legal fees which I inherited when I took office. The necessity for outside legal services provided by the private Bar carries with it an obligation to scrutinize carefully the costs paid for those services. Claims must be examined, expenditure justified and value obtained for the taxpayer. This principle applies to all claims by external providers of legal services, whether the claims are in respect of my own choice or not. Chair, the allocation before us supports the responsibilities of the Office. Those responsibilities must be discharged with competence and care in the use of public money. I am ready to take your questions.

7.40 p.m.

Question proposed: That Head 23 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $337,300,700 for Head 23: Office of the Attorney General is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We will now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 001: Personnel Expenditure, pages 146 to 148.

Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Law Reform Commission; Item 003: Equal Opportunities Commission, transferred to the Ministry of Justice. Item 005: Law Revision Commission, transferred to the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs. Item 007: Intellectual Property Office, transferred to the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs. Item 009: Criminal Law Department.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Law Reform Commission; Item 003: Equal Opportunities Commission, transferred to the Ministry of Justice. Item 005: Law Revision Commission, transferred to the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs. Item 007: Intellectual Property Office, transferred to the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs. Item 009: Criminal Law Department.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Law Reform Commission; Item 007: Intellectual Property Office, transferred to the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs. Item 009: Criminal Law Department. Subhead 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies: Item 005, Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move to the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund, Item 005: Multisectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings; C. Welfare Services. Infrastructure Development Fund. Item 005: Multisectoral and Other Services; F. Public Buildings.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 23 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Attorney General.

Head 04: Industrial Court, $35,844,500.

Hon. Jeremie SC: Chair—

Madam Chairman: Head 04—

Hon. Jeremie SC: —I have a statement.

Hon. Member: You have a statement?

Hon. Jeremie SC: With the Industrial Court.

Madam Chairman: Sure, one second. Head 04, Industrial Court, $35,844,500. I will now invite the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Jeremie SC: Chair, I am grateful for the opportunity to provide this Committee with an overview of the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago, its mandate, its functions, and the important role which is continuous to discharge in the administration of justice in the Republic. These remarks are prepared by the court itself, and I read it on behalf of the court.

The Industrial Court is a specialized superior court of record established pursuant to the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01. It occupies a distinct position within our judicial system, having been entrusted by this Parliament with the responsibility for the adjudication of industrial relations matters, and the promotion of—**Hon. Members:** [*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: May we please allow the hon. Attorney General to make his opening statement in silence. Thank you.

Hon. Jeremie SC: This is the Industrial Court, you know. The establishment of the court reflects a recognition that matters arising within the employment dynamic require a specialized deliberative framework, one which is responsive not only to legal rights and obligations, but also to the practical realities of industrial relations, the interests of employers and workers, and the broader economic and social

development of the Republic.

In discharging its mandate, the court exercises a range of statutory powers, including the determination of trade disputes referred to it in accordance with the prescribed statutory procedures, the interpretation and application of collective agreements, and the adjudication of matters concerning industrial relations practises, as well as offences under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Chap 88:01. Importantly, the court is required to exercise its jurisdiction in accordance with the principles of equity, good conscience, and the substantial merits of the case, having regard to the statutory framework governing its proceedings. The distinctive approach recognizes that industrial justice must be administered with due regard to fairness, industrial relations practises, and the maintenance of harmonious relations between employers and workers.

The court comprises the President; the Vice-President; the Chairman, Essential Services Division, and other members appointed in accordance with the provisions of the IRA. The court operates through two established divisions, the General Services Division and the Essential Services Division, thereby providing a specialized mechanism for the determination of disputes arising across different sectors of the economy.

In addition to its judicial complement, the court is supported by its administrative establishment under the leadership of the Registrar, who is next to me, whose responsibilities are essential to the efficient management of the court's operations. These judicial administrative functions encompass the management of court records, the filing and processing of matters, the scheduling and coordination of hearings, the preparation and issuance of court documents, and the provision of institutional support necessary to facilitate the court's judicial functions.

It is important to recognize that effective administration of justice depends not only upon the adjudicative work of judicial officers, but also upon the efficiency, competence, and continuity of the administrative systems which support that work. The importance of the court extends beyond the resolution of individual disputes. By providing an independent and structured mechanism for the resolution of industrial conflict, the court contributes directly to industrial stability, the protection of workers' rights, the recognition of employers' legitimate interests, and the maintenance of orderly labour relations.

Its decisions contribute to the development of industrial relations jurisprudence in Trinidad and Tobago, providing guidance to employers, trade unions, workers, and other stakeholders concerning acceptable industrial relations practices and the standards of fairness expected within the employment relationship. In this regard, the court serves not merely as a forum for the resolution of disputes, but as an institution which supports economic confidence, social dialogue, and the orderly functioning of the national economy. Thank you, Chair. I will take the questions.

Question proposed: That Head 04 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $35,844,500 for Head 04: Industrial Court 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*, page 18, Sub-Head 01: Personal Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: South Office; Item 003: Tobago. 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 the Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund, Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 04 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

7.50p.m.

Head 03: Judiciary, $579,454,980

Hon. Jeremie SC: Chair, I have an opening statement. Again, it is the statement of the Judiciary—of course, they are not Members of the Parliament. I read it on their behalf.

Madam Chairman: Yes. The Attorney General will now make a brief statement.

Hon. Jeremie SC: The Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago operates as an independent arbiter to resolve disputes that arise in society. The Government continues to work with the Judiciary to ensure that adequate funding is provided for its operations and to provide the necessary resources to ensure targeted improvements in systems and processes that affect the administration of justice in Trinidad and Tobago. The Chief Justice has stated his priorities for the year, which include reducing the backlog of cases and improving timeliness in the delivery of Justice, improving court building infrastructure and access to court services, enhanced performance monitoring and reporting, enhanced customer service delivery culture, and integration of technology within the court service

delivery framework.

The Government continues to support the transformation of the Judiciary to a high-performing environment led by the hon. Chief Justice and has balanced the needs of the Judiciary against the needs of the other areas of the economy and state. In doing so, I am pleased to announce that the Minister of Finance has been able to increase the level of funding to 1.07 per cent of the national budget. That should be sufficient this year to meet the annual commitments of the Judiciary for the 2027 fiscal period. The Government, through the Ministry of Justice, will also provide the Judiciary with improved and expanded physical court facilities and ensure access to court services by all stakeholders throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Judiciary has been allocated just over $733million for recurrent and capital expenditure for the 2027 fiscal year, representing an increase of $73million over the 2026 allocation.

The increased sum represents a provision for back pay to public servants and to cater for increased support services for court operations and human resource orientation, training, and judicial education for members of the Judiciary. The sum of $720 million has been provided to fund recurrent activities, and $13 million has been provided for capital expenditure and development projects.

In addition to the allocation made directly to the Judiciary, funding in the sum of $73 million has been allocated in fiscal 2027 for judiciary building infrastructure projects under my colleague's Ministry, the Ministry of Justice, which is the agency that is now responsible for construction and refurbishment of facilities. In the context of ensuring a properly resourced Judiciary, this Government continues to support the Judiciary and is committed to revisiting this budget allocation if required at the mid-year review to further support any critical

initiatives needed to advance the Judiciary service improvement trust. With that, Madam Chairman, I will take questions.

Question proposed: That Head 03 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $579,454,980 for Head 03: Judiciary 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, pages 11 and 12; Item 001: Judiciary – Trinidad; Item 002: Judiciary Tobago. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: Judiciary Trinidad; Item 002: Judiciary Tobago. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: Judiciary Trinidad. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Head 03 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Attorney General, once more.

Head 02: Auditor General, $55,641,200.

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I think the country

already knows the importance and the value of the Auditor General, thanks to the activities of the Members opposite, and we therefore hold ourselves open to questions, if such arise.

Question proposed: That Head 02 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: In the essence of time, I now put the question

Question put and agreed to

.Head 02 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: The Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Saturday, October24th, 2026, at 10.00a.m. Good night, everyone.

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