

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE OF
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT
CHAMBER, LEVEL 2, TOWER D, THE PORT-OF-SPAIN
INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, 1A WRIGHTSON ROAD,
PORT OF SPAIN, ON TUESDAY, MAY 08, 2018 AT 1.30 P.M.**

Madam Chairman: I would like to welcome Members to this meeting of the Standing Finance Committee. Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Orders 82(6) and 87, this meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is convened to consider proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for fiscal year 2018.

In accordance with Standing Order 45(1), the speaking time in Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on each intervention.

The proposals for supplementation will be considered prior to the proposals for variation, and the procedure we shall follow shall be as follows:

1. The Head and the amount to be supplemented or varied will be announced;
2. The Minister of Finance will then be invited to explain the purpose for the supplementation or variation;
3. The Chair will then propose the question that the Head be supplemented or varied;
4. Members may then seek clarification from the Minister;
5. Once this is concluded, the Chairman will then put the question that the sum to be supplemented or varied be approved; and
6. The procedure will be repeated for each Head.

So we will now consider the supplementation for the fiscal year 2018.

Head 15: Tobago House of Assembly \$20,000,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief

opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. We at the level of the Government have decided to assist the Tobago House of Assembly with a supplementary appropriation for fiscal 2018 to open up areas for agriculture, and to promote and boost agricultural production in Tobago, especially with the imminent arrival of the Tobago Sandals Hotel which will require a lot of indigenous agricultural products, which we expect and hope will be produced in Tobago first.

Let me just give some information. In the year 2013, the allocation for agricultural access roads in the THA budget was \$2 million. However, the THA found it necessary in that year 2013, to supplement the allocation by \$28 million, making the total expenditure on access roads for agriculture—*[Interruption]* making the total expenditure for agricultural access roads in 2013 in Tobago \$30.9 million.

In 2014, the allocation was \$5 million, and the Tobago House of Assembly thought it was appropriate and prudent to transfer \$42 million, making the revised allocation and expenditure for agricultural access roads in that year \$47.6 million.

In 2015, the original allocation was \$5 million for agricultural access roads for the THA; again they thought it prudent and necessary, all with the aim of boosting agricultural production, to supplement the appropriation by \$61 million, making the total together with another transfer expenditure on agricultural access roads of \$75 million.

In 2016, the original allocation was \$5 million on agricultural access roads for the THA, and they supplemented that with additional appropriations ending up with an expenditure of \$91.2 million.

In 2017, the appropriation was \$25 million originally, and they supplemented that ending up with an expenditure of \$53.9—actually \$54 million.

In 2018, the original appropriation was \$24 million, and looking at the pattern of expenditure over the last five years or so: \$30 million, \$47 million, \$75 million, \$91 million, \$53 million, we have decided to assist the THA with an additional appropriation, which will bring their appropriation for 2018 from \$24 million to \$44 million, which in fact is a little below what they have been spending for the last several years. So possibly the THA may find itself having to do some other transfers to spend at the level—*[Interruption]* Yes, and we may very well do further supplementals in the next fiscal year to assist the THA to improve and accelerate its Agricultural Access Road Programme. So that is the reason for the supplementation in the sum of \$20 million for the THA.

Ms. Ramdial: Good afternoon all. Minister, with the figures that you quoted with respect to allocations for agricultural access roads for Tobago, would you be in a position at this point in time to identify and locate the access roads that you are going to be constructing for this additional \$20 million supplementation that you have asked for?

Mr. Imbert: Not at this time, but we will endeavour or make our best effort to provide that information by Thursday.

Dr. Tewarie: In the instances that you mentioned, Minister, there seems to have been a supplementation or variation from the THA itself in 2013 and 2014 and 2015. I wondered why it was necessary now to have this supplementation come from Central Government when the THA has its own budgetary allocation and its own developmental allocation.

Mr. Imbert: This will come up in another Head, but the Tobago House of Assembly did not get adequate releases for back pay for RHA workers when the Ministry of Health in Trinidad received allocations for back pay for RHA workers. So what the Tobago House of Assembly has had to do is to use its funds, move it

around to pay the back pay to the RHA workers. In fact, you will see a supplementation in another area that deals with that. So that this is really replenishing some transfers that they have already done to deal with a problem in the health sector.

Dr. Rambachan: Minister, I noted that from the figures you called, years 2013 to 2017, that \$296.7 million has been allocated and used by the Tobago House of Assembly for agricultural access roads. When you add the \$44 million that is being now allocated, that would be \$340.7 million in five years. Has the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries or the relevant Ministries kept a check as to how many kilometres of roads have been rehabilitated or built new, and what is the relationship between this investment in agricultural access roads and increase in production of agricultural crops, or in terms of milk or meat or what have you?

Mr. Imbert: Well, this supplementation is really looking forward. It is not looking backwards, and you are asking a question about previous years which have already been dealt with in previous budget debates and so on. I can only talk going forward. I am sure this money will be well spent, and I am sure we can give some further details on Thursday on what the money will be spent on, and how it will boost agricultural production.

But just by way of comparison, the constituency of Tabaquite alone consumed \$250 million on box drains. So that I would not worry about \$250 million for agricultural access roads for the whole of Tobago, when one constituency consumed \$250 million.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister of Finance. In the 2018 PSIP for Tobago, it was stated at page 6 that an allocation of \$38.4 million was provided to facilitate the development of the agricultural sector in Tobago. It also states that under significant achievements in fiscal 2017 that 32 new access

roads were created. Further, at page 16 the Tobago PSIP for 2018 stated that \$36.7 million would be provided for the continuation of projects in agriculture which include agricultural access roads to provide for the opening of new access roads to recognized farm lands, clearing landslides, overhangs and cylindrical drains as well as to create a database and GPS mapping land use for agriculture.

Can the hon. Minister tell this Committee whether these roads were actually completed, and whether this additional funding will be used for new roads or the completion of access road projects that are not yet completed?

Mr. Imbert: I will give as much detail as I can on Thursday, but I am sure it is going to serve both purposes. I just want to make a point. Let us take the year 2016 for example, when the original allocation for access roads in Tobago was \$5 million. The THA thought it necessary at the time to spend \$91 million. They had to take that money from their allocation, so they had to move money around. They had to prioritize, and so on. So that obviously, and I agree, this is a very important activity in Tobago and I would see what information we can provide to respond to the questions asked.

Mr. Lee: The Minister had identified earlier that \$24 million was originally allocated, and now you are asking for a supplemental of \$20 million to take it up to \$44 million, and basically it is for agriculture access roads. Could the Minister identify at this point in time what is the status of that \$24 million that was originally allocated in the original budget?

Mr. Imbert: That is more or less the same question that the Member for Chaguanas West asked.

Mr. Lee: No, the Member for Chaguanas West asked PSIP.

Mr. Imbert: It is more or less the same question. I would give as much information as I can with respect to what has been done and what is to be done

with this \$20 million, including as much information as I can with respect to the original allocation of \$24 million.

Mr. Lee: Can I just ask a follow-up? I got the impression that when we came here today asking for additional funding, that the Minister would have at least brought some sort of response and clarity to what was happening with the original amount of \$24 million.

Mr. Imbert: You may have thought that but I will provide the information on Thursday.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. To the Minister. Minister, given this annual ritual of terribly under-budgeting for agricultural access roads in Tobago, and over the past five years, as you have yourself admitted, we have had the escalation of between 1,000 per cent to about 1,800 per cent, in some cases from \$5 million to \$91 million and so on, for agricultural access roads.

Tobago has spent more or less half a billion dollars in five years on agricultural access roads. Given that the Government is now interested in Sandals and that operation, would you be prepared to indicate, not only the list of new roads that are to be accessed and developed, but the process to be used for tendering and awarding of contracts and the names of companies that would be involved in this expenditure for the development of these new access roads to support the Sandals initiatives? That is some information that we would like—well, after you get advice you could answer.

1.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Are you finished?

Dr. Moonilal: No. I would like to continue, if invited. The budgeting aspect, would the Minister consider looking at the set-up of the budget in Tobago to

prevent this from happening again, where Tobago comes in the annual budget for \$5 million or so, and then ends up with \$91 million, \$71 million, \$65 million over a period of time, and to bring greater balance to this area of agricultural access roads, because it seems to be eating up a big portion of money.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Dr. Moonilal: And I did not ask about Oropouche East, just in case you want to—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I am surprised that a simple allocation for agricultural access roads in Tobago has spawned such questions going back five years and asking all sorts of things that are not related to the subject matter. But as the Member well knows, the THA is subject to examination by appropriate committees of Parliament, it reports to Parliament, it reports to the Public Accounts Committee or, I believe, it is the Public Accounts Committee, it also reports to other Joint Select Committees of Parliament, it makes a report, it answers questions. And therefore, all of those issues with respect to procurement, if they are not contained in the THA legislation itself which is quite self-explanatory, they have their tender rules. It is all published, it is all in the public domain—how things are done in Tobago.

And as a long-standing Member of the Opposition who has been involved in Public Accounts Committees and Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committees, the Member for Oropouche East knows very well what the process is, and therefore, all I would say is that on Thursday the information with respect to how the original allocation of \$24 million has been used, and how the \$20 million will be used, will be provided.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam, to the hon. Minister, following up from the Member from Oropouche East with respect to this pattern that we have seen of under-budgeting over the past few years, with respect to THA and these access roads, the question really lies: Whether or not the Minister has expressed concern at the THA Planning and Budgeting Division with respect to this continuous pattern that we are seeing? And if so, could the Minister provide some clarity in terms of what is the way forward with respect to the Planning and Budgeting Division of the THA, with respect to these issues of expenditure being severely under-budgeted?

Madam Chairman: Okay. I am not going to allow that question. I think it is in similar vein—

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—to questions that were originally asked.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, allow me a general point of clarification. When we do the call circular every year at the Ministry of Finance and we ask Ministries to indicate their requirements in terms of Recurrent Expenditure, Goods and Services and Development Programme, usually the requests are two to three times—and anybody who has been in Government, and there are Members on that side who have been in Government—usually the requests that come from Ministries and agencies are three times what is affordable.

So the THA would make a request for an allocation and they would be allocated a sum of money in accordance with the disrepute resolution formula which was settled so many years ago, between 4 and 6 per cent, I believe, and this is what the THA has been allocated within the scarce resources available to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. And the THA then will decide how to use

its money in the best interest of the people of Tobago.

But the question of the THA requiring \$5 billion or \$6 million as the case may be, and the Parliament giving it to them or not giving to them as the case may be, is really not something we should discuss. The requests we get from Ministries total \$200 billion and we have a \$50 billion budget. So we have to allocate in accordance with logic, common sense, priorities, historical trends and development needs of the country, and you know that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could the Minister just clarify that these moneys for the agricultural access roads would not be necessarily for new roads, but the upgrade and rehabilitation of existing roads? And these moneys are also in addition to moneys for the national reforestation programme and the CEPEP programme as well?

Madam Chairman: Member, I think that is encompassed in the earlier question and the response of the Minister, that on Thursday he would try to give as much information with respect to what has happened, what it is going to be used for, et cetera. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, if I were to take the Minister's argument in response to my earlier question, the argument that the Minister has put forward is, because it has been done before that we will continue to do it over and over again, that is essentially what the Minister has said, Madam. And in that regard, the Minister is not giving us a way forward with respect to the Budgeting and Planning Division of the THA, with respect to severe under-budgeting, and it comes back to the original point. It cannot be that we continue to do the same thing over and over again, and that is the argument that the Minister advances.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member, as I said, I allowed the Minister some latitude with respect to that question, but I do not believe that that is a question that should be properly before us for this exercise.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 15 supplemented by the sum of \$20,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Might I ask the body—Tobago House of Assembly comes up later on, I think, under the increases, and seeing that we have Tobago House of Assembly here, and their officers having the need to get back to Tobago—whether it is the wish of the House that we abandon a bit the procedure and take Tobago under the increases now, or whether you all wish for it to remain in its place? Minister of Finance, could you assist, please?

Mr. Imbert: I said yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Members, if you will permit, and I think it follows up from a question that was also asked by the Member for Caroni Central. If we could then just go to the increases and—if you go to variations.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the last item for Tobago House of Assembly is 62, which is on the same supplementation on the same page that we are on here. There is no variation for it as far as I know. Oh, yes. I am sorry. Yes. There is a variation as well, that is true. There are three items.

Madam Chairman: So Members, if I can just direct you to page 16. So, we are going to Head 15. Alright. And if you look at page 9 of the matters relating to the 2018 accounts?—and page 5 of the Schedule. Alright? So— if we go to Head 15.

Head 15: Tobago House of Assembly \$100,000,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief

opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. The Chief Administrator has provided me with the actual figures. The THA actually spent \$138 million on back pay for Regional Health Authority workers in Tobago. They did not receive any supplementations for that or any advances for that. So this \$100 million is to partially correct that situation, and as I said, the \$20 million for access roads can also be considered in that context. So the THA has put out \$138 million for back pay over the last couple of years—and for the RHA workers—and this \$100 million is to give them back the money. It is as simple as that. They have been using their overdraft and so on to do this.

Question proposed: That Head 15 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$100,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, would you be able to say how many workers were paid this \$138 million, of which you are returning \$100 million back to the THA for?

Mr. Imbert: Thursday.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair, to the Minister. Could the Minister indicate for what period, in terms of the duration of the collective agreement, that this back pay is being paid for?

Mr. Imbert: This is arising out of the back pay situation that was gifted to us by the former administration of which the hon. Member was a part, where they agreed to a 14 per cent increase for public officers and made no provision to pay them back pay. This is one of the things we have struggled with as a

Government over the last two years. It cost us \$6 billion to settle the back pay liabilities gifted to us by the outgoing administration after they—on the edge of election—after they raided the National Gas Company of \$16 billion. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Lee: Here we go again.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, the Minister seems to be all over the place this evening, and I will simply ask him for what period, and whether this represents year one, year two or year three of the settlements?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, the hon. Member was a Minister in the Ministry of Finance and a former trade union leader. He must know, that this is for the period just before the 2015 General Election and it is—

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Minister, tell me the period that is all, and whether it is—

Madam Chairman: Member, one minute, please. Member, please. Minister of Finance, could you assist with the information or are you going to undertake to provide it at a later time?

Mr. Imbert: I am providing the information, Madam Chairman, I “doh” know why my friend is in such high spirits. The period is 2011 to 2014.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Madam Chair, with respect to Janitorial Services and the Security Services, I see you have a common figure of \$42 million. [*Crosstalk*] Okay. Oh, sorry, sorry.

Mr. Imbert: Are you with us, Member?

Mr. Singh: Yeah. Yeah. I thought you had moved ahead.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Madam Chair, through you to the Minister, I am going to ask a question, the same question, again, that my colleague asked. Could the Minister state here today the \$138 million—how many workers this \$100 million or \$130 million affected? The number of workers that were paid this back pay? We are here in this Standing Finance Committee and this is—normally we get these kinds of answers from the Standing Finance Committee, not when the Minister is debating this budget on Thursday.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, just let me correct the record. Having been a Member of this House for 26 years, unlike my friend opposite who just arrived, [*Crosstalk*] it is standard practice—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, may we have some order, please? Member for Couva South, let us have a little order. Minister of Finance, it is very early in the day, if you are in a position to give the information, I would ask you to give it. If you are not in a position, then I think you would take, as your experience dictates—give the necessary undertaking.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam Chair. As has been the practice of every Minister of Finance that preceded me for the last 26 years, at the Standing Finance Committee, questions are asked and the answers are provided in the debate. So they will be provided in the debate, as has been the practice for 26 years.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Charles: Thank you very much. To the Minister of Finance, if, as he said, this arrears of salaries was for the period 2011 to 2014, and he knew the liability, because the agreements were made, what prevented him with that knowledge, from putting that into the current budget, or is it an oversight or lack of

comprehensiveness in your planning?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Fortunately, we have a very cooperative team in the House of Assembly, and because of budgetary constraints, we were not able to give them the appropriate amount, and we had an arrangement with the THA, that they would use their overdraft, and now the time has come to repay them.

Mr. Charles: So, why did you not tell us, when you gave your budget address, that you had underfunded this cost item, and that the intention was to come at this stage to do the variation?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Because of the debts left for us by the UNC, and the fact that you raided all the state enterprises, we had to underfund everything.

Hon. Member: Madam Chairman—

Mr. Imbert: The whole country was underfunded.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, I would just ask you please, to revisit that word, I am sure you can find another word, please.

Mr. Imbert: Which word, Madam Chairman?

Madam Chairman: I would not say the word, I am sure you are quite aware of the word.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Because of the fact that the funds that are normally available to a government—*[Interruption]*—Madam Chairman, I am trying to answer the Member and he is just talking. Could I be allowed to answer you? Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Because of the fact that the usual source of funds available to a government which is dividends from the National Gas Corporation, it is normally available to any government, has been available to governments for many, many years, because

that company is usually profitable and had built up tremendous dividends, because all of those dividends were taken out, removed, the fund of the National Gas Corporation was depleted—since you do not like the word “raided”—we had to make adjustments, and underfund the entire country.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. Hon. Minister, can you indicate whether the \$100 million that you indicated is an overdraft, is that inclusive of the interest that would have been accrued? Or is this a repayment where the THA repaid the overdraft, but in fact is looking for their moneys to be refunded? Is this inclusive of interest or not?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, what I said, is that in order to fund this expenditure, the THA used its overdraft facility. If in so doing, the THA has incurred interest cost, then that would be a matter for discussion between the central government and the THA in the next budget exercise, which will take place in a couple months. All we are doing here, they used their own money to do this, and we are giving it back to them.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister of Finance, could the Minister state what period the \$138 million in back pay was paid to the workers?

Madam Chairman: I believe that question—

Mr. Lee: No, it was not.

Madam Chairman: I believe that question was asked about three times by the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: But we did not get the answer.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Yes, thank you. Is it normal in budgeting when you cannot for whatever creative made-up reasons, you do not have the fund—

Madam Chairman: Member! Member! Member!

Mr. Charles: Yes Ma'am, I am answering you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. If we are all going to proceed like this, we are going to get nowhere. Certain objections were taken for a particular word, it was rephrased. Let us just do not go—I believe the Member for Tabaquite has reminded us that if everybody took an eye for an eye we will all be blind. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I withdraw the question.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah. Minister, this was in a sense a follow up to my earlier question. The concern I have with the supplementation from the central government is that the House of Assembly is according to law entitled to be treated in a certain way in percentage terms in central government allocations. The assumption in all of that is that there will be a certain amount of fiscal discipline exercised, in order to manage affairs on an annual basis given the nature of the budget. And my concern is that, not just the \$20 million allocation, but this \$100 million allocation, notwithstanding the fact that it covers arrears for salaries that the THA paid, is now being repaid by the central government. Now, I am not saying that what you are doing is wrong. I am saying that given the way the budgetary allocations are made, according to law, I wonder if this is the proper thing to do, and not let the House of Assembly manage its business.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the Member for Caroni Central seems to be completely bereft of knowledge with respect to the law. Because, this is in accordance with the law. The Tobago House of Assembly is entitled—Madam

Chairman, I do not know what is wrong with the Member for Naparima.

Madam Chairman: Member, you are sufficiently seasoned. I am sure you can rise above that and keep focus. [*Interruption*] And keep focus, please. [*Interruption*] I heard no such insults. Please keep focus.

Mr. Imbert: He cannot help it. Anyway, the fact of the matter is that the Dispute Resolution Commission agreed that the minimum allocation for the THA should be 4.3 per cent. But they gave an upper range of 6 per cent or a little more than 6 per cent, and this falls squarely within that range. In fact, it is much closer to the 4.3. So that I am afraid the argument that they should manage their resources, does not hold any water. We are well within what Tobago is entitled to, and we are giving them their just due.

Madam Chairman: So, hon. Members, the question is, that the 2018 appropriation for Head 15, Tobago House of Assembly be varied by an increase in the sum of \$100 million.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 15 varied by an increase in the sum of \$20,000,000.

I thank the representatives from the Tobago House of Assembly, you are relieved.

So we are going to revert now to Head 23, and this is at page 7 of the Schedule.

Head 23: Ministry of Attorney General and Legal Affairs \$30,000,000.

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

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. The appropriation that we that we are seeking to increase here is solely and exclusively for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. We are seeking to increase the allocation for fees for legal services and for other services, which include accounting services, et cetera, for the

DPP's office by an amount of \$30 million. This is directly related to matters arising from the collapse of the Clico enterprise, the Commission of Enquiry into the CL Financial Limited, the Colonial Life Insurance Company, et cetera. These moneys are required for the DPP in order to pursue ongoing work which is in that office and has been for some time, and which has reached at a very critical stage, so a specific request has been made for that purpose. As a result of agitations from the AG's office to the Ministry of Finance, we were given this further appropriation, and we ask hon. Members to consider dealing with that.

I would just like to add, as I come to a close, that last year our appropriation, we spent 73 per cent of the appropriation at the Attorney General's office in terms of our fees, at the office of the DPP, and we have continued therefore to give full priority to the work of the office of the DPP in pursuit of its aims and objectives. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 23be supplemented by the sum of \$30,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Could the hon. Attorney General specify that these fees to be paid, whether they are local or foreign legal professionals, and the name of the accounting firm? Secondly, can the hon. Minister also specify the status of legal issues arising from the commission of enquiry, and update this Finance Committee on action being taken to address the issues raised? Especially in light of the fact that we have been asked to provide further funding? We need to know what value we are getting for the funds being spent.

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the hon. Member for the question. I must remind that the Government, and any government—because it is a

continuum of work—has to respect the constitutional division between the office of the DPP pursuant to section 90 of the Constitution, and the work of the office of the DPP. With that in mind I can state that the payments are for local and foreign expertise. They are not only for legal services. In fact, the vast majority are not for legal services. This comes on the back of a continuum of work which is many years old. So, it actually crosses three administrations now. And I can tell you that the office of the Attorney General alone has spent upward of a \$143 million in cumulative fees in this enterprise, which is no small sum, needless to say. That is to be added by a further \$6 million in certain other fees that have been paid. This relates, as I am given the information, to squarely the Clico Commission of Enquiry and work which the DPP is engaged in.

The Government has been very careful not to interfere with the DPP's purpose. What is required of us is to receive the invoices, receive the sums. I myself have kept a very careful distance away from these matters. In fact, Minister Young has been pioneering, at my request, the management of these things just to make sure that all i's are dotted and t's are crossed. Suffice it to say, we are informed that the DPP's office is close to fruition. It would be *infra dig* for us to go any deeper into that exercise. The DPP has requested for the two years successively, the last financial year and this year, for further appropriations, and we have committed to that. As I said a "lil bit" earlier, last year we in fact spent 73 per cent of our allocation for fees into the criminal law department, which is the DPP's office. So, we treat the DPP's request with utmost sincerity. We treat with his provision for funding and for other facilities. It has been a very hard financial management, obviously, with the decrease in Government revenue standing to almost 96 per cent when we look at oil and gas positions, to find this money, but fortunately the Ministry of Finance has prioritized this request, and we are very

pleased to make it.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Thank you very much, Chairman. To the hon. Attorney General. Mr. Attorney General, there is a risk here that if we continue like this every year, and I am happy to hear you say that we have reached a critical point without—we do not need the details in terms of the critical point, but there is a real risk that we may end up here spending more money on this than the agricultural access road in Tobago. My question is, on the Criminal Law Department, 009, in the Estimates 2018, unless I am mistaken, there is no Sub-Head 23, is it that there was no allocation for this fiscal year for this purpose? If it is a continuing matter, a matter that we know is there for several years, and is likely to raise issues of fees and so on, why is it that there was no Sub-Head 23 under 009, Criminal Law Department, to match this type of expenditure, or to provide at least something small to go by?

And secondly, to follow up on the question of MP Singh, while it is very clear that we ought not and cannot be requesting information on the legal issues, and where they are, and where they are not, and so on, since the Parliament is responsible for the provision of taxpayers dollars to this entity and for this purpose, there must be some way that we can get a sense of what is happening without any knowledge, any detailed knowledge at all of where we are with these cases. Because otherwise if we do not have that we will continue every year to spend taxpayers' money on this matter and we do not know when the end may come. So, I am sure that you could give the answer without giving any detail or knowledge as to the precise matters that are being investigated, where they are and so on.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, hon. Member, for the question. So Head 23 is the Office of the Attorney General, and the subset for fees is a general block of fees. We have

been managing the payment of some of these items from the general block of fees. The allocation for fees in general is somewhere close to 25 per cent of what fees have been year to year. If I can give you an example. When we treat with the allocation of fees from the AG's office we have moved down from highs of close to \$200 million in a previous time down to the level that the current Office of the Attorney General does, for both legal affairs and for the Attorney General's office.

The matter of Clico itself is one which involves multiple Heads of expenditure. There have been expenditure from the Office of the Prime Minister, from the Ministry of Finance, from the Attorney General's office. The Commission of Enquiry, for instance, would have been paid out of the Office of the Prime Minister. Conservatively, we are talking about several hundreds of millions of dollars in fees and expenses in this matter. We are constrained in terms of details. The DPP has taken the caution quite properly to certify that in his view, the expenses that are being raised on this particular matter are reasonable expenses and we are very satisfied that the DPP, known to be a very conservative individual, and properly so, has certified these things as being reasonable.

So there was a general Head of expenditure. We were working out of a general block of expenditure and, in fact, made payments from that. We seek now to add a specific Sub-Head to that for the first time, because \$30 million is nearly 75 per cent of the entire allocation for fees that we had for the entire year for the rest of the legal matters that were dealt with.

With respect to the value for money exercise, the DPP has certified that in his view the fees are reasonable and required—and we do not take the word of the DPP lightly. He is, of course, a well-respected person, an office holder in this country.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: My question may have been asked by my colleagues; it is simply whether the \$30 million is specifically for the implementation of the recommendations of the commission that has to do with prosecution.

Mr. Al-Rawi: The \$30 million is part of moneys due and owing for services provided by legal professionals and accounting professionals as they relate and come from matters involving investigations into Clico and CL Financial and other entities and they are exclusively for that purpose. In total we have spent so far, conservatively, in terms of expenditure, as the Office of the Attorney General's Permanent Secretary has provided, \$150,675,011 on this particular category of expenditure for these particular services and that is for the years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 inclusive.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Hon. Attorney General, given that all that you have said before it would not be unreasonable to ask a reasonable man to give us a list of the professional services, legal and non-legal, local and foreign, the names of the firms and the sums of money to be paid. That is all. That is all. Nothing else, no other detail about the matter, but I think you can give an assurance that we can get from the Office of the DPP a list of those entities, local, foreign, legal, professional, technical, accounting and the moneys paid. That is all the request we have and I believe such a request could be reasonable. And apart from that I did take note so—

Mr. Al-Rawi: If I could just answer just on that part. I would want to be very, very careful about that. I would not want to engage in anything that would prejudice the DPP's work. An identification of personalities and sums in the cost of ongoing litigation could well be viewed to be something which is not the subject of disclosure for the sensitivity and management of the DPP's purpose. So I would

want to be very careful. I do not have that particular position and that would be a matter for the DPP and I cannot speak to that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. I understand that point Attorney General. I keep saying, by your admission you have said is \$150 million plus has been spent. We are now spending more. I leave it right there because I would not to—but could I just indicate, you said, I think correctly, that your estimate was \$40 million for 2018. Now, that was reduced by seven to \$8 million from the previous year.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: And now you are requesting \$30 million more. The \$40 million you have in fees here already, to what extent that has been spent and could we get then a listing, this is outside of this specific matter, a listing of the fees paid, the entities and for what purpose without requesting any detail as to the status of matters and so on.

Madam Chairman: Would this relate to the same payments under the Sub-Head 23?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, Ma'am. At 23 we are adding \$30 million to a pool.

Madam Chairman: Okay, but the question you are asking, because from my understanding there was no Sub-Item 23 before. So is the question related to this Sub-Item 23? Because if it is a general question about fees under the Attorney General, I am not going to allow that.

Dr. Moonilal: No, Ma'am. The Attorney General assured us that he was using from a bigger bucket and all I am saying is since 23 was not there before and you are coming now to put that, let us know what is happening to the bigger bucket that we are throwing the \$30 million in.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Sure. Madam Chair—[*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Just now. I am not sure that I understand that the \$30 million is being thrown into a bigger bucket. To me it is quite clear that the \$30 million is being put into a new bucket.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, in fact—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, let me intervene—*[Interruption]*

Madam Chairman: One minute, please. And therefore, I am saying to the Member for Oropouche East, if the question relates to the bucket as you say, Sub-Item 23, I would allow it. If it is referring to fees altogether in the Attorney General's department, I will not allow that question. So if you could just clarify and then we could move on.

Dr. Moonilal: My clarification is simple. The Attorney General indicated to us, rightly, that there was no allocation under 23; 23 comes now at mid-year and he was using before fees from the wider thing. All I am saying is that if you could give us an appraisal of the fees you used from the wider Vote which you were using all the time before this day arrived.

Madam Chairman: Which would have been related to this Item 23.

Dr. Moonilal: Which would have been related to the Clico matter.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. I just want to clarify, Madam Chairman, for the benefit of the hon. Member. This allocation is specific to the DPP's office and it has been ring fenced, can only be used for the purpose for which it is intended. It cannot be transferred or vired and used for any other purpose. Those arrangements have been made.

Mr. Al-Rawi: So, Madam Chair, this is a brand new pot and it is the DPP's pot soon.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I ask therefore, simple question, in that in the first six months of the fiscal, did you use anything from the fees for the purpose of the DPP in this matter?

Madam Chairman: And I would not allow that because that will be another Sub-Item.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, to the hon. Attorney General. In light of the legal professionals that he spoke of under this particular line Item, I know that the Member for Oropouche East raised issues concerning whether there were local or foreign consultants or representatives on these particular matters. At least, could the Attorney General indicate or confirm at this point that this sum also represents those foreign entities?

Madam Chairman: Member, I think, if I remember the whole discourse, this Sub-Item here relates to new payments to come, okay? It relates to new payments to come.

Mr. Padarath: And therefore, Madam, we would like to know whether or not this, with new payments to come would include, if it necessitates the issue of bringing in foreign consultants or attorneys to represent on matters.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, the matters I have stated before concerns accounting and legal fees. The legal fees are external legal fees and the accounting matters are a mix between foreign and local.

Mr. Lee: My question was answered, Madam Chair.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 23 supplemented by the sum of \$30,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so we are now at page 12 of the Schedule, Members.

Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries \$100,000,000.

I now invite the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Mr. Khan: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, the 2017/2018 budget was predicated on an oil price of US \$52 per barrel. In that budget also the Government substantially removed the fuel subsidy. This resulted in an upward revision in fuel prices for diesel and super gasoline. In the case of diesel it moved from \$2.30 per litre to \$3.41 per litre. In the case of super, from \$3.59 per litre to \$3.97 per litre.

However, there was still a residual subsidy of approximately 30 cents per litre. And this was due to be covered by the petroleum levy because had we removed the subsidy in its entirety, we would have lost the \$260 million that is paid as a levy from the oil companies. This resulted in zero allocation for petroleum subsidies, which is the matter before us here today, where we are asking for a supplementation of appropriation for \$100 million. As it is common knowledge, the oil price is now well above \$52 per barrel so in a sense the State now has to meet a subsidy cost for liquid fuels, in particular, diesel and super gasoline. Hence the reason for this supplementation.

Question proposed: That Head 40 be supplemented by the sum of \$100,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Point-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: Can the Minister state if this \$100 million would be sufficient or would he have to come back to this House to request another virement or supplementation?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Khan: It is uncertain at this time, but we are looking for a supplementation of \$100 million. It all depends on how the oil prices move up or down in the coming six months. It is hard to give an exact figure of how much it will be.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Would the Minister be in a position to tell us the level of subsidy per litre for diesel and super, latest information?

Mr. Khan: No, that varies every month. So I do not have the monthly figures with me right now, but when we put in October 2017, the actual subsidy on diesel was 45 cents per litre and I think it is 32 cents per litre on super.

2.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, would you care to say—how did you arrive at this \$100 million? How was this figure calculated? And, secondly, who are the companies to benefit from this \$100 million and in what percentages or amount?

Mr. Khan: Let me just answer the first part and Mr. Imbert will take on how we calculate the ongoing subsidy liability for the rest of the year. But this subsidy actually goes to Petrotrin, because Petrotrin sells its fuel at a subsidized price to NP, then NP forwards that subsidy to the people. So the subsidy payment is made to NP and then NP cuts a cheque to Petrotrin. But until that process is incomplete, Petrotrin absorbs the subsidy.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam Speaker—sorry, Madam Chairman. The appropriations here are variations of the 2018 appropriation which were proposed to this House by the Minister of Finance, not by any other Minister. So these are all appropriations recommended by the Ministry of Finance. The Ministers are here to explain certain

particulars with respect to the operations of their Ministries, but the actual appropriation, that decision is taken by the Ministry of Finance and by the Cabinet. So it is not any individual Minister that makes a decision whether to put \$100 million or \$200 million or \$300 million. The Ministry of Finance makes a recommendation to Cabinet and Cabinet will then determine what the allocation should be.

At this time, it was the view of the Ministry of Finance, and the Cabinet agreed that this particular Vote should be supplemented in the amount of \$100 million. If further adjustments need to be made at some point in the future, adjustments will be made, and adjustments can be made in many, many ways. For example, you would have heard of the situation where we are not getting the royalty payments that we should be getting from Petrotrin, and this is one of the issues with rising oil prices that, perhaps, not everybody understands. You look at the oil price, you see \$70, you say, "Wow, the Treasury must be getting a lot of money". That is not necessarily correct because 60 per cent of our oil is produced by Petrotrin, which has not been in a position to remit royalties to the Ministry of Finance. However, the liability then falls on the Government to pay the fuel subsidy.

So in reality, when oil prices go up, it may create a problem for the Government rather than solving a problem for the Government. So there are many different ways to deal with this issue, because Petrotrin owes the Government and the Government can always do a book transaction and resolve the subsidy, as governments have done in the past. The UNC Government did that when there were issues with respect to money owed to Petrotrin and money owed by Petrotrin. There was a netting off. So there are many solutions to this problem. So at this point in time we thought it appropriate to put an additional allocation of \$100

million.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair and thank you, Minister of Finance. But let me just ask another supplemental to his answer. Is he stating that the \$100 million block that he is allocating now to Petrotrin, it could be much more than \$100 million in the subsidy? And then the second question, maybe he might be able to explain to me if there is any subsidy still on unleaded gas, given where the—

Madam Chairman: I will allow the first—

Mr. Imbert:—given where the price of gas is right now.

Madam Chairman: Member, it is not a question of whether you could answer; it is a question of its relevance in what we are doing.

Mr. Imbert: I know, but I can answer it.

Madam Chairman: So I will allow the first question, please.

Mr. Imbert: The subsidy would be in the region of \$900 million if oil prices remain at the \$70 range. So that is something we have to look at. But we do not know where oil prices would be. Oil prices fluctuate. So that we are looking at it and we will make appropriate adjustments. The back taxes owed by Petrotrin is \$3 billion. So, as I said, there are many different ways to approach this matter. So at this point in time we felt it appropriate to put \$100 million for additional subsidy.

The budget was predicated on \$52. As I said, oil prices are now \$70, and there is absolutely no way of predicting this. You can make a professional judgment on oil prices and you can come close, but I do not think anybody at the time that we said \$52, thought that it would hit \$70. In fact, when we read the budget and we said \$52, there were scandalous remarks from those commentators that said, that is too high. You know? “Where did the Minister of Finance get that figure from? He pull it out of a hat. It too high. Oil would drop to \$20.” Those are

the kind of things we heard. [*Interruption*] Yes. Some of the usual scribes in the papers who read an article and then become experts overnight, said that \$52 was too high. It, in fact, turned out to be too low. We cannot predict. So we have put \$100 million in, and as I said, the amount owed by Petrotrin to the State, is far more than any subsidy would ever be. So we have ways and means of dealing with this before we get to the end of the fiscal year. Okay?

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Minister, I do not know if this is a great place to ask, but you said that if the rising oil prices continue, it puts you at a disadvantage on subsidy. Is that what you said?

Mr. Imbert: No. What I explained was that Petrotrin produces 60 per cent of the country's oil. We derive revenue from oil in two ways at this time, because there has been a period of depressed oil prices for the last several years. Since 2014, July, is when the price started to slide, hitting \$28 around February, 2016. So that we have had a period of depressed oil prices. As a result, oil companies have been declaring losses. So the country is not getting revenue from petroleum profits tax which is what the corporation tax is, in the petroleum sector. It is called petroleum profits tax. It is really corporation tax—tax on companies, on their profits.

But what the country gets revenue from is royalties, which is a tax on gross. So that revenues from royalties come off the top without any calculation of expense on profit and loss. Supplementary Petroleum Tax kicks in at \$50. For every dollar above \$50, we get 33 per cent of royalties for the shallow water areas, and we get 18 per cent—sorry, supplementary petroleum tax, we get 18 per cent for the deep water marine areas and the land areas. So depending on where the oil is coming from, we would get supplementary petroleum tax on every increase above \$50 at a different rate depending on the source—type of oil, et cetera,

because the price varies also, whether it is light, sweet crude or whether it is, heavy oil, et cetera. And we also get royalties across the board from everybody.

So that when the price of oil goes up, Petrotrin immediately has money for the Government by way of royalties and by way of SPT, because we have been above \$50 for a very long time. Petrotrin has not been making these payments. But as the price goes up, the cost of gasoline and diesel goes up because, you know, those prices of refined products are predicated on the price of the crude oil. So as crude oil goes up, eventually gasoline and diesel go up. And when those prices of refined products go up, the Government becomes liable to pay a fuel subsidy to the marketing companies: to Petrotrin, NP and so on—the other one—

Hon. Member: Unipet.

Mr. Imbert: Unipet. So that while we on this side acquire a liability in the hundreds of millions of dollars in terms of fuel subsidy, we are not getting the revenue from the primary producer of oil to pay the fuel subsidy. So we have to pay the fuel subsidy. We are not getting the income to pay it. So when oil prices go up, it is not always beneficial for the Treasury. It is not always beneficial.

Hon. Member: Sixty per cent.

Mr. Imbert: If we were getting full payment of the 12½ per cent royalty from Petrotrin and full payment of the 33 and 18 per cent from Petrotrin, it would be more than enough to pay the fuel subsidy that flows from an increase in oil prices. But we are not getting it from Petrotrin, but we have to pay it on the other side in terms of the fuel subsidy. I do not know if that answers your question.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Minister of Finance, for that clarity. Based on what you just said, is it fair to say that the country can expect an increase in prices at the pump—of gas prices at the pump, based on where the oil

price is at today?

Mr. Imbert: No, I would not answer it in that way. What I would say is that in several budgets now we have said we will introduce a formula where, as the price of oil moves, the price of gas at the pump will move in tandem with it. But we have not introduced that formula yet because we never anticipated oil would hit \$70. We thought when we made the arrangements—the previous increases—it would be sufficient for a \$52 oil price. Now, we have to go back to the drawing board and look at it and see what we are going to do. But what we did say was that we would introduce a formula as obtains in the United States, as obtains in Jamaica—if you want to use a Caricom country—and Barbados, where, as the price of oil goes up and the price of gasoline goes up, it is a direct correlation to the price at the pump. It is a formula that is transparent and the public will be aware of it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Could the Minister tell us how the subsidy is calculated? I am saying that because I recall years ago when I worked at NP, it was based on the ex-refinery price, plus the customs duty, plus VAT, plus dealer margin, plus retail margin, and if those in total were higher than the price at the pump, NP was paid the subsidy. Is this the same formula used? And if so, is NP paid the subsidy, or Petrotrin?

Mr. Imbert: Petrotrin takes “the bounce”, to use the vernacular, and the fuel is supplied to NP at the subsidized price and Petrotrin absorbs the loss on the sale of the product, and then we have to pay Petrotrin. Okay?

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Imbert: So rather than giving NP directly, we give it to Petrotrin who provides the gas at the subsidized price.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. As the Minister is providing clarity, and so on, this evening, this \$100 million—and I know, Minister, you indicated that our oil may not fetch the price of US \$70 as is currently—where it is. The \$100 million—because you said the budgeted oil price was \$52—what figure or what price of oil was used to arrive at this \$100 million supplementation?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: We did not use a price. What I just explained is that if the price of WTI remains at \$70, we estimate the final fuel subsidy bill for 2018 to be somewhere in the vicinity of \$800 million to \$900 million. But I might say that if you do a calculation of the average price of Petrotrin's crude, and you multiply it by 12½ per cent royalty, and then you look at the supplementary petroleum tax that one should be getting from Petrotrin, with the price being between \$50 and \$70, it works out at about \$1 billion. That is what Petrotrin should be paying the Treasury for the oil they are producing at \$70. We should get about \$1 billion out of Petrotrin in royalty and SPT.

So that the fuel subsidy should be fully covered by any increased royalties and SPT we get from Petrotrin, and that is why I spoke about the concept of “netting off”. Because they have \$1 billion for us, we may have \$800 million for them. So that it is actually a credit to the Government, of \$200 million. So rather than burden the appropriation with those arrangements, we have other ways of dealing with that situation. In other words, they owe us \$1 billion; we may owe them \$800 million and we may net it off. So that this \$100 million is not fixed to any price of oil.

And just let me correct the point you are making. Some of the crude we get in Galeota fetches more than \$70 a barrel. The Galeota crude is very good crude and it is close to Brent and will probably be getting about \$75 when West Texas

Intermediate is \$70. But the land crude produced by Petrotrin is heavy crude and that might be \$60/\$62. Not so, Minister of Energy?

Mr. Khan: About \$5 less than—

Mr. Imbert: Five dollars less he is telling me. He is telling me \$5—so \$65. There is always an argument as to whether it is \$5 or \$7. So that you have to look at the producing fields—*[Interruption]* No, that is incorrect data. *[Laughter]* You have to look at the producing fields and you have to look at the quantity of the producing fields. You look at the oil that that field actually produced, whether it is in Barrackpore or Forest Reserve or any of those other fields; whether it is Trinmar production, you get the production by price, royalty/SPT and you will work how much we get from Petrotrin.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: I am okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Minister, I think you said it, but just for clarification, that the subsidy is actually paid based on a levy from the oil producing companies and therefore—

Mr. Imbert: There are two. The subsidy is paid in two ways. It is either paid by the Government or it is paid by the oil companies. There is a levy on oil companies, but we only generate about \$300 million from that. It is a cap. So that the cap is about \$300 million. And if you have a subsidy of \$1 billion, you have to find another \$700 million. So it is in two ways it is paid. Okay?

Question put and agreed to.

Head 40 supplemented by the sum of \$100 million.

2.45 p.m.

Head 62: Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts \$2,000,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Chairman. The National Commission for Self Help is a state enterprise under the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts which provides assistance in the form of grants for minor infrastructural repairs and projects to individuals and communities. The entire \$2 million supplementation is to be used to provide assistance to grants for Tobago for people whose homes have been affected by flooding and other damages. Thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 62 be supplemented by the sum of \$2 million.

Mr. Karim: Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, might you be able to say how many such claims or homes that this is going to respond to, and the average amount of money?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Chairman. The Self Help Commission provides grants with respect to minor repairs, and those grants are capped at \$15,000. In addition to that, the Commission does projects which can affect communities and can assist communities. They have at the moment a pre-approved list of over 200 such projects and grants that can be allocated, and so the allocation is to provide the clearing up of that backlog.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, can you indicate over the last year how many of these grants have been provided to Tobago?

Madam Chairman: Member, I would not allow that question based on what we are considering.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, can you indicate how long now these claims have been made or outstanding? This allocation that is going to

be addressing the claims.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Chairman, there will be varying lengths of application times. It all depends on when the persons would have applied.

Mr. Karim: Can you give us a sense as to some continuum as to how long ago—what is the earliest and what is the previous?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I do not have that type of information before me. They would range, I would expect, from 2015 and onwards, and there may be quite a number of them that may have come from before that.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. In light of the expenditure of public funds and all that has been associated with self-help with respect to the revelations that have been made at the Joint Select Committee, could the hon. Minister indicate at this point whether or not a CEO has been properly appointed to oversee this expenditure seeing that that was a main concern in recent public domain?

Madam Chairman: Member, I would not allow that question.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 62 supplemented by the sum of \$2,000,000.

Madam Chairman: We are now at page 17 of the Schedule. Head

Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries \$38,000,000.

I will now invite the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

Mr. Rambharat: Madam Chairman, thank you. This supplementation is in the total sum of \$38 million. It addresses two Sub-Heads in the Ministry; two very critical Sub-Heads. The first is the Agricultural Incentive Programme. The Minister of Finance proposes to supplement the original allocation with an additional \$31 million and this is intended to meet claims made by farmers under the Agricultural Incentive Programme. The second area is the relief of flood

damage and the Minister of Finance aims to supplement the original allocation with an additional \$7 million, and that is intended to meet the flood claims made in this fiscal year 2017/2018. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Question proposed: That Head 77 be supplemented by the sum of \$38 million.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister for clarification. In the budget speech addressed by the Minister of Finance, he talked about an Agricultural Financial Support Programme with grants for new and existing farmers of up to \$100,000. Is this what this—

Mr. Rambharat: Member, we intend to launch that grant towards the end of May and that is an addition to this. So that is an additional incentive over and above the incentive that is normally offered to the farmers.

Mr. Charles: Could you indicate how many farmers will benefit from this increased allocation?

Mr. Rambharat: This particular proposal? Well, at this time under the Agricultural Incentive Programme we have claims for this fiscal from 3,951 farmers. So we estimate that close to 4,000 farmers will benefit from the additional \$31 million under the Agricultural Incentive Programme.

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister be in a position—again for clarification—to indicate which areas? I did not want to say Naparima, but which general areas are beneficiaries of it, or it is spread throughout?

Mr. Rambharat: Member, it is spread throughout the country, and let me just explain that in September 2015 when I was appointed we met—the way the incentive works it is paid in a financial year but it represents claims sometimes from previous financial years, and it is across the country. So in fiscal 2015, we made a major dent in the backlog by paying out in that fiscal \$35 million. The

subsequent fiscal year we made a further dent by paying out \$34 million, and again this year, this supplementation would help us to provide benefits to even more farmers and it is across the country.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, how many flood claims are still outstanding; and thus far how much has been paid out?

Mr. Rambharat: At this time we are dealing with 1,083 flood claims and the total amount is \$6.3 million, and the supplementation of \$7 million is meant to address those claims.

Mr. Karim: Minister, you answered the one with respect to the flood claims, but what about the agriculture incentive? Will this amount be sufficient to address all of the subsidy claims?

Mr. Rambharat: This amount will be sufficient to address the claims we have at hand.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. Minister, I understand the subsidies are being very important for the incentive programme and so forth, but without the access roads, I mean it really works against each other. Is there anything in place for access roads to be done particularly in my constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla?

Mr. Rambharat: Member, this is the sub-heading Agricultural Incentive Programme and the Sub-Head, Relief of Flood Damage. It is not access roads.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I will defer to him and come after.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Member, it is my understanding that some of the farmers in Oropouche West, the number or the sum they have proposed, or the sum that was sent to be paid for this flood during the hurricane Bret, the amount they have applied for is far less than what is paid out, is that so because there are some farmers who said they have made claims for up to \$80,000 and they are

being paid \$9,000? Can you do the clarification?

Mr. Rambharat: Member, the payments are made based on a well-established formula. The last time that formula was reviewed is in 2011 and the payments are made in accordance with that formula. The experts in the Ministry do the calculation and they effect the payment.

Madam Chairman: Just by way of clarification, is the notification not saying it is flooding during the month of October 2017?

Mr. Rambharat: Yes. Madam Chair, yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, can you undertake to provide, perhaps in writing, a list of the claimants with the sums that would be paid to them—

Mr. Rambharat: I could do that.

Dr. Bodoë:—and the areas? Well, of course, that will include the areas that they would reside in.

Mr. Rambharat: We could do that, yes.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister: Can the Minister state the Agricultural Incentive Programme, what is the size of those claims; what would be the largest one that is outstanding or due?

Mr. Rambharat: Under the Agricultural Incentive Programme, historically looking at the past five years, the bulk of the claims arise from vehicles subsidies. So farmers who purchased heavy equipment or transport equipment for their farms, the bulk of the claims arise from vehicle subsidies. So the significant part of what we propose to pay out with this supplementation would go towards farm equipment.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, in addition can you give an

indication of when these payments will be made; how soon the claimants can expect payment?

Mr. Rambharat: I cannot give an indication. As I said earlier, we are still dealing with claims from your administration. We have tried to clear the backlog. As far as possible we try to bring it up to current claims. These are current claims and it would all depend on the availability of the funding out of this exercise we now engaged in.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry, Minister, just for clarification. The items here states that during the month of October 2017, am I to understand that this does not only refer to October 2017? Because you mentioned claims arising before this, can you clarify?

Mr. Rambharat: Yes. The bulk of this will relate to the bad weather during Diwali period 2017, but, of course, you would have instances where farmers reported damage but were late in submitting documents from previous years. Field inspections took place and there were delays. So there would be instances when you have claims from previous years, but the bulk of this relates to bad weather in October 2017.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Madam Chair, it was asked and answered.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Chair. Just to confirm something you said, hon. Minister. With respect to the process of an assessment you indicated earlier that there were field inspections, could you confirm that these field inspections occur during the period October 2017 and thereafter?

Mr. Rambharat: Well, the farmers would make do. There is a requirement that the farmers made the reports in a particular time frame and they would provide 14 days. They would provide photos and other things to the Ministry, but there are

field inspections that take place subsequently and those inspections are based on historical data that the Ministry has. So the Ministry would have information on the historic planting of the farmer and the production from the fields, and those inspections will take place against that baseline documentation.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, what proactive measures are being taken by the Ministry to mitigate against further flooding such as proper access roads?

Madam Chairman: I will not allow that question.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, you indicated that the formula used to compensate farmers date back to 2011, having regard to your knowledge and your current status that you occupy and your experience in the agricultural sector with the inputs of insecticides, herbicides, fertilizers and nursery, do you think that there is need to upgrade that formula?

Mr. Rambharat: Some of the incentives are based on percentage. Like for example, field equipment is based on a percentage rebate. So as prices increase, of course, the percentage remains the same, but you have other things relating to the particular crops where the rate paid per crop is fixed. As I have said in the Parliament, before we have just actually completed a review and maybe by the time we get to the next fiscal, we would have reviewed and made some changes to the formula.

3.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, in the explanation here on page 4, it says specifically as a result of loss of crops and consequential flooding in the month of October 2017. So this \$7 million is just for that month. I visited my farmers in Tabaquite only last week and they are telling me that they have not been

paid for about two years of claims that they have made in the past. So we are paying specific for this but yet you have all these accumulated claims coming up. What are we doing about that?

Mr. Rambharat: Well, Member, your farmers are in a particular dilemma that we have to resolve and that is that while the Tabaq farmers are some of the most productive in the country—

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you. Tell the Prime Minister that.

Mr. Rambharat:—they are farming on the river banks, they are farming on water reserve areas as you know. We cannot give them leases. One of the things to qualify for the incentives and the financial assistance in flood, one of the requirements is that you have your farmer's badge and many of your farmers, because of where they farm, do not qualify for the farmer's badge. And I have said to them—in fact, after Bret when I visited, as you know, I have been talking to them, they have to be relocated. In fact, we are going through right now dealing with the long outstanding leases and when I see flood prone, I send the file back because we have to deal with these farmers who farm in flood-prone areas or on water reserves or other reserves. We cannot give them the lease and because they cannot be given tenure, they are not in a position to access support.

Dr. Rambachan: Minister, just to respond to what you are saying, you said flood prone. During our time in office as Government, we spent considerable time and effort in dredging those very ravines and rivers around those areas and except for the one big flood that they had in 2011 when we, in fact, increased the prices of the subsidies on the plants and so on destroyed which you referred to. Why is it that the Ministry is not, in the meantime, dredging those ravines and dredging the rivers so that the farmers can continue to supply? When Aranguetz floods, it is Tabaquite that feeds the nation.

Madam Chairman: Member, Member, I am not going to allow that question. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister be in a position to tell us whether any farmer from the Tableland Pineapple Farmers Association or the Iere Village Food Crop Association. Are any members of these two organizations beneficiaries of this Agricultural Incentive Programme?

Mr. Rambharat: I am sure they benefit from it. I am sure the Tableland and I am sure the Iere Village food crop farmers benefit from it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, what is the criteria used to award a farmer's badge, one, and two, can you guide us as to the formula used to calculate payments?

Madam Chairman: Member, I will not allow that question. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chairman. My hand was getting a little tired. [*Laughter*] Madam Chair, could I find out from the Minister—because I think he said that he is dealing with 1,083 flood claims. Could the Minister, or is he willing to provide a comprehensive list of these farmers and how much they would have applied for in terms of flood compensation?

Mr. Rambharat: Madam Chair, I will provide the information.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. To the hon. Minister: Minister, I was happy to hear that several speakers raised the issue about the Tableland Pineapple farmers, as you know, that is in my constituency. One of the questions that I really had and I know it is affecting several of the farmers, not only the pineapple farmers, but because they are producing in such a large scale, some of them have started

looking into the area of export. The question that I really wanted to ask with respect to the flooding alleviation with relation to that, is that with respect to that particular issue of the flooding, the assessment, do you consider the market price externally?

Mr. Rambharat: There is a fixed scale based on each—each commodity is assigned a value, and the compensation—what is given is not compensation for loss; it is assistance to allow the farmers to be able to replant and I can assure you, Member, if you are familiar with Tableland, pineapple grows on the hillsides and there is no risk of flooding. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. [*Continuous laughter and crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Order, order! Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Ma'am, I am not hearing myself with all this noise opposite. Minister, given the perennial problem of flooding and the perennial problem of complaints against the Ministry of Agriculture for delay in getting on the field, for delay in inspecting crops and so on, in our area, that has been a complaint that in the aftermath of flooding when farmers are attending to their crops, and taking their own remedial actions, so to speak, the Ministry's representatives and institutions are tardy and slow to respond. Have you been looking at institutional strengthening, human resource strengthening for the relevant units and institutions regarding flooding? Because we do regrettably wish to inform you that in the absence of major or even minor works in the Oropouche area, regrettably, we can expect more flooding in the coming days. Would the institutions be prepared to respond in a timely manner to investigate, enquire and look at damaged crops and so on?

Mr. Rambharat: Well, you know, we will always have instances of delay but I

think that the Ministry recognizes, the Permanent Secretary is here, I think they all recognize the urgency of getting out to the farmers and doing the inspections. I think they have been doing well and once we get this supplementation, we would be able to address these claims and we would be able to deal with claims in the real-time and not having to constantly deal with a backlog of claims.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Minister, I just want to suggest something. You know, flooding is an act of God and it is not covered by insurance policies. Is it possible that you could get together with the Ministry of Finance—this is a thought—and start a flood insurance programme for food crop insurance, a contributory plan? I think it might go a longer way than just taking this small amount of money, giving it to farmers which is just not enough. If you start a contributory plan for flood insurance, I mean, you might be able to give them much more.

Mr. Rambharat: Well, a lot of work has been done on that already. In fact, your administration commissioned work like that and ultimately, there is difficulty and maybe impossibility in having a carrier of that type of risk.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 77 supplemented by the sum of \$38,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Head 78, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Members, we are now on to page 18 of the Schedule.

Head 78: Ministry of Social Development and Family Services \$23,000,000.

I will now invite the Minister of Social Development and Family Services to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

Mrs. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' core responsibility is the delivery of social

services inclusive of income support and the maintenance of a safety net that protects our poor and other vulnerable citizens.

Despite our straitened economic circumstances, this Government has maintained its social safety net and continues to pay benefits at the established levels to individuals who receive senior citizens pension. There are currently 94,302 senior pensioners. The budget allocation for fiscal 2018 for the senior citizens pension—*[Interruption]* Thank you, Madam Chair. Budget allocations for fiscal 2018 for the senior citizens pension amounted to approximately \$3.5 billion and represents 74.6 per cent of the Ministry's total allocation. Approximately \$2.1 billion has been expended up to May 2018 and it is in this vein, Madam Chair, that we are looking for the \$23 million additional funds at this point in time. Thank you very much.

Question proposed: That Head 78 be supplemented by the sum of \$23,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Member, is it correct to say that you are dealing with a multibillion dollar Ministry here and you are asking for a supplementation of \$23 million to add to \$3.5 billion? Could you not have found that money in the Ministry?

Mr. Imbert: Unfortunately not. That is why we decided to give the supplementation. You have to remember the number of old age pensioners or senior citizens who receive the grant is a fixed number, in fact, it is growing every day. The pension is a fixed amount, the disability grant is a fixed amount. It is always very, very difficult for the Ministry of Social Development. In fact, in the last appropriation, we had to give them an additional \$300 million. It is a very difficult Ministry in terms of the number of persons that you have to help.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chairman. Hon. Minister, I was going to ask the question but Minister of Finance brought it very differently and that is how many pensioners started receiving the increased figure of \$5,000 as stated in the budget 2015 because the Minister of Finance said that it is a fixed figure and that is not correct, if we have to go based on your budget statement?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Let me correct that. There is no increase in senior citizens grant of \$5,000—to \$5,000. I am surprised at the Member. What we increased was the cap for persons who receive both national insurance and senior citizens' pension. We did not increase the senior citizens' pension to \$5,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister, how do you know—I am just asking. You are asking for an additional \$23 million for the old age grant and we are not against that but coming out of the Auditor General's Report for 2017, there were some concerns by the Auditor General in respect to the old age grant and, two, deficiencies were that they were requesting a list of persons which they could not get of whom a pension has been granted together with the rate at which and the date from which such a pension became payable was not produced and then secondly, a reconciliation between the registered pensioners at the Social Welfare Division Head Office and monthly validates on the NIB were not done since 1983.

So my question is that we are not against the request but how based on the Auditor General's Report and the deficiencies of not getting the proper information, how do we know that the \$23 million would be sufficient or there are not any—and I want to use “ghost pensioners” or anything like that?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Social Development and Family Services.

Mrs. Crichlow-Cockburn: Member, well firstly, that report, I understand, has not been officially released.

Mr. Lee: Yeah, it was laid in the Parliament.

Mrs. Crichlow-Cockburn: We have not received it but notwithstanding, the Ministry has its data and we are certain that we are paying pension on a monthly basis as of March this year to 94,302 persons.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, given that the Minister of Finance indicated which we have all know—hon. Minister?

Madam Chairman: Member, could you ask the question, please?

Mr. Karim: Hon. Minister, through the Chair, given that the Ministry of Finance indicated, which we are all aware of, that we are facing an ageing population, might you be able to indicate to us what was the percentage increase in the ageing population from 2017/2018 that would have caused this increase of \$23 million?

You did say so. The Minister of Finance indicated that the numbers of persons were increasing. I am using the word “ageing” that you are indicating—
[*Interruption*]

3.15 p.m.

Madam Chairman: So question is the increase?

Mr. Karim: The question is: Can you give us idea as to the increase from 2017/2018, the percentage of persons who would have been added to the list of pensioners then?

Mrs. Crichlow-Cockburn: As of October 2017 to March 2018, 3,278 senior citizen pensioners have been brought onto the system.

Mr. Imbert: Just let me clarify, Madam Chairman. When I said the numbers are increasing, it is because this PNM Government increased the cap. So, more people

are qualifying for old age pension because of this caring PNM Government.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. Hon. Minister, in light of the fact that there was an increase in the cap, how many persons have qualified to receive pension within that cap of \$5,000?

Mrs. Crichlow-Cockburn: From 2015 to present?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes.

Mrs. Crichlow-Cockburn: I would be able to give that figure at a subsequent date, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the question is that the Appropriation for the fiscal year 2018 be supplemented.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 78 supplemented by the sum of \$23,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Appropriation for the fiscal year 2018 supplemented by \$213,000,000.

Madam Chairman: We now go on to variations. Hon. Members, we shall now consider the proposals for variation. The proposals for decrease will be considered first, followed by the proposals for increase.

Decrease. Hon. Members, we shall now consider the proposals for decrease for fiscal year 2018.

Head 18: Ministry of Finance \$796,297,635.

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

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. As in previous years, the decrease is from the Infrastructure Development Fund because, based on our calculations, we

can release this sum from that fund to cater for the various variations. You would see that most of the money for the variations has come from that Infrastructure Development Fund allocation. There is still a substantial sum in the Infrastructure Development Fund that would cater for the Development Programme for 2018.

Question proposed: That Head 18 be varied by a decrease in the sum of \$796,297,635.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Mr. Minister, just to ask a few quick questions on this. What percentage of the IDF has been spent after six months of the fiscal year?

Secondly, the 796-more or less million is what percentage of the IDF? And could you indicate that, if at this stage, six months into the fiscal year, you are going to take almost \$.8 billion from the Infrastructure Development Fund and move it around in this way, which we will come to in a little while, what are the projects, the capital projects, to be affected? Would it be vehicles for the police? Would it be highways? Would it be roads? Would it be bridges? Would it be drainage? Would it be schools? Would it be health care centres? Would it be a sporting facility? Would it be lights, street lighting? Because clearly, if you have identified \$.8 billion, that you are—Mr. Minister, in a language you understand. You are raiding the Infrastructure Development Fund of 800—let me use a different word then. What is the word you used instead? Depleting. You are depleting the Infrastructure Development Fund of \$.8 billion. I will ask you specifically, and in a pointed way: What are the projects, in which Ministries, are to be effected? Because I believe you are going to crash the economy by collapsing the IDF in this manner.

So tell us what will not be done in the next six months to September 2018,

as a result of this depletion of the Infrastructure Development Fund. We will discuss later where it is going, but I very interested to know: Where is it coming from?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the precise details of the savings on projects that we anticipate would be made available on Thursday. However, the hyperbole of the Member aside, there is no crash here. The Government's Development Programme is funded from the Consolidated Fund and from the Infrastructure Development Fund. Our allocation for this year for the Development Programme was \$5billion and we had a balance on account from the Infrastructure Development Fund because as a former Minister, the Member will know that the Infrastructure Development Fund is a rolling fund. So we had a balance carried over, and this has allowed us now to take this amount out, together with the projections, in terms of cash flow available to us.

Because, as you can recall, you left us with the overdraft up to the limit. So we can only spend the cash that is available to us. So the net effect of all of this is that we are more than satisfied we will have enough money to fund our Development Programme for this year and the Infrastructure Development Fund will be quite healthy from this year going into next year.

Dr. Moonilal: My follow-up question: Given that it is stated in our document before us that you will not fully utilize for capital projects, funds under the IDF, it will not be fully utilized, could you state in writing for us these capital projects that will not be completed?

You have also stated, given that contracts have not been finalized as initially projected—so tell us what you initially projected and the contracts that will not be finalized, that will allow you a latitude of \$.8 billion. And the amounts per contract that will not be finalized, which project that will allow you this money that you can

put into recurrent expenditure as the case may be? And is the Minister indicating to us that that the Government will continue with a capital programme, having depleted the IDF of \$.8 billion?

Mr. Imbert: I wish we had access to the Standing Orders with respect to tedious repetition. The information will be provided on Thursday.

Dr. Tewarie: Minister, you did not answer the question of the Member for Oropouche East, but out of the IDF allocation of just over \$1.8 billion, the money that is being deployed for operational expenses/recurrent expenses is upwards of 40 per cent. But you said something that is not clear, which I would like clarified. I do not know if this 796-plus million dollars represent 40 per cent of the \$1.8 billion that was allocated in this year's IDF, or whether it is a rollover; it also includes part of the rollover from the year before. Could you clarify that for me? Or is it one and the same?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I do wish Members would read their documents and try and understand them. This year's allocation, as is clearly stated in the English language in black and white, is \$2.675 billion. The revised provision after we take out the \$796 billion will be the \$1.879 billion. So please stop saying that the original allocation was \$1.8 billion. The original allocation was \$2.67 billion. And after we take out the 796, we would be left with 1.9 approximately, which is more than adequate to fund our projects for this year.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Could the Minister commit? I do not know if we have assurance committee to take note of these things, but tell us as at the sixth month, what percentage of the IDF has been spent.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, that is tedious repetition, you asked that already.

Dr. Moonilal: I did not hear from him a commitment.

Madam Chairman: I believe the Minister said—

Mr. Imbert: I said it twice you will get it on Thursday. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member, Member! Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: It is ridiculous.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, please! Member for Oropouche East.

Mr. Imbert: Irritation.

Madam Chairman: Member, Minister of Finance. Member for Oropouche East, I believe I heard him say—[*Crosstalk*]—I heard him say that the information will be supplied on Thursday.

Dr. Moonilal: Well, Ma'am, I hear you clearly. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Madam Speaker, I mean, I heard the Minister say that he would give us the information on Thursday, and we understand that—[*Crosstalk*]—yes, I did hear that.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, please!

Dr. Tewarie: But I want to say, I mean, really development funds are being taken here for Recurrent Expenditure, and I think this Finance Committee is the appropriate place to ask if you are going to take development funds and put it in operational expenditure. What are the projects that are going to be, what can you say, not executed? Because we did approve a budget, and part of that budget was the development expenditure. So what are the projects that are not going to be executed? Can you not tell us that?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: For the third time, that question which has been asked twice by the Member for Oropouche East and now once by the Member for Caroni Central, the answer will be given on Thursday. It is now three times the same question.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me ask the question in a different way and be specific to the Minister. No, No.

Madam Chairman: But if it is going to be the same question—

Mr. Lee: It is not going to be the same question—

Madam Chairman: I am going by what you said.

Mr. Lee: I am going to ask a question.

Madam Chairman: Ask your question.

Mr. Lee: Under the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, Madam Speaker, under the Draft Estimates of Development Programme Expenditure 2018, the Minister of Finance, and there is an allocation of \$58,619,000 for Infrastructure Development Projects in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

One, development in industrial sites for \$21 million; two, development of new port facilities for \$15 million; and three, dredging of the Sea Lots main channel and turning basin for \$22.6 million, to a total of \$58.619 million. I am asking the question: Could the Minister state based on this reduction in the IDF if these projects in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries would not be done?

Madam Chairman: Member, I feel that this comes from under Head 18, Ministry of Finance. This is what I have seen here. So that I will not allow a question about the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Well, my question was asked in part by the Member for Caroni Central. But I really wanted to know whether there was a change in philosophy of the Government in that if you put money for capital expenditure under IDF, you are doing so because you want to stimulate the economy, and you want to be sure that that money goes into job expansion and diversification, and what have you.

So I want to know, if there is a change in philosophy that you are moving

money to Recurrent and whether the Minister is concerned that this is going to further stagnate the economy?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, it has been standard practice for Ministers of Finance, including my predecessor who was in the government of the Member for Tabaquite, to move funds from the Infrastructure Development Fund to Recurrent. It is the standard practice, and please do not pretend that you do not know that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: They move more?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Planning and Development.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: May I just add also that as the Minister of Finance said previously, this is a rolling fund. And so there will be times when we can take money out of the IDF in order to supplement what is needed in the Recurrent Expenditure. A number of the projects are being funded through the IDF and also through the Consolidated Fund. So it does not mean necessarily, if it is a rolling fund that projects will be stymied if money is taken out of the IDF.

And I am sure the Member for Tabaquite is well aware of that.

Madam Chairman: Head 18: Ministry of Finance, \$796,297,635.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 18 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$796,297,635.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the question is that the 2018 Appropriation be varied by a total decrease in the sum \$796,297,635.

Question put and agreed to.

Appropriation for fiscal 2018 varied by a total decrease in the sum of \$796,297,635.

Madam Chairman: We move on to increase. Hon. Members, we are now at page

1 of the Schedule. Hon. Members, we will now consider the proposals for increase.

Head 03: Judiciary \$18,193,195.

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

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Judiciary's proposed increase for Recurrent Expenditure is really disaggregated into two separate items. Firstly, the sum of \$8,193,195 for the Vote labelled as Judiciary Trinidad, Contract Employment. This is specifically to facilitate the payment of salaries to contract officers to the end of the fiscal year and to cater for following and filling vacant positions which were in fact in fiscal 2018, specifically for Case Management Officer, Court Recording Officer, Information Technology Specialist and Business Operations Assistants.

The second aspect of it relates to the very excellent project which is the Children's Court. We are proposing to add a further \$10 million into there, again to facilitate salaries to contract officers for six positions which we filled during the course of this year, being Case Management Officer, Court Recording Officer, Information Technology Specialist, Judicial Orderly, Court Rapid Text Entry Specialist and Business Operations Assistants.

I must caution that the figures that we are demonstrating here in the total aggregate increase for these two items of \$18,193,195. These figures are current figures and the figures that have been circulate in relation to the schedule indicate virements which have come to date. So that it is important that Members appreciate this as the current position and as we work our way forward.

We were, as the country is well aware, starting up the Children's Court for the first time, Family and Children Division, and therefore it was a moving target. And the Judiciary had to vire funds along the way, with the assistance of the

Ministry of Finance to make those courts a reality. Because the Judiciary has broken a record in having in 18 months' time, open for the first time, two courts in Trinidad and Tobago to treat with a specialist division of the Judiciary.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 03 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$18,193,195.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. AG, what is the total number of contract positions filled for this—over \$8million? And two, whether you all have additional positions created for this \$10million under the Children's Court?

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: The total number for the Family and Children Division is 160 positions.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. That was part of the question I had. But, could I ask as well, the Attorney General to just guide us a bit here. The sum for Contract Employment Judiciary Trinidad relates to 02/001/16. Is it that, in this area where you are varying \$8 million more or less there was no provision in the 2018 estimates? And second question, the Judiciary Children Court which is now I think 004/16 Contract Employment, you had a smaller figure of \$2.4 million and you have gone up to \$10 million required. Is this for outstanding payments to contractor officers or to facilitate payments only from the midyear to the end of the year? And I would like to request kindly, a list of the contract officers and positions and the new positions that have come on stream to require \$10 million in the event that it is for six months and not for the 12 months. The clarity if possible?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Sure, the Minister of Finance wishes to make a small intervention and then I will respond.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I just want to point out to hon. Members, there is a Schedule circulated to all Members which tells you what the original appropriation was and what the new one is. So that Members should not have to ask whether there was a provision. There was a provision for the Children's Court for \$5.73 million it is there in black and white.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, if I may. So, in answer to the first question to the hon. Member. Yes there was a provision and that is in fact by the indication of the two specific heads, Judiciary Trinidad which is 001, with the Sub-Item 16, and Judiciary Children's Court 004, with the Sub-Item 16. So there were originally Head Items.

Secondly, we are proposing that the sums move to take us into the completion of the financial year. So these moneys which are being increased to the Judiciary is to take us to the year's end. Salaries, of course, are paid for contract positions every month. What the Judiciary has been doing is viring moneys from particular Votes across into other Votes and what we have done is to really use the Judiciary Trinidad which is the larger block and Vote of allocation and feed it into the Children's Court for Contract Employment and for other expenses.

So the figures are going up, it is to year's end, of the 160 Contract Employment items—it is a rather long position to put on the point, I am sure that could be attended to if a regular question is put in the course of normal parliamentary business.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, just for further clarification, in addition to the original provision \$5.73 million which is indicated on the Schedule on page 1, circulated to all Members last week the agenda was also circulated to all Members

last week and on page 7 it states clearly under Head 03 that the payment of salaries is to the end of the fiscal year. It is there in black and white.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. AG, in relation to the number of positions, you mentioned the figure of a 160. Would you be in a position to state the breakdown between the north and the south locations for the courts?

Mr. Al-Rawi: It is just over eighty-something for the south and then the rest are at Port of Spain.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Just as a point of clarity, we are looking at the document that was circulated to us last week, which is what I think what the Minister is directing us to, does it mean that we should not look at the yellow books that we approved by the Parliament last when we began with the budget? Because, I was under the impression that this photocopy document that was sent to us is an extract from the books, the Estimates that were passed by the Parliament. Am I correct to say that the photocopy sent to us, is from the yellow book, the Estimates that were passed by Parliament?

Mr. Imbert: It cannot be. Because this Schedule indicates the original provision and the revised provision. The revised provision could not possibly be in the original document. It goes without saying that a revised provision is different to the original provision.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I further clarify, Ma'am? When I look at the provision Estimates 2018 in the photocopy page, I see one figure and when I look in the Estimates—

Madam Chairman: Could the Member again, as you say for clarity just tell us the line Sub-Item so that—

Dr. Moonilal: If I can just get an explanation, and I am sure there must be one, because I do not think the Minister will deliberately come here and fudge the data. In Sub-Item Judiciary 004: Children's Court, for example, I am seeing 16 on the photocopy paper, Provisional and Estimates 2018 including direct charges, transfer virement \$5.7 million. But, when I look at the book, I see 004: Judiciary Children's Court 16; Contract Employment, an estimate in 2018 of \$2.4 million.

Now, there must be an explanation because the Minister is not someone to come here and lie or mislead us. Not lie, he is not one to come and mislead us. He is a very honourable man.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, I indicated in my opening statement that the figures that were on the table right now included the virement figures from Judiciary Trinidad. So whilst I understand that my learned friend is seeking certain clarification, et cetera, I did specifically at the outset indicate that the Judiciary has been managing its affairs. And, in fact, the figures that we have here in this new schedule Item really refer to the current position. So, we are in the no-man's-land between the original yellow book items where we are today and the document in the schedule is the brand new information that we have as circulated.

Dr. Moonilal: So the budget document that was approved by the Parliament, could we now put it away—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Yes, yes.

Dr. Moonilal:—and look at these photocopied documents we have. Because this is what the Parliament approved for a specific purpose. There was no other approval by the Parliament until you come for a midterm review, what you are doing now. So are you inviting us to look a new figures as the current position that was not approved—that is the question because there are other discrepancies of if you can

explain one, I imagine it would hold for everything else.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, first let me put on the record there are no discrepancies. The original provision could not possibly contemplate transfers and virements after the budget was passed. It was an original provision. As the Member would very well know, throughout the year Ministries are allowed to transfer within items. You do not have transfers within Heads because that is why we are here. So if you want to move an appropriation from a Head, such as Head 18 to Head 20, you come to the Parliament and you seek a variation of appropriation between one Head of Expenditure such as Judiciary and another Head of Expenditure such as the Tax Appeal Board. But within Items, the Member very well knows that the Minister of Finance is empowered to approve transfers and virements from one Item to another.

3.45 p.m.

So the Judiciary, for example, may have had a provision for a particular Item, the purchase of a vehicle—let us just use that as an example—and they may wish to vire that to another Item such as the purchase of a piece of equipment. So that the Permanent Secretary would apply to the Minister of Finance for approval to transfer from an Item—and I am making the distinction between an Item, which is a particular appropriation within a Head—a Head being a Ministry or an entity such as the Judiciary, that is a Head—and you have Items within that Head, and Sub-Items.

The entities are allowed to apply for approval—apply to the Minister of Finance for approval—to transfer funds and, therefore, what you would find, is that after the budget has been read and passed, at some point in time—a month

later, two months later, three months later or six months later as we are here now—the original provision in a particular Item such as the one we are discussing, which is, 02/001/16—Contract Employment, now \$54.17 million, that is as a result of virements and transfers that would have taken place after the budget. So the figure here may match the figure in the yellow book, if there have been no virements and transfers, but it could not possibly match the figure in the yellow book, if there were virements and transfers, and you know that.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I further clarify?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, before the Member jumps in, I just refer the Member on to the first page of the Schedule. The column is headed: “Provision in Estimates 2018 including Direct Charges, Transfers and Virements” and that table, therefore, sets out exactly what the Minister of Finance has put out, which is that the virements are at the current position.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I then further clarify whether Parliament needs to approve the decision of the Minister to vire outside of the IDF?

Mr. Imbert: No. No. You very well know it is not so.

Dr. Moonilal: So that you are coming here today with different figures from what was passed in the Parliament.

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is not correct.

Dr. Moonilal: No, it has to be different because you are dealing with virement transfers as well.

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is within the Vote. The virement comes from Judiciary.

Dr. Moonilal: So that it will make no sense really to be focusing on the yellow book at this stage, because in all the areas you have significant virements.

[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, just let me clarify something. We have the closing of the accounts every year. Now, I am very surprised. You are an experienced Member, Madam Chairman, through you, a very experienced Member, and you know that—[*Crosstalk*] Madam Chairman, this is for the public, because the Member is being mischievous. Every year we have closing of accounts. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Could we have one— Order! Order! Order! The Member for Oropouche East made a particular enquiry and the particularly enquiry was taken in a particular context. I will allow the Minister of Finance to answer. Any other Member who wishes to speak after, if he catches my eye, will be given the opportunity.

Dr. Moonilal: Ma'am, will you allow him to insult?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, could you kindly answer the question and, as you said, it is for the benefit of the public, if it can be packaged in a particular way so that the members of the public could—

Mr. Imbert: Certainly. Madam Chairman, as the Member for Oropouche East is well aware, having been a Member of Cabinet for several years, the Minister of Finance is authorized to approve transfers and virements within Heads. At the end of the year, we have an event in this Parliament, where there is full debate on the closing of the accounts for the fiscal year.

At that time, Madam Speaker, all of the virements, transfers and movements of money between Items, Heads, Sub-Items, et cetera, are debated in this Parliament and approved by this Parliament, and it is a public record. So the Member for Oropouche East very well knows that a Minister of Finance can approve virements and transfers within heads during the fiscal year, and has to

come with a closing of accounts at the end of the year. So this is no mystery. There is nothing new about this and it is just wrong to pretend that it is something out of the ordinary.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just for clarification, Attorney General, because I could recollect you said it is 160 contract positions, and I noticed that in both instances as it relates to the Children Court and the Judiciary, Business Operations Assistants, plural, in both instances. Could you clarify for us how many Business Operations Assistants are being recruited in both instances?

Mr. Al-Rawi: I could not immediately, Madam Chair. That is very granular information. And, again, this is an exercise of the JLSC and a very independent position. So, several is the answer. Business Operations Assistants are an essential part of the operation. It used to be called secretarial assistants—of a different type now. So it is to assist in the administration of the workings of the court.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: The Member for Couva South just asked that similar question, Madam Chairperson. I just needed to know the role and function of the—because in judicial jargon I have never heard of the Business Operations Assistant, so that is why I would just like to clarify—

Mr. Al-Rawi: It is actually a post which is across the entire public sector. It is not a judicial jargon terminology. So in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, the Personal Assistant, your assistant is called your Business Operations Assistant—your BOA, level I, level II, et cetera. So it is a public service position, so categorized by the Management Division of the Ministry of

Public Administration and Communications, and it has been a feature of the current system for a very long time now.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 03 varied by an increase in the sum of \$18,193,195.

Madam Chairman: I thank the Minister and the representatives from the Judiciary. Head 06, Service Commissions. Hon. Members, we are now on page 2 of the Schedule.

Head 06: Service Commissions \$1,376,570.

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

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. And, Madam Chairman, for the benefit of the Member for Oropouche East, in particular, the information with respect to these appropriations, variations—is found on page 7 of the agenda document circulated last Wednesday by the Parliament to all Members. I shall now read from page 7 for the benefit of the Member for Oropouche East, in particular:

“Funds are required for the payment of arrears of acting allowances, increments and also for the payment of Salaries to the end of the year for recently filled positions.”

And, secondly:

“Funds are required to meet expenditure to the end of the fiscal year as contract positions for Pension and Leave Officers, Business Operations Assistants and Legal Officers were filled.”

That is it.

Madam Chairman: Is your statement complete, Minister?

Mr. Imbert: That is my statement.

Question proposed: That Head 06 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$1,376,570.

Dr. Bodeo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, could you indicate how many Pension and Leave Officers—?

Mr. Imbert: Two. [*Laughter*]

Question put and agreed to.

Head 06 varied by an increase in the sum of \$1,376,570.

Madam Chairman: Thank you to the representatives from Service Commissions.

Head 09: Tax Appeal Board, and for the information of Members, we are now on page 3 of the Schedule. And we are now on page 8 of the agenda.

Head 09: Tax Appeal Board \$908,770.

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

Mr. Imbert: Yes I think, Madam Chairman, the best thing to do is to read from the document that was circulated to all Members of the Opposition last Wednesday. Page 8. I think that is the best thing to do. We require additional funding of \$614,770 under Head 09, 02/001/16, Contract Employment.

“Funds are required to meet shortfall due to payment of arrears of Salary for one IT Specialist and a former Business Operations Assistant I and also for the renewal of contracts for two (2) CAT Reporters, one (1) Driver/Courier and one (1) IT Specialist.”

Funds are also required under 02/001/23, Fees, in the amount of \$294,000 to pay for:

“the annual subscription of the Lexis Nexis and EOS Web Integrated Library System for the years 2017 and 2018.”

—making a total supplementation or variation for the Tax Appeal Board in the amount of \$908,770.

Question proposed: That Head 09 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$908,770.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 09 varied by an increase in the sum of \$908,770.

Madam Chairman: I thank the Registrar and the other representatives from the Tax Appeal Board. We are going on now to Head 13, Office of the Prime Minister, and for the guidance of Members, we are on page 4 of the Schedule and we are at page 8 of the agenda.

Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister \$10,000,000.

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

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I will defer to the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister behind me.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Chair. Funds are required to facilitate payment of an outstanding invoice to the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago for repairs and maintenance to a building located at 13—15 St. Clair Avenue, St. Clair, the Office of the Prime Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 13 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$10,000,000.

4.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chair, at the risk of incurring the wrath of the Minister of Finance and the insult of the Minister of Finance, I just wanted to again seek clarification. In our Schedule which we got last week, page 4, I am seeing Sub-Head—I am on page 4, Ma'am—04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, under which there is a Sub-Item, 011, Transfers to State Enterprises. I read that correctly, I think. In our Estimates of Expenditure, under the Office of the Prime Minister, Head 13, there is an 04 called Current Transfers and Subsidies. So far, I think I read that as well. But under this, I see 003 and 01, I am now seeing 011. I am just seeking some clarification here whether the 011 for NIPDEC—is it? Was anything in the original budget for that? But I am sure the Member could quickly explain that.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, please assist.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam Chairman, we were inflicted by some Ministers in the last five years, including the Member for Oropouche East, who knows, from his long experience as a Cabinet Minister for five years and three months, that the Minister of Finance and the Ministry of Finance is empowered under the law to create Sub-Items during the year as and when the need arises. In this particular case, the loans, the NIPDEC loan was finalized after the passage of the annual budget. So that the new Items 011, 02 and 03 were created by the Ministry of Finance during the last six months. Again, this is standard practice. All of my predecessors have done this. We are empowered to do that. We are allowed to do that. We can do that, and it has been done.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: You are saying that during the last six months you created a Sub-Item and placed it under the Office of the Prime Minister to treat with a NIPDEC loan for construction. Could I ask why we would do that in this way, as

opposed to working it out with a Ministry, with your own Ministry of Finance, for example, or the Ministry of Works and Transport? Why would you create a Sub-Item under the Office of the Prime Minister specifically to deal with a loan arrangement for what would be essentially construction?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: As the Member who was a Minister for five years and three months knows, the former Government proclaimed the Children Act without putting the necessary infrastructure in place to deal with children at risk, and having done that, proclaimed the Act without the infrastructure in place, then went to court—went to court. The former Attorney General who proclaimed the Act, then went to court knowing that what he had done was wrong and sued this Government for not having the necessary children's homes and children's infrastructure—I do not know how to describe that—how you could proclaim an Act knowing that it is deficient, and then—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: But that was not my question.

Mr. Imbert: I am explaining. I am explaining the reason for this. So that your Government proclaimed the Children Act knowing fully well that children's homes and homes for children at risk did not exist within the confines of that law—proclaimed that Act under your tenure, then came and sued this Government for not having the necessary infrastructure. Your former Attorney General did that. I just cannot believe it still. I am saying it and I cannot believe it. And, therefore, what this Government had to do, after that act of—I “doh” know what to call that action. I “doh” want to use an unparliamentary word, but after that atrocity was committed, we, in this Government had to go with speed, with lightning speed to engage a state enterprise, in this particular case NIPDEC, to hustle and do the construction work because we were given deadlines by the court, as a result of the

proclamation of an incomplete system by your Government; \$100,000 a child is what it is costing your inaction, your incompetence. Your ineptitude has led to these NIPDEC loans which we have created.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: I want to assure the Minister—[*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Order. I am sure you are having difficulty hearing yourself and me in this scenario. Order, please.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chairman, I just want to clarify from the Member, my question was simply put as to why the Office of the Prime Minister—I now understand that Anand Ramlogan caused a Sub-Item for you to put under the Office of the Prime Minister, as opposed to the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Works and Transport, or any other place that was—the Office of the Prime Minister was best suited to create a new Sub-Item for you.

Mr. Imbert: It was a disgrace. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima. Order, please. Order, please. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, and hopefully he will answer in an appropriate and curt manner, and a succinct manner. The question is, Item 40/011/03, Interest Payment on a \$56 million loan, Modernization programmes for the St. Michael's School for Boys, et cetera—and I read recently where the school is going to be closed, and all I am asking—no insults—all I am asking is if money is going to be spent, taxpayers' money is going to be spent, are we going to find some alternative use so that we could get value for money?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, I will ask you to be courteous not curt.

Mr. Imbert: I know, I think that is what he meant.

Madam Chairman: I will ask you to be courteous.

Mr. Imbert: I think that is what he meant—struggling with the English language.

Madam Chairman: Member, Member, please just answer courteously.

Mr. Imbert: I am being very courteous. I can assure you I am being very courteous. The point is that this is a loan that we were forced to take out and to construct new facilities because of those legal challenges brought upon this country by your Government, who proclaimed an Act where there was no infrastructure, and then after you lost to Government, ran to the court and sued this Government for your incompleteness of those projects. With respect to the situation with the St. Michael's School for Boys, we were forced to do that, and this is simply an interest payment on a loan already taken out. With respect to the St. Michael's School for Boys and the plans going forward, I will defer to the hon. Minister behind me.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: In terms of the plans going forward for St. Michael's, the Anglican Church, as well as the Government, reserve the right to continue another arrangement going forward. The Church has indicated that they are interested in the care and protection of children in need of supervision.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: To the Minister of Finance, could it be that you were sued because of your sloth in getting action done to facilitate the Act?

Madam Chairman: I will not allow that question. I will not allow that question, and, therefore, hon. Members—[*Interruption*] Member for Oropouche East. [*Interruption*] That was not a question.

Dr. Moonilal: I am just following up, is the Minister—[*Interruption*] I am speaking now. I am on the floor. Is the Minister of Finance saying—[*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: I thought you recognized me, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: I thought you recognized me. I am not hearing you because of the noise that is emanating—

Madam Chairman: Member Oropouche East, please proceed.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Thank you very much, Ma'am. Is the Minister saying that given the circumstances he found himself in, he was forced to take a loan of \$56 million? Had you not purchased Massy Communications for a quarter-billion dollars, you could have used that money.

Madam Chairman: Is it going to be the Attorney General or the Minister of Finance who is answering? Okay. So we shall proceed with the Attorney General and then the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, you talk first. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, there was a very important point raised by the Member for Naparima, and there was a rather salacious point put forward. The comment specifically was the Government was sued because of its sloth. I want to put on the record, whilst I was being sworn in as Attorney General on the 9th of September, 2015, in the middle of the swearing in ceremony I had to take a phone call because the court had been moved by Anand Ramlogan in a particular matter to deal with the State having been found in a case where there were no child rehabilitation centres, notwithstanding that the law had been proclaimed by the Attorney General for the UNC. So I cannot fathom for a moment how one could be slothful if the call from the court on an injunction basis, arrives at the moment that you are being sworn in as Attorney General for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. And it was important to put that on the record, because these very irresponsible statements can have legs and wings, and take flight in very mischievous ways, if other persons grab them the way they are sold. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: To summarize, Madam Chairman, the reason why, and it is standard practice, standard practice—the Member for Oropouche East was at one time—fortunately not for long—in charge of UDeCOTT, and the Member would know that from time to time under his administration—and we have an Item coming up which was done under his administration—that state enterprises such as UDeCOTT, for example, would be tasked by Cabinet to go and borrow money with a Government guarantee and then the Minister of Finance will put the appropriation for debt servicing within the Head and the Item related to that particular entity. The idea of giving NIPDEC an appropriation to do work by way of loan financing for the Office of the Prime Minister—there is nothing new about this. This is 56 years old and it was done on innumerable occasions under the last administration. And the reason why we had to do it this way and do it fast is because—I want to reinforce what the Attorney General said, we came into Government—the rest of the Government was not even sworn in until the 11th of September. The UNC exiting Government on the 7th of September, proclaiming an Act that they knew would have adverse legal consequences because they put no infrastructure in place to deal with children, but proclaimed the Act—before the 7th of September they did that—and on the 9th of September, two days later, they are suing the incoming Government for its failure to have a child rehabilitation centre. It is an absurdity. It is pure wickedness as far as I am concerned, and this is why we had to do this. Because of your wickedness, this is why we did this.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Madam Chairman, it is clear by the utterances of the Minister of Finance and the Member for San Fernando West, that they misled the population into believing that they were “red and ready” for every eventuality, [*Crosstalk*] and therefore you were caught flatfooted, and we are here today as part of that sloth.

[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Just now. The Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, it is incumbent to put on the record that the honourable judge who sat in that matter—there is no appeal outstanding, there is no sub judice—was astounded and shocked by the fact that the person who came to court was Anand Ramlogan, asking for a declaration that the State was in breach of the Act as proclaimed by the UNC. The judge was astounded in court and asked on a number of occasions, the lawyer who appeared in the matter, Mr. Anand Ramlogan, Senior Counsel, whether he was actually serious about what was being put forward. It was that astronomical. It is therefore no wonder that the Member for Naparima could have made the submission that he just made about “red and ready”. “Red and ready” has a certain element of decency to it. There is a certain amount of integrity to it. One cannot contemplate wickedness in all of its forms in the formula of “red and ready”. So I take no caution from the Member for Naparima, who is on a frolic of his own on this matter.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: I just have two very calm questions to ask. Could I ask first, just calmly—[*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, I would like to hear the Member for Oropouche East.

Mr. Indarsingh: The Member for Laventille West is being very insulting, very insulting—very nasty with his language.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, I would like to maintain the calm, which—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, listen to what is transpiring here.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South, may we maintain the calm that I

think the Member for Oropouche East has signalled he would like to restore. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister of Finance, I have heard the Minister of Finance indicate the dire straits that he found himself in and the need to act in this manner. Could you indicate when this loan arrangement was made? The loan arrangement, when was it made? And why was it not part of the 2018 fiscal package when you presented it in the first place? When did you have to take out this loan to deal with this matter, and, if it ever found its way into any budget document before? And my second question is really for the Office of the Prime Minister, the Minister of State there, could you just give us now, or maybe on another occasion, an update on the construction of the Regional Assessment Centre, you know, where it is at the moment, the expenditure, and when will it be completed, if it is completed? It is at a total cost of \$34 million. [*Crosstalk*] The matter is the construction of a Regional Assessment Centre. That is what the loan is for. I read that, Minister of Finance, or did I not see that?

Hon. Member: Page 8.

Dr. Moonilal: On page 8 of the document. The document was circulated last week, Minister, I think you would have seen it. I thought you would have read these documents thoroughly.

Madam Chairman: So, Minister of Finance, the first question.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I am sure the Member knows all of this; I am sure; I am absolutely certain. The Government was given certain deadlines by the court to do things to have things ready, and we proceeded with dispatch, and these loan arrangements were executed in January of this year and this is why they appear now.

Dr. Moonilal: Are you saying that the rush from September 2015, led to a loan in January 2018? You acted swiftly.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, as I just said, because of the behaviour of the last government, this Government was given deadlines by the court. It is no question of moving swiftly. The court gave this Government deadlines, and what the previous Attorney General and his associates were doing was constantly introducing all sorts of things into the matter, so the deadlines kept moving, and we had to move to deal with it. So we met the deadlines by way of this loan, and the arrangements that flowed from that.

Madam Chairman: And, then, the second question to the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Madam Chair, through you. The buildings were constructed. We were not able to have the handover because we had to settle the outstanding debts. The locations are: a regional assessment centre in Manahambre, an assessment centre in Chaguanas, a workshop centre located in Reform Road Princes Town, a workshop centre in Ste. Madeleine and a transition home located in Ste. Madeleine. We are actually looking to have the transition home occupied on the 14th of May, with 14 boys.

Dr. Rambachan: I just want to know from the hon. Minister, in terms of all of these buildings and the \$34.4 million, what was the cost for each one of these buildings, and how much square footage of building was involved in each one?

Mrs. Webster-Roy: I could provide all at a later date.

Dr. Moonilal: Just to complete the dialogue properly, the matter that the court determined, is that matter on appeal?

Mr. Imbert: The Attorney General answered that.

Madam Chairman: I believe I heard the Attorney General said, no appeal. I

believe the Attorney General said that.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 13 varied by an increase in the sum of \$10,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Thanks Minister. Thanks PS.

We now move to Item 26, Ministry of Education, which would be at page 8 of the Schedule and page 9 of the agenda.

For the information of Members, we shall not be suspending for tea, but tea would be available and Members can stream out as they wish to have tea.

Dr. Moonilal: But Ma'am, this is not a debate. All our Members cannot—Madam Chair, “we hungry”.

Madam Chairman: Members, we do not have many more to go. [*Crosstalk*] I am not at all insinuating that we rush, but we do not have many more to go.

Head 26: Ministry of Education \$159,000,000.

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

Mr. Garcia: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Education is seeking a variation of \$159 million to its current budget. The areas that have been identified are, one, primary education; two, janitorial services and, three, security services.

In the area of primary education we are seeking an additional \$75 million. For janitorial services we seek the additional sum of \$42 million, and for security services the sum that is needed is \$42 million. Thank you very much.

Question proposed: That Head 26 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$159,000,000.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, could you indicate to us what period is this covering, the bargaining period for the increase in salary and

COLA, and how many teachers in the primary sector are going to be benefiting from it?

Mr. Garcia: The Member for Chaguanas East has it all wrong. It has nothing to do, absolutely nothing to do, with bargaining between the recognized association and the Chief Personnel Officer. It is really to plug the hole with respect to a shortfall in the budgetary allocation.

Mr. Karim: Could you tell us how many teachers are going to benefit from this increase of \$75 million, Sir?

Mr. Garcia: I have been told approximately 7,000 teachers.

Dr. Tewarie: Madam Chair, this is really a question for the Minister of Finance. I know that we are dealing here with variation, so that there is no increase based on this movement of funds. But I want to take note of the fact that for janitorial services and security services, we have an allocation because of costs that have to be met.

During the Finance Committee meetings which we held some months ago, there were three issues that kept coming up: contract labour, security services cost and janitorial services cost. Can I ask the Minister of Finance if in general, costs for these matters are increasing in the Government public service system?

Mr. Imbert: If a state enterprise like MTS is used, then any impact of the wage agreements reached over the last five years or so would definitely impact upon the cost, because MTS workers have received increases, so there would be an increased cost when you use MTS. With respect to janitorial, again, if you are using MTS for that, because they are a state enterprise and they have received wage increases, there would be increased costs.

But I must tell you, MTS is very cost effective, which I am sure Ministers and former Ministers would know, based on any interaction with MTS. So even

though it may be increasing, it is still very, very cost effective, very competitive in terms of what is available in the marketplace. So yes, there would be increases in the cost of MTS services, but MTS is very competitive.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Mr. Minister, you are seeking the virement here, the variation of \$42 million for security—this is in addition to the \$99 million—well \$100 million budgeted and without any virement in the first six months. Is it possible, not now necessarily but—to get a list of the security companies that operate within the Ministry of Education and moneys owing to those companies?

Mr. Garcia: I will be happy to provide you with that listing subsequently.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, could you indicate as well, in the same vein, who provides these janitorial services and whether this amount would take care of all that you are owing to them, or is this just a part of the debt?

Mr. Garcia: Do you want a list of the persons of the firms who provide janitorial services?

Mr. Karim: Yes. And is this for the entire sector?

Mr. Garcia: The education sector? Yes, it covers both primary and secondary schools, also ECC centres.

Mr. Karim: Okay.

Mr. Charles: To the Minister. In respect of 02/001/37 and 43, the contractors listed in the janitorial services and those who will provide security services, are they listed in the Register of Contracts as required by Financial Regulation 129/L, since the Auditor General's report said that that list of Register of Contracts was not provided?

Mr. Garcia: Surely you do not expect me to have that information at my fingertips, but I can provide you with that information.

Mr. Charles: You will give a guarantee that it would be included on the list?

Mr. Garcia: Well, I do not know what you are talking about, but we will try to give you as much information as possible. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, a simple question. Mr. Minister, now that are requesting a virement, a variation of \$42 million, could you undertake to assist in a situation where at one of the incomplete schools, the Ramai Trace Hindu School, we have had vandalism there, and you can provide some security to that site?

Mr. Garcia: Madam Chairman, does that question arise?

Dr. Moonilal: I am simply asking if you will consider to assist with providing security at that site, given the situation there, where we have had some theft and so on.

Madam Chairman: All right, so I take that as a question which the Minister could consider at some other time.

Mr. Karim: Hon. Minister, I do not know whether you had answered the question or the part of the question I asked. Is this \$42 million for janitorial services going to be sufficient to take care of all you are indebted to these contractors?

Mr. Garcia: I am happy to state yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 26 varied by an increase in the sum of \$159,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Now Members, having regard to the protestations based on my statement concerning the suspension, I have considered the sort of contributions and participations in the discussion, and therefore, I want to suggest that we take the tea break now and we return at five o'clock.

The former Minister of Health advises me that it is not correct for people to go hungry for long. This meeting is suspended. We shall be back at 5.00p.m.

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

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

Madam Chairman: This Standing Finance Committee is now resumed. Head 28, Ministry of Health and we are now at page 9 of the Schedule and at page 9 of the agenda.

Head 28: Ministry of Health \$121,000,000.

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

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to all. Madam Chairman, under the proposals for variation of appropriation for the fiscal year 2018, the Ministry of Health has been given \$121 million. The Ministry of Health is responsible for the provision of primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary services to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Under the RHAs to pay outstanding trade payables, \$30 million will go to the North-West Regional Health Authority, \$6 million to the Eastern Regional Health Authority, \$35 million to the North-Central Regional Health Authority and \$40 million to the South-West Regional Health Authority; that will give you a total of \$111 million. The other \$10 million will be used for the medical treatment of nationals in the institutions. And with that, Madam Chairman, I am ready to take questions. Thank you very much.

Question proposed: That Head 28 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$121,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Minister, through you, Madam Chair, you are getting another \$10 million for treatment in private institutions. Will that be for new services or would that be—or have you expended the \$60 million already?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Okay. It will be for a mixture of existing services. Under the

EPP programme, as you would know, we have the treatment of adult cardiac programme, renal dialysis, the waiting list initiative, and medical aid. Most of this money will go to the renal dialysis programme where we currently provide dialysis services to 1,187 patients with the list for persons requiring dialysis growing every single month because of this country's affinity for sugar, bad living and a sedentary lifestyle. Diabetes and hypertension are running rampant, and the cost to the State, this is what it now costs the State. And it costs the State \$111,400 per month per patient. That is a very high cost that the State is putting out. So that is why we have launched the NCD programme, and a future Minister of Health will reap all the rewards for that sometime in the future.

Dr. Khan: Could I also ask about the national organ transplant unit—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Khan:—as well as the amount of renal transplantation that has taken place in the last couple of years?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Well, that is not included in that. That will be another—

Dr. Khan: I know. I know. I just asked an additional question.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yeah. But that I can probably address—

Dr. Khan: As you had mentioned dialysis.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes. I can probably address that on Thursday.

Dr. Khan: Okay. Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, and before I ask you a question, can I ask you just to review the allocations for the RHAs because I suspect that the figures that I have here are different from the ones you announced. I just want to be sure.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Okay. I will. Thank you.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Are you finished?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Sorry?

Dr. Bodoë: Were you meant to correct them, Minister?

Mr. Deyalsingh: No. I said I will review it. [*Crosstalk*] Repeat the allocations?

Madam Chairman: Restate.

Dr. Bodoë: Restate. Yeah. Because the ones that you stated are apparently different from what I have here.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Oh, sorry.

Dr. Bodoë: Unless I heard wrong.

Mr. Deyalsingh: North-West Regional Health Authority, sorry, \$41 million; eastern, \$6 million, north-central \$25 million and south-west, \$39 million. Sorry.

Dr. Bodoë: That is what I thought. So can I follow up on—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Yes. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, can you indicate—and you said that these are to meet outstanding trade payables?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Can you perhaps indicate what category of items—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë:—are outstanding, these payments are outstanding for?

Mr. Deyalsingh: So, the major category across the RHAs will be medical

supplies, and that will include things like diagnostics, drugs, orthopaedics, reagents, gases, consumables, dental, ophthalmology, and that will be the major category across RHAs.

The second major category across the RHAs will be security services. Other categories will include things like janitorial supplies, office supplies, private medical institutions. Those are some of the mayor categories.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. Through you, Madam Chairman. In terms of the medical supplies, can you perhaps get a figure or maybe a percentage of this allocation for the RHAs?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Sure. I can get that to you in writing.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Dr. Bodoë: Maybe one more point, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: One more and then we will—

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, I am just looking, if you could permit me just to look at the allocation for 2018, and to note that if I just take south-west RHA, for example, you had a decrease of \$118 million thereabouts, and now you are adding back about \$39 million. That still leaves you with a shortfall as compared to what you spent in 2017. How do you expect—do you believe that this revised allocation would be sufficient to meet the needs of the patients of that particular RHA?—just for example.

Mr. Deyalsingh: So if you would have listened, but I am sure you did when the Minister of Finance was speaking, when a similar question was posed to another Minister, he said that there are other ways between now and the end of the fiscal, if there is a need for additional funding, additional funding can be

supplied by other mechanisms. He said so very clearly. Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Yeah. Minister, just one short question. What you have enumerated here, you said “trade payables owed by the following four RHAs”.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Khan: So that is money that is already owed. So when you have paid that money what happens as you go forward towards the end of the fiscal year?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, let me just deal with this. One of the problems we had when we came into office, we inherited hundreds of millions of dollars in debt from the RHAs in terms of simple little things, simple little things: medication, bed sheets in the hospital—simple little things.

Dr. Khan: You had to go there, right?

Mr. Imbert: You handed us a billion-dollar debt. So we have been paying off this debt over time. And this is simply another instalment—

Dr. Khan: We never had that debt.

Mr. Imbert:—paying off your debt.

Dr. Khan: Through you, Madam Chair. I do not think the Minister of Finance is correct in what he is saying because I cannot remember any debt being left there—

Mr. Imbert: You cannot remember? You left \$140 million in CEPEP health alone. You cannot remember?

Madam Chairman: So as far as the Ministry of Health—

Dr. Khan: CEPEP, not function of the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Imbert: That is true, that is why we are not paying. We are not paying.

Madam Chairman: All right. So Members, Members. We have had a little

suspension and therefore, let us get back seriously to the business. And, please, do not let me regret what I put was wisdom coming from the Member for Barataria/San Juan when I allowed the tea break.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Member.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—if I may? I told you not to suspend. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Member or Oropouche East. Leader of the House.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Ma'am. If I could just focus a question, and thank you for the suspension since it meant that the Government would not have been in a minority. We would have had a majority if we had continued. To the Member, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance did raise the matter and I wanted to enquire, whether any of these moneys would be to pay the CEPEP contractors for the work undertaken; or would you wait until, well the Minister of Finance, would you wait until the contractors sue you and then start taking away all the medical supplies and hospital beds and so on?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: I would really like to see that law suit since the Ministry of Health was not the employer under those very questionable contracts. And in order to sue you have to have evidence that you did work, you know.

Dr. Moonilal: That is why CEPEP lost their microwave.

Madam Chairman: Minister. Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Madam Chair, the hon. Minister of Health indicated that part of these trade payables would be for janitorial services. I would like to ask the Minister, because I am always concerned about value for money: Is the Minister satisfied that in making trade payables, especially for janitorial services, that the

hospitals are being given the quality of janitorial services that they are being paid for?—because, if you go to the San Fernando General Hospital, as I go on several occasions to visit, the environment is really not what should be the standard of a modern hospital in terms of janitorial services.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Health.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Chairman, the quality of janitorial services across the RHAs have improved remarkably, in my view, over the past six months to a year when new tenders came out and we engaged contractors who have a different vision as opposed to the old ones. I do agree with you that San Fernando in itself, which is a very old structure, does not lend itself to particular degree of aesthetics, but we spent a lot of money on janitorial services because you do not want to have diseases and infections being contracted because of poor hygiene. But the hygiene levels across the hospitals, all four, have increased remarkably in the past six months to a year.

Dr. Rambachan: Well, I expect the Minister to defend himself and say that, but, Minister, I think you should take a drive down south—

Mr. Deyalsingh: I go very often.

Dr. Rambachan:—and you should visit, and you should go behind the—

Mr. Deyalsingh: I go very often to south.

Dr. Rambachan:—you should go behind Mount Hope Hospital—

Mr. Deyalsingh: I go there.

Dr. Rambachan:—and you should see the bins and you should examine exactly how garbage is disposed and collected at the back there, and then you will understand what I am talking about.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Hon. Members—

Dr. Khan: Just one question.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Just a suggestion to the Minister through the Minister of Finance, maybe you should start looking at CEPEP janitorial.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 28 varied by an increase in the sum of \$121,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you PS, and other members of the Ministry of Health.

We move onto Head 31, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. And for the guidance of Members, we are at page 10 of the agenda and also it will be page 11 of the Schedule. No. Page 10, sorry, 10 also of the Schedule, 10 of the agenda.

Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration and Communications \$20,846,408.

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Public Administration and Communications to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Ministry of Finance proposes to vary the appropriation of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications in the sum of \$20,846,408. This sum is to facilitate semi-annual loan payment to First Caribbean Bank Trinidad and Tobago Limited with respect to the outfitting of the International Waterfront Complex due October 11, 2018, in order to avoid late payment and additional interest charges. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 31 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$20,846,408.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Thank you very much. According to our Schedule here, this adds on to the \$447 million that was allocated to item 08/02/08, Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. Given that this would have been something that would have been entered into before, just a quick clarification. Was provision made in the 2018 allocation for this payment, and why was it not made then? Did it occur just in the last six months or so?

5.15 p.m.

Ms. Mc Donald: What was your question, sir? Could you repeat your question?

Dr. Moonilal: Well, Minister of Finance, you heard it? Oh, you were not paying attention. The matter I am raising is on 08, you have \$447 million. There was no virement there so it remained at that figure. We are now varying to add into that \$220 million, \$21 million more or less, for the payment on a loan, which is due in October 2018. I am just asking, why was this not done in the initial allocation in 2017 when you prepared for the 2018 fiscal?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: I would give the answer I had given before, that when you get requests from Ministries, it could add up to \$200 million. So, the Budgets do not answer for me. I am answering. You “cyar” answer me. [*Interruption*] Madam Chairman, did he not ask me to answer?

Madam Chairman: Please proceed, Minister.

Dr. Moonilal: If you want to ask me a question you could.

Mr. Imbert: You cannot answer your own question. So that when you do the budget you get requests totalling, maybe \$200 billion, you have to make adjustments to come up to \$50 billion. During the year, as things go along, you will see where you have to make adjustments, which is what we are doing now, as

we do every year, as has been done for 56 years.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Or is it because the Ministry had been for a long time without a Minister in place?

Mr. Imbert: Nooo, nonsense!

Dr. Moonilal: It is just a simple question.

Mr. Imbert: No!

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the question is that the 2018 appropriation for Head 31, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications be varied by an increase in the sum of \$20,846,408.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 31 varied by an increase in the sum of \$20,846,408.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, PS and other representatives.

Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities \$169,272,692.

And for guidance of Members, we are at page 10 of the agenda, and page 11 of the Schedule.

I will now invite the Minister of Public Utilities to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Mr. Le Hunte: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Public Utilities' overarching philosophy is geared towards improving service to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and increasing efficiency in the utilities sector. This is achieved while ensuring that the vulnerable groups are not left behind. In the Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 2018, the Ministry of Public Utilities has received \$169,272,692. These funds will be allocated as follows:

- Street lighting - \$61,272,692.

These funds are required for the payment of T&TEC for lighting bills associated with street lights, and the illumination on maintenance of over 350 recreational facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. These provide opportunities for recreation, whilst still providing a sense of safety and security to the population.

- Refund to WASA re improvement in rates in the amount of \$60 million.

The WASA improvement rates is collected in accordance with the Water Works and Rates Conservation Act. These funds are used to offset the cost of providing desalinated water to the industrial customers in the industrial estates; and

- Refund to T&TEC re rebate on electricity bills in the amount of \$48 million.

Madam Chairman, in February 2017 T&TEC implemented the measures as outlined in the 2016/2017 budget, bringing relief to customers in the Rate A. This relief affords a 25 per cent rebate for customers whose bills are not in excess of \$300 million—[Laughs] \$300 per cycle. My apologies. Madam Chairman, this is directly impacting over 105,000 customers on a monthly basis. I thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 39 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$169,272,692.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, could you say whether this \$61.2 million for street lighting to T&TEC, is this the entire amount that you are going to clear, or is it a part of it? And if so, what is the balance you would be still owing?

Mr. Le Hunte: It is estimated that approximately—this should clear the majority of it, based on our estimates to the end of the year this should make a sizable dent, but we expect that at the end of the year we will have in the amount of

approximately \$40 million.

Mr. Karim: Outstanding?

Mr. Le Hunte: Yes. Because we started the year with a deficit.

Mr. Karim: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, I just wanted to get some clarity here in terms of who pays the power bill for those parks, those recreation grounds? Is it the regional corporation or does T&TEC pick up that bill directly?

Mr. Le Hunte: The MPU pays those bills.

Mr. Paray: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. Hon. Minister, in light of the fact that the \$61 million represents outstanding amounts, do you have any for recurrent expenditure in terms of your street lighting projects?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Public Utilities.

Mr. Le Hunte: This is in the Recurrent Expenditure area, and it covers some of the past bills and some of the Recurrent Expenditure expected to happen for the rest of the year.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: I believe that you would be able to identify how much of it is going into outstanding payments so that you can estimate what is the rest due?

Mr. Le Hunte: Yes, the amount that is going towards—I think what you, is it that you are asking about the amount that we are going to put into capital expenditure under the PSIP, which is a separate issue? Or do you want to know exactly the amount for recurrent?

Madam Chairman: Arrears.

Mr. Le Hunte: The arrears position is about—I am advised that all is Recurrent at this point in time.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. To the now distracted hon. Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member, you may proceed.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, thank you. Minister, just for clarity, could you just explain, what is the water improvement rates, and the extent to which any assistance here would lead to better supply of water and service in the Oropouche East area which has been severely hit over the past few months?

Mr. Le Hunte: Well, the water improvement rate is a rate that is applied for industrial customers in specific areas. It is a rate that came about because of improvements that happened in water in the desalinated plant for the Point Lisas area. There was a particular levy that was charged to those customers, specifically—and the effective is about \$8.50 per cubic metre as approved by Parliament. That was a rate approved by Parliament, and therefore that is the amount that is charged to these industrial customers, and they pay it via WASA, it gets to the Treasury, and then it comes back to WASA.

Dr. Moonilal: There is a serious problem in some of our constituencies with the supply of water.

Dr. Francis: After water for all.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, and it happened over the last two years or so. I do write letters and so on, but is this being addressed now and what might be the problem now? Is there some problem with the dam, or the level of water, or not enough flooding, or so?

Mr. Le Hunte: This particular line Item is a very specific one. It is about a rebate forgiven. I am sure I would be able to answer it on a subsequent question.

Dr. Moonilal: I am sure you will.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the question is that the 2018 appropriation for Head 39, Ministry of Public Utilities be varied by an increase in the sum of \$169,272,692.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 39 varied by an increase in the sum of \$169,272,692.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister. Thank you PS and other officers of the Ministry of Public Utilities.

We now proceed to Head 42, which is at page 13 of the Schedule, and it is at page 11 of the agenda.

Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government \$122,000,000.

I will now invite the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I am delighted to be able to present the achievements of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. *[Interruption]* Well, I am not so—*[Interruption]*

Our midyear period to this honourable House and to the public of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry remains committed to serving the people at the head office and through the municipal corporations, as we have been working towards local government reform. So, Madam Chairman, I am here to take part in this midterm review.

Question proposed: That Head 42 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$122,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Just a quick series of questions to the Minister. Minister, from the \$122 million in the variation being sought here, this

would be to pay the continuing payment of existing contractors. It would not be to pay outstanding moneys to contractors, is it?

Mr. Hosein: No.

Dr. Moonilal: Is there a plan or some proposal somewhere to meet the requirements of those who already have outstanding moneys from the CEPEP owed, and particularly those who have been involved in litigation?

Mr. Hosein: Hon. Minister, if you are speaking about the health—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: Let him continue, do not disturb him. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Hosein: Sorry, sorry, sorry. Hon. Member, if you are speaking about the health sector initiative, we are right now dealing with the—we have hired a Queen's Counsel to deal—quantity surveyor—"Hon. Members yuh kind ah excuse meh because ah feeling kind of nervous, right." *[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: Take your time. Take your time.

Mr. Hosein: So, we hired a quantity surveyor to work with the health sector personnel to ensure that the variations are correct and so on before we decide to pay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Those matters would deal with the health contracts matter. There are also other outstanding amounts concerning minor infrastructure projects that have been completed, and where there are also claims by contractors, would you be meeting and treating with those as well?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you. Hon. Minister, the \$122 million you say is for continuing the programme as it were, paying the contractors, right?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Dr. Rambachan: But then there are lots of contractors who are owed money, do you know the sum of money owed to contractors now in the CEPEP programme? Leaving out the ones under the health programme, what is the total amount outstanding to contractors that you are liable for that have not been paid?

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Hosein: We had some non-compliant contractors and that amounted in the sum of \$31 million.

Dr. Rambachan: When you say non-compliant, what do you mean?

Mr. Hosein: They did not pay their NIS and Health Surcharge.

Dr. Rambachan: Right. No, but how much is owed to the contractors in the CEPEP Programme? Because a lot of contractors are complaining that they have not received their management fees although their workers have been paid and so on. How much is outstanding to them?

Mr. Hosein: Most of them got paid, you know, hon. Member. So we are coming up to—kind of balancing everything now.

Dr. Rambachan: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: It is okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Dr. Rambachan: That is interesting.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister. Is there any outstanding sum of moneys to the employees of these contractors in CEPEP?

Mr. Hosein: No, no.

Mr. Indarsingh: So all, at the moment as we speak Minister, employees are up-to-date in terms of their salaries?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Minister, I may have missed it earlier in your presentation, but have you been working with the CEPEP board and management in terms of a strategy to meet and treat with those contractors who have outstanding matters and are seeking to litigate, to take the company to court which will involve further legal fees and so on. And the legal fees that the CEPEP companies are paying right now—including I think, to sue myself—would you be meeting and treating with that as a way of reducing the cost on CEPEP, at a time when CEPEP may not have the resources to meet and treat with outstanding payments, yet CEPEP will engage lawyers and Queen's Counsel and so on, to engage in suing contractors and Members of Parliament and so on?

Mr. Hosein: That is why we took the step right now to ensure that we talk, because you must have consultation and before it gets out of hand at that level, we decided to meet and talk and that is why the Quantity Surveyor is in progress right now dealing with the whole situation.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair.

Dr. Moonilal: Chair, Ma'am—

Madam Chairman: One minute please. I think the Minister, the Attorney General would like to make an intervention on this take.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, I am so sorry to interrupt, but I have heard the hon. Member for Oropouche East mention on several occasions, about a suit involving himself. And I want to be very cautious and I mean this in the best way possible. There is an immediate rule in Parliament that one must declare interests in lines of questioning because if one is advancing a position for personal benefit—that is a significant issue. I do not mean to be pejorative but the Standing Orders have to be

observed and the privileges of Parliament have to be observed. So I just want to be ultra-careful about that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Ma'am, I was not aware I had a benefit there. The matter has been dispensed which I believe, I am not sure if they appealed, I do not know if the CEPEP company appealed the matter, but I knew the matter was dispensed in the High Court. But if they have appealed against me then that is fine, I would not go further because I understand the matter may be before the court, on that matter. Could I ask the Minister, in light of the challenges that CEPEP face, is there a new chairman at CEPEP at this time and who might he be?

Madam Chairman: And Member, I would not allow that, in terms of what is here—the matter.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I rephrase the question, Ma'am. The \$122million that will now be added to CEPEP to continue the work under the management and under a very efficient board, would you indicate the chairman of that very efficient board to spend the \$122 million?

Madam Chair: I am still not going to allow that question.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 42 varied by an increase in the sum of \$122,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister; thank you CEO; thank you PS.

Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport, \$62,500,000.

And for the guidance of Members, we are at page 11 of the agenda and we are at page 14 of the Schedule.

Head 43, Ministry of Works and Transport be increased by \$62,500,000. I will now invite the Minister of Works and Transport to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Mr. Sinanan: Thank you, Madam Chair, colleagues. The Ministry of Works and Transport has been provided with an increase in allocation of \$62,500,000. This has been provided under Other Contractual Services Vote of the Highways Division, the Traffic Management Branch, the Drainage Division and the Rent/Lease Vehicle and Equipment Vote of the Drainage Division. Under the Other Contractual Services there is an increase of \$14 million which will be utilized to pay previous years' commitments as well as initiate new work.

Under Other Contracted Services Vote of the Traffic Management Branch, an increase of \$20 million, which will be utilized to pay outstanding bills for the repair of cable barriers and maintenance and servicing of traffic signals. Increased funding of \$20 million under the Drainage Division, other contracted Votes will be utilized for payments of contractors and river maintenance and erosion control projects. Funding of \$8,500,000 under 09 of the Drainage Division will be utilized for works under the comprehensive desilting programme. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 43 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$62,500,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, we are about a month and a little bit away from a—I suspect is going to be another brutal rainy season. In terms of the drainage aspect, the desilting, you know Mayaro was—we suffered tremendously and I have been trying to get some assurances from the Ministry of Works and Transport that some work can be done on the desilting of the watercourses in the area. When I communicate with the local works office I keep getting the same response that, you know, no funding has been made. So I am hoping, or can you give us some assurance that some attention will be paid to some

of those watercourses in the Mayaro constituency to alleviate that problem that we may get. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Works and Transport.

Mr. Sinanan: Sure. Through you, Madam Chair, the Cabinet has approved that new desilting programme for us which consists of 298 projects. Those projects are comprised in the north, 86 projects; in the south, 47 projects; in central, 83 projects; in the east, 82 projects; a total of 298 projects. These projects would have been identified by the different divisional engineers and I can assure you that the entire country has been taken into consideration.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: So Minister, the 298 projects, are you going to undertake all in this fiscal year?

Mr. Sinanan: The projects have started already.

Dr. Rambachan: The 298?

Mr. Sinanan: Yeah, well we cannot start 298 at one time, but the aim is to complete the 298 in this year.

Dr. Rambachan: And this \$8,500,000 that you are asking for in the variation, can I ask you a question? You are going to be using, I suppose, excavators; 320 excavators?

Mr. Sinanan: Well, the equipment to be used—[*Crosstalk*]—will be specified by the technical—

Dr. Rambachan: Just give me a chance please.

Mr. Sinanan: By the technical—

Dr. Rambachan: Right. But you are going to use excavators.

Mr. Sinanan: Well, we will use the equipment that is required.

Dr. Rambachan: Right. What is the price that you pay now for an excavator per

day?

Mr. Sinanan: Okay, the rates that we are using are the CTB bonded rates.

Dr. Rambachan: And that is how much for—

Mr. Sinanan: The rates will vary depending on the contractors. We use CTB bonded rates to ensure that we get value for money and this programme is based on that.

Dr. Rambachan: Does any one of your technical people here know what the CTB bonded rate is for an excavator on the market now—CTB bonded rate?

Mr. Sinanan: I do not have the documents with us right now, but these rates would have been the rates that the Ministry would have been working with, this system in this Vote for the last five years, at least as far as I can recall.

Dr. Rambachan: Madam Chair, the reason I am asking is very simple. There is an oversupply of equipment on the market now, and you can rent throughout the country, an excavator 320, for \$3000 a day, plus the transport to getting it to the site. Which means, that if you are getting \$800,500,000, you have the potential of about 2,800 days of work that you could rent excavators for.

Mr. Sinanan: All right, let me just correct you there. You said it is about \$3,000.

Dr. Rambachan: Yeah.

Mr. Sinanan: We are paying actually \$2,400.

Dr. Rambachan: Right, better, you see. Good. So that is excellent. So therefore, that means you have at least 3,400 days of work that you can get with this 8.5. How are you monitoring that you are really getting 3,400 days of work and not six hours per day instead of eight hours per day on the market. [*Crosstalk*] No, please. Please. You see the Minister came unto office and said he will be efficient and he will seek value for money and I am just putting back the reality on the ground for him.

Mr. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair, that has been a concern that I have raised, and as far as possible, I liaise with the director of drainage through the Permanent Secretary to ensure that we have proper supervision. This has been a challenge in the Ministry for years, for years. It is not something that is new and it is something that we have to keep monitoring, and I think the contractors clearly recognize now, that if we find out that any contractor has been shortchanging us, serious consequences will have to be paid, because the country does have a challenge with money. We are trying our best to keep cost down so that at least the citizens could finally get value for money and I have to put my trust in the employees—that whoever is supposed to supervise these contractors, is doing what they are supposed to do. We used this last year—[*Crosstalk*] no, no. We used this system last year and I must say it worked well and we got a significant amount of watercourse cleared for the amount of hours that we gave the contractors.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. Hon. Minister, on page 11 indicated that funding is required to meet the cost of road rehabilitation. I am wondering if Balata Trace and Bon Air Road and Fishing Pond Road, if they are in fact—are these roads part of the road rehabilitation that this funding will be catering to.

Mr. Sinanan: We do have a road programme and we deal with roads based on a priority listing. We do have a programme of work for paving, for road repairs and in this case most of the funding would have gone to rehabilitation and emergency works.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: If I may ask, hon. Minister, I do not know if you are aware that Balata Road is on the verge of collapsing. If it does, the residents will not be able to come in or go out of the area, and the same thing for Bon Air.

Mr. Sinanan: Yeah, well—

Madam Chairman: Member for—is it noted, Minister?

Mr. Sinanan: Yes, it is noted.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister can you undertake to provide to this Committee a list of all the projects.

Mr. Sinanan: The desilting projects?

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah, the desilting projects.

Mr. Sinanan: Yes, yes, I—

Dr. Bodoë: In writing.

Mr. Sinanan: Yes.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: He answered it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Thank you. Hon. Minister, of the 47 projects I have just heard, you said, for the desilting of watercourses in south—do Black Water Channel, the Alligator Channel, and Duck Pond which form part of the Oropouche West constituency, do they form part of your scope of works?

Mr. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Did you not undertake to provide a listing?

Mr. Sinanan: No, I actually visited those projects this weekend and I saw ongoing work there. So we have actually started in those areas.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Ma'am, these people, I mean, colleagues opposite are speaking and

disturbing me.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East, I am sure you are quite adept to overcome that. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Ma'am. To the Minister. Minister, according to the data before us, and I am looking at the photocopy Schedule again, we have 005 Drainage. Out of 005 we have 09, Rent/Lease Vehicles and Equipment and so on. You were initially budgeted in the last budget, the allocation—\$1million. But I see that \$1million moved to \$16.5million so that you had an internal virement from \$1 million to \$16.5 and you are now increasing that by \$8.5million. Correct? Could you tell us the nature of this increase? Why is it in that magnitude?

5.45 p.m.

And, secondly, the contracted services, you were allocated in the estimates 2018, \$10 million. Again, by virement in the last six months, the \$10 million moved to \$16 million and now you are dropping a \$20 million on the \$16 million, so you add up to \$36 million for "Other Contracted Services". You could just give us some detail as to what this will entail. And to add, just to crystallize a point raised earlier, could you undertake—not now, of course, but to give us a full listing of the water courses that are being dealt with now? And let me put, for my own concern, in the Penal/Debe area, a full list of the water courses that are being desilted, or dredged, or cleared, or paved, and so on, because, as you know, it is a place prone to flooding, and we would really like, in the coming days, that some work will be done and intensified so that we can prevent the occurrence of those problems last year.

Mr. Sinanan: Sure. Through you, Madam Chair, the reason for the increase is because of the desilting programme that Cabinet has approved. What we did is, we

vired funding to ensure that the programme was started. So the programme has started and it is a programme that, once we accomplish the 298 projects, it is estimated at close to \$35 million. So this would have been the reason for the increase in the Vote.

Secondly, the other Vote you spoke about under “Highways”, we have been left with a bill as far back as 2013, for the Highways Division for the cable barriers. There is a challenge with the contractor who has not been paid since 2013/2014, and efforts are being made through this Vote and this funding, to regularize that payment and have the cable barriers on the highway at least functional.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, with respect to the “Other Contracted Services, Highways”, with the new highway in the Caroni area in the vicinity of La Paille, the highway acts as a dam and that there is need for some measure of drainage. I have brought this to the attention of the Acting Director of Highways. Whenever it rains heavily, that La Paille area is flooded out. I hope it is noted and perhaps can be part of your works under “Contracted Services”.

Mr. Sinanan: Thank you. I saw the Director of Highways taking a note there, so I am sure he will be able to report back on that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Minister, bearing in mind that this Ministry is a very significant construction Ministry and the population depends on the work of your Ministry, particularly areas like drainage and road rehabilitation, and so on, would you be aware of any of the development plans in the Development

Programme under the Ministry of Works and Transport, Head 43, where the removal, or the movement of the \$800 million in the IDF will affect your Ministry, in particular? And I refer to drainage and irrigation again, because you also had money allocated here for flood alleviation, drainage programme, infrastructure rehabilitation, river clearing, and so on. Would that be affected now that the money has been moved away from the IDF?

Mr. Sinanan: The answer to that—

Mr. Imbert: Hold on, let me answer that. The IDF is a Development Programme. We are not speaking about Development Programme. In big, bold letters, it says, “Recurrent Expenditure”—“Recurrent Expenditure”. Stop all these tricks “nah man”.

Dr. Moonilal: When you move the money from the IDF, what will you not do?

Mr. Imbert: We know your tricks, “yuh know”.

Dr. Moonilal: I must ask the Minister a question.

Mr. Imbert: We know your tricks.

Dr. Moonilal: It is not the *Galleons Passage*. “Yuh doh have to jump on this too”. This is not the boat, “yuh know”. The man will answer himself.

Mr. Imbert: He is up to tricks.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, are you opting to answer on behalf of the Ministry of Works and Transport?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam. I will reiterate that the Member for Oropouche East knows that we are dealing with an item of Recurrent Expenditure and that projects that he is speaking of are Capital Expenditure and therefore your question is irrelevant.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Madam Chair, I just want to say I am very happy with the moneys to fix the cable barriers, because I have seen many lives saved on that north to south highway as a result of the cable barriers. But I would like to bring to the attention of the Minister, under “Highways, Other Contracted Services”, or “Traffic Management”, that there are several very dangerous areas in the country which are not being attended to. I want to refer to two in particular. One is just after the Raja Yoga Centre, going north. Ever so often, vehicles run into what were the yellow signs there, and now they are so dirty, they have been mashed up. They do not even have the reflective lights; that vehicles are hitting them all the time. And sooner or later someone is going to get injured there very, very badly.

Hon. Member: In Chaguanas?

Dr. Rambachan: Secondly—

Hon. Member: In Chaguanas?

Dr. Rambachan: Yes, in Chaguanas. And then going down, just after Bhagwansingh’s, the same thing. On the exit out of Bhagwansingh’s the same thing exists there at night. Also, for five weeks now in the vicinity of the Oropouche Junction, across the road there is a hole that has now deteriorated to about 12 inches—across the road, and that falls precipitously at the edge. And I am seeing something is going to happen there, that for five weeks you have officers driving on that road and they would not make a move to fix it—for five weeks.

So I really want to ask a question. In all of this “Traffic Management, Other Contracted Services”, and “Highways, Other Contracted Services”, what are those officers who are paid to go around and identify these particular things—how is that

information brought back here so that you can do a more effective job of saving lives?

Mr. Sinanan: Through you, Madam Chair, I was just informed that the Oropouche Junction is being looked at right now by the AECOM consultants—

Dr. Rambachan: No, I am not talking about that. I am talking about across the road, just where the Oropouche—where you come out of the police station and you come back on the road, the whole thing. I think the Member for Fyzabad knows what I am talking about.

Mr. Sinanan: I want to give the undertaking that I will have this looked into—

Dr. Rambachan: Twelve inches deep.

Mr. Sinanan:—immediately. These three items, I will have them looked into immediately.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, just a follow-up on the cable barriers. I recall in the last Standing Finance Committee a few months ago when this very matter came up, you had indicated Government had not then taken a decision with respect to restoring this particular programme and that you would be looking at a cost benefit analysis with respect to this particular programme. Has a cost benefit analysis been done?

Mr. Sinanan: Yes. Through you, Madam Chair, the decision to go with the cable barriers, I think was in 2013, I do not know if everything was taken into consideration, but it is a very costly system to maintain. As I said, right now we are owing the contractor close to \$18 million for the last three years. And one of the challenges that we have, we just, as an example, spent close to \$1 million about a

month ago, and since then a significant portion of it went down. Because once you get an impact on one part of it, you actually lose about 500 metres, so then you have to go back and revisit and reorganize. So what we are doing right now is that we are revisiting the entire highway and we are looking at areas where we can remove them, putting some of the Jersey Barriers, and we are looking on a phased basis to actually get some sort of supplement. Because I do not know if we could continue to be spending this amount of money on the cable barriers. It is ridiculously high to maintain.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Yes, Ma'am. Just another follow-up on the same matter with respect to the New Jersey Barriers. Again, at the Standing Finance Committee a few months ago, another question was posed with respect to the New Jersey Barriers which you gave the undertaking to take a look at and now you are alluding to some of the work that has been done with respect to this. So, one, are you confirming that work has been ongoing since the cost benefit analysis has started? And secondly, with respect to the New Jersey Barriers, whether the new systems of the 2017 technology will be utilized to offset some of the cost that is being occurred with respect to the actual cable barriers?

Mr. Sinanan: Okay. It cannot happen overnight. What we are looking at right now is where we can rent the equipment, or purchase the equipment where we can have the cable barriers repaired in-house. Because we do have a team in the Ministry who would have been pulling cables. If you drive up to Maracas you will see cables that would have pulled there 50/60 years ago. So what we are trying to do now is to develop the expertise within the Ministry to have the repairs done in-house. While we do that, then we have to look—because you cannot just put New

Jersey Barriers where the cable barriers are. You have to actually fill the median, and when you fill the median, then you can put the Jersey Barriers. So it is nothing that can happen in a one-year period. What we are trying to do is to develop the capacity in-house so that we can save on the maintenance cost, utilizing some of the existing equipment that we have.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: And the last question on this matter, Ma'am. Could the hon. Minister indicate who is the current service provider at this point?

Mr. Sinanan: When this contract was awarded in 2013, there was a three-year contract which took us up from 2014 to 2017. That contract would have been expired. However, we did utilize the original contractor, which is Unisure, for the last job. We do not have a maintenance contract and we are trying to renegotiate the price downwards, if not, have to do the work in-house ourselves.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, my question has been asked already.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is just a suggestion. When these vehicles run into the barriers and cause damage, has any consideration been given to getting the insurance companies, in some way, to compensate for the damage?

Madam Chairman: We are exploring that. We do have, I think, two matters right now before the court. With the inclusion of the cameras and so, on the highway, it will make it easier for us. Unfortunately, most of the times when people run into the barriers and they do not report it, there is really no way you can bring a case against anyone.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to your de-silting programme, is it going to be undertaken in-house, or is it going to be a combination of both outsourcing and in-house works being done?

Mr. Sinanan: Most of it is done outsourced. We use the CTB-tendered rates to the CTB-registered tenders' contractors first. So we go to the CTB-registered contractors, then we go to—but I would say 95 per cent is done outsourced. The Ministry just does not have the capacity to do that amount of de-silting in-house. We do actually utilize the army in certain areas to assist us to get the job done in some critical areas.

Ms. Ramdial: Okay. So I am seeing \$8.5 million here for Vehicles and Equipment under the Drainage Division. Could you tell us exactly what type of equipment you are speaking about here?

Mr. Sinanan: These are the heavy equipment.

Ms. Ramdial: For de-silting? For drainage works?

Mr. Sinanan: Yes, for de-silting.

Ms. Ramdial: So there is going to be some work being done in-house?

Mr. Sinanan: We do some work in-house. Based on last year, we did most of the Diego Martin in-house. So we would utilize our equipment as far as possible, but we just do not have the capacity to do 298 projects. So we will utilize our equipment as far as possible and then utilize contractors' equipment.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, following up on that very issue, while you have told us by north, south, east, west, central, that there will be various projects with respect

to de-silting, clearing water courses, et cetera, we are in the month of May—already the second week in the month of May—and the rainy season is impending. We have started to see many showers already in this month. Can you tell us whether or not the Ministry itself has a work schedule with respect to flood-prone areas, that these areas would be specifically targeted first? Could you tell us if that work schedule exists at the Ministry at this point, and that that is what you are working with?

Mr. Sinanan: Yes it is. Now, remember, we do have our maintenance river-cleaning teams and so, that would have been ongoing since January. And de-silting, and so, is something, based on the availability of funding, that we have to time properly. Because if we would have started this programme in January, by now vegetation would have taken over the water courses and so, again.

So yes, there is a programme in place to look at the most vulnerable areas and the most critical areas, and those are the areas that we have been targeting first, and we should be in a position where we would accomplish most of these projects well in advance of, especially the rainy season that really affects us the most, which is the October rainy season.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 43 varied by an increase in the sum of \$62,500,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you PS and other representatives of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

6.00 p.m.

Head 61: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development \$11,200,000.

Madam Chairman: We are page 11 of the agenda and page 15 of the Schedule. Head 61, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, an increase of

\$11,200,000. I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, in October 2013 when the Member for Oropouche East was the Minister of Housing, the Urban Development Corporation engaged a \$233 million loan, in the same way that under this Government the National Insurance Property Development Company was engaged to rehabilitate children's homes, and a loan was taken out from ANSA Merchant Bank to meet the cost of construction work at the Real Spring Housing Development Project. We are still trying to find out what that money was spent on. There is no evidence of any work. That project is virtually abandoned. So we do not know what this \$233 million—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: What?

Mr. Imbert: Real Spring—borrowed by the Member for Oropouche was spent on because we were inherited a half-finished project. But, we are a responsible Government, so despite the fact that we do not know what the \$233 million borrowed by the Member for Oropouche East was spent on, because there is no evidence of it, we are committed to repay the loan.

Question proposed: That Head 61 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$11,200,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Mr. Imbert: “You go tell us now?”

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could I begin by asking the Member to just tell us this loan UDeCOTT took out, which financial institution did they take this loan from?

Mr. Imbert: I said that. You “doh” listen. I said it was ANSA.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance. Minister of Finance?

Mr. Imbert: But I said that, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance?

Mr. Imbert: Whole day he not listening.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, we all need to be temperate.

Mr. Imbert: But he is not listening, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, especially at this hour, I will crave that you be temperate—

Mr. Imbert: And he take out the loan with ANSA—

Madam Chairman: And courteous.

Mr. Imbert:—and he is asking me. He take out the loan and he asking me. You have no shame.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance—

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chairman, given—

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance—

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman:—these are one of the situations I ask you to be courteous and not curt. Please answer the question.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chair, given the clearly agitated and tired deport of the Minister, I propose to speak much more on this in the debate, but could I ask you now: Is this the same loan arrangement that was taken on August 21, 2006, involving the Home Mortgage Bank?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I repeat, I certainly hope that the Member will listen this time. In October 2013, the Urban Development Company Corporation engaged a \$233.097 million loan facility from ANSA Merchant Bank to meet the cost of construction work at the Real Spring Housing Development project when

he was the Minister. Ask yourself.

Dr. Moonilal: Is the Minister aware that that arrangement with ANSA had to deal with repaying the Home Mortgage Bank, a loan that Calder Hart took?

Mr. Imbert: Ask yourself. You were the Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member?

Dr. Moonilal: So, is the Member aware that UDeCOTT, under Calder Hart, took the initial loan from the Home Mortgage Bank to finance Real Spring Estate, which then collapsed with a “haffy”—anyway. Madam Chairman, I will say much more in the debate that will follow.

Mr. Imbert: Ask yourself. You took out this loan, ask yourself.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 61 varied by an increase in the sum of \$11,200,000.

Madam Chairman: I thank you, Madam PS.

Hon. Members, we have now completed the increases and, therefore, I put the question that the 2018 Appropriation be varied by a total increase in the sum of \$796,297,635.

Question put and agreed to.

Appropriation for fiscal year 2018 varied by a total increase in the sum of \$796,297,635.

Madam Chairman: Members, I shall now adjourn the Standing Finance Committee Meeting. I would like to advise that the debate for the adoption of the Committee’s Report will take place on Thursday, May 9th, 2018, at 10.00 a.m. This meeting is now adjourned.

Hon. Members: Thursday is the 10th.

Madam Chairman: Thursday is the 10th or the 9th?

Hon. Members: The 10th.

Standing Finance Committee (cont'd)

2018.05.08

Madam Chairman: I am sorry. Thank you very much. Thursday, May 10th, 2018
at 10.00 a.m.

6.06 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee adjourned.*