



VERBATIM NOTES OF THE STANDING FINANCE

COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES HELD IN THE SENATE CHAMBER, RED HOUSE, ST. VINCENT STREET, PORT OF SPAIN, ON FRIDAY, MAY 05, 2023, AT 1.30 P.M.

Madam Chairman: Good afternoon everyone, kindly have a seat. Good afternoon Members, and welcome to this meeting of the Standing Finance Committee. This meeting is now called to order.

Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Orders 82(6) and 87, this meeting of the Standing Finance Committee was convened to consider proposals for the supplementation and variation of appropriation for fiscal year 2023. Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 45(1) the speaking time in Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on each intervention.

Our procedure is as follows. Item No. 1, Supplementation:

Firstly, the Head and the amount to be supplemented will be announced;

Secondly, the Minister with responsibility will then be invited to provide an explanation for the supplementation;

Thirdly, the Chairman will then propose the question that the Head be supplemented;

Fourthly, Members may then seek clarification from the Minister;

Fifthly, once this is concluded the Chairman will then put the question that the sum to be supplemented be approved;

Sixthly, the procedure will be repeated for each Head.

So we now embark on Item No. 1, Supplementation. Hon. Members, we will now consider the proposals for supplementation of appropriation for fiscal year 2023.

Head 01: President \$10,797,000.

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

UNREVISED

opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you. Madam Chairman, I think all Members are well aware that the President is the Head of State of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The President has duties as outlined in the Constitution and various obligations. I do not think I need to go into any further detail.

Madam Chairman: You are through, Minister?

Question proposed: That Head 01 be supplemented by the sum of \$10,797,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Chairman, through you, to the hon. Minister. Minister, line Item 02/001/04: Electricity, there is a supplementation of \$350,000 for T&TEC. Can the hon. Minister indicate if this is arrears in light of noticing that there is a pattern under several Ministries and now the Office of the President where we are seeing large amounts? And from last year's budget we were told there were a lot of arrears. So could the Minister indicate if this too is a reflection of arrears?

Hon. Imbert: The information I have, there are no arrears, but the new President is expected to occupy President's House. Whereas the former President did not use President's House as her domicile and, therefore, there is an anticipated increase in electricity usage at the official President's House building.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, line Item 05: Telephones. An additional \$200,000 is being requested for this line Item up September 30, 2023, can the hon. Minister indicate if this line Item was under-budgeted in the presentation of the appropriation Bill or if this is additional unforeseen expenses that have incurred?

Hon. Imbert: Again, I am advised that all arrears have been settled. Again, this is in anticipation of the new President together with family occupying President's House.

Mr. Ratiram: Supplemental question. Hon. Minister, so we are projecting future expenses till the end of this fiscal year for the remaining months, telephone expenditure at \$200,000 for regular operational telephone expenses, or is there any specific capital expenditure for specific equipment is going to be installed for us to come up and utilize this amount of money?

Hon. Imbert: It is not just for the building. It is for the entire compound and I am advised it is operational expenditure. These are estimates.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, through you, to the hon. Minister. Minister, I am not referring to the building. I am referring to specifically line Item 05: Telephones, where the explanation given for this line Item for \$200,000 is: "The sum needed to meet obligations" of TSTT to September 30th. We are in the month of May. So I am asking if it is from May to September we are expecting to utilize \$200,000 in telephone bills or are there additional pieces of equipment that are going to be installed?

Hon. Imbert: I already answered that.

Madam Chairman: I believe the question was asked—

Hon. Imbert: Asked and answered.

Madam Chairman:—and answered. And as far as each prong of your question, it was answered.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam. At 02/001/21, Minister could you give some type of explanation as to what maintenance work at the President's House is expected to be undertaken for the \$2.2 million to September? Bearing in mind that

the President's House was recently refurbished and a lot of work was done there over the last few years, what would this \$2.2 million be for specifically?

Hon. Imbert: This is facility management.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. So it is to hire people, to pay facility managers. What is the maintenance we are talking about, no specific programme of maintenance?

Hon. Imbert: Well, as you can see from the explanation, it is a facility management agreement with UDeCOTT.

Hon. Member: We do not have it.

Hon. Imbert: You do not have that explanation?

Dr. Moonilal: No.

Hon. Imbert: Oh, I am sorry. I have received those additional explanations.

Dr. Moonilal: Explanations?

Hon. Imbert: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Could we benefit as well—

Hon. Imbert: I was not aware you did not have it.

Dr. Moonilal: Could we get a copy of that additional explanation so we can probably go a little faster if we have all the explanations?

Hon. Imbert: No, I am afraid not.

Dr. Moonilal: Or you prefer a longer process?

Madam Chairman: Are you finished, Member for Oropouche East?

Dr. Moonilal: No. Well, I am still asking the question now that he has the full explanation before him and we do not. What is this programme of maintenance? They say, "cost associated with the maintenance of the President's House".

Hon. Imbert: Well, if you look at the heritage buildings around the savannah in particular, you have Stollmeyer's Castle, you have Mille Fleurs, you have the White Hall and so on, all of these buildings need to be maintained as a routine

matter and this sum is for the facility management agreement with UDeCOTT.

Dr. Moonilal: With UDeCOTT?

Hon. Imbert: Yes, with UDeCOTT.

Dr. Moonilal: So UDeCOTT has a facility management agreement for the President's House?

Hon. Imbert: This is to enter into. This is a future facility management agreement.

Dr. Moonilal: Oh. So there is to be a facility management contract of which UDeCOTT will enter with the President's House and you need \$2.2 million between this date and September?

Hon. Imbert: That is the information I have.

Dr. Moonilal: That is the explanation you have.

Hon. Imbert: That is the information I have.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, just a follow-up on the question that my colleague asked. You had an initial budget of 230,000, you are now asking for \$2.2 million more.

1.40 p.m.

Is it that when the building was constructed, no arrangements were put in place for maintenance of this structure?

Hon. Imbert: To answer that question specifically, I am simply answering on behalf of the President. However, what I do know is that in most cases where there was restoration of heritage buildings—Whitehall, Stollmeyer's Castle, President's House, Red House—that the project manager, UDeCoTT, continued to maintain the facilities for a period of time after completion of the construction or renovation works. But at some in point in time, that temporary arrangement has to come to an

end and you have to enter into a longer-term formal maintenance agreement. So, in this particular case, UDeCOTT would have continued to do facilities management on an interim basis and it is now necessary to enter into a facilities management agreement with UDeCOTT for the maintenance of the facility.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. So is it that the initial expenditure of \$230,000, was that figure what was considered to be reasonable for the period going before 2023 and now you expect significantly more expenditure under this Head?

Hon. Imbert: As I indicated, I do not have details of what occurred before, except conceptually, that I know UDeCOTT, after completion of the work, continued to do maintenance work and performed the facilities management function. But you need to formalize it now so that in each case, there will be a facilities management arrangement between UDeCOTT and the Government.

Mr. Tancoo: I understand, Minister. We are just trying to get clarification as to what would have caused this drastic increase. You indicated that you are now at a point where we are formalizing an arrangement with the same entity that was already providing the service and that service was budgeted at \$230,000. The question we are trying to figure out is what would have caused this massive jump between what they were spending before and what they are now being asked—*[Inaudible]*

Hon. Imbert: I think you misunderstand. I think you misunderstand.

Mr. Tancoo: Please clarify, Sir.

Hon. Imbert: UDeCOTT would have been carrying these costs all the time. At some point, UDeCOTT would have get reimbursement from the Government. So when you look at that 230, that would have been what would have been spent by the President's House itself, not by UDeCOTT. So you are mixing up apples and

oranges there.

Mr. Tancoo: So you are advising then that UDeCOTT was literally carrying the load, and allocations to the President's House was not made for repairs and maintenance for buildings because UDeCOTT was carrying that load? So if I look at the yellow books before, I would not see a figure for repairs and maintenance—
[*Inaudible*].

Hon. Imbert: You would not see the full amount. That is in the case of all the heritage buildings. UDeCOTT did the work and then continued to maintain them on an interim basis until formal arrangements can be put in place.

Mr. Tancoo: Last question, Minister. So does this mean that this \$2.2 million extra, to take it to \$2.43 million, would include arrears to UDeCOTT?

Hon. Imbert: I cannot answer that but I could certainly get that information out of OPM, which is the line Ministry for UDeCOTT, to settle that particular point you have raised.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, or should I say Acting Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Could you inform the meeting how many vacant positions will be filled with this additional sum of \$2 million?

Madam Chairman: Which Item are you on?

Mr. Indarsingh: 02/001/26.

Madam Chairman: 02/00—excuse me, Member, just guide me. Which Sub-Item?

Mr. Indarsingh: 26: Expenses of President's Establishment, \$2 million.

Hon. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you. No, we are in Sub-Item. We are under the same Sub-Head—

Hon. Imbert: Sorry, a different Sub-Item.

Madam Chairman: Yes, and the Member has now identified it. Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: It is not just for vacancies, it is for the conduct of the national awards, state dinners and other events that would have been held by the Office of the President, such as the recent inauguration.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, unless I was given the wrong document, and I am scrutinizing this document well and I have my glasses on, the:

“...sum is needed to facilitate the recruitment of persons to fill vacant monthly paid and daily-rated positions on the establishment that is specific to the President’s household.”

Unless the Acting Prime Minister has a different brief because he alluded to my colleague that he had privileged information that the Opposition is not in possession of.

Madam Chairman: I am not sure. Is there a question for the Minister to answer or is that just a statement?

Mr. Indarsingh: The question still stands, Madam Chair. How many—

Madam Chairman: The vacant positions—the number of vacant positions.

Hon. Imbert: When I look at what was circulated to Members, it does say:

“...to facilitate the recruitment of persons...”

But the detailed notes I have here given to me by the representative from the Office of the President is that 02/001/26, the general Head is “Expenses of the President’s Household” and this will include expenses for national awards, state dinners and so on. And I am also advised, which now deals directly with the issue raised, that the

previous President, as I said before, did not occupy what is called the great house, the large building, and as such a skeletal staff was maintained during the last five years. The new President and her spouse will be residing at the President's House and therefore funds will be required the hire additional staff for the upkeep of the President's household.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, unless I am confused, I know that there is another Sub-Head to deal with the hosting of conferences and seminars and other functions and so on, and I mean I do not want to belabour the point, this has to do with:

“...vacant monthly paid and daily-paid positions on the establishment...”

And I know the Acting Prime Minister has had—in a previous incarnation would be familiar with these terms, and simply I am asking these things. Are we going to recruit contract positions for when there are state banquets and so on, at the President's House? I am just asking or seeking the clarification.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I thought I clarified. The previous President did not live at the President's House and therefore the President's Office maintained a skeletal staff. The new President and her spouse will be occupying the President's House and therefore a full complement of staff will be required to provide services to the President's household, and that is one of the purposes for this allocation of additional expenditure. I thought I made myself crystal clear.

Mr. Indarsingh: And, Madam Chair, given what is being told to the meeting, no problem, how many—the Minister has indicated that the President will now come and fully occupy with members of her family and so on. So is it 10; is it five, six daily paid? These are the things that we want to know for the benefit of the meeting. That is all.

Madam Chairman: Can you provide—[Inaudible]—hon. Minister?

Hon. Imbert: Well, I was waiting. Ten.

Hon. Member: You should have said that before.

Hon. Imbert: He did not ask.

Mr. Indarsingh: Ten in total?

Hon. Imbert: He did not ask. Ten.

Mr. Indarsingh: And could you provide a list or a breakdown of the classification?

Hon. Imbert: I certainly cannot provide that now. I will endeavour to get the information out of the Office of the President in time for the debate.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, Madam Chair, based on the track record of the Acting Prime Minister, we would plead upon you to ensure that this information comes before the debate.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: The question was asked.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to that said line Item, Item 26, where \$2 million is being requested for the recruitment of 10 persons for the rest of this fiscal year. Can the Minister provide us, in addition to what he has committed to, the positions and the compensation, the salary for those positions that this line Item is intended to fill?

1.50 p.m.

Madam Chairman: I believe that was already, that undertaking was already given—

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you and—

Madam Chairman:—and the Minister would have provide details concerning the

10 positons.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, in addition—

Madam Chairman: —Member for Caroni, you finished? Sorry.

Mr. Ratiram: Another line Item if I could wait—

Madam Chairman: Sorry. Go ahead, go ahead, go ahead, you have my ear.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you Madam Chair. Madam Chair, with respect to line-Item 28: Other Contracted Services, of \$500,000 being requested and the explanation in the notes is, engaging the services of specialists in the field of archiving and research. Can the hon. Minister advise us many specialists and what are the terms of engagement for these specialists, what specific archiving and research will these persons be doing?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman that was a misleading introduction from the Member that is not all that is in the document circulated to Members. So for the benefit of the listening public I will read what has been circulated to Members:

“Other Contracted Services - \$500, 000.

Funding is needed to facilitate:

- i. the upgrade of the DRaaS (Disaster Recovery as a Service and it wireless infrastructure which is a cloud computing service model used to back up the organization’s data, and IT infrastructure);
- ii. the expansion of the Columbus Communication Trinidad C&W Managed Services and Cloud Security/Managed Wi-Fi; and
- iii. engaging the services of specialists in the field of archiving and

research.”

So it is three things, quite a bit of it would be IT and matters of a technical nature. So could the Member please be more specific in the question?

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, thank you most certainly hon. Minister for adding that and in addition to explanation three, with specifically the details asked for by, with the specialists, can you also provide us in terms of the service providers for Items one and two to provide those services, or a breakdown of what is budgeted for those services, in Item one and two.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I was very clear, I did not stutter.

“ii) the expansion of the Columbus Communications Trinidad Limited Cable and Wireless Managed Services and Cloud Security/Managed Wi-Fi.”

And therefore, the service provider for Item two is Columbus Communication Trinidad Limited Cable and Wireless Managed Services and Cloud Security/Managed Wi-Fi. With respect to the others, I will endeavour, I will try my best to get the information for the debate.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, in respect of line-Item 21, you indicated previously that that expenditure is required for facilities management in the respect of an agreement, a futuristic agreement with UDeCOTT, can the Minister indicate what procedure was used for the selection of UDeCOTT in respect of the facilities management?

Hon. Imbert: The agreement has not yet been entered into. That is the intention.

Mr. Ram: And what process—Minister what process is being used to engage

UDeCOTT?

Hon. Imbert: I am not aware you need a process to have an intention? The process will be when UDeCOTT is engaged and it will be in accordance with the Public Procurement Act. Right now it is simply an intention.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princess Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you Madam, hon. Minister line Item 02/001/58: Medical Expenses, there is an allocation of a \$100, 000, can the Minister say whether this is associated with recent medical challenges of her Excellency?

Hon. Imbert: It should be known to the more experienced Members of the House that a decision was taken by successive governments, or decisions, plural, that all former Presidents, and as an aside all former Prime Ministers, are entitled to medical care for life. And therefore, there is now another former President and therefore it is—there is now a requirement to take care of the new former President, and the new President hence the increase.

1.55 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratriam: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, line Item 03/001/01: Vehicles, an additional 1.5 million is being requested. Fund is needed to meet the cost associated with the purchase of two replacement vehicles. Can the hon. Minister advise if these vehicles are also to be used on the weekend vacation that has been circulating Her Excellency takes down in Mayaro?

Hon. Imbert: As far as I know, the President is on duty like some of us, like some of us, 24/7/365 days a year. And, therefore, the President is always on duty. But in this particular case, my understanding is, this is for escort vehicles for the Office

of the President.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 01 supplemented by the sum of \$10,797,000.

Madam Chairman: I thank you Minister of Finance and I thank you Secretary to Her Excellency, the President.

Head 02: Auditor General, \$1,493,000.

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

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Auditor General is the supreme audit institution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The Auditor General audits the accounts, the public accounts of Trinidad and Tobago and various accounts associated with Departments and agencies. The Auditor General's appointment is covered by section 116 of the Constitution, and the Auditor General's functions, duties and responsibilities are also covered in the Constitution.

Question proposed: That Head 02 be supplemented by the sum of \$1,493,000.

Madam Chairman: If we can just wait a little bit before I take questions so that the technical assistance for the Minister would be in place. *[Pause]* Okay, we can proceed.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 02 supplemented by the sum of \$1,493,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much Auditor General.

Head 05: Parliament, \$14,591,000,

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

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I was asking the Leader of Government Business if she was going to do this one. But it appears the task falls to me, unfortunately.

I think we all know that the Parliament is the Legislative Branch of the State. There are three Branches, the Executive, the Parliament, and the Judiciary and I do not think I need to explain to hon. Members what the Parliament is all about. But as you know, Madam Chairman, we have a bicameral Parliament. We have two Houses, the House of Representatives and the Senate, and the allocation to the Parliament is intended to cover all of the expenses of maintaining the functions and the proceedings of the House of Representatives and also of the Senate and all the associated officers associated with the two Houses: the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, and so on, and also looking after the upkeep and maintenance of constituency offices and other allowances that are paid to Members of Parliament and all matters relating to the functioning of our Parliament, which I dare say, is one of the best in the world.

Question proposed: That Head 05 be supplemented by the sum of \$14,591,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratriam: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the Hon. Minister, line Item 02/001/21: Repair and Maintenance Building, an additional 5.8 million is being requested to meet the cost of maintenance of the Red House and Cabildo Chambers to September 30, 2023. Can the Minister provide us with a breakdown of what this additional 5.7 million is for, when in fact this Item was actually budgeted at 200,000 in our Appropriation Bill?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Imbert: My answers will be identical to all of the questions with respect to a

similar line Item in the previous Head in the Office of the President. This is for a facility management agreement between the Urban Development Corporation and the Heritage Buildings, which comprise the Red House and Cabildo Chambers. In the past, as I said in answer to a previous question, UDeCott would have been carrying these costs. It is now necessary to enter into formal facility management agreements with UDeCott for the Red House and Cabildo Chambers.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, I refer you to line Item 02/002/01. It would be the same question for 002/01 too. I notice that you have an allocation; based on your request here, you asking for funding for July to September for the Office of the Ombudsman, both in terms of travelling and subsistence and in terms of salaries and cost of living for investigators attached to the Office of the Ombudsman. So these are the first two line Items in the schedule. Is it that the Minister has under-budgeted, in the sense that provision was made for October 2022 to June 2023 and no provision was made thereafter, or is it that these investigators are now being proposed to be brought on board from July to September?

Hon. Imbert: The latter.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Line Item 64, Minister: Operations of Constituency Offices. The Parliament is requesting an additional \$1.2 million, approximately. The question is: Is this to take care of arrears, firstly? And a general question is: Within this line Item, does it take care of Members of Parliament's staff inside this line Item of \$36 million?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Imbert: This is for operations. Let me just see exactly what was told to Members. Just excuse me one second. It was indicated this was for operations. So, what this would be for is constituency office staff salaries, constituency office rentals, and other similar matters. So, it is not arrears. It is for continuing payments for the staff that we have in our constituency offices and the allowances that we get, and so on.

Mr. Lee: Just a follow-up question, Madam Chair, through you to the Minister of Finance and maybe to the Clerk of the Parliament. This \$36 million that it takes care of all of our staffing at our offices, do you agree that maybe it is time to look at an increase in allocation for the employment of the income of staff?

2.05 p.m.

Hon. Imbert: You are talking about an increase in allocation overall—

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Hon. Imbert:—to Members of Parliament for the engagement of constituency office staff?

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: I think I kind of vaguely remember the Member for—

Mr. Lee: Couva South.

Hon. Imbert:—Oropouche East was associated with the House Committee, and I have just been reminded that the last time we looked at this was eight years ago, but this is a matter for the House Committee. So what I would suggest you do, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, is make representations to the House Committee, because normally a recommendation would come from the House Committee and go to Cabinet, and then Cabinet would make the appropriate decision. So make representation to your members on the House Committee and we will take it from there.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Hon. Imbert: Because the last amounts were settled eight years ago—eight/nine years ago.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Question was asked and responded to.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 09/005/06/F/013: Restoration of the Red House - Technical Team. An additional \$2 million is asked to add on to the 3.5 million.

“This sum is required to meet the cost of renovation works at the Red House, Parliament Museum as well as repair and refurbishment of all passenger lifts at Cabildo building.”

Can the Minister provide us with a detailed breakdown of whether there are outstanding bills to be paid or there are new purchase orders to be funded with this additional \$2 million?

Hon. Imbert: Well, I think like any Government department there would be outstanding bills. You want to get some details now? I can give it to you.

Mr. Ratiram: If we can get it in writing, Minister, that would be fine.

Hon. Imbert: I have the information—some information. Cleaning and shampooing of furniture and carpets in the complex due to mold, renovation works at the Red House, painting enhancement, irrigation repairs, landscaping, repair and refurbishment of the passenger lifts, installation of a annunciator panels for the fire alarm systems. I do not know what more detail you want.

Mr. Ratiram: Can you provide us with a breakdown of the service providers and

the cost?

Hon. Imbert: I will ask the Parliament for the information.

Mr. Ratiram: Also Minister, you indicated the presence of mold and mold treating inside the Parliament building. Can you advise when this occurred and if there is still any threat of the presence of mold because this is something that can compromise the health and safety of the employees and the Members.

Hon. Imbert: The question finished?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Imbert: The Clerk has advised me that that was in Cabildo and it has been eliminated.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West. Member, no? You were just testing your agility. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, Sub-Head 09/Item 005/line Item 005: Televising and Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings. I see there is an increase of \$1 million and the explanation is to do some renovation at the Gran Couva broadcast site and some additional upgrade to broadcast equipment. Can the Minister advise in terms of the split between what is the amount going towards the upgrade of the facility at Gran Couva and what portion is going towards the broadcast equipment?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Imbert: I am advised by the Clerk that that would be made available.

Mr. Paray: Excuse me?

Hon. Imbert: I am advised by the Clerk of the House that that information will be made available.

Mr. Paray: Thank you. I have a part B of the question, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am aware that the Gran Couva site is a shared site for all telecoms operators in terms of broadcasting. The fact that the Parliament is paying a portion of this renovation, I am wondering if we are taking up the full cost of that renovation or is it being shared amongst other telecoms operators?

Hon. Imbert: Answer is no. The Parliament is not paying the full amount and it is a shared cost.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Hon. Imbert: I do not know if you have an interest in this matter because if you do, I would like you to declare it.

Mr. Paray: Absolutely not. I sold my interest.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 05 supplemented by the sum of \$14,591,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Clerk
and the supporting technocrats from the Parliament.

Head 06: Service Commissions, \$3,566,000.

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

Hon. West: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Service Commissions Department acts, as we all know, as the secretariat for the four constitutionally enshrined service commissions. It supports the service commissions through the provision of administrative, technical and advisory services. The Division is continuing to provide support to the four commissions and is continuing to seek to improve its operations through digitalization, through revisiting of its structure, and through addressing the issue of delegated services to Ministries, agencies, and divisions.

Madam Chair, I am happy to answer any questions—one more thing,

Madam Chair, the adjustments are all in relation to recurrent expenditure to continue the operation of the service commission, nothing to do with capital expenditure of any of their capital projects. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 06 be supplemented by the sum of \$3,566,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, madam Chair. To the Minister, with regard to Item 002/001/22, which is Short Term Employment for \$865,000 requested, Minister, can you indicate when is the completion date for the renewal of these contracts? And if you can, how long have these employees been on short-term employment?

Hon. West: Yes. Madam Chair, as I indicated in my opening statement, the Service Commission is seeking to revise its structure and the structure for the Police Service Commission. So these short-term contracts are being entered into pending the completion of that exercise, at which time we propose to hire either establishment persons or long-term contract people.

Dr. Bodoë: Understood, Minister, and thank you for that explanation. Are you in a position to give any time frame for the completion of this restructuring exercise?

Hon. West: The matters are currently before PMCD, and we are in discussion with the Service Commission as to how we see the restructuring going forward. Those discussions are actively being pursued. I would think within the next couple of months we should come to a landing on those and go before Cabinet for approval.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 02/001/23: Fees, in the amount of \$1.468 million. Minister, based on the explanation we are given here, there are basically three areas, one for licences of software, the other

for the examiners and markers for promotional exams, and the third is to retain the service of the attorneys. Can you just give a breakdown of the amount per item? How much would be the software for the examiners and for the attorneys?

Hon. West: The RFO software is \$416,000 in respect to the Database Enterprise Solution. In respect of the Survey Express it is \$90,000, facilitation of examinations \$367,000. Payment to Senior Counsel is \$594,725.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you just tell us who that Senior Counsel is?

2.15 p.m.

Hon. West: We have two different senior counsels for different matters and they are Russell Martino and—sorry, there are three attorneys, Russell Martino, Deborah Peake, Dominic Martino.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much.

Hon. West: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, with respect to 02/001/22, how many employees have been on short-term contract or short-term employment, and for what periods have they been under what we would term short-term contract?

Hon. West: There seven persons on short-term contracts of the period currently before us.

Mr. Indarsingh: Could you under take to get that—

Hon. West: We can provide that.

Mr. Indarsingh:—and a breakdown of the seven persons, their job classification, please?

Hon. West: Yes, I can give you the job classification. It is Assistant Director, Research and Evaluation; Assistant Director of Public Education; Audit Analyst; Business Operations Assistant II and I.

Mr. Indarsingh: And, Minister, with respect to the said line Item and employment and so on, I heard you indicate restructuring and reorganization of the Service Commissions is currently with the PMCD. Given that the Prime Minister has said that Service Commissions will be disbanded, will—given the restructuring and reorganizing, will there be any employment within the Service Commissions following the restructuring and reorganizing?

Hon. West: We are currently dealing with the Service Commissions and the structure as exists, and we are seeking to ensure that it is as efficient as it can be while it continues to exist.

Mr. Indarsingh: So there would be no disbanding of the Service Commissions?

Hon. West: I am currently treating with the Service Commissions as they exist.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Hon. West: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, line Item 23, with respect to Fees, can the Minister advise if any of these fees are to be paid or are going to be paid for legal advice for the shutting down of the Service Commissions as announced by the hon. Prime Minister?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. West: Madam Chair, these legal fees are for the ongoing work or past work of the Service Commissions. The issue that the Member raised is not currently before Service Commissions.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am continuing questioning based on line Item 02/001/23. Hon. Minister, you indicated that the sum is required to pay several things including:

“...the Oracle Software Licence for IHRIS...”

Is this a new licence that the Ministry is engaging in, or is this an Item that was a previous—based on previous agreements? The question being—the question I am trying to find out is whether or not this should have been budgeted for because it is part of the normal renewal of licenses under the Ministry? So, is this a new licence or is this continuation of an existing licence?

Hon. West: They are not new licenses but what I would advise the Member, to make the position clearer, is that we are—the entities responsible for the HR in the public service are currently revisiting the issue of the platform to be used for the HRM management and because that is ongoing, these licence expenses need to be continued until we come to a landing on that which will be soon.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Just to follow up. So, Minister, this was clearly going to be an easily predictable exercise. So can you advise why it was not provided for in the initial budget for the financial year?

Hon. West: It was predictable but uncertain, because it was contemplated that we would have made the switch before now.

Mr. Tancoo: So no provision was made based on that—

Hon. West: Provision would have been made in the PSIP for transfer to a new dispensation if the decision had been taken in time. Because of a decision is not yet made, those funds in the PSIP remained unspent and we need to make an adjustment to recurrent.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, line Item 43: Security Services. An additional \$400,000 is being requested for this line Item, can the hon. Minister advise if there is a new security service at Cipriani Plaza, a new contract that is being entered into, or to pay fees for the rest of the financial year?

Hon. West: It is to pay fees for the rest of the financial year.

Mr. Ratiram: And can the Minister advise, if it is to pay fees for the financial year, why it was not provided for in the initial budget?

Hon. West: Well, you may recall that there was an issue regarding the cost being incurred by the Police Service Commission to complete the exercise of locating and appointing a new Commissioner of Police. There were additional costs that needed to be provided for, so virements were made to treat with that. So we need to supplement those accounts to take us to the end of the financial.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Taking into consideration that a new Commissioner of Police, a substantive Commissioner of Police has not been placed in office as yet and this is an ongoing exercise, can the Minister advise if this funding here will be sufficient?

Hon. West: [*Inaudible*]*—*Commissioner of Police. That was approved by the Parliament some months ago.

Mr. Ratiram: As I am saying—

Hon. West: So that exercise has come to an end.

Mr. Ratiram: So that exercise has been ended?

Hon. West: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Just for clarification, hon. Minister, this same line Item 02/001/43. This sum is required to meet the cost of Security Services. But you indicated just

now that this was for a replacement of funds that were vired for some other purpose?

Hon. West: It was that some of—we needed to vire funds from—to some accounts to treat with expenses in the Police Service Commission. And some of those funds are now being replaced.

Mr. Tancoo: So we had movement of moneys from under this Head, out of this Head to another purpose?

Hon. West: Correct.

Mr. Tancoo: And this money now then is to replace that funding?

Hon. West: Correct.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Minister, if I may, where then would I be able to see if you could just assist me—

Hon. West: Sorry?

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Naparima, I am sorry. I am really being disturbed. Yeah, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, I am assuming that when we look at transfers between Heads, at some point in time, we will be able to see that reflected? Thank you.

Madam Chairman: So let us just understand, is it a transfer between Heads? Are we using the right terminology here?

Mr. Tancoo: That is the understanding that I have from what the Minister's explanation is, that moneys were taken from this Vote to be used somewhere else and this is to supplement that—

Madam Chairman: Yes, but Head is a different thing. So that is why I am asking, I want us to be clear. Head would be Parliament. Okay? We are not

talking—or Goods and Services, and Personnel, but I think we are talking Sub-Item here.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: I do not know, maybe the Minister could clarify, because I am not sure what is being asked and what is being said is the same thing.

Mr. Tancoo: Ma'am, the question that was asked is whether this was a virement. This was to replace funds that move between Heads. This sum is required to meet the costs of Security Services. This is not a new cost. The Minister indicated that the money was allocated and some money was moved from this Vote to move elsewhere. That is not reflected in the explanatory notes that was provided to this honourable House. I am actually satisfied with the Minister's answer Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: And all I am trying to say is that you are using the word move from one—"vired from one Head to another Head". And for the length of time we have been sitting here, that cannot be done.

Mr. Tancoo: All right. All right, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: So I am just—you know.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 06 supplemented by the sum of \$3,566,000.

Madam Chairman: Minister, thank you very much, and Director of Personnel Administration, thank you very much.

2.25 p.m.

Head 07: Statutory Authorities, Service Commission, \$444,000.

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.

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the Statutory Authorities, Service Commission was established to deal with particular Statutory Authorities, such as the two city

corporations, the two borough corporations and a number of other statutory authorities. Its function, its responsibility and its role is very similar to the other service commissions.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 07 be supplemented by the sum of \$444,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a quick question to the Minister. Minister, 08, under General Administration, Rent/Lease-Office Accommodation, the authority is asking for an additional \$110,000 and it is to cater, based on the notes, for the months of August and September rental which, when you work it out to be approximately \$60,000 per month. So, the question will be—which is a straightforward budgeting amount—why 720 was not budgeted for at the beginning in October?

Hon. Imbert: In the budget exercise, when the Ministry of Finance gets requests from Ministries and departments, the requests always exceed the revenue and, therefore, one has to make adjustments, and one expects that most heads of departments, Ministries and so on, would be able to find savings from within their overall allocation to vire or transfer, but sometimes it is unavoidable that we have to supplement. So that the Statutory Authorities, Service Commission was not given the full amount for this particular Sub-Item.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line-Item 16, to the hon. Minister, Contract Employment. Can the Minister advise: What is the engagement period for this, a specialist, that this line-Item is for?

Hon. Imbert: Three years.

Mr. Ratiram: And this three years started at what time and is expected to be finishing at what period?

Hon. Imbert: Fiscal '23.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 07 supplemented by the sum of \$440,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister, thank you the Acting Executive Office at the Statutory Authorities, Service Commission.

Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister, \$125,502,845.

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

Hon. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, as before, the Office of the Prime Minister is there to provide the support services for the hon. Prime Minister in his day-to-day operations and in the running of the country, including the Cabinet Secretariat. We also have two Ministers in the Office of the Prime Minister with specific responsibilities, one for Gender and Child Affairs, and Communications.

Question Proposed: That Head 13 be supplemented by the sum of \$125,502,845.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Mr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line-Item 02/001/66. Could you please provide the breakdown on how the supplemental sum will be divided among the projects stated?

Hon. Young: Madam Chairman, the Member is asking for the breakdown as to which symposium, which ceremony, which—so for the celebrations of the 60th Anniversary for the Independence of the Republic and then for the co-hosting of the Regional Symposium on Crime and Violence as a Public Health Issue, he wants to know how it is broken down?

Mr. Seecheran: Yeah.

Hon. Young: Okay. That could be provided. Just now. Well, as was answered by the hon. Prime Minister, at the last prime ministerial questions, the crime symposium which was co-hosted with CARICOM is at a cost to the taxpayers of 1.5 million. So, therefore, the remaining \$13 million, we will have to provide the breakdown for that.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: You are not asking?

Mr. Charles: No. The Prime Minister had indicated that the cost was estimated at 1.3. Could we get the final cost?

Hon. Young: \$1.5 million.

Mr. Charles: 1.5? And the breakdown please.

Hon. Young: What do you mean the breakdown?

Mr. Charles: The main expense items. You could do it in writing if you so wish.

Hon. Young: I would do it now, see if you could follow.

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Hon. Young: Thank you. The official launch, \$150,000; invitations—the opening ceremony, sorry, \$90,000; hotel accommodation and breakfast, remembering, of course, it is customary and proper to provide hotel accommodation for the various Heads of CARICOM or the Heads of the delegation for each CARICOM country, \$225,300; rental of vehicles—again, it is customary and proper to provide transportation for the Heads of CARICOM who attended, all the various Heads of delegation, the Secretary General of CARICOM, \$200,000; venue security; \$50,000; food and beverages, \$400,000; translators; \$50,000; ushers and protocol officers, \$25,000; master of ceremonies, \$10,000; the moderator, \$14,000; decor,

set-up hospitality, \$200,000; tokens and memorabilia for delegation, \$75,000; tokens and memorabilia for patrons, \$50,000. That comes up to \$1,539,300. It is cheaper than a function at the Prime Minister's residence in 2010 to 2015.

Hon. Member: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line-Item, Expenses of Cabinet-Appointed Bodies, \$9 million. I know in the explanation notes it is for the expenses incurred by the Commission of Enquiry into the Paria tragedy. Could the Minister state that \$9 million—a breakdown of that 9 million? And is it a running expense? Meaning, I know, all the expenses would not be completed. So, what period is this \$9 million for and who? The breakdown.

2.35 p.m.

Hon. Young: Cabinet is to approve the—

Mr. Charles: On a point of order—on a point of order, this matter deals with the Paria Fueling Trading Company Limited and I see—

Hon. Young: This matter deals with the commission of enquiry—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. A question was asked by Pointe-a-Pierre which is being answered by the Minister.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: So what you are objecting to, the question?

Mr. Charles: I am suggesting that there is a conflict of interest here and in terms of the fact that we are dealing with an issue in which, Madam Chair, you are conflicted, and I am dealing with the UK Parliament, House of Commons Staff Handbook, Avoidance of Conflict of Interest, Upholding the Code, Robert's Rule of Order, Parliamentary Procedure, Erskine May's treatise on the law, privileges, proceedings and usage of Parliament (25th edition), and it says, and I quote:

Where a member of a committee, particularly the Chair, has an interest

which is directly affected by a particular enquiry or considers that a personal interest may reflect upon the work of the committee or its subsequent record, they should stand aside from the committee proceedings related to it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: So I am just raising a question of ethics and proprietary at this point.

Madam Chairman: Point noted.

Hon. Young: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Is it a—

Hon. Young:—I will now proceed to answer—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute. Is it that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre wants to withdraw his question?

Mr. Lee: No. No Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Please answer, Minister.

Hon. Young: Madam Chair, it would be remiss of me not to place on the record the irony and hypocrisy we just heard from the Member for Naparima. So I place that squarely there and now I will proceed—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Young:—to answer the question asked by Pointe-a-Pierre. “Ah sure he cyah spell ethics.” So with respect to the \$9 million—

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair, are you going to ask the Member to withdraw—

Hon. Young:—that is the projected amount of money that has been put aside, Cabinet is yet to approve the final invoices of the commissioners and the counsel to the commission, and that is where the majority of the expenses will be. So as soon as that is done that could be provided.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you, Minister. So it is an allocation of \$9 million that is being put aside; when those expenses— Out of that \$9 million what expenses would be paid? Would it be the commissioners be paid out of that \$9 million? Would the lawyers for the commissioners? I do not know; I am just asking.

Hon. Young: So as I just indicated, yes. So that \$9 million would be to pay the fees for the commissioners—there are two commissioners—and then to pay the fees for counsel to the commission led by Senior Counsel Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, and he has two junior counsel along with him. So it would be to cover those expenses, and then there are some administrative expenses; paper, photocopying, and those things to be covered as well. But as I said, Cabinet is still to approve the final invoicing by the commissioners, as well as counsel to the commission, so this is projected to cover that.

Mr. Lee: Just a follow-up—thank you, Minister—and for my own appreciation, viewing the commission of enquiry there are several lawyers that are present there. Is the Government—this \$9 million catering for any counsel outside of what you just mentioned?

Hon. Young: As far as I am aware, no. Cabinet has not made any such approvals and I am not aware of any applications coming to Cabinet along those lines. Those would really be directed to the Attorney General's office.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, I do not know, because I was trying to follow with the whole question of what was put forward by my colleague, Naparima, about conflict of interest and so on. But the issue—and from the Minister—I do not know if he already gave my colleague “eh”—the total cost for fiscal 2023 is

approximately \$44 million as it relates to this commission of enquiry at the moment?

Madam Chairman: Is that a question or a statement, Member? I need to know.

Mr. Indarsingh: No. I am trying to find out based on the supplementation.

Madam Chairman: Is it a question? I want to know if it is a question you asked because—

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—it was said like a statement.

Mr. Indarsingh: At the moment, given the Minister's indication to my colleague, has it reached \$44 million or it may increase with the passage of time?

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much for that question, Member for Couva South. You would see that the sub-Item, the line Item is Expenses of Cabinet Appointed Bodies; the original allocation in total for that, for fiscal 2023 was \$35 million, and there is now a specific increase of \$9 million. That \$9 million is for the Paria Commission Of Enquiry. The \$44 million, which was previously 35, is for all Expenses of Cabinet Appointed Bodies. There is another commission of enquiry and coming out of Cabinet, you have a number of Cabinet-appointed bodies that that sum of money is set aside for. So it is not for the Paria, the commission of enquiry, into the fatalities at the facilities to deal with the LMCS divers.

Mr. Indarsingh: But you have committed to Pointe-a-Pierre that there may be an increase to this.

Hon. Young: I never said that.

Mr. Indarsingh: No, I am—

Hon. Young: I said that—

Mr. Indarsingh: I was a bit.

Hon. Young:—Cabinet is to—if you would allow me?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Hon. Young: I will make sure that the record is correct. We are dealing specifically with \$9 million that have now been allocated for the specific commission of enquiry. I said Cabinet is to approve the expenses of the commissioners and counsel to the commission which this is estimated to cover. It may very well be less.

Mr. Indarsingh: Okay. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, line Item 04/007/03, the Children's Authority; Madam, the supplementation of \$62,500,000, which essentially is a reflection of the under-resourcing, the continued under-resourcing year after year of the Children's Authority which demonstrates the Government's lack of care and compassion in treating with children's matters with any sense of urgency. Madam, the question I have to the hon. Member, the first one being, is that in light of critical areas of increased Personnel Cost, Accommodation Requirements, Internal Security Issues—the first one I want to deal with is increased Personnel Cost, and could the Minister share with us the current complement of staff at the Children's Authority in terms of numbers?

Hon. Webster-Roy: Madam Chair, there are currently 224 contract officers and 134 service providers.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, could the hon. Minister indicate to us, in light of the recent interviews with members of the Children's Authority in the local media and the issue of staff shortages and vacancies at the Children's Authority, can the Minister indicate how many vacancies currently exist at the Children's Authority in terms of the structure?

Mr. Lee: Madam Chair, the Children's Authority would have recently gone through a restructuring exercise. It is the intention of the Authority based on the new organizational structure to recruit 241 persons by now and September.

Mr. Padarath: Okay.

Hon. Webster-Roy: Would you like the categories?

Mr. Padarath: Yes. But can we also get from you, hon. Minister, the total number of vacancies that currently exist up to this time?

Hon. Webster-Roy: The organization recently went through a restructuring exercise. Coming out from that—

Mr. Padarath: Yes. But in light of that answer you would know how many vacancies there are.

Hon. Webster-Roy: I can tell you how many persons they intend to recruit between now and September based on the new structure. Would you like that information?

Mr. Padarath: Yes, Madam.

Hon. Webster-Roy: Okay. One CEO; 64 Child Support Officers; 16 Child Support Assistants; 145 Child Support Associates; eight Executive Assistants; one General Manager, Corporate Support Services; one General Manager, Finance Enterprise Risk and Supply Chain Management; one General Manager, Legal Services and General Counsel; one General Manager, Research, Planning and Development; one General Manager, Child and Family Reintegration Services; one General Manager, Child Welfare Service; one People Leadership and Transformation Manager; a total of 241. That would bring the total complement at the Authority to 609 by September, 2023.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, can you tell us on the current establishment at this time, how many child psychologists exist at the Children's Authority in terms of warm

bodies in position?

Hon. Webster-Roy: I do not have the breakdown for the exact number of child psychologists at the Authority at this time.

Mr. Padarath: Would you be able to give us the undertaking to provide that?

Hon. Webster-Roy: Sure.

Mr. Padarath: Also, Minister, in light of this allocation, can you indicate how will this impact on children's homes that have not met the requirements of the licensing regime?

Hon. Webster-Roy: How would the increase—

Mr. Padarath: How will this 62.5 impact on children's homes that have not met the requirements of the licensing regime?

Hon. Webster-Roy: The support for the homes that have not been licensed is coming directly from another line item. This allocation is specific to the Children's Authority and the operation. What would happen is additional supervision, support, technical and otherwise from the Authority to the homes.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Padarath: Certainly. Minister, there is an explanation that is provided in this document that speaks about accommodation requirements. Can you indicate how this has impacted in terms of—you spoke about the service centres and support centres, whether or not this allocation incorporates those service centres and support centres, or is this purely for the administration of the Children's Authority in terms of the administrative element of it?

Hon. Webster-Roy: It is for the administrative elements.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Going back to line Item 02/001/66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. Minister, are there any intentions to do a follow-up symposium under this line Item, to determine the success of the initiatives proposed at the regional symposium, as crime and violence were not definitively linked to public health, and no public health proposals were offered at the Hyatt meeting?

Hon. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My friend may have been absent on the last occasion where those on his Bench, and I think in particular it was Oropouche East who had made a submission that there was no linking of public health to violent crime as a public health nature. I took the time in my contribution, it was actually last week Friday—so I do not fault my friend for his memory not sufficing. I know a week is a long time for him to remember—that I actually read the declaration that on a number of occasions and on a number of sentences that was the declaration of the Heads of CARICOM. They have made the link.

Those who attended beyond the opening and had interest in what was taking place—so, again, I understand the absence—would have also have seen that it started off with experts in public health putting forward papers and discussion, drawing that analogy and that specific link. And interestingly I saw last night on MSNBC the Americans doing the exact same thing. This is recognized, no matter how they try to rewrite it.

As to the question whether there will be follow-up symposium, I am not sure whether there will be a follow-up symposium. What I can tell the population

through you is that all of the various Ministries in Trinidad are working towards the continuation of this. So you have National Security, you have Gender and Child Affairs, you have Ministry of Health, you have the Attorney General, who I know for a fact is already outreaching to the other Attorney Generals throughout the rest of CARICOM, to ensure that the legislative agenda and what was discussed by the Heads is carried out.

This also gives me an opportunity, Madam Chair, to just correct something I said a short while ago. I have now been provided with Office of the Prime Minister. The question that was asked with respect to the cost of the symposium is \$1.5 million. There is also a breakdown of approximately an additional \$1.8 million for associated expenses that were support expenses for the symposium that did not fall in the category of the symposium. So the total cost estimated at this stage is \$3.4 million. The 1.5 is the direct cost for the symposium. These other costs for example are invitations, \$5,000; dinner, \$60,000; team uniforms, \$25,000; an event planner, \$140,000; display of NGOs, \$50,000; website content development, \$100,000; social media/media monitoring, \$100,000; photography and video editing, \$200,000; set design, banners, signage, et cetera, \$800,000; meals for the Secretariat, \$50,000; coordinator for the National Secretariat, \$30,000, and a contingency of \$300,000, that may or may not have been used.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: I am on 04/011/10 and 11. Would the Minister be kind enough to give some detail on the loan arrangement with UDeCOTT for 226 million-plus for the San Fernando Waterfront Redevelopment Project, particularly to state, if not

now, he could supply the information, the name of the financial institution to which UDeCOTT is involved with for this loan, terms of the loan, the specific programme of works that the loan would be used for at the waterfront project in San Fernando?

Hon. Young: Thank you very much. UDeCOTT secured a fixed-rate loan facility of \$226.46 million from Republic Bank Limited on the 17th of January, 2023, at a rate of interest of 2.9 per cent, and a terminal date of 2028. The principal due is \$22,646,142.70, which is due by the 14th of July, 2023.

The funds that are being requested of \$46,400,000 approximately, the funds approved were 29.9 million. The programme project breakdown is as follows: For the Bayshore Housing Development, \$4.1 million—these are estimates, I will not worry to get into the cents—the San Fernando waterfront redevelopment fishing facility, approximately \$3.7 million; the San Fernando Waterfront Redevelopment Project, \$2.9 million; the reclamation part associated with it, \$4.4 million; the NIDCO carpark modification works, about \$379,000; the relocation of Customs and Excise, I believe was done. I remember the Minister of Finance going to open a new facility down there, \$8 million; the relocation of squatters to be worked out; the relocation of the PTSC maintenance facilities, \$14 million; the upgrade of Plaza San Carlos, \$6.6 million, and water trucking bay removal, \$1.5 million. Totalling about \$46.5 million. Other expenses have not yet been submitted.

Dr. Moonilal: Could the Minister tell us or indicate whether he could tell us, how much funds have been expended on this project prior to taking out the loan in January 2023?

Hon. Young: We would have to provide that information.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to refer the Minister's attention back to line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. Could the Minister give a breakdown of the cost and the service provided for the regional symposium on Crime and Violence as a Public Health Issue? Can the Minister also provide a breakdown for the other seminars and functions listed in this \$14.5 million being requested for supplemental?

Madam Chairman: Member, I believe that was the very first question asked with respect to the breakdown under each of these.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, in addition to what the Minister has provided here in the House, can the Minister also provide us with who the service providers are and the payees for these line Items that he has identified?

Hon. Young: Madam Chair, we will take the necessary advice and if advised that that should be provided, it will be provided.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Back to line Item 04/007/03 to the hon. Minister. Minister, there is an explanation here that part of the 62.5 million for the Children's Authority will be used for:

“...the creation of an Internal Security Department to provide oversight and security to all Children's residents”.

In light of the troubling number of cases of child abuse under your watch, could the Minister indicate what currently exists in terms of the oversight and security of all children's residents?

Hon. Young: Madam Chair, to assist my colleague here, that is not information that will be put into the public domain. The security arrangements for these various institutions, their location, how children are housed, their safety and security would be compromised if that were to be provided. So that is not something that can or should be provided.

I will also use this opportunity, based on the opening statement of the Member for Princes Town a short while ago, when he started directing his questions, to remind the population, through you Madam Chair, that it was the 2010 to 2015 government that proclaimed this legislation, without putting any infrastructure in place. And it was then their Attorney General who sued the State and brought constitutional motions and actions against the State, knowing fully well that he and the Cabinet did nothing to operationalize this legislation.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, the question coming from the statement made by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East, while I do appreciate that there are elements of security and so on in it, there are areas in terms of the 62.5 that we are being asked to supplement that can be shared in terms of a broad overview. For the Minister to blanketly give the impression that nothing was done post-2015, in terms of the legislation that was passed, this is eight years later, and you have had to change your own proclamation date of March 31st.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Padarath: Nobody gave you a proclamation date of March 31st, you did that, and after eight years there is complete incompetence to meet your own proclamation date of March 31st.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Padarath: So essentially all that we are asking is pretty much to give us a broad overview in terms of what this would encompass, seeing that there has been wanton abuse of children under your government's watch for the past eight years.

Hon. Webster-Roy: Madam Chair, before I respond to the hon. member, I would like to advise the hon. Member, and the wider public, that child care and protection is everybody's business. It is not just up to me or the Government. It is everybody's business. For a child to end up in a home, something has had to happen out in the communities. Having said that, Madam Chair, at present the Children's Authority is currently working alongside the TTPS to determine the best security arrangement to facilitate our various homes.

2.55p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, could the Minister confirm that in light of what she just indicated whether or not the Child Protection Unit is involved in terms of advising and so on, in this particular matter?

Hon. Webster-Roy: Madam Chair, I just said the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is working alongside the Children's Authority to determine the best security—

Mr. Padarath: Madam, I asked that in light of, it is public knowledge that the

Child Protection Unit is also understaffed and under-resourced, and therefore that is why I wanted to get a confirmation from the Minister, that they are actually involved in it, in light of both units being understaffed and under-resourced.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, line Item 53, an additional \$13.6 million is being requested here for Telephones; Rent/Lease-Vehicle & Equipment; Repairs & Maintenance of Buildings; and Security Services. Can the Minister advise if these payments include outstanding arrears, or it is to meet expenses up to the end of this to fiscal year?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chair. In some instances, there are some arrears, outstanding payments to suppliers for telephone and Internet and these sort of things. So, yes, there are some.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, through you, to the hon. Minister. Minister, can you be kind enough to provide us with a breakdown of those payments that are outstanding and the suppliers? For example, Repairs & Maintenance of Buildings; Security Services; Rent/Lease of Vehicles & Equipment, if you can provide us with who those persons are being owed at this point in time?

Hon. de Nobriga: Yeah, I am sure we can provide it for you.

Hon. Young: So under Rent/Lease for Vehicles & Equipment, you have TSL and Massy Finance, provide photocopier services. TSL, in particular, provides photocopier maintenance services to service points primarily in rural areas where in most instances the only photocopying and print resources available to residents are provided by Nalis. Our inability to make these services available to patrons impacts negatively on Nalis' mandate to provide library and information services. Photocopier services by TSL have been suspended at all of the Nalis' branch libraries since October 2022. Insufficient allocation in prior periods resulted in a

bought forward debt of approximately \$1 million in annual expenditure and the annual expenditure is approximately 1.2, so this is to clear that.

The Repairs & Maintenance, you have it there, Symon?

Hon. de Nobriga: Yes.

Hon. Young: Then go ahead, “nah”.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you. Repairs and maintenance, your balance representing payments due to the London Street Project Company Limited for the period September '22 to February '23, as well as invoices from other miscellaneous contractors. Again, insufficient allocation in prior periods would have resulted in a brought forward debt of approximately \$1.3 million. There is a lease arrangement with the London Street property management company that has ended as of January 27th—that has ended as at January 27, 2023, and approximately \$1.4 million in unpaid invoices to them. Those are currently on hold, and annual expenditure for the maintenance of the National Library building and all the branch libraries is about \$7.2 million.

Mr. Ratiram: The other contractors, can you provide us a breakdown in writing of those, if you do not have it here?

Mr. de Nobriga: I am sure I can.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 13 supplemented by the sum of \$125,502,845.

Madam Chairman: Thank you to the three Ministers.

Head 78: Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, \$348,172,814.

Madam Chairman: I have been told that there has been agreement for this

Ministry to come at this time.

It should be page 39 on the schedule. I will now invite the Minister of Social Development and Family Services to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Donna Cox): Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services continues to effectively carry out its mandate of maintaining the nation's safety net. Madam Chairman, given the occurrence of unprecedented flooding in fiscal 2022 the Ministry being responsive in nature depleted its allocation by \$20 million under the social assistance vote. Coupled with this, the Ministry was required to pay its clients the one-off transportation grant which was announced by the Minister of Finance during the budget presentation, and this payment was effective in January 2023.

As a consequence, all three of our major grants, namely Senior Citizens Pension, Public Assistance and Disability experienced a shortfall. It is also noteworthy that for fiscal 2023 the sum of \$4.1 billion was allocated under the Recurrent Expenditure for Senior Citizens Grant, which represented a decrease when compared to the actual expenditure of \$4.2 billion for fiscal 2022. So the Ministry therefore requires an additional allocation of \$348,172,814 to meet its commitment for 2023.

In closing, Madam Chairman, the Ministry recognizes its responsibility to ensure that the limited resources are adequately managed given straightened economic circumstances, and in this regard we remain resolute in the delivery of a responsive and multifaceted social service system, the caring for and protection of our poor and vulnerable families, as we invest in the development of the people needing it the most, helping, empowering and transforming lives. I thank you.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 78 be supplemented by the sum of \$348,172,814.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would have a few questions as it relates to line Items 02, 03, 08, as I go along, so if you would permit me? Madam Chair, through you, Minister, I note that there is a supplementation of \$348,172,814 which is required according to the explanation, due to payment, of course, you said trend in expenditure and the one-off transportation fuel grant of \$1,000. Minister, can you indicate what is or was the total cost of the facility of the one-time fuel grant?

Hon. Cox: One time fuel grant, the total cost we spent \$151 million.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, can you state whether all eligible recipients have been paid to date given that the initial sum mentioned by the Minister of Finance was \$175 million?

Hon. Cox: Yes, all was paid to date.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, based on the Minister of Finance's budget statement of this \$175 million being allocated for the payment of the one-off fuel grant, why is this figure of \$348 million-plus so far off, bearing in mind that data would have of course been provided for the budgetary process for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services? Further to the \$175 million you have an additional \$173 million, which would be divided into the Senior Citizens Grant, the Social Assistance Grant as well as the Disability Assistance Grant, why the—

Hon. Cox: We actually did not spend \$175 million, so that is the reason why. We spent based on what was needed. So because of the fact that some persons were off the system, then we did not spend \$175 million. We spent less.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. So Minister, based on your response why is there the need to

supplement 02, 03 and 08 based on the increase amounts shown here?

Hon. Cox: Because the Ministry of Finance did not give us this money. We spent based on what we had. So we took it out of the Senior Citizens Pension, social assistance and Disability Grant to pay for the one-off grant.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. I think maybe the Minister of Finance can help you here. Minister, given that this one-off Fuel Grant was a major fiscal measure of the Government for this financial year, can you indicate why a separate one-off Sub-Item was not created to facilitate this one-time Fuel Grant seeing that what you are explaining now, you have utilized finances from standardized grant line Items here?

Hon. Cox: Because the Minister of Finance—this was not in our Estimate. The one-off Fuel Grant was not in our Estimate. Right. That was not allocated to us. This came up after, and we spent from what we had, so this is the reason why we now have to get it back.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. So which brings me back to any initial question. Minister of Finance, maybe he can assist. Why a specific line Item.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughs*] I thought you were asking me. When you do the annual budget the documents are completed about two week before the actual reading of the budget. The fiscal measures are quite often settled during that two-week period, so you will find in many budget statements you would have mention of fiscal measures in the fiscal year and this is not confined just to this Government or previous governments and so on. It is a feature of all budgets where fiscal measures may be developed in the week before the budget which would not find themselves in the budget documents, because these are sent to the printers two weeks before the budget. So that is why it was not in there.

Ms. Mohit: Sure.

Mr. Imbert: It is as simple as that.

Ms. Mohit: Thanks.

Mr. Imbert: And that is why we make arrangements later on. Sometimes Ministries can find savings within their overall allocations, so you do not have to do a supplementation, sometimes they cannot. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is an expensive Ministry, it spends over \$5 billion, and we are constantly trying to manage the expenditure on social grants, and we are therefore trying our best to contain that expenditure. But once people qualify for a grant they have to get it. So that quite often you find we have to supplement that particular Ministry. If you go back in history you will see that particular Ministry is usually supplemented, not just by this Government, but by all previous governments.

3.10 p.m.

Ms. Mohit: Minister of Social Development and Family Services. Madam Chair, I want to refer to line Item 2: Senior Citizens Grant. Minister can you state whether this increase, you know, whether this increase for the senior citizens grant arose from the lengthy wait for approved applicants to be placed onto the system?

Hon. Cox: I just want to say that we have an ageing population and therefore we have a lot of persons who have been coming on living past 60. And I would want to say that we have also taken persons off the system, but of course it is almost similar amount of numbers on. I believe we took off about 5,000 and something persons and we put on within the last year over 5,000 persons or so.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. Minister you would hear time and time again that persons would have been approved for a grant but they are awaiting the payment of that grant and it runs for into months, five months, six months, seven months, of

course, after they are given retroactive. Can you state for us as at May 01, 2023, how many approved Senior Citizens Grant applicants are awaiting placement onto the system and to receive their grants?

Hon. Cox: 109,436 existing clients. We have 2,500 to be processed. The problem is not just about being approved. The delay takes place because there are checks and balances. Therefore we also have—we recently signed an agreement with Immigration because we also have to check travel patterns, we also have to check with NIB with regard to—before approval takes place. And that is where, part of where the delay takes place, besides the fact that there is also staff shortages at the Ministry.

Ms. Mohit: Minister can you state the approximate wait time for persons—you stated, processed applicants. Can you state the approximate wait time, because I know they apply on their birthdays. Following the application on their birthdays what is the approximate wait time for pensioners?

Hon. Cox: Well, officially it is supposed to be three months, but in reality it takes six months and up.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, can you state whether the Ministry would be taking on any new measures to deal with staff shortages to ensure that these Senior Citizens Grants are paid on time or processed on time?

Hon. Cox: Well I just want to repeat, it is not just only the staff shortages because we have to wait on information from Immigration. So we are hoping that MOU we signed with them will help us to be able to fast track and the Ministry will be able to approve pensions quicker. We also have to wait on the information from NIB, that too in itself takes time. But also we have persons on contract, we also have some OJTs, we have been lobbying Service Commissions Department because there are vacant positions.

Ms. Mohit: Minister given all that you have said, what would you as Minister of Social Development and Family Services say to pensioners?—because I mean pensioners are not young people. You mentioned they are aged, we have an ageing population. What would you say to pensioners who have dropped their applications and they are awaiting processing?

Hon. Cox: Okay, what I would say to them, of course, I will tell them to, you know, you have to apologize, number one, because of the fact that some of them have had a long wait because some have contacted me. But also, part of it is that we are improving the process, we are improving the system. Because of our digitalization efforts very soon this will be an easier process for them. But we continue to try our best to ensure that they get their pension as fast as possible. Also they have to be reminded that it is not just the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. We also have to depend on information from outside to be able to complete the process.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. Minister I know you mentioned 5,000 persons have been removed from the Senior Citizens Grant Programme. I know the Ministry, based on the Auditor General's report, as well as work with the Registrar General, in addition to your compliance unit, would have been involved in data cleansing. I know you gave us for senior citizens, can you give us how many persons would have been removed based on this data cleansing initiative from the Public Assistance Grant as well as the Disability Assistance Grant? Line Item 3 and 8 referring to.

Hon. Cox: The Social Assistance Grant, 3,075 persons were removed, Disability Grant, 1,892, for the period October 2022 to May 2023.

Ms. Mohit: Any specific reasons found?

Hon. Cox: Some—we found that some of them, well for example, with senior

citizens some were not eligible and some died. Social assistance grant, the movement, we found them to ineligible in going through our data cleansing. Similarly with our Disability Grant some of them you have to be permanently disabled and in the review you must have the doctor's report to state that you are permanently disabled. So once you cannot produce that then you are not entitled to be on the disability grant.

Ms. Mohit: Sure. Madam Chair, Minister you mentioned eligibility, the removal of persons who are in receipt of the Public Assistance as well as the Disability Grant Assistance, are you saying that this has nothing to do with persons being on both food support as well as these particular grants that they were removed or just specifically eligibility?

Hon. Cox: Well, I think that has to do with the requirements. Many of them did not meet the requirements. There were persons who were permanently employed and on public assistance. There were persons found to be permanently employed and on public assistance. There were those who at the time when they applied they would have been in need. But afterwards nobody is going to come back and say, I "doh" need this anymore. But it is while investigations take place then we realized this.

We started doing some data cleansing and we recognized that there have been some persons, we found about 20 persons with the same birth certificate who applied for grants, we have found that. Our investigation unit, we have about 200 cases being investigated by the police. With regard to our Senior Citizens Grant we have found collusion between internal and supermarkets. We have clients living abroad, clients reported dead but are still alive. There are those who supposed to be alive but dead but receiving and cheques being cashed. We have reports of cheques returning to the Ministry because of someone producing a death

certificate and those cheques were cashed.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Minister based on all that you have just explained and give that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is expending a lot in data cleansing as it relates to these three specific grants which the Ministry expends on every month, can you state to this meeting when do you expect to bring some type of closure to these particular issues listed?

Hon. Cox: Well the truth is I really cannot say. The investigations continue and we are not responsible for charging individuals and we have about 200 cases before the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service at this time.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, moving on to Social Assistance. I note that in previous meetings under Social Assistance income support and food support would have been paid under this particular line Item. Minister, as at May 01, 2023, can you state for us how many income support and food support for Phase 1 COVID-19 relief are outstanding? I note that you would have provided information that 1,154 individuals are awaiting income support payments which would also include food support under this particular line Item.

Madam Chairman: Before us, I just—which one of these Items—

Ms. Mohit: This falls under Social Assistance.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Mohit: If not, if you will be willing to provide it to us prior to the—

Hon. Cox: Repeat your question please?

Ms. Mohit: Based on information provided to us, under 03 Social Assistance, I note that income support and food support, COVID-19 relief would have been paid under this particular line Item. At the last meeting you indicated that 1,154 outstanding income support and food support under COVID relief would have been existing at the Ministry. I am asking as at May 01, 2023, how many income

support, food support Phase 1 COVID-19 payments, not uncollected cheques, are outstanding?

3.20 p.m.

Hon. Cox: I think we do not have any payments outstanding. We have uncollected cheques totalling almost \$1 million outstanding. We have since December 2022, 435 cheques valued at \$1.2 million, was expended, and 77 of those 435 cheques were collected.

Ms. Mohit: So Minister, we can safely say that the 1,154 persons were dealt with?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, can you give the assurance based on your increases in allocations, that all recipients under Item 007, which is Senior Citizens Grants, Social Assistance, Disability Grant, would receive their payments for this fiscal year?

Hon. Cox: Definitely, this would be able to cover all.

Ms. Mohit: All. So it would cover four and it would be paid in this fiscal year?

Hon. Cox: Definitely.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, you mentioned one thing in your opening statement which I note was paid under Social Assistance as stated by you. Can you state how many flood relief grants have been issued as at May 01, 2023?

Hon. Cox: 1,511 cheques were collected.

Ms. Mohit: How many applications did the Ministry receive and how many were approved?

Hon. Cox: Yes, 4,270.

Ms. Mohit: That is how many were received. How many were approved?

Hon. Cox: We have 481 awaiting approval. We have 360 appending validation because investigations take place. We have expended the values of the cheque,

\$12.1 million.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, can I ask whether all payments for flood relief would be completed by the end of the third quarter in this fiscal year?

Hon. Cox: Well, we are hoping so. But the point is, is that we have to investigate some of them. We have some with queries. We have duplication and that is one of the thing that is clogging the system because there is a lot of duplication. We have persons who applied more than once. There are persons who never had a flooding, but applied. Some of the queries are under question as possible fraud. There are some awaiting some validation because remember, we work together with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and they are some of the main first responders with regard to examining the households.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, just a few more questions.

Madam Chairman: Member, might I just allow two other Members to intervene and then we will return to you. Okay? So Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair, very quickly. With respect to line Item 04/007/02: Senior Citizens Grant, the Minister indicated to my colleague that staff vacancies were impacting on the processing of applications for the Senior Citizens Grant. Minister, how many vacancies are existing in each of the divisions and the total at this point in time?

Hon. Cox: Okay. With respect to the establishment in Social Welfare Division, we have 216 positions, 123 filled, 93 vacant. With regard to contract positions, 34 filled, nine vacant. So we have 43 positions overall with regard to the contract. So what we have done though, is that we have some persons on short-term and we also have OJTs to help us, but we still have to lobby service commission because we have 93 vacant positions on the establishment.

Mr. Indarsingh: And the OJTs, they do what? They do field—because in terms

of social—

Madam Chairman: Just now, Member. I have allowed you—remember, we are just dealing here with the actual. This is moneys to fund the grant. We are not dealing here with personnel, or contracts, or short-term employment. I allowed you that question because it arose out of something that the Minister said, but for our considerations of the Committee those line Items are not here before us. So I would not allow you to develop on those Items. Okay?

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you. I still have another question—

Madam Chairman: Sure. You ask your question.

Mr. Indarsingh:—because old age pension is very important to the persons who have reached 60 and 65 in this country. Through you, Chair, Minister, again in the context of the agreement that you indicated that was signed between your Ministry and the Immigration Division, through you, Chair, would you allow the Minister to just elaborate on that? Because as a Member of Parliament, people come to my constituency office and they describe horror stories in terms of their experiences they have with the Immigration Division in getting information to forward to the Social Welfare Division?

Hon. Cox: That MOU was signed so that we will be able to fast track and be able to get the information with regard to persons' travel patterns. So far, just last week actually, the Minister of National Security and myself had a discussion about it because we have been having some kickbacks with regard to getting the information and, therefore, the Minister promised to deal with it quickly.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, through you, line Item 04/007/003: Social Assistance. Minister, I make reference to a *Guardian* newspaper article by Gail Alexander on the 5th of October,

2022 titled, “Government moves to revive Food Box programme alongside Food Card”. It was reported that the hon. Minister of Finance said that:

“...‘we intend to do in 2023 is to restart the Food Box programme and we’ll supplement the Food Card programme with the Food Box programme.’”

The Minister continued later down in that article to highlight the benefits to the agriculture community:

“‘The farmers will get some income because they’ll be providing the produce and the meat to Namdevco to distribute it to the Social Development Ministry.’”

Through you, Madam Chair, to the hon Minister: Can the Minister advise if this supplemental funding that we are seeing here under this line Item will also take into consideration the commitment that had been made by the Minister of Finance when we went through is that exercise earlier in October 2022; and if it is that your line Ministry intends to uphold the promise to our citizens, that through your Ministry we will see the return of the food box programme to deserving applicants?

Hon. Cox: Well, I must say that this is not under this line Item, but I would say that at this time we have been having discussions with NAMDEVCO and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to organize the food box programme. We are doing the data cleansing and we recognized that on our programmes a lot of addresses are not even right, because if we have to deliver we must have proper information. So therefore, part of the data cleansing is taking place at a fast pace. We have been having meetings to ensure that when we start that it will be efficient and effective.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Minister. Through you, Madam Chair, also following up from the response that you would have given my

colleague, the MP for Chaguanas East, with respect to the cheques collected for flood relief, out of the 4,270 applicants, the 1,511 flood relief grants provided, can the Minister advise how many of those grants provided have been allocated to the central region through the Couva/Tabaquite/Taparo Regional Corporation specifically if you have the information for the constituents of Couva North because we have had a lot of residents in Couva North who were flooded out and also in my colleagues' neighbouring constituencies.

3.30 p.m.

And up to recently, we have been receiving complaints that they have not received any kind of support from this Government up to today's date. So can you advise us in terms of how many have already receiving from that region and how many are outstanding?

Hon. Cox: Okay. Well, what happened is that the flood relief is not categorized based on regions, it is done as soon as it is received so we do not have it with regard to constituencies. So what we can check—because recently I got a letter from the Member for St. Augustine asking about the flood relief, those outstanding and uncollected cheques for her area, and we were able to pull that and send it. You should receive it soon. And for Couva/Tabaquite area, we can check that for you. We would not have those figures here.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay. Thank you. Would you be able to provide it in writing at a later date?

Hon. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, with respect to the supplementation for the Disability Grant, in terms of \$18,972,086, on the last

occasion of the Standing Finance Committee, you were able to share with us the number of persons that this grant really serviced in terms of all three areas. The question I am trying to get at, hon. Minister, is whether or not you will be able to provide us, in terms of the Disability Grant, of how many children are impacted by this particular grant?

Hon. Cox: We have 3,004 children are recipients of the Disability Grant for minors.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, you mentioned \$12.1 million in grants for flood relief. Can you state whether this is—the 4,272 applications that you have come from every area that was affected by flooding?

Hon. Cox: Yes, total applications printed, we have 4,270—no, this is the—1,511 persons would have benefitted to the tune of \$12 million; 12.1.

Ms. Mohit: Right. Minister, based on this \$12 million—I know it is different grants they would have benefitted from—if not now, can you provide for us a breakdown of the types of grants which would have amounted to this \$12.1 million?

Hon. Cox: Okay, yes. But with the flood relief, there is no one figure because it depends on your situation. I can provide that.

Ms. Mohit: Right. So can you provide us with a breakdown?

Hon. Cox: Sure, yes.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, can you just state one more thing as it relates to applications. How many assessments, in terms of a figure, would you have received from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government as it relates to flood relief?

Hon. Cox: I would have to provide that because we assess and Rural

Development assesses, and it is all one figure.

Ms. Mohit: Have you received all—

Hon. Cox: From Rural Development?

Ms. Mohit:—assessments from Ministry of Rural Development ?

Hon. Cox: I am not sure. I will have to check.

Ms. Mohit: And, Minister, one more question, can you state whether this 1,511 persons who would have benefitted, which period of flooding they have would benefitted for?

Hon. Cox: This would have been 2022.

Ms. Mohit: 2022.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Arising out of the Minister responding to some of my colleagues, two points, one with respect to pensioners. From reports from my constituents, I heard the Minister's explanation of the long wait for the pensions. However, in addition to the lengthy process of application where the applicants have to wait for immigration to send information, wait for NIS to send information—whereas previously they would have been allowed to collect that information and deliver it. But even after if the approval is given and they are notified that their pension has been approved, there is usually quite a lapse in time before they can receive their first payment. So that is one just for your information.

Secondly, the Tunapuna Social Welfare Office is responsible for the St. Augustine constituency and recently, a number of officers there, their contracts expired. So for the Senior Citizens Grant, Disability and Social Assistance, a lot of clients, current clients and new applicants have been on hold because they either are awaiting visits, their file cannot be processed because so many officers'

contracts have expired. And from time to time, I am forced to send things to the Ministry or to the PS because that Tunapuna office seems to be in a state of—I mean, there is always some issue with staff and the delays, and you have been subjecting constituents of St. Augustine to really inhumane treatments because these people feel that they are already in a terrible situation and they are begging for help, and they are being given a runaround and being treated in this way, and this also applies to people who have food card issues and so on. So my question is, how soon will the issues with regard to expired contracts for officers, particularly at that Tunapuna office that deals with St. Augustine but generally, be rectified to sufficiently deal with all the issues that are presented to the Ministry?

Madam Chairman: Member, I am certain you were here when I made the sort of direction to the Member for Couva South and while it might impact, it is not a Head here for us to consider. So I am sure you will have another opportunity to do the kind of examination that you would like. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good day, Minister.

Hon. Cox: Good day.

Dr. Seecheran: Line Item 04/007/003: Social Assistance. Just as a follow up to my friend from Couva North, how many individuals qualified for and received Social Assistance because of severe flooding and the loss of property, livestock and crops in the areas of Las Lomas, El Carmen, St. Helena, Kelly Village, Warren and Cunupia for 2022? I just would like that information at some point.

Hon. Cox: That is not under this line Item.

Dr. Seecheran: Sorry, well, the line Item for flood grants.

Hon. Cox: No, the flooding is not under Social Assistance here.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, the Minister went through a very extensive period

when she was discussing the support for flood grants. A substantial amount of detail was provided. My question is actually based on the Minister's involvement—

Madam Chairman: Member, could you may be carry your mike up—

Mr. Tancoo: Sure.

Madam Chairman:—a little bit because the voice is dropping a lot.

Mr. Tancoo: Sure. Thank you, Madam. My question is based on the Minister's information. You indicated that several persons would have applied for and not gotten the grants because of several reasons. Now, these are grants that would have been requested since 2022. We are now in month five of 2023 and what we have in our constituencies, all of us, I am sure even in your area, we would have had people coming in, asking for updates and we are then required to make phone calls on a one-on-one basis or write letters on one-on-one basis. Is there any consideration being put in place for somehow providing the information as to whom have not been granted based on whatever information you want to provide so persons could be sure that they are not going to get—or that their query, their application is being processed? Is there some mechanism being put in place so that persons could have an idea of what is the status of their application by name rather than just by number?

Hon. Cox: Okay. That is fair enough. But I believe our—we have a department and they have been contacting persons because some of the applications were incomplete and so on, and they have been contacting them. Those who are not eligible, we have been telling them about it also and they have been asking them to provide more information. Remember that some—the first responder is the Ministry of Local Government and therefore we pay and we sometimes assess too, but we can only process too what we have. Because I have had persons send

queries to us with regard to the flooding, only to check and realize we did not have it. It did not reach the Ministry as yet.

Mr. Tancoo: Right.

3:40 p.m.

Hon. Cox: But a system could be put in place definitely, I agree with that they can respond to persons so that they will understand and know this current status.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 78 supplemented by the sum of \$348,172,814.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister, thank you PS.

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. Minister of Finance, I now invite you to say something.

Hon. Imbert: Certainly Madam Speaker. Although I must say, these days I am not sure, because I am hearing about a separate Government in Tobago and so on. But, according to the law, the THA was originally a colonial institution that is in fact the country's oldest political institution, first incarnated in 1768, in the island's former capital Georgetown, which is now Studley Park. The capital moved to Scarborough in 1769 and in 1877 representative government was abolished with the Crown Colony introduced to handle the administration of the island. In 1889, Tobago was joined with Trinidad by the then British government. After 1990, the THA was formed into seven divisions, each representing a developmental concern.

Today the THA comprises two main arms, the Legislative arm, and the Executive arm, and nine divisions, eight with particular remits. The Legislative arm is where all members of the Assembly meet in preliminary or Select Committees. The Executive arm is headed by the Chief Secretary in his capacity as leader of the council. The council has individual and collective responsibility for carrying out the task of the assembly through its divisions, and the role and function, and responsibilities of the THA is, sorry, are covered the Tobago House of Assembly Act.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 15 be supplemented by the sum of \$100,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, with respect to Development Programme under 09/003/15D/523: Major Improvement Works of Secondary Roads, Minister, could you inform this meeting in terms of where these works would be undertaken and provide a list of the roads that will be improved with this additional supplementation?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: I was just checking with the government of Tobago, which has given me a list, and work would be done on the North Side Road in Runnemede, if you know where that is; Highlands Trace, North Side Road; Mason Hall, Mount St. George; Castara; Bloody Bay, Winward Charlottesville; Turpin Corner, Flagstaff Hill; Sangster Hill, Scarborough.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Hon. Imbert: You are welcome. That is it?

Madam Chairman: That is it?

Hon. Imbert: All right.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 15 supplemented by the sum of \$100 million.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister of Finance. Thank you to Chief Administrator and your support staff. Safe journey home.

Head 18: Ministry of Finance, \$313,724,596.

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

Hon. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Finance has the responsibility for collection of revenue and allocation of expenditure, management of debt, and management of relationships with international institutions, and also has, under its purview, a number of state corporations and statutory authorities. But, I want to make the point that this particular supplementation has very little to do with the Ministry of Finance.

The Ministry of Finance has the responsibility for allocating funds under the Infrastructure Development Fund. If one looks at this particular supplementation, one will see the Ministry of Education is being supplemented, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. As Minister of Finance, I would not have detailed information on the workings of those Ministries so, I have asked the relevant Ministers to answer the questions on the particular Heads. As for example, I would not know what furniture is being procured for ECCE centres, and so on. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Question proposed: That Head 18 be supplemented by the sum of

\$313,724,596.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad. If maybe you could indicate under which Head.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. Thank you, Madam Chair. Head 28: Ministry of Health, if I could, with the guidance of the Minister of Finance, direct this to the Minister of Health. Hon. Minister, the 78,271,000 owed to contractors, can you disaggregate that amount with regard to A, B and C?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes, sure. Thanks. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thanks for the question. So 78,271,000 will be disbursed under four headings: Physical investments, hospitals, district health facilities, health centres. The sum of 19.9 million is required to facilitate the payment of outstanding invoices submitted by UDeCott to the Ministry of Health for development fees, colleague, which represents 4.5 per cent of the construction costs for the San Fernando Teaching Hospital.

In addition, funding is also required in the amount of \$2,230,201 to replenish the Vote, subsequent to an unforeseen payment for variation of works related to the Arima District Health Facility of \$894,000,524, and the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Centre, \$1,335,678.

Construction of the Arima Hospital, \$29,708,700, the sum of \$2,158 is required to facilitate payment of outstanding invoices submitted by UDeCott for construction works; that is of the Arima Hospital right. An additional sum of \$27,550,650 is required for the payment of costs associated with the maintenance of the Arima Hospital.

Then we come to the third heading: the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital, \$17,431,000. Colleague, this additional funding is in the sum of \$15,501,123, VAT inclusive. This is required to meet outstanding payments to

UDeCott for the period February 08, 2021 to February 07, 2022, related to the maintenance of the new Point Fortin Hospital.

Additionally, the sum of \$1,929,877 is required to facilitate payment of outstanding invoices submitted by UDeCott for construction works completed in fiscal 2022 which pertains to the Point Fortin Hospital again.

And fourth and lastly, colleague, the construction of the Ministry of Health Administration Building, \$8,942,100. This sum is required with respect of some redesign works we had to do for the new admin building, the new head office, ICT equipment, hardware, software, UDeCott project management fees, and so on. So, that was basically as much detail as I have.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. Minister, with regard to the Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals, which are now operational, can you say whether there are any outstanding balances for construction costs?

Mr. Deyalsingh: I will have to check. I do not want to say yes or no just off the top of my head, but we could check and get that back to you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item Head 79: Ministry of Sport and Community Development, an allocation of \$103,192,097, but it has an explanation “amounts owed to contractors for refurbishment works at the Hasely Crawford Stadium, upgrade of the Dwight Yorke Stadium, redevelopment of Skinner Park, and construction of community centres.” Would the Minister be kind enough to indicate to us whether or not these projects as suggested are actually completed in totality?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Sport and Community Development.

Ms. Cudjoe: Okay. As it relates to Hasely Crawford Stadium, the works are still ongoing. We have an estimated completion date of June 23rd. We have some

outstanding payments also from last fiscal year, where we are re-doing some ceiling. As it relates to--we are also doing some infrastructural works at the National Centres, for instance the Aquatic Centre, the Cycling Centre, because we are hosting the Commonwealth Youth Games. So, works, that is for outstanding works and works that are ongoing. In addition to that, the Dwight Yorke Stadium, the fixing of the athletic track and outstanding moneys for Phases II and I of that project.

For Skinner Park, Skinner Park is completed, but we are not close to paying our final payments to the contractor. So, this represents the invoices we have had on hand at the time of mid-term, at the mid-year exercise. So, that amounts to 103, and well \$13 million to pay a number of contractors for works that were completed as early as 2001 for community centres.

Mr. Padarath: Okay. Minister would you be kind enough to provide us, if you do not have the information now, but a list of these community centres—

Ms. Cudjoe: Sure, I could provide it to you now.

Mr. Padarath:—in terms of its locations, the cost and the contractor?

3. 55 p.m.

Ms. Cudjoe: So for the Arima Community Centre, the contractor is JNCO Enterprise and the outstanding invoices on hand totalled \$1,133,657.15. For Belle Vue Community Centre the contractor for which we have invoices on hand it—yes, Belle Vue, the amount on hand is \$2,612,184.46. As it relates to Belle Vue, contractor is—this is not Belle Vue, this is Belmont.

Madam Chairman: Minister, maybe you can bring your mike a little closer because your voice is fading.

Ms. Cudjoe: Right, for Belle Vue the total is \$2.6 million or should I say, \$2,612,184.46, the contractor is Hemispheric Building and Security Limited; for

Belmont, Ramdhan Engineering Project Management and Consultancy Limited, the total is \$1,237,784.63, for Belmont Community Centre—for Belmont Community Centre—that was Belmont Community Centre, sorry. Caiman Community Centre, PROTRAN 97, we have invoices, \$541,429.26; for Cascade Community Centre, Trinidad Pro Construction, \$843,988.65; for Diego Martin North Community Centre, SAS Marketing and General Contractors, the total is \$1,496,422.90; for Diego Martin North—no, for Diego Martin North, yes, SAS Marketing and General Contractors, I said that one all ready. For Edinburgh 500, Clydon Enterprise, \$1,743,147.77; El Socorro, Mattzack Company Limited, \$679,803.23, El Socorro Community Centre—that was Mattzack—sorry, I said that one all ready. Harmony Hall Community Centre, that is Jacobs Transport Co. Limited, \$752,774.24; Indian Trail Community Centre, Clydon Enterprise. You got it?

Mr. Padarath: Clydon's?

Ms. Cudjoe: Yeah—construction services, \$644,413.16. Lisas Gardens Community Centre, SAS Marketing, \$3,516,955.12; Maitagual Community Centre, PROTRAN 97 Limited, \$943,044.95; Maraval Community Centre, Fides Limited, \$1,173, 615; Quarry Road Community Centre, Junior Charles Construction and Transport Services, \$5,232,991.92; Quarry Village, Pioneer Construction, \$1,777,435.35; San Fernando North Community Centre, AG Mahabir Maintenance Co., \$677,666.82; Surrey Village, Ramdhan Engineering Project Management and Consultancy Limited, \$1,459,021.32; Tacarigua Community Centre, JNCO Enterprise, \$3,655,919.94; Tarodale Community Centre, Kenwin Company Limited, MAP works package that is for \$537,582.28; Tarouba Community Centre, Leonce Innovations Company Limited, \$931,503.75.

That gives a total of \$30,094,918.99. However, what is being allocated to

community centres is \$30 million. So we will still be out by \$94,000 and that is for the invoices that is up to mid-year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is on Head 26 to the Minister of Education with respect to the amounts owed to contractors for improvement/refurbishment/extensions of ECCE centres. If we can get which schools benefited from the improvement, refurbishment and extensions please? So I understand it is 51 primary schools, 71 secondary schools, and the ECCE centres.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance—Education, I am sorry, Minister of Education.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we have 29 ECCE centres and these can be detailed in—it will take a little long to read here, we can send it in writing.

Ms. Haynes: Absolutely.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The ones that we have had.

Ms. Haynes: Absolutely, and if we can have included in that how many contractors are owed and the names of the contractors owed please. I want to move to one—

Madam Chairman: Yes, please, Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Yes. I also see that some schools are getting pre-engineered classrooms. Which schools are targeted for these pre-engineered classrooms and the rationale for using pre-engineered classrooms in some of these schools?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, I can offer the rationale now.

Ms. Haynes: Yes.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The pre-engineered classrooms are cheaper to construct, they are faster as well, and once they are maintained well they give us well beyond the

construction shelf life. So we can have a pre-engineered classroom. We do have pre-engineered classrooms that have been put up, up to maybe 15 years ago that are still existing well and serving the schools well. So that would be the rationale behind it, and I can supply the listing of those that we proposed to do work on, or those that have been worked on.

Ms. Haynes: And so the cost of the—could you also provide the cost of the pre-engineered classrooms for us?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The—?

Ms. Haynes: The cost. You said it is cheaper so we would like to know what is the cost of—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The cost is a very variable thing because it will depend on the square footage, where the school is, the lay of the land, so—

Ms. Haynes: So therefore, when you are providing the schools that stand to benefit—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: “Mm-hmm.”

Ms. Haynes:—include the cost next to it so that because it is going to be in the information that you have all ready, please.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Okay. Well, once we have that information we will provide that.

Ms. Anita Haynes: Thank you. And then one other question on the status of “the development of a school for special education”.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: “Mm-hmm.” That work has been done so it is really to pay for work that has been done.

Ms. Haynes: This is the school in Pointe-a-Pierre?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. And that school is expected to come—so the school is

operational?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I said that was an operational school.

Ms. Haynes: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good day, Minister. On the infrastructural development for Head 28: Ministry of Health, Minister, why were redesigned works required at the new administration building for the Ministry of Health?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Health.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Okay. So when you are constructing a brand new building, very often you have to do redesigns based on what the engineers see when they reach the site. Maybe specs may change during construction, so you have all these things to consider.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, what was the initial cost to build this new administration building?

Mr. Deyalsingh: So, that would come under the Ministry of Health's variation, so we could look at that then, under Head 28.

Dr. Seecheran: And we will also—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Seecheran:—find out the new cost under that Head?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, would there be any loss of personnel numbers when the transfer to this new building occurs?

4.05 p.m.

Mr. Deyalsingh: No, it is not an—

Madam Chairman: Remember, we are looking here at are the financial matters, the transfer of a sum to the Minister of Health for redesigned works. Regrettably, I cannot allow that question under the exercise in which we are—*[Inaudible]*

Dr. Seecheran: Okay, Minister—thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, part a) with regard to the construction of the Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals, and the amount owed to contractors, has the Health Management Information System been implemented under this—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yeah.

Dr. Seecheran: —Vote?

Mr. Deyalsingh: So Cabinet took a decision to start the digitization of the health system using the ERHA and the South-West RHA as a pilot, the reason being, they are geographically next to each other, especially on the southern coast. So we are going to be sharing that system, then it will be rolled out to the other hospitals to form a national grid.

Dr. Seecheran: And when can we expect completion of this full roll-out?

Mr. Deyalsingh: So we got—

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, may I come in here, please? Madam Chairman, this allocation is specific: construction of Arima Hospital, construction Point Fortin Hospital, construction of Ministry of Health’s admin building, et cetera. I appreciate that my colleague wants to be very generous to the Opposition but the rules are very specific, we can only ask and answer questions on what is before us.

Madam Chairman: Agreed. Member, it is a similar sort of objection to earlier questions you have asked. Okay so—

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, part c) with regard to:

“payment...”—to—“outstanding...”—services—“to UDeCOTT for development fees in respect of the San Fernando Teaching Hospital.”

Is this sufficient to clear all outstanding invoices with regard to this teaching hospital?

Mr. Deyalsingh: As I indicated to your colleague who asked the same question, I will have to check. I do not want to give an answer that may be inaccurate.

Dr. Seecheran: Does this include any amounts with regard to plans for a cardiac catheterization lab in this facility?

Mr. Deyalsingh: This is not under this Head, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Development fees. That is what it is development fees. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister of Education. With respect to the \$105 million being requested for the:

“improvement/refurbishment/extensions to ECCE centres...”

And the:

“procurement of furniture ...for ECCE centres...”

Hon. Minister, I have, since 2020, been lobbying through our appropriate debates, Appropriation Bill, et cetera, SFC, begging of you to have the ECCE centre in Waterloo opened, outfitted with furniture, put the necessary systems in place, and you have given commitment that you will definitely look into it. I think you would have done an assessment of the outstanding works required to have these ECCE centres completed and opened. Can you advise if this supplemental funding inside of here involves completing the works at the Waterloo ECCE centre, and if we will be seeing an opening of that centre sometime soon?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It does not.

Mr. Ratiram: Can you can you advise if any study, any feasibility, any audit has been conducted to have that project completed so that we can see it in the near future?

Madam Chairman: Member, it is the same difficulty. Head 26 has very detailed itemization of what the moneys are for, the amounts due, a) to e). So you can ask about if the particular school was one of the 29, or something like that, but the feasibility study and all of that sort of thing—

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: —regrettably, I cannot allow in this exercise.

Mr. Ratiram: Guided accordingly, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister of Finance, can the hon. Minister of Finance, instead of going through each one of these Head, can the hon. Minister of Finance provide us with a commitment to identify the contractors that are going to be paid under this IDF fund?

Madam Chairman: I believe what the Minister said in his opening statement is that he does not really manage these things, and that is why he permitted each of the Ministers to give details with respect to their respective Ministries. Okay? So that if you wish you could ask under Head 26, to the Minister of Education, as you have seen; under Head 79, to the Minister of Sports and Community Development, as you have seen, et cetera, et cetera. Okay?

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair, and Madam Chair, this being Head 18: Ministry of Finance, and to all the different Ministers here, Heads 26, 28, 48, 79 and 80, can the hon. Ministers give us an undertaking that they will provide us with a detailed breakdown of all the contractors and the amounts to be paid to these contractors, as of what is being requested for in the supplemental funding?

Hon. Imbert: Yes, Madam Chairman, I just want to make a point. This is under the Infrastructure Development Fund, which was set up many years ago, about 15 years ago, to allow the use of state enterprises for the execution of the Development Programme of various Ministries. So all of this work would be

under the Development Programme, that is number one. And secondly, the supplementations are very, very specific, and I want to use a specific example. The Member asked about a particular ECCE school—centre, sorry, Waterloo, and wanted to know whether the construction of that would be under this. But the wording is specific. It says:

“improvement/refurbishment/ extensions to ECCE centres...”

It does not speak to construction of ECCE centres. So that I would like to tell Members whatever questions they ask have to be relevant to what is in this document, otherwise it will be difficult for them to get answers to the questions because the questions would have no locus standi.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, hon. Minister. Through you, Madam Chair—and it seems as though we have a delayed reaction from the Minister of Finance, because this question was already traversed between myself and the hon. Minister of Education. And I move on to another question where through you, Madam Chair, I directed the question to the Minister of Finance, and you provided the guidance that the Minister of Finance may not be able to provide the answer to the question I asked but the Ministers responsible for Heads 26, 28, 48, 79 and 80. So seeing that the Minister of Finance might not have been paying attention to the question that was asked when he intervened and provided with that response, I will repeat it for him to understand. What I am asking for is for a detailed breakdown of the contractors—

Madam Chairman: Now, Member, I allowed—you asked that question already and I gave some guidance. I allowed the Minister on the second occasion to answer because I thought he was going to give you some explanation with respect to how with respect to how the IDF functions. It is quite clear. What the Minister

has said in his opening statement, his Ministry is the vehicle by which these sums are allocated. He is not—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Who is speaking there?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]—Caroni Central.

Madam Chairman: Member, Member. Members, Members, Member for Caroni Central, let us—and Member for Tunapuna and whoever else, let us get ourselves under control. It may be that Members need a little break and they are very welcome to take the break and come back in.

Yes, so what I am saying, Member—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: —Member, please. And the Members on this side Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Laventille West, please let us get on with this business. Member for Couva North, as I said, I allowed the Minister because I thought he was going to give some guidance that may have helped you understand a little clearer what he said. The Minister and the Ministry of Finance are the vehicle by which these lump sums are given to the Ministries. That is what I understood from the opening statement. The Ministries are the ones who disburse the payments based on the various contractors and so. The Minister made it very clear that he is unable to give the details that you wish and I have sought to guide you that if you wish those details, you are entitled to interrogate each of the Ministers. I will not rule on that again. So either you want to go that route or we go on.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you for your guidance, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: So, Member for Oropouche East—or you no longer want to ask the question? I will let you get you act—you ready?

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Okay, please.

4.15 p.m.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Chairman. These are short questions. On this matter, Head 79: Ministry of Sport, if the Minister can just indicate to us, out of the \$103 million, exactly how much to contribute to the redevelopment of Skinner Park? And the Minister indicated, a moment ago, that the project has been completed. If the Minister could indeed, tell us, the final tally, the final cost of the redevelopment of Skinner Park.

Ms. Cudjoe: Chair, I spoke to what we have before us, as it relates to the invoices as of this exercise at mid-year.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Cudjoe: Can I answer the question please? All right.

Madam Chairman: No, one minute. I am certain we would all love to hear you. I am being challenged to hear you. I do not know if may be your colleague on your right could also allow you to use his mike and may be the two mikes might give you the degree of volume for us to hear.

Ms. Cudjoe: Right.

Madam Chairman: Thanks.

Ms. Cudjoe: Madam Chair, the question is, how much of this allocation is going to Skinner Park and that is \$23,380,798. As I said before, the project is completed, but this is outstanding moneys owed to the contractor.

Dr. Moonilal: I did not hear what would be the final, total cost for the redevelopment of Skinner Park?

Ms. Cudjoe: Oh. Based on the invoices that we have in so far, we have 54 million already paid in the last fiscal, in the previous fiscal. In this year, we have

already paid \$29,142,496.12, and when we get this allocation, we will be paying \$23,380,798. I know, right now there are some negotiations taking place between the contractor and UDeCOTT, so we look forward to see what the end of that will be.

Dr. Moonilal: So, it is more or less \$111 million, is the total cost of the redevelopment so far?

Ms Cudjoe: So far.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question relates to Head 48: Ministry of Trade and Industry, where an additional \$9.8 million is being requested to meet VAT payments for work done on the construction of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate. I am assuming that the Minister of Finance will be providing me with the answer since the Minister of Trade and Industry is not present. My question is whether this—well, several questions. Question number one is: How long has this VAT been outstanding? And my second question is: Whether this VAT that is being paid here now is included in the \$3.something billion that the Minister recently announced that he was going to pay in VAT refunds for the period for fiscal 2023?

Hon. Imbert: Okay. The Acting Minister of Trade and Industry is here, that is, Dr. Browne, and you can pose your questions to him, and I understand his Permanent Secretary is here as well. So, could you please be specific on questions related to this line item?

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: So, can we redirect to the Acting Minister of Trade and Industry?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am. To the Acting Minister of Trade and Industry, we are looking at an increase of \$9.8 million being requested to meet VAT payments for

works undertaken at the construction of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate. My question is for what period of time is this VAT been outstanding and whether this component of VAT—this \$9.8 million being requested—is included in the Minister of Finance’s commitment to pay \$3.something million worth of VAT refunds in fiscal 2023?

Hon. Imbert: Chairman, before the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs comes in, this is an allocation to the Ministry for payment of VAT and, therefore, it would not form part of VAT bonds or anything like that. This is a supplementary allocation to that Ministry, because a contract of this nature would be VAT exclusive. So, the contractor has to be paid the VAT and then he will make his usual submissions to the Board of Inland Revenue with respect to VAT. So, this is a supplementary allocation to the Ministry for the VAT that is due and payable on the contract and, therefore, it would be a cash payment. It would not be part of the bonds, but I cannot deal with the first part that you are asking.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Minister?

Dr. Browne: Yes. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mr. Tancoo: No, no, the Minister has to respond.

Madam Chairman: Minister. Acting Minister of Trade and Industry.

Dr. Browne: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. With respect to the specifics of the question, I just want to be clear for the Committee that this \$9.8 million is not, in total, to meet the cost of Value Added Tax. That is a small portion of this additional allocation. The component of this amount for payment of VAT on the value of works completed was 156,000 not 9.8 million. There is 8 million for additional works on the offsite detention pond and there is 2.8 million, out of this 9.8 million, for additional road works, including the placement of boulders to soft

spots on the road network. So, this is a project that is almost completed, described as 99 per cent completed. There is some additional infrastructural work that is required, as is provided for in these supplemental allocations, and there is a small amount to treat with the issue of remaining VAT. I do not have the specifics of the time frame of that VAT component of \$156,000. I hope this adds some clarity to the Member's understanding.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. Just one follow-up question. Would this allocation now be sufficient to take the project to its eventual completion? You said it was 99 per cent complete, and we are looking at 1 per cent. So, would this be sufficient to cover full cost of the project?

Dr. Browne: This allocation would be sufficient to complete the construction of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, to the hon. Minister of Education. Will you be able to indicate if the completed Coalmine ECCE will be included within this funding?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, let me repeat. The wording of the documents circulated to all Members, including that Member, that hon. Member, falls within the definition I gave earlier. This is for improvement, refurbishment and extensions to ECCE centres. It is not for the construction of the ECCE centres.

Madam Chairman: Member, I would allow you to ask the question again, because I felt you were under "B". Is your question under "B"?

Dr. Ragbir: Yes, Madam Chair, because it is completed.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, the reason why the intervention would have been made: is it open? Is it operational? It is not. Member, I am clarifying.

Dr. Ragbir: Repeat that again?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Is it an operational centre you are asking about?

Dr. Ragbir: Yes. It is totally—it is not operational, but it is totally finished.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: So, that is why the intervention would have been made. That would be one of the centres that may seem to be finished, but there are legal issues regarding the actual finishing and, therefore, the operation of the centre, it would not be here, and that is why the Minister would have made that intervention.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you.

4.25 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to ask some of the Ministers; firstly, the Minister of Education: Minister, with respect to Head 26 and that sum of money, under a), does it take into consideration the refurbishment of the Sonny Ladoo Early Childhood Education Centre which has been brought to a total destruction over the last eight years?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Chairman, I would have to check the exact list; it is quite a long list. I will check the list and let you know in writing.

Mr. Indarsingh: And in terms of your 71 secondary schools, will further sums be expended on the Couva West Secondary School?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Couva West is one of the schools that receives regular attention. As you know, there are some issues with the construction of that school, so it may not fall under this in terms of this particular allocation, but we have been doing regular work to Couva West, and if anything is required it will get that type of attention.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Minister, merely articulating the interest of concerned parents and students who are from the constituency of Couva South.

Secondly, the upgrade of the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre, how much of this allocation or supplementation will be allocated and could you just give us an insight into what will entail in terms of the upgrade?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Two million dollars is allocated to the upgrade of RCLRC, and that would have to do with a security booth; upgrades to the auditorium and the media; upgrades to the language, arts and science and IT room; the administrative office, the curriculum division office, the technical—it is also for technical/vocational training, that room; a prefabricated structure that has to be refurbished; to the printery, renovations to the printery and electrical work; work on the air-conditioning units; the MTS maintenance room. That is the scope covered in the \$2 million.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Minister. Chair, to the acting Minister of Trade and Industry, with respect to additional road works on the construction of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, Minister, I do not know how much of this \$9.8 million will be utilized but there are hundreds of potholes on the UTT road to Savonetta Junction and the Camden Road that leads to the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate—

Madam Chairman: Wait. Wait. Wait. Member, we are talking about the Construction of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, additional roadworks, so—

Hon. Member: In the estate.

Mr. Indarsingh: In the estate—merely seeking the clarification. And finally, under Head 80, Minister, to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Minister, are you in a position to tell us how much of this total sum here will be for the construction of the Desperados Pan Theatre and the Ariapita Avenue Enhancement Project? How it would be—

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, could you provide the breakdown?

Hon. Imbert: Yes. Unfortunately, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts could not be here, but he sent me some details so I will try my best to indicate the breakdown of the expenditure. The information I have is that of this \$16,585,210, \$8,020,410 is allocated for the construction of the Desperados Pan Theater and \$8,564,800 is allocated for the Ariapita Avenue Enhancement Project.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Chair, and to the very cooperative Minister of Finance, could we get the total cost in terms of the construction of the two mentioned projects?

Hon. Imbert: Certainly. By a stroke of good fortune, I happened to have received that information from the Minister, and the budget approved by Cabinet for the Desperados Pan Theater is \$14,020,409.89, and the budget approved for the Ariapita Avenue Enhancement Project is \$16,635,870.01.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I think that when the Minister of Finance acts as the Prime Minister he is always a bit cooperative with the Parliament.

Hon. Imbert: Sometimes. [*Laughs*]

Madam Chairman: It is so lovely when we could compliment one another. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Madam Chair, just to build on the last response from the Minister of Finance in respect to Head 80, the Ariapita Avenue Enhancement Project, Minister, is—yes, you just said budgeted \$60 million based on what the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts sent you, but what really is the Ariapita Avenue Enhancement Project? Yeah.

Hon. Imbert: I have some brief details, and I am merely the messenger so do not shoot the messenger. The phase one is for the construction of public washrooms, a

cycling track, police post, sidewalks, landscaping, signage and installation of waste receptacles.

Mr. Lee: Thanks. [*Laughs*] Sorry—sorry, Madam Chair. Minister, who is the— is it this project falls under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts or it falls outside of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts? Does it fall within the Port of Spain Corporation? Who is the exercising organization?

Hon. Imbert: The project manager is UDeCOTT, and UDeCOTT has been contracted by the Tourism, Culture and the Arts to do the project.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister of Finance brought it to my attention that the language here is very specific and so I want to return under the Ministry of Education to a point, the “development of a school for special education”, what is this development entail if it is not improvement, refurbishment, extension? What is this development that we are looking to do for a school for special education under item d)?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Education.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Chair. The development would have referred in past years to when you do some work on the school. So that is what this development was, some work was done on the school. There is a new building and so some work was done on the school to retrofit it to the use of the special school, and that is what that referred to.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. Well, I am not—so it is not an extension or anything? When you say, work done, if it is not refurbishment or an extension, is it to the interior of the—like the upgrade of equipment inside? What—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Chair, if I may, it is just the terminology used but it is

infrastructural work that was done to retrofit an existing building for the use of the special school.

Ms. Haynes: Can we be a little more specific because the Minister of Finance was very clear that the language here is specific, and so—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I do not know how much more specific I can be, Madam Chair. It is retrofitting infrastructural work done to an existing building to allow for the special school to occupy. So that would be the ramps, the railings; infrastructural work done.

Ms. Haynes: And which special school is it?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This is the Pointe-a-Pierre special school.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair, and just following up on the question raised by my colleague, the MP for Tabaquite. Can the Minister be kind enough to provide us with the scope of work or bill of quantity for this project, item d), under Head 26, along with who the contractors were?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister. Minister, item a), under this same Head 26, improvement/refurbishment/extensions to the 71 secondary schools, can the Minister advise if the Carapichaima West is one of the 71 secondary schools?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: I committed already to provide that in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: And can you also provide us this entire request for \$105 million, amounts owed to contractors for a), b), c), d) and e)? Can you provide us with a breakdown of who the contractors are and the amount that is being owed to those contractors?

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: As far as possible we will provide it.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, through you, to the hon.

Minister of Sport and Community Development, under Head 79, \$103 million here for the—well, several projects but I am specifically looking at the “redevelopment of Skinner Park”, can the hon. Minister provide us with the scope of work or bill of quantity, and the breakdown of the contractors and the amounts that are being owed to those contractors?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Sport and Community Development, I think that question was posed to you.

Ms. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would provide to the best of my ability.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

4.35 p.m.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Chair. With regard to Head 26, the additional sum provided for improvement/refurbishment/extensions to the schools. The Curepe Presbyterian was allocated 5 million in the budget. I know that was not enough, and the repairs were supposed to be done on a phased basis. Can the Minister state if any additional funding is being provided to complete the upgrade to the Curepe Presbyterian School?

Mr. Chairman: I would have allowed if you were asking if it is on the list, and I would have said the Minister has already indicated that she would give a list, okay? So, if you are asking—your question kind of imputes that you already know it is not on the list, but you want to ask something outside. I will not allow it.

Ms. Ameen: I will wait for the list, and then I can always bring it forward. No problem, thanks.

Madam Chairman: You have another question? Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: The question was asked already, Madam Chair. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 18 supplemented by the sum of \$313,724,596.

Madam Chairman: I thank the Minister of Finance and the Ministers of Education, Health, the Acting Minister of Trade and Industry, the Minister of Sport and Community Development, and the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, through the Minister of Finance.

Head 20: Pensions and Gratuities, \$1,600,000.

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

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, this particular Head is a separate Head of Expenditure, which caters for the payment of pensions and gratuities to public officers.

Madam Chairman:

Question proposed: That Head 20 be supplemented by the sum of \$1,600,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister, given that these are government contract workers whose tenure, whose life of the contract would have been known at the initiation of the contract, can the Minister indicate why these payments were not included in the original budget for fiscal 2023?

Hon. Imbert: The processing of gratuities and pensions is a moving target, because in order to pay a pension or a gratuity the person's files must be in order. People move from one Ministry to another, from one contract position to another. Sometimes in the middle of a contract they may take up another appointment with a higher salary and so on. So that in each case the person's file and the person's application for a gratuity or a pension must be audited, and there are a number of steps that the Government is required to go through, including auditing by the

Auditor General, which is more or less the final step. Therefore, it is not possible at any given time or any given year, to know exactly what the requirement would be for Pensions and Gratuities. It is an estimate, and therefore in this particular period, it has been established based on better information that comes forward during the year, because in September and August when the budget is prepared, one may not have information on the gratuities that would come due, but as the year develops the information is perfected and therefore we require an additional amount of 1.6 million at this time.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Just a follow-up, Minister. Can you advise how many contract workers' contracts would have expired prior to 2023, and currently await gratuity payments, and those which would have expired in fiscal 2023 and whose gratuity payments will be due?

Hon. Imbert: What I can tell you is that the number of gratuity files outstanding for processing is 114. On an average a gratuity payment per person may vary between 20,000 to 60,000. I can provide the information on the allocation of \$1.6 million. I cannot provide information outside of that in this forum. I can provide it otherwise based on a question and so on, but not in this forum.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Asked and answered.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 20 supplemented by the sum of \$1,600,000.

Madam Chairman: I thank the Minister of Finance and I thank the Comptroller of Accounts.

Head 22: Ministry of National Security, \$128,899,000.

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of National Security to make a brief

opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

[Mr. Forde in the Chair]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, Minister of National Security, kindly proceed.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Ministry of National Security is responsible for the safety and security of the jurisdiction that is Trinidad and Tobago. It consists of several divisions, some uniformed, some not uniformed. Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of National Security operates in a very dynamic environment with international implications, in the context of transnational crimes, and as a consequence its responses must be equally and perhaps even more dynamic. It is in the context of this, Mr. Chairman, that the Ministry of National Security seeks the intervention of this Parliament in terms of the supplementation of some of the allocations that had been previously considered by this Parliament, and therefore, we are before you in this regard.

Thank you very much.

Question proposed: That Head 22 be supplemented by the sum \$128,899,000.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I will be asking three questions. To the Minister, 02/002/12: Materials and Supplies, \$2 million.

“Funding is required to facilitate the acquisition of firefighting branch pipes, medical supplies, safety-helmets, respirators...”—et cetera.

4.45 p.m.

Minister, given what we are led to believe by fire service representatives, who are on the ground and who speak about a dire lack of equipment, critical equipment—Last week, we were told by the president in Tobago, for example, they had to use their own vehicles to respond to fires. Is 2 million adequate in your view, based on

information, detailed information and inventory of needs? Is 2 million adequate to deal with what we as citizens are being led to believe from those who are working in the fire services?

Hon. Hinds: Mr. Chairman, this is the request for the supplementation that we seek and for obvious reasons we consider this appropriate at this time.

Mr. Chairman: Naparima, Member.

Hon. Hinds: And of course, of course, Mr. Chairman, this only one element of the supplementation that we seek in relation to the fire service under this particular Item—

Mr. Charles: So Minister, you are giving Trinidad and Tobago the assurance that once we approve this \$2 million that we will not be hearing from fire service personnel, and witnessing it when we see them dealing with fires, shortages of critical equipment like respirators and suction strainers? This is the assurance you are giving Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Hinds: I cannot anticipate what we will or will not be hearing in the future, especially when it comes from the noise and the noisy elements in Trinidad and Tobago. I cannot know what we will be hearing. Maybe the Member for Naparima knows that—

Mr. Charles: We will be seeing, not hearing.

Hon. Hinds: And, as far as I am concerned, this is what we seek in terms of this particular Item for materials and supplies. It is only, as I indicated, a small part of what we seek in terms of supplementation today and for our purposes this would, for the time being, do the job.

Mr. Charles: Second question, Maintenance of Vehicles, \$4 million.
“Supplementary funding is required to facilitate the purchase of parts and servicing of emergency tenders, wreckers and other ancillary vehicles

assigned to the fire service.”

Could the Minister tell us how many fire stations, are with appliances that are in need of critical repairs, at this moment?

Hon. Hinds: There are 25 fire stations across Trinidad and Tobago, three of which are in Tobago, and I am advised by the fire service that six of them are without tenders as we speak. I would have already indicated to this Parliament in very clear terms, that in light of that, the Cabinet approved the acquisition of other vehicles for use and the application of the fire service. Some have already come to Trinidad and Tobago and another is expected very shortly. Very, very, shortly. Imminently actually. I am told that it would have been already shipped, and therefore we look forward to that with great anticipation.

Mr. Chairman: Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Minister giving Trinidad and Tobago and the personnel employed in the fire services the assurance that once we approve this 4 million and the 31 million of which you speak that fire stations like Princes Town Fire Station, Rio Claro, and Siparia, will be fully equipped with functioning, efficient fire appliances? We are not talking talk and expectation. We are talking about factual, on the ground, delivery of services.

Hon. Hinds: Mr. Chairman, part of our request to this Parliament today for additional moneys would also entail expenditure to repair certain equipment used by the fire service. For an example, four emergency tenders require repair and we are requesting 600,000, in that regard. Four hazmat tenders, we are making a request here for 400,000, in that regard. Four crash tenders, another 400,000.

4.50 p.m.

This is how the \$4 million is broken out. And, of course, service parts for 14 Isuzu D-Maxes, service parts for seven Nissan Frontiers, the purchase of a 150 tyres and,

of course, 117 plates, batteries and spare parts for 10 Atego water tender tankers and, of course, two wreckers, all to be repaired. We are confident that in addition to the new vehicles that we have ordered to support those that we already have, when we repair these as well, part of the supplementation is directed to that, then we should be in a much better place than we are in now, having already indicated to this Parliament that the business of repairs and maintenance, and the business of purchasing of new vehicles for the fire service, and indeed all the arms of national security is an ongoing business, a work in progress, constantly so, and has been that way from the time these organizations were established, and I can only anticipate it will be that way until they no longer exist. So it is a work in progress and it continues.

Mr. Charles: The third question and then one more after this. The third question is—

Ms. Ameen: You could go ahead.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Charles: One difficulty we have on this side is that every time we raise issues about lack of equipment and supplies we get a list, so the question to the Minister is, do you at present have an inventory of what is required by the 25 plus three fire stations in terms of equipment and appliances? And are you at this stage in a position to tell us how many of those are not, at this point in time, capable of functioning optimally if a fire occurs in their area of jurisdiction?

Hon. Hinds: Sure. That at the top of this segment of his interrogation, I did say that there are 25 fire stations, three of which are in Tobago, and six as we speak without functional water tenders. And of course when a fire occurs, in these circumstances the fire service has arrangements to bring to bear resources from those that possess them to assist in those cases. And I have just explained in great

detail what we are doing to improve the stock in terms of repairs and maintenance, and certainly in terms of the acquisition of others. And I have indicated that to the Member. I do not think I can reasonably be expected to go any further than that, especially since I take my timing advance, and confidently so, from the fire service administration which presents these information—which present this information for our use and benefit.

Mr. Charles: And the last question. But before I go to that last question. The statement made last week on TV that the all of Trinidad saw, that fire officers in Tobago are using their own vehicles, those three fire stations that you referred to in Tobago, you are saying that this will not happen in future. And I take your word for it, so I go on to 03/005/04, Minor Equipment Purchases, \$12 million. The sum is required to meet the cost for the purchase of ammunition for the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. The question I have for the Minister, is the fact that we keep hearing repeatedly, and reading in the press about ammunition, bullets with TTR registration marks turning up on the scene of crimes, the question we have for the Minister, is he assured, could he give assurances to us that the equipment—the \$12 million requested here to buy ammunition, that there are safety and security procedures in the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to ensure this none of this equipment will end up on crime scenes, and some of those bullets be used to kill some of us?

Hon. Hinds: I can only as a Minister of Government rely on the information made available to me on request by me to the Chief of Defence Staff, the Commissioner of Police and the other elements of law enforcement that carry and use firearms routinely by virtue of the nature of their work.

In respect of the defence force this matter arose, and I answered this in this Parliament previously, and I indicated to this Parliament that I was given the

assurance by the Chief of Defence Staff, leading the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, that when the reports of ammunition marked TTR began to appear, action was taken to improve—an audit was conducted—the security measures. I went as far as to tell this Parliament, that even when they go to do range practice officers from the armoury now accompany the training team on the respective ranges to ensure that the ammunition that they dispense for training is used and accounted for.

So I am given the assurance that the defence force and the police service have accentuated their processes to ensure that these things do not happen. But we are dealing with human beings. And then I might have alluded, and if I did not before, I am tempted to do it now, but I did say to this Parliament without going into any further details, because it may touch and concern matters that as we speak in the public domain—but I did indicate to this Parliament that it is quite possible that persons who may have had access to these things, other than in the way the Member is talking about, may have been where the vulnerability is. And therefore, without being able to say anymore, I give the assurance on the basis of what was told to me, I as Minister, raised these matters in potent terms, with the leaders of these organizations, and they reported to me accordingly, which I have shared with this Parliament.

Mr. Charles: But Minister, the time has long since passed that people give you the assurance, your job as Ministry of National Security—

Hon. Hinds: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Let him finish. Just let him finish.

Mr. Charles:—is to ensure that these, the ammunition does not turn up at the scene of crime. Not to be given assurance, but to be sure—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles:—so that we will have confidence as citizens of this country that we are safe and secure, and I rest.

Mr. Chairman: I will give you the opportunity to respond Minister.

Hon. Hinds: I do not know. Perhaps what the Member expects is that when, for example, on a daily basis throughout the course of the day the armourers in the storerooms, in the defence force, in the customs, in the police service, in all the stations they ammunition all over, I suspect what the Member is suggesting is that I will be there to see that 10 rounds is given to Constable Brown, and when he comes back he brings the 10, and I record that, for the 150 distributions of ammunition that took place on that particular day, in that particular station, and I should do that at every police station and in every police barracks all over Trinidad and Tobago. If that is what the Member wants, he should make that clear.

Mr. Chairman: I will recognize Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I want to go straight to the largest allocation here which is 04/009/02, the Strategic Services Agency, and I am seeing that there is an additional \$76 million that would be allocated for the CCTV camera infrastructure, the national CCTV camera network. Minister, I want to ask you now, how many cameras we have, ow many are operational, and how many are not operational.

Hon. Hinds: Mr. Chairman, this is a question that I have answered ad nauseam in this Parliament. Let me record it again. As far as I am aware there are 1,700-and I think about 90 or 96 cameras utilized by law enforcement through the provision of a service provider across Trinidad and Tobago.

5.00 p.m.

I would have already explained that as technology goes, for one reason or another, some of these cameras may not be functional on a particular day and

therefore maintenance and repair is an ongoing business and replacement. Sometimes the criminals shoot at them or shoot them, sometimes shrubbery grows, gets in the way of the camera, that is discovered, maintenance requires removing it so that it can do its work. And this is an ongoing state of affairs that moves, the number move from day-to-day.

I have also indicated that in light of the obvious need for improvement this Government engaged another service provider and contracted for the deployment of 2,500 high tech, best in class cameras which are now being installed across Trinidad and Tobago. I can tell you some of them, having been deployed up to as far back as Carnival 2023, were in service for Carnival and yielding very positive results giving us a great feeling of encouragement and optimism as to the impact of 2,500 of them when that comes to bear some time later in 2023. But as I speak to you now they are in the process of putting these cameras out there in locations and in ways as directed by the Strategic Services Agency, which would have worked in collaboration with all other arms of law enforcement, particularly the police. And therefore, in this regard, we anticipate the application of that technology, CCTV camera systems, will be significantly improved in the not too distant future in the protection of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Chair, can the Minister tell us as of today, without all of those words—

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to say what the figure is today.

Mr. Hosein:—how many—I have not asked the question. Can you tell us as of today how many of the 1,796 CCTV cameras are working?

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to say, but I can find out and tell him what happened today if he wants that. No problem.

Mr. Chairman: So the Minister will get the information.

Mr. Hosein: So the Minister is telling us today that he does not know how many cameras are working in Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Hinds: As a matter of fact, we may have started this morning with one figure and it could be improved by this hour if the crew went out on the job.

Mr. Chairman: Question Member.

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to say with specificity.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Chair—

Mr. Chairman: Additional question?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, I do. The Minister indicated that the Government's policy is to implement 2,500 additional cameras. He said some were installed for the Carnival period. Out of those 2,500 cameras how many were installed so far?

Hon. Hinds: I am unable to say but it is a work in process. But the contract is to install 2,500 and I am aware that they are being installed as we speak. I came to this Parliament at 130 p.m., may be a dozen more might have been applied today, installed today. I am unable to say. What I do know is that we expect that by later this year all 2,500 of them will be in place, serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Chair, the Minister earlier told us cameras were installed for Carnival. He said the amount that were installed so far was as though it was 2,500 were working and today he is unprepared and cannot tell us exactly how many CCTV cameras were paid for, installed and are operational in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Chair, I find that totally unacceptable—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: The Minister day by day is continuing to show his naked incompetence in this country, Mr. Deputy Chair.

Hon. Hinds: As you are demonstrating your petulance—

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Chair, I have another question.

Mr. Chairman: So Minister—

Hon. Hinds: Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Any additional information?

Hon. Hinds: No, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: You are giving way? Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. So, Mr. Deputy Chair, is the Minister committing, just for the record, to provide us with all of those information that I requested with respect to the operational cameras, non-operational and out of the 2,500 how many have been installed, in writing?

Hon. Hinds: No, I am not committing to that.

Mr. Hosein: So what is the aim of this exercise? He is asking for \$76 million additional so that the SSA budget will now be \$319 million and we cannot have this information?

Mr. Chairman: Right. So again, Minister that is for the records?

Hon. Hinds: I have nothing further to add—to usefully add.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Any additional question?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, please.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: I am looking at Security Services, 02/004/43, \$7 million. And according to the explanation provided it is for the cost of prisoner transportation. Mr. Deputy Chairman, we have been operating under virtual court for quite some time. Therefore there will be no need really for prisoner transportation because the prisoners can in fact appear virtually at the prisons for court. Can the Minister give

us an indication what this prisoner transportation cost is associated with?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, there is some use of the prisoner transport to get persons, for example, from police stations to the court, when the police arrest people, take them to the stations. Not all of the matters are heard in the way the Member described and therefore is some use of the prison transport system still in place.

Mr. Hosein: Are there any arrears; would this figure be covering any arrears that were previously owed?

Hon. Hinds: No, no, no. This is anticipatory.

Mr. Hosein: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: So I now go to Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much. Minister with respect to line Item 02/002/13, I heard you indicate to my colleague, Naparima, that four hazmat tenders have been requested for the—

Hon. Hinds: Yeah, yeah, Point Lisas.

Mr. Indarsingh: No, I mean, my friend could allow me—

Hon. Hinds: Yeah, your constituency. I am just anticipating. Come with it, come with it.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you. Yes, taking into consideration that there is the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, the Point Lisas Business Park, the Couva children's hospital, the National Aquatic Centre, the Cycling Velodrome and so on. Could the Minister inform this meeting if any of these four hazmat tenders will be allocated to the Couva south fire station?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to, and I am

sure the Member would find it in his soul, unusual as that might be, to celebrate with me the fact that the stations in the central area which he has just spoken, that is to say the Central Divisional Headquarters at Chaguanas, the Couva Fire Station, the Savonetta Fire Station and the Piarco Fire Station, they are all outfitted with tenders.

Insofar as hazmat vehicles are concerned, those are not—the central area is not the only area where the possibilities would generate the need for the application of hazmat vehicles. So those and their distribution and allocation around the country is clearly going to be left to the wisdom, the experience of the Chief Fire Officer and his administration. I would like to say happily that some time last year I was able on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to celebrate the fact that a warehouse on the Point Lisas Estate went under fire and the fire service responded using thousands of—I had all of the details at that time, but they responded and they were able, they had difficulty getting in because of the system of securing that place, but they were able to get in and they were able to put an end to that fire and there was no damage or risk to any other building and they were able to contain it quite successfully, proving that things are in a place to respond to those circumstances and on that occasion they did it quite successfully. That happened some time last year. And I congratulated the fire service as Minister of National Security for that.

And as I indicated earlier today we are asking for additional resources in order to ensure that four hazmat tenders are brought up to efficiency by the maintenance and the repairs that we anticipate. And of course, just to conclude, there is in fact an operable, serviceable, functional hazmat vehicle in the central area with an eye on the issues that my friend so persistently and burdensomely raises at the first opportunity.

5.10 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Deputy Chair. I hope that as a member of the National Security Council of Trinidad and Tobago and taking into consideration the hundreds of millions of dollars in investment in the geographic area that we are speaking about, the Minister will rest comfortably in advising and ensuring that there is a fully functional hazmat tender assigned to the Couva South Fire Station—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh:—which was built to service the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, and God forbid if there is an industrial accident or spill of a small, medium-sized or large magnitude there will be an effective response. And in relation to—

Hon. Hinds: Before you go just let me say in relation to that, that too is my prayer, that we will be all right and we will be able to protect and defend our self in the worst circumstances that might come to us as a people.

Mr. Chairman: Couva South

Hon. Hinds: That is my prayer.

Mr. Indarsingh: And with respect to 02/002/12: Materials and Supplies, the \$2 million, does this take into consideration—Minister, I do not see it in relation to branch pipes. I see “branch pipes, medical supplies, safety-helmets, respirators” and so on, the acquisition of hazmat suits. Because I am told that none of the hazmat suits which were assigned to fire officers at the Couva South Fire Station—

Mr. Chairman: Members, please remember all cell phones are to be on silent or switched off please.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes. All the hazmat suits, Deputy Chair, which have been assigned to the Couva South Fire Station, they have expired and they cannot serve

the purpose that they were acquired for.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Very generally speaking, insofar as hazmat suits are concerned, that appears under a different Head for which we are not seeking any supplementation today, Mr. Chairman, but provision has already been made in that regard. So we are not seeking a supplementation in respect of hazmat suits which appears under another Item which is not in front of us here today.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Deputy Chair, the question was asked but it was not answered earlier. I refer in particular now to line Item 03/005/04: Other Minor Equipment, \$12 million. Minister, in response to my colleague, Member for Naparima, you spoke about an audit being carried out in relation to those registered defence force ammunition and certain steps being taken. You rely on the Chief of Defence Force, et cetera, et cetera. Minister, what I would like to inquire of you now and hopefully get a response is: What mechanisms have been implemented, are in place, or are to be implemented, to ensure that when we spend this \$12 million that whatever ammunition we acquire here will be used for the intended purpose and not end up on crime scenes? That is what we are trying to get, Minister. It is not just an assurance. We want to get what exactly is put in place by the Ministry of National Security, the National Security Council to deal with this situation.

Hon. Hinds: Mr. Chairman, I answered that question a while ago and I was implying as I answered that. Those operational matters are for the Chief of Defence Staff and the Commissioner of Police, and I, as Minister, raising this public concern with them, would have been advised that they would have taken the action that they would have taken. And they gave me as Minister, the assurance

that they tightened up their security systems and the accounting systems for ammunition. I gave you an example of that, when they go to the range. So I have answered that question.

Mr. Chairman: Thanks for the additional information.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Additional question?

Mr. Rambally: No please, Mr. Deputy Chair. Another Item please.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you. Minister, I go to 04/009/02. Question was asked by my colleague, Member for Barataria/San Juan, but not answered. Minister, in relation to the question as to how many CCTV cameras are actually functioning, Minister, it is that you are not in possession of information as at a particular date, meaning last week Friday, December 31, 2022, as to what or how many cameras were actually functioning as at that point in time? It must be that if you are seeking this \$76 million and we are talking about part of it being installation, that your technocrats would have been in possession of information to bring forward to you that you would take to Cabinet and have this approved.

Mr. Chairman: Member, you yourself said that the question was asked—right?—but I will give the Minister the opportunity. Any additional information based on the Member's question. Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Except to say that I did promise the Member for Barataria/San Juan that I can provide that, an accurate answer to that question for today in the near future. I can do that. So today is the 5th of May, I can provide an answer as to the state of play as at the 5th of May. I told him that.

Mr. Chairman: Supplemental, Member. Proceed.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Hinds: And, of course, if he wants one for the 6th of May, he could get that too.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister. We would appreciate if we could get it before the substantive debate. It would assist.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. On that very Item 04/009/02, the provision of \$76 million is related as well to an initial operation of a dedicated data connectivity solution, bearing in mind that the Strategic Services Agency indicated to this Parliament in a joint select committee that they are only responsible for 70 cameras, no more. They have no responsibility for no more than 70 cameras. Is this a joint project between the SSA and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service; and what company or subcontractor has been recruited to assist with this major multimillion dollar project?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Mr. Chairman, when the SSA would have said that, they may have been reporting to that joint select committee as to the state of play on the date that they reported it. This project for the new cameras is being conducted under the auspices of the Strategic Services Agency. And to answer the second question: the company is Digicel along with another service provider, and they are engaged in establishing the backbone and the cameras and their installation as I have described.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I ask the Minister to indicate the identity of the second service provider apart from Digicel?

Hon. Hinds: JCI.

Dr. Moonilal: What is the meaning if you know it offhand?

Hon. Hinds: Johnson Controls Incorporated.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. Thank you. Could you also give the undertaking, as you did earlier, when you indicated you will tell us in the near future how many cameras are working and how many are not, could you also disaggregate that to reflect the—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Chairman, may I come in here please, or Mr. Chairman?

Dr. Moonilal: Could I—

Mr. Chairman: Conclude, Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Could you also disaggregate that specifically for cameras that are operational or non-operational in Tobago?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, we went through this before in this Committee. The supplementations are very specific. This is simply for security software and a data connectivity solution. It has nothing to do with cameras that are working or not working and therefore, questions should not be posed on that and answers should not be required on that.

5.20 p.m.

Dr. Moonilal: But, Mr. Chairman, let us be very clear. You are asking for \$76 million for a data connectivity solution for the overall national CCTV network. If that network is not working, what do you want to get a solution to what?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I think I have made myself very clear. This Committee is very specific, the allocations are specific and according to my interpretation of the Standing Orders—

Dr. Moonilal: It is for the CCTV cameras.

Mr. Imbert:—questions can only be asked on the specific matters under reference.

Dr. Moonilal: So if no cameras are working, “what solution yuh creating”? For

what?

Mr. Hosein: It says:

“...installation, training and initial operation...”

Dr. Moonilal: I never thought the Minister of National Security would be more clear than you. Mr. Chairman, please.

Mr. Chairman: Again, Mr. Minister, in terms of the information being requested from a national security standpoint, can the information be provided?

Hon. Hinds: Well, I just wanted to record that—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Listen, hold please.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Hold please!

Hon. Hinds: I was always mindful that what is in front of us today is indeed very specific and I was always mindful that this has to do with new installations. And I received questions and patiently answered them in respect of existing installations, and I am agreeing with the Minister of Finance. However, I did say that I was prepared to provide an answer to the question that was given as at to this day. I said that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the information—Members, the information that will be provided will be based on the 1,796 cameras and 2,500 cameras in terms of how many we have. In terms of being specific, right, we are not going into the details.

Hon. Hinds: And I just want for the benefit of the Member, in answer to a question he asked, Tobago has indeed been obviously considered and some of these cameras will be installed on the beautiful island of Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Mr. Chairman. Line Item—

Mr. Chairman: Member, again.

Mr. Ratiram: 04—

Mr. Chairman: Yeah.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 04: Electricity, \$5.5 million is being requested to:

“...meet obligations to Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission...for all departments for the period June to September 30, 2023.”

Can the Minister advise why this was not allocated in the Appropriation Bill, in the budget, if it is to meet obligations for the period June to September?

Hon. Hinds: There were allocations for these, Mr. Chairman, in the budget. We are now requesting additional moneys.

Mr. Ratiram: So is it that we anticipate the use of additional electricity expenses, electricity service to the tune of \$5.5 million for the upcoming period June to September, or does it include any arrears that is being owed to T&TEC?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Hinds: Right. We would have been paying on these accounts from the various agencies on an on-going basis. Having utilized most, if not all of what was already allocated, we now anticipate for 2023 additional expenditure which is what this is all about.

Mr. Chairman: Additional question?

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 05: Telephones, \$2.5 million.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise if this—

Hon. Hinds: Which Item?

Mr. Ratiram: 05.

Mr. Chairman: 02/001/05, Telephones.

Hon. Hinds: Yeah. Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise if this \$2.5 million include any arrears being owed to TSTT?

Hon. Hinds: No. The answer is essentially no. We would have paid and we anticipate additional expenditure in this fiscal, similar to the issue with the electricity.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 06: Water and Sewerage Rates, \$2 million for:

“...all Departments for June to September 2023.”

Can the Minister advise if this includes any arrears being owed or if it is for additional expenditure that we expect to realize for the rest of the fiscal term?

Hon. Hinds: The principle that I enunciated with Electricity, repeated with the Telephones, is to be further replicated. The principle is the same in respect of Water and Sewerage Rates, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Minister, Line Item 02/004/13: Maintenance of Vehicles, the \$4 million that is being requested there, can the Minister advise how many vehicles are expected to be serviced and/or repaired under this allocation?

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Ratiram: No, it was not. It was the amount of fire stations.

Hon. Hinds: Right. I was quite detailed in my response to this earlier in this Committee, you know.

Mr. Chairman: Member, that question was asked and answered, because I even have some of the information jotted on my note sheet here also, so could you—additional question? Anymore?

Hon. Hinds: He must have been asleep.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. One second. Thanks, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: And dreaming in Spanish.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister, thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: There is not a mirror on this side of the House and no one is sleeping on this side. It is the Minister who sleeps away while—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Right. Any additional questions, Members?

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, yes, moving on to line Item 43, and I hope the Minister is awake to receive this question of an additional \$7 million that is being requested here:

“This sum is needed to meet the cost of prisoner transportation for the period of April to September 2023.”

April to September 2023, Mr. Chair, falls within the financial term and why was this not allocated in our budget? Is it that we have underbudgeted by \$7 million for this line Item?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Minister.

Hon. Hinds: We did approach the Parliament for more than was allocated in the budget. We were not in receipt of that at that time because obviously, as we indicated at that time and we are aware as reasonable and responsible public servants, that the Minister of Finance would have had the constraints that faced him in terms of budgetary allocations. And we were always confident that we can come on this occasion to have the allocation supplemented as we appear today to have done.

Mr. Ratiram: So you were underbudgeting in the—

Hon. Hinds: I never said.

Mr. Ratiram:—Appropriation Bill?

Hon. Hinds: What is wrong with the, Member?

Mr. Chairman: Please.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Additional question, Member?

Mr. Ratiram: Just one last question to the Minister of National Security, and I hope in his submission he did not fall asleep in sending in these submissions, these supplemental submissions—

Mr. Chairman: Oh, Member.

Mr. Ratiram:—to the Minister of Finance. But in terms of the recurrent expenditure of—

Mr. Chairman: Which line Item, Member?

Mr. Ratiram: This is under Head 22, under the Ministry of National Security, the overall request for \$128 million, Mr. Chair, through you, no request is before us today for the TTPS and the resources that the TTPS requires—

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Hold on, Member. Again, totally not accepted, Member.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 22 supplemented by the sum of \$128,899,000.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Thank you, Permanent Secretary, Chief Fire Officer, and the other senior executives from your Ministry.

5.30 p.m.

Head 23: Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, \$280 015,740.

Mr. Chairman: Welcome Attorney General, welcome madam PS and your senior officers from the Ministry. I will now invite the Attorney General to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Mr. Attorney General.

Hon. Armour SC: Thank you very much Mr. Deputy Chairman. Mr. Deputy Chairman the office of the Attorney General is an important office as we all know under the constitution, and particularly with the merger of three previous Ministries that of Attorney General, Legal Affairs and Justice, is now a large all-

encompassing Ministry with significant responsibilities. I am here today to justify to this House the expenditure of \$280,015,740 that we asked for in General Administration for operations covering a number of different areas, which are set out in the terms of reference. And additionally, Mr. Deputy Chairman funds are also necessary for the continuous, strengthening and maintenance of our IT software, particularly the Registrar General's Department, the Civil and Companies Registry and the completion of the Property Business Registration Phase C.

As Attorney General, it is imperative that I support the plant and machinery for digital transformation, also to outfit part of the accommodation for digitalization, criminal justice and anti-terrorism units. The Ministry is also required Mr. Deputy Chairman, to ensure payments of salaries to persons employed in Legal Aid as well as to function as a conduit for the police complaints authority. These moneys are being expended, we hope as being fundamental in the provision of robust legal services to the public offices and the citizenry at large. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you hon. Attorney General. I recognize the Member for Bartaria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy.

Mr. Chairman: One second member. One second.

Question proposed: That Head 23 be supplemented by the sum of \$280,015,740.

I now proceed to you, member for Bartaria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much Mr. Deputy Chair. Mr. Deputy Chair, the initial allocation under the Head 02/001/23: Fees, was 63.5 million dollars. And now there is going to be a further supplementation of 190 million dollars, which

means that the global figure just in legal fees under the office of the AG for this fiscal year will be \$253,000,000, \$253,000,000. The last time when the Attorney General appeared before this Committee I had asked him to provide, kindly provide a breakdown of all of the attorneys who would be collecting fees pursuant to this particular Head.

The Attorney General indicated that he will—and I can quote him, that he will do his best to provide me with a written record. Mr. Deputy Chair, the Attorney General has not provided this Parliament with a written record of all of the attorneys who collected fees under this Head. This is a standard procedure in this parliament Mr. Deputy Chair, his predecessor, the Member for San Fernando West provided it, the Attorneys-General under the Partnership Government provided it. This is the only Attorney General who did not provide this information to us. I am going to ask the hon. AG, Mr. Deputy Chair, whether he will provide a complete breakdown of this 253 million dollars to be paid to both local and foreign attorneys.

5.35 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Attorney General.

Hon. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. With the greatest of respect to the Member for Barataria/San Juan, I do believe that this House would record that I have provided a record to this House, a summary listing for the 19th June, 2021 to the 3rd of March, 2023, with the names of attorneys. I actually have the listing here and I have to flip it many times; the names of all of the attorneys up to a total of \$206,052,968.49. So that the categorical lapse of error on the part of my learned friend's memory does him a disservice. The information has already been provided.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Hold on, one second. Let me let the Attorney General complete.

Hon. Armour SC: If I may finish. The information has already been provided. I have it here, and to supplement his deficient records, I am prepared to provide it to him, that which is already in this Parliament. Thank you.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Chair, I would want to say for the record that this information was not provided to the Members of the Opposition. I can say, when we get documents, based on undertakings being given by Ministers to the Parliament, it is normally placed on the *Rotunda*. There is only one response that was ever placed on the *Rotunda*, which is a letter from the Attorney General with some specific questions. That particular breakdown was not provided to the Members of this honourable House.

I would ask the Attorney General to indicate the date in which this document was sent to the Parliament to be circulated. Because we are accustomed to documents and files going missing from this Attorney General's office.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Attorney General, any information to add?

Hon. Armour SC: I have the information. I am not be able to tell them today the specific—

Mr. Hosein: When was it provided?

Hon. Armour SC: In the procedure of this House, Mr. Deputy Chairman—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Armour SC:—am I allowed to complete a sentence?

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Hon. Armour SC: Thank you. I have the information. I am not able to give the specific date it was provided. I will give that date, but I am able to say today,

categorically, that it is available. It has been provided and I will make that which I have in my hand today, available to the Member, and to the Members of the Opposition.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Member for Baratatia/San Juan, any additional? Chaguanas West, in the meantime.

Mr. Rambally: Attorney General, in relation to line Item 02/001/23, would such a breakdown be forthcoming for this 190 million that is now being supplemented?

Hon. Armour SC: That 190 that is now being supplemented is not in the breakdown that I have already provided.

Mr. Rambally: So, I am asking whether such a breakdown will be provided for this 190?

Hon. Armour SC: Well I am not able to give you that assurance just yet, because we have asked for a supplementation and we are in the process of working out the supplementation's applicability. But certainly as and when that is worked out, we are prepared to disclose that.

Mr. Chairman: Additional.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you AG. May I ask then whether you are in a position to tell us, this 190 million, does it include the—

Mr. Chairman: Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Yes thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Attorney General, would this 190 supplementation include the \$800,000 that has been paid to retired Justices Nelson and John for the file which was never missing?

Hon. Armour SC: I thank you for that question, Member for Chaguanas West. I have not said nor placed on the record that \$800,000 has been paid to those two eminent gentlemen. What I said, and I will quote from the answer that I gave in

Parliament, among other parts, is the approximate provisional fee under discussion amounts, in the case of Mr. Justice Nelson (Ret.), to approximately \$500,000 and the approximate provisional fee under discussion, in the case of Mr. Justice John, amounts to approximately \$300,000. That cannot translate into a sum of \$800,000 paid.

Mr. Chairman: Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. In relation to the said line Item, Attorney General are you in a position to tell us whether this 190 million will include, or does include fees paid to White & Case for the appeal which was filed in the Miami proceedings?

Mr. Chairman: Just now, one second. The specific identification of your brief that you are trying to bring into the discussion, we are dealing specifically with the general total. But when you are asking for the actual breakdown and identification of titles, and so on—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Listen Member, Member, please. So, again, let me hear the question Member.

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Chair, the question is a simple one. I asked whether the Attorney General is in a position to tell us whether the 190 million, that budget, deals with the appeal which was filed by White & Case in the Miami proceedings?

Mr. Chairman: And it is specifically within this particular financial year?

Mr. Rambally: Well, it is 190 million to be paid in legal fees. So, yes, it is within this.

Mr. Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Chairman, if I may intervene for a moment? Hon. Members, it is a matter of public record that the hon. Attorney General has recused himself

from managing the Piarco matters in which White & Case is involved. I have been answering questions in that regard. The estimates are inclusive of potential fees to come. However, they are not crystallized yet.

Hon. Armour SC: I was about to say to the Member for Chaguanas West, that as you well know, and the word is recuse, I have recused myself from that matter and I have no part to play in it. Thank you.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Chair, most respectfully and with the greatest respect to the Attorney General, that is not what I ask, I was asking in relation to fees. So, I do not know why.

Hon. Armour SC: No part to play includes fees, Member.

Mr. Chairman: Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Yes, thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair. Yes, thank you. Attorney General, in relation to the case or Shervon and Devon Peters and others versus the AG, in which the State, there is a judgment whereby the State has to pay some approximate \$20 million to former accused persons in the Vindra Naipaul Coleman case, does this also include the fees, the legal fees that the State would have had to pay to its lawyers to represent the State in this matter?

Mr. Chairman: Attorney General.

Hon. Armour SC: Thank you, Deputy Chairman. The figure of \$190 million is to be allocated to the payment of legal fees, local and foreign, and in due course I expect some part of that will be paid to deal with that particular case. Yes.

Hon. Armour SC: Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am back on the line Item that deals with fees. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the record, a response was given by the office

of the Attorney General by letter dated 8th November, 2022 addressed to Ms. Keiba Jacob-Mottley, Secretary to the committee, Standing Finance Committee, signed by the Permanent Secretary of the office of the AG. And the breakdown was not provided for the attorneys-at-law who were paid under this line Item for that fiscal year.

I want to read, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under Item 02/001/23: Fees whereby the amount of fees.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, this is not on this line Item.

Mr. Hosein: It is, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Imbert: It is the supplementation for fiscal 2023, not 2022. This is fiscal 2023.

Mr. Hosein: I am asking, Mr. Deputy Chairman, if the Attorney General—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I put to you that that question is not relevant.

Mr. Hosein: I am asking, Mr. Deputy Chairman, if the Attorney General is willing to stand by his word that he provided that information to this Parliament?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, that is not relevant.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Members, again.

Dr. Moonilal: Not to two fellas on that side you know, to the Parliament. You could have printed the thing and given anybody, to the Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: And if you did not, just say you did not. You do not have to lie.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Finance Minister, remember he is asking for 2023 information. That is the information that he is requesting.

Mr. Imbert: There was an answer to a previous committee meeting where the answers were not given. A previous meeting, not this one. That is what he is

saying.

Mr. Chairman: No, but remember it is in the statutes of the same period, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Hosein: It is the same allocation.

Mr. Chairman: So bear with me. So again, Barataria/San Juan. Right, so you are going back to your initial question.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, I was not allowed—

Mr. Chairman: And you are stating based on the information that was provided, that the AG is saying he has provided, so proceed.

Mr. Hosein: Yes. And I am saying, Mr. Chairman, from that particular letter I quoted earlier, that all the Attorney General provided was the—this is the response given in that letter: Response:

The total amount of fees paid to the Attorney General from financial year 2022 allocation was the sum of 1.428750 for matters for period June 15 to February 23, 2022.

No breakdown of any fees again were given.

Mr. Chairman: Right, again, okay. And again—

Mr. Hosein: In this response.

Mr. Chairman: And again, Member for Barataria/San Juan, you are making your point in terms of having the information that you would have requested at the time versus what the Attorney General is trying to provide today. Right. So again, Attorney General, you care to give any feedback on—

Mr. Hosein: So for the record, Mr. Chairman, my submission is that that information is not found in the Rotunda where we normally get the responses from the Standing Finance Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, point taken. Member, point taken. I will give the AG the

opportunity to respond and then we will move on.

Hon. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In answer to the question, the question refers to a 2022 document that has been put on the record. He has referred to it; I am not the author of that document. I do not accept that that is a document that speaks to the provisional supplementation for the year 2023, which is what we are speaking to. I will however, I was given the document that I have just read from, which speaks to the sums that I have recorded having provide to this Parliament, and I was given that by a member of my staff.

Mr. Chairman: Members.

Hon. Armour SC: I was given that by a member of my staff, and I will get from that member of staff the record of when this document was laid in this Parliament. And I will give that to the Member.

Mr. Chairman: Sure. Now, Minister of Finance, you will have the last point on this particular aspect. So let me hear you, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*—you see exactly what was put before Members of the House are supposed to—my particular notes—

Mr. Chairman: Page 14, bottom line, bottom section on page 14, 190, 02/001/123.

Mr. Imbert: What is here—

Hon Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: One sec—

Mr. Imbert:—would you kindly ask them to stop muttering.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Go on, proceed.

Mr. Imbert: What is here is fees \$190 million. The sum is required to facilitate the payment of outstanding fees to local and foreign attorneys at law for the

provision of legal services. And Mr. Chairman, the detailed notes I have from the Budget Division, this is for the period 1st of January, 2021 to the 30th of September, 2022. And therefore, has no connection whatsoever to the matters that Member for Barataria/San Juan is raising

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. I now—hold on. I said, the Minister of Finance was the last thing on this particular line Item. Chaguanas West, you have an additional question? No. I said it earlier, we are moving on.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan, Chaguanas West I am acknowledging. You have an additional?

Mr. Rambally: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Any question on moving on. New line Item.

Mr. Rambally: Yes please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: So hold one second.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: All right, proceed. Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Chairman, I am wondering why the Attorney General cannot pattern with the Minister of Finance who is being very cooperative and very quick with his info. What is the difficulty in telling us this afternoon when that information was laid with the Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

[*Mrs. Annisette-George in the chair*]

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, we have had responses from the hon. Minister of Finance, we have had him being very cooperative, why can the Attorney General not be as efficient as him, and put the information here this afternoon?

Madam Chairman: Members, I think you all understand the process, and also I

think Members understand how Parliament works. If Members feel an undertaking was given and it was not complied with, this is not the place for it. Okay? There are other avenues open to Members. For the lawyers amongst us, we understand very well procedure. Let us move on. And I have so ruled, who feels else otherwise, then they could then go to the place that they feel. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Just a matter of clarity.

Madam Chairman: Same matter?

Dr. Moonilal: I want to just ask the Attorney General to clarify the matter at 02/001/23. A matter of clarification. Could I ask the Attorney General, the \$190 million in fees that you are requesting, could you tell us is it to pay fees for local or foreign attorneys, over what period of time?

Madam Chairman: But is that not what all the discussion was about and the Minister of Finance—

Dr. Moonilal: There was a lot of noise and I did not hear clearly what they were saying.

Madam Chairman: Well, it is unfortunate but it is on the record because I came in and I heard the Minister of Finance indicate, he read over what period. Let us go on. Anything else? Hon. Members, the question is that the 2023 appropriation for Head 23, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs—

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: I asked if anything else. So let us all get on the same page. Yes, Member for Oropouche East. I am asking you know, and—

Dr. Moonilal: But Ma'am, I put up "meh" hand.

Madam Chairman: Okay, good.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: We normally do that.

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Dr. Moonilal: We “doh” shout at you to tell you we want to ask a question, we put up our hands.

Madam Chairman: Uh-huh.

Dr. Moonilal: Right. I am on page 15, so we are on the same page, 001/62, Mr. Attorney General, would you be kind enough to just explain in some detail, more than the two and a half lines here, exactly what is this \$1 million for in terms of paying in the next few months I imagine, until September, a public—to sensitize the public on the role and functions of the Attorney General, when the Ministry like every Ministry will have access to government broadcasting, TTT, Facebook and so on, that is basically free of charge. What programmes are you going to implement with \$1 million to tell the public what is your job essentially?

Hon. Armour SC: I am glad you asked that question, member. The Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs has a Communications Department, and since I have come into office, I am regretting that it has not been built out. Since I have come into office, my thinking is that as Attorney General I owe a responsibility to the citizenry of this country to keep them updated on a number of things as they occur. In particular, for instance, the legislation that is brought to Parliament and passed, to talk to men and women of this country in simple language and not the obfuscatory language that sometimes attends debates in Parliament, and to say this is—

Hon. Member: What!

Hon. Armour SC: And to say, this is—

Dr. Moonilal: You are casting aspersions on the conduct of Members of Parliament.

Hon. Armour SC: May I finish? And say to the public through a communications programme that will be launched and run on a regular basis, this is the legislation that we passed in Parliament, this is how it affects you, this is what it means for you, and to do that in an engaging way to allow questions and answers on the appropriate platform.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Attorney General, this is what, for newspaper ads, radio, advertisement? I “doh” know. That is what I am getting at. I understand you want to explain law and parliament in layman’s terms, so to speak, what is this \$1million intended for?

Hon. Armour SC: It is what I just said, to build out a programme that is in process. And it is a programme that is going to be on the website. It is a programme that is going to law lawyers within the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, not just the Attorney General, to speak to the public, to invite questions, to exchange information, and the help inform and educate the citizens about the laws that we are passing in their interest for their benefit.

5.55 p.m.

Dr. Moonilal: So this is an addition to what is occurring now, your very regular press releases—I think you did one just yesterday—is in addition to press releases, is in addition to your press conference, is in addition to all that we normally communicate through government broadcasting and so on?

Hon. Armour SC: The difference is that it will be proactive, that is to say it will proactively engage the population of this country in a continuing dialogue and not reactive in the way that press releases tend to be, to react to something that happened in the past. It will be proactive to educate and inform the public of this country what we are doing with the taxpayers’ money to pass laws to make a difference and to improve their lives.

Dr. Moonilal: So you are going to spend \$1 million of taxpayers' money to tell them what you are doing with taxpayers' money? Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am seeing—I am on line Item 02/009/08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage, \$6 million. And this:

“Funding is required to pay the rental cost of the accommodation for the North and South offices of the...”—Office of the DPP.

Madam Chair, we all know that there are issues facing the Office of the DPP, and that we pay a monthly rent of about \$600,000 for that building. Can the Attorney General indicate when the outfitting will be completed for the DPP to occupy that building that we are paying this rent for?

Hon. Armour SC: Can you just give me one minute, please, Member?

Mr. Hosein: Sure.

Hon. Armour SC: Can you repeat that question, please, Member. I am trying to—

Mr. Hosein: What I am asking, AG, is whether or not the Office of the DPP will be moving into—when they will be moving into that north office that we are paying rent for under this line Item?

Hon. Armour SC: I am engaged in discussions with the Director of Public Prosecutions on that subject. I am not able to tell you definitively when he will be moving in with his staff into that office.

Mr. Hosein: AG, can you tell us if there is a lease agreement signed for that particular building?

Hon. Armour SC: There—which building are we speaking about?

Mr. Hosein: The north building that is currently being rented, that the DPP is not occupying.

Hon. Armour SC: There is a month-to-month lease arrangement at the moment for that building.

Mr. Hosein: So, AG, do you believe it will be saving the taxpayers' money, if there are no intentions to occupy that building, to terminate the lease? Because we pay \$600,000 per month for a building that has not been occupied.

Hon. Armour SC: As I have just said, Member, I am in discussions with the DPP and that is a matter that I expect will be very shortly resolved.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just going back to the line Item Promotions, Publicity and Printing that my colleague from Oropouche East was asking. So what I got from the Attorney General is that this new—the cost associated with these initiatives are intended to be housed on platforms you already have, your website, et cetera. So the question we are asking is, from this \$1 million, is it that you are paying for, ads, sponsorship, additional hosting costs, staff to roll out the initiatives? We really want the specifics of where this \$1 million is going, what is it actually paying for.

Hon. Armour SC: It will be paying for a number of things. It will be paying for software enhancement, it will be paying for staff, it will be paying for programme direction and things associated with an effective communication strategy.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. Haynes: Well, I got what we were looking for. I guess we will just examine how it rolls out.

Madam Chairman: Do you have another question?

Ms. Haynes: No, no, no, that is it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you, Madam Chair. 02/001/27; Official Overseas Travel, \$2 million. AG, can you give us a breakdown of the travels, the cost per travel, and those who would have accompanied the Attorney General on those overseas travel?

Hon. Armour SC: Which particular travel are you referring to now, Member?

Mr. Hosein: All under this particular line Item?

Hon. Armour SC: Well, all under that particular line Item do not involve me, other than one particular occasion when I travelled. So I do not understand the question, whether I can give details of persons who are accompanied me, when I only travelled once.

Mr. Hosein: Well then, can you give us the details of when you travelled?

Hon. Armour SC: Yes, I can give you the details of when I travelled. That was in—if I am not mistaken around about November last year I went to the Bahamas. One occasion and no one accompanied me. I went on my own.

Mr. Hosein: What was the purpose of the trip, AG?

Hon. Armour SC: I went to have consultations with persons in the Bahamas to do with particular matters that are engaging the attention of the DPP. I am not at liberty to speak more to that.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam—

Hon. Armour SC: Madam Chair, just to be specific, can I just say that that was a visit that I made to the Bahamas in January 30, 2023. That was for a CFATF Steering Group ministerial subcommittee.

Mr. Hosein: So that is a different—so one was in November, one was in January.

Hon. Armour SC: Yes. The one in November is the one I just spoke on—I am just checking the notes here. On November I went on my own, no one accompanied me. January 30, 2023, I attended a meeting of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force in the Bahamas, and I was accompanied by the head of the Anti-Terrorism Unit, Ms. Vyana Sharma.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I will ask for a ruling on this again. This \$2 million is addition to the original allocation and it is for payment of travel expenses in the future. It is—has nothing to do with past expenses. Members opposite are on a fishing expedition and they are asking questions that bear no relationship to the Item under consideration. I want to repeat, this is a supplementation to deal with travel going forward. It has nothing to do with travel going backwards. There is nothing here that deals with the expenditure on this Item before today. So I would ask for your ruling on that, that Members confine themselves to the matters under consideration.

Madam Chairman: Well, I agree that they will confine themselves to matter under consideration. The Member's question may have had a foundation if he had asked a previous question that laid the foundation. Okay? Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Well, therefore, Madam Speaker, my question to the Attorney General which arises now, if this is for, as the Minister of Finance indicated, future travel, well, would you indicate what future travel it involves?

Madam Chairman: You mean anticipated?

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah. Well, if—they have asked for \$2 million before the Minister says for future travel. He must know where he is going that requires \$2 million.

Madam Chairman: That is what I said, that is anticipated. Attorney General.

Hon. Armour SC: Thank you, Madam Chairman. To answer the question, this is anticipated travel. There are a number of different engagements that the Office of the Attorney General, including members of staff of the Attorney General, necessarily have to travel on. Examples of that have to do with the travel that I undertook in January of 2023, the CFATF meeting in the Bahamas, that has to do with anti-money laundering, proliferation financing. There are a number of other engagements, training engagements, educational engagements—using the examples of the past, intellectual property engagements and training programmes, international human rights law programmes and training conferences, and such like. So that what we are doing here is making provision for future travel consistent with the remit of the Office of Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Attorney General, I am looking at line Item 02/001/16: Contract Employment, \$17 million. Are you able to tell us how many positions are vacant? What are those positions available and the timeline for the recruitment?

6.05 p.m.

Hon. Armour SC: Just give me one minute please. I can tell you the total number of contract positions at the 30th of April, 2023 is 872. Of that total, 471 are filled and 401 are vacant. Total number—and that is staff. Total number of contract, legal positions, 239. Of that legal filled, 94, vacant 145; total number of non-legal positions, 633; non-legal filled, 377; non-legal vacant, 256 and total number of positions to be filled up to the 30th of September, 2023, 97 positions.

Madam Chairman: That is it? You have another question?

Mr. Rambally: No, please.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 23 supplemented by the sum of \$280,015,740.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Attorney General, thank you Madam PS, thank you to the technocrats.

Head 26: Ministry of Education, \$69,419,023.

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

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Education has a mandate to deliver modern, relevant, equitable education for all, with the goal of creating the citizens with positive values, attitudes and behaviours and appropriate qualifications that would drive the development trajectory of the nation toward the realization of Vision 2030.

The executive and staff of the Ministry of Education take this mandate very seriously, and continue to do the work that would redound to the benefit of our over 250,000 students in approximately 850 public ECCE, primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary institutions. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 26 be supplemented by the sum of \$69,419,023.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item—well Item 007: Households; Line Item 001, Transfers to State Enterprises. This is on the principal payment to MTS on the loan that meant to cover financing to the completion of seven schools and critical infrastructure works for 26 government schools. Could the Minister give us an appreciation of how far along we are in the payment of this?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: How far along we are in the payment?

Ms. Haynes: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: This loan was taken, very recently, and so this amount that is due, is the first payment we are making and it is a payment of \$13,481,195.

Ms. Haynes: And would we be able to get the 26 schools that benefited from the critical infrastructure works?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Sorry, are you asking about the 26 or the seven?

Ms. Haynes: Both. Well the seven that have been completed and the 26 that benefitted.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: The seven that are going to be completed would be: La Horquetta North ECCE, Ramai Trace SDMS Primary, Arima Central Secondary, Holy Name Convent, Piccadilly Government Primary, Bishop Anstey High and Lower Morvant Government Primary. And the 26—it is actually 27 schools that will be the subject of the other loan that the payment is identified here for: Barataria North Secondary, Brazil Secondary, Carapichaima West Secondary, Chaguanas North Secondary, Chaguanas South Secondary, Diego Martin North Secondary, East Mucurapo Secondary, El Dorado East Secondary, El Dorado West Secondary, Five Rivers Secondary, Malick Secondary, Manzanilla Secondary, Moruga Secondary, Morvant/Laventille Secondary, Mucurapo West Secondary, Point Fortin West Secondary, Princes Town East Secondary, San Juan North Secondary, Sangre Grande Secondary, Siparia East Secondary, Siparia West Secondary, South East Port of Spain, St. George's College, Success Laventille Secondary, Tranquillity Secondary, Union Claxton Bay Secondary and Valencia Secondary.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. So Minister, I am on line Item—I am being disturbed by Port of Spain North, Madam Chair. I am being disturbed.

Madam Chairman: I think the Members are celebrating the schools that have been selected. Yes, Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Line Item 004: Social Infrastructure, Education. This line Item is being supplemented by 16.2 million. Could you give us some sense of what this covers? Does this include the Vacation Revision Programme? This is Social Infrastructure, 004.

Madam Chairman: What Item are you on please, Member?

Ms. Haynes: 004: Social Infrastructure; Sub-Item 04, Education.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is to cover the National Additional Scholarships based on advanced level examinations.

Ms. Haynes: No, no. That is Educational Services, 004, and I have a question there, but I am above that under Social Infrastructure, line Item 04: Education, unless that is a typo in the document provided by the Minister of Finance. Page 19.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, no. The line Item is 004/04, Group G/004.

Ms. Haynes: You are watching a different document.

Madam Chairman: Members, we are looking at the Schedule, Item 004—so this is page 19—Social Infrastructure; 04: Education. It is above “G” which is Educational Services.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: As I have it—

Madam Chairman: So, it is 004: Social Infrastructure; Sub-Item 04, Education.

Ms. Haynes: Correct.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Chair, the line Item, as I have it, is

26/09/004/04, G/004.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, well that is an additional one. But if we look at page 19 of the Schedule—so that is the opening up of it. So, that is exactly what it is, but it does not look like that here. Yes, Minister. Yeah. So one is the overall categorization and then you have it underneath. Yeah.

Ms. Haynes: Under the breakdown of 004: Social Infrastructure, it included Items like the Vacation Revision Programme, but if we are discussing the scholarships here, then my question is: Are there any outstanding payments—does this 16 million cover outstanding payments to scholarship winners or—?

6.25 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It covers the shortfall in the allocation required to pay up to the end of this fiscal, the personal maintenance allowance and tuition for 756 existing scholars and new scholars; 49 open, 91 additional, and two President's Medal scholars.

Ms. Haynes: So does that mean that as of right now some of our scholarship winners are without their personal allowances?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, it does not mean that. It means that the allocation that is given is not enough to cover to the end of the fiscal.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. So this is an outstanding payment due before the end of the term, the semester?

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It means to not run into arrears we have to get a supplemental figure and this is the figure.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 26 supplemented by the sum of \$69,419,023.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Ministers; thank you, PS. We go on to Head 28,

Ministry of Health.

Head 28: Ministry of Health, \$692,975,753.

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

Hon. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Good afternoon to all. The Ministry of Health continues to provide health care services to the population of Trinidad and Tobago under the concept of universal access to health care. We provide absolutely free health care at the primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary levels to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We have made considerable strides in many areas of health, most notably maternal mortality rates, neonatal mortality rates. We are embarking on four strategic objectives for the next year or two; one, the attainment of the 95-95-95 targets from HIV Aids by 2023, the continued decentralization of mental health services in Trinidad and Tobago, the continued thrust in our NCD drive to reduce the burden on the population and the Government about the high rates of diabetes, hypertension, cancers and other NCDs. These and other strategic objectives are what occupies us at the Ministry of Health, and at this time I look forward to availing myself to questions from my colleagues.

Question proposed: That Head 28 be supplemented by the sum of \$692,975,753.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, if I can draw your attention to Item 02/001/08, with regard to the request for \$13,646,406 to meet a shortfall in allocation with respect to the BOLT agreement for the Ministry of Health administration building. Minister, can I ask you to explain in terms of why this allocation is needed, especially in view of the BOLT? Is it a part of the contract

that the Ministry is required to pay a sum as part of the contract?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So we need this allocation to meet expenditure for the BOLT agreement for the period May 2023 to September 2023. The monthly expenditure that was anticipated, because we had to provide for it, was \$2,945,674 for five months, which will come up to roughly about \$14.7 million. So that is why we needed that allocation.

Dr. Bodoë: All right. Minister, can you indicate what further payments will be required? Can you say at what stage of completion this building is?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. So the building is roughly about 84 per cent completed at this time.

Dr. Bodoë: Are you in a position at this time to indicate what will be the total cost of the building?

Hon. Deyalsingh: The BOLT agreement, which was established in March 09, 2020, has a total negotiated amount of \$249,468,110.

Dr. Bodoë: Can you share with us details of the lease arrangement going forward since you are close to your occupation from what you said?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. So it is going to be a 15-year BOLT arrangement so we will pay it out over a 15-year period.

Dr. Bodoë: And the monthly rental?

Hon. Deyalsingh: As I just indicated, 2.9 million.

Dr. Bodoë: Rental as you go forward?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah.

Dr. Bodoë: Amm—

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry. If I—

Madam Chairman: Sorry. Go ahead, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: I just wanted to ask on 02/001/21, Madam Chair, with regard to the outstanding amount for the building repairs and maintenance of the Couva Hospital. The \$73,539,902 being requested, Minister, can you provide the details of the building repairs and maintenance that was executed for this sum?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yeah. So this was to be paid to UDeCOTT who undertook all aspects of maintenance for the Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility for the period January 31, 2021 to September 30, 2022.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, can you indicate whether there are any outstanding payments due to UDeCOTT for work done at the Couva Hospital that you anticipate at this time?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Well, this is just for maintenance, up to September 30, 2022, so there will be outstanding fees after September 30, 2022, for maintenance.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. Yeah. And if I may, Minister, with regard to the Couva Hospital, and with regard to your own pronouncements in this House and the statement from the Ministry of Health today, and PAHO indicating that COVID is no longer a global pandemic, are you in a position to indicate when the Couva Hospital will no longer be required for the use of COVID patients?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Madam Chair, could I have a ruling as to whether that question is relevant under Repairs and Maintenance?

Madam Chairman: I will not allow it. I will not allow it, Member.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, same line Item, 02/001/21, why are such works being undertaken on a fairly new complex which the PNM Government said was properly completed before putting it to use for COVID-19?

Hon. Deyalsingh: We must maintain the build, Member.

Dr. Seecheran: Seventy-three million?

Hon. Deyalsingh: You cannot have a building unmaintained.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, why are the payment invoices relevant to the previous fiscal year, is this because of bad budgeting?

Hon. Deyalsingh: No, sir, because we allocated for this period so that is why it is there.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, if I can refer you to Items 04/009, and if we can take 02, 03, 04 and 05 together with regard to each of the RHAs, and you are asking for a total sum of \$321 million-plus with regard to facilitate partial payments and trade payables for the period April to September, 2023, and maybe you may want to provide this in writing or if you can at this time, and can you indicate for each RHA in terms of the suppliers and the goods or service that are to be provided, any contracted cost and any outstanding payments of some of these sums for outstanding payments?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So these Items, I will give you for North West Regional Health Authority, to facilitate partial settlement of trade payables for North West for the balance of fiscal 2023. Categories include medical supplies, 22.2 million; utilities, 2.4 million; security services, 9.5 million. In the case of Eastern RHA, same principle, medical supplies, 4.4 million; utilities, .7 million; security, 2.4. North Central Regional Health Authority, medical supplies, 56.9 million; utilities, 8.7 million; security, 17.8 million. South West, medical supplies, 20.8 million; utilities, 4.2 million; security services, 13 million; janitorial, 4 million.

6.25 p.m.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, with regard—if I may just look at the—tie this to the

allocation for the South-West Regional Health Authority, and to ask whether you are in a position to disaggregate the projected trade payables for Point Fortin and Augustus Long Hospitals.

Hon. Deyalsingh: I would not have that breakout here, but we will attempt to get that for you.

Dr. Bodoë: If I may one more question under that heading, South West Minister. Any of these trade payables would be for equipment that would have been procured for the cardiac catheterization laboratory that you promised is being built at the San Fernando General Hospital?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So, Madam Chair, I was very specific. I said it was for trade payables, not for capital expenditure, and under trade payables, I will repeat, medical supplies, 20.8 million; utilities, 4.2 million; security services, 13 million, and janitorial, 4 million. CapEx does not fall under this.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. Madam Chair, if you would allow me one more question. I am just looking at the big picture here in terms of this expenditure. Overall now we are going to add—this will be a total revised budget expenditure of about 4.2 billion for the RHAs in total. With regard to the full proclamation of the public procurement Act, Minister can you indicate whether all four RHAs have fully established procurement personnel departments as required by the legislation?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Madam Chair, can I have a ruling please?

Madam Chairman: Member, I am sure that is a pertinent question, but you would be able to ask it somewhere else. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you to the hon. Minister of

Health, same line Item for the RHAs. Would these payments also include purchase of pharmaceuticals at the hospitals?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Madam Chair, I will repeat. As for all four RHAs, the payments include under the same headings medical supplies, utilities, security services and janitorial. I do not know how else to say it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East. Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 04/009/01: Regional Health Authority, with regard to the “Global Medical Response of Trinidad and Tobago”. Minister, state how this sum of \$71 million will be shared over the period April 01, 2023, to September 30, 2023?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, thanks. So this, as you said, the National Emergency Ambulance Services, the allocation is \$91 million. So we pay roughly—the actual expenditure for fiscal year 2023, as of March 2023, was \$98 million. So that is what this is going to be used for, to cover us for the balance, hopefully, of 2023.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, will this additional funding lead to improved efficiency and overall performance of this service, and if so, how?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So what we do with GMRTT—GMRTT has recently added over 10 ambulances to their fleet. They now have a total complement of 58 ambulances, and it has resulted in increased efficiency.

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item under the Development Programme, 004/07/022. As you would recall I have had some conversations with you prior, with a particular interest in terms of Government’s

assistance in AIDS relief. I did take particular attention to the statement that you made earlier. Can I ask two questions under this same line Item, under the Development Programme, 022, the President's Emergency Programme for AIDS Relief?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, yes.

Mr. Padarath: As indicated before, I know you and I have had some conversations about this, and I had two questions. One had to do with, what is the current number of staff in this programme, and can you give us an idea of the scope of the operations of this programme?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So this programme, this funding, the PEPFAR funding, goes to the MRFTT and the San Fernando General Hospital Ward 2. I do not have the actual number of staff, but I could tell you the categories of staff.

Mr. Padarath: Yes.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Doctors, nurses, pharmacists, phlebotomists, adherence counsellors, patient tracers, HIV rapid testers, peer advocates, programme administrators, HIV helpline officers and clinic coordinators. If you want the exact numbers, we may have to provide that.

Mr. Padarath: Ma'am. The second part of the question, Minister. If you can give us an idea of the scope of the operations, in terms of—I was wondering whether this was more of a support mechanism, or whether or not it is operations in terms of evaluation, testing, medication, et cetera.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, we do testing and we provide medication.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, if I can direct your attention to 004/07/A/003, with regard to the requested sum of 14 million.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Please, just point me.

Dr. Bodoë: So it is page 18, just above PEPFAR.

Madam Chairman: With the Commissioning and Decommissioning of Arima and Pt. Fortin? Is it that?

Dr. Bodoë: Yes, yes. So with regard to the allocation to Point Fortin, could you just break that down? Because I see there are two Items. Can you break it down for the electricity and the surgical/medical equipment?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So for the Point Fortin Hospital it was for the payment to suppliers for medical and surgical equipment related to the starting up of services at Point Fortin, the commissioning.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, but the document I have says it is “to settle outstanding invoices for electricity for...the period June 2020 to January 2021”.

Hon. Deyalsingh: That is for Arima, yes.

Dr. Bodoë: No, no, for Point Fortin. This is what I have in front of me.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, let me just double check that.

Dr. Bodoë: It gives a total amount of 10 million, and I just wanted a breakdown.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Technical folks are just double checking it. What I have here is for Arima, payment to suppliers for medical and surgical equipment related to the commissioning 7.1 million, and outstanding electricity bills for the period June 2020 to January 2021, and April 2021 to July 2021, 3 million.

Dr. Bodoë: I am sorry, Madam Chair, this is not—

Hon. Deyalsingh: Okay, sorry. My PS:

“settle outstanding invoices for electricity for the Point Fortin Hospital in respect of period June 2020 to January 2021 and April 2021 to July 2021 and for surgical/medical equipment...”

Dr. Bodoë: I think we are on the same page. So I am just asking for the breakdown in categories.

Hon. Deyalsingh: All right. So we will try and get it for you.

Dr. Bodoë: You can provide the information?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes, we will attempt to do that.

Dr. Bodoë: Before I leave that matter, are you in a position to say whether there are any outstanding invoices for electricity? Because this is a period we are going back to 2021 here now, for the Point Fortin Hospital?

Madam Chairman: You asked Member, outstanding for electricity over what period? Because that is the note. Settle outstanding invoices for electricity Point Fortin?

Dr. Bodoë: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. No, I meant going forward. This is just covering the period 2021.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Well, we—Madam Chair, can I have a ruling please?

Madam Chairman: No. The Item here deals with outstanding invoices, and it tells us the period. So instead of outstanding, the word I guess we would want is “arrears”. That is what the payment is for, arrears. So your question?

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam. I will move on from there.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister of Health, line Item 005/06/C/250: Health Services Support Programme. I see there is an increase of 40 million. Minister, could you indicate what projects will be ongoing during this programme?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So this Health Services Support Programme is geared primarily at reducing the incidence of non-communicable diseases. Programmes would include, one, our Gestational Diabetes Management Programme for our diabetic pregnant population; sourcing of IT system for the RHAs; procurement of oral and fasting glucose monitors; the Lung Cancer Early Detection Management Programme—under that we have already procured \$7.1 million worth of equipment for the Lung Cancer Treatment Centre at North Central RHA, which is doing very good work; the supply of physical equipment for primary and secondary schools, 90 per cent completed; our recent rollout of our diabetes foot care project in Princes Town, Diego Martin, North Central, Eastern and Tobago; our community-based health youth wellness installation of physical activity equipment, where six youth centres were fully equipped, and also under our TT Moves campaign, to help people drink more water, eat more fruits and vegetables, and move more. Our recently concluded International Women’s Day week of activities, where over 2,800 women received free pap smear tests, so that we could detect cervical cancer in the precancerous stages.

So these were some of the activities that we have undertaken, and moving forward we will be implementing more of these.

6.35p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, on the same line Item, what is timeline for completion of this programme, or is it an ongoing process?

Hon. Deyalsingh: It is 2025.

Dr. Seecheran: Okay. Has a Chief Medical Physicist been retained under this programme?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Madam Chair, there is nothing under this line Item for a Chief Medical Physicist.

Dr. Seecheran: Madam Chair, I would like to move to line Item 005/06/C/251: Covid-19 Emergency Response Facility of a 134 million. Minister, this loan was approved in July 2020 with the aim to support procurement of medical supplies for testing and diagnosis, inputs for infection, prevention, personal protective equipment for staff and training and appropriate care. Could you give the amount spent on each of these items in each category?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Component one, emergency response, \$80.9 million, direct payment from the World Bank to PAHO, as per the contract agreement for the purchase of PPE for frontline health workers. Component two, support to the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, \$52.2 million, for financing to the Government to for the purchase of vaccines which was a retroactive payment, so we paid it and got retroactive payment, partial reimbursement and so on. And component three, project management and monitoring, \$1.2 million, for project personnel expenditure and operational cost.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, were any antigen test kits purchased using this facility?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Madam Chair, can I have a ruling, please?

Madam Chairman: One minute, please. Now, really, this is for an advanced payment on a loan. Okay? I allowed you some latitude. The Minister said what it was applied to. Therefore, member, I rule that your question is out of order.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chair, line Item 04/011/22: UDeCOTT, for a payment of US \$24.967 million. Minister, are works on all contracts up to date?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Yes. So this is for the new central block in the Port of Spain Hospital. Right now the programme has been broken up into several packages and work is ongoing. I had a site visit there about two weeks ago—yeah, so work is ongoing.

6.40 p.m.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister have all contractors met their stipulated performance functions.

Hon. Deyalsingh: Madam Chairman, can I have a ruling please?

Madam Chairman: One minute. These sums are with respect to payment of principal in one case and interest in another case. Okay. So that the questions have to be related to the—

Hon. Member: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes. Now sometimes I would allow a little latitude, like in your first question, because, you know, it may be intimately tied up with the financing. It might be a question of whether the financing being used in the right way. But, you know, we cannot stretch it to that extent. But I do say that if the questions are really of that import, there are other avenues for you to ask them. Okay? Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister line Item 005/06/C251, the COVID Emergency Response Facility, \$134 million. The initial bank loan was for \$20 million US, is that correct Minister?

Hon. Deyalsingh: That is correct.

Mr. Lee: So that at \$6.80 is \$136 million TT? This payment of \$134 clears off

that, or close to clearing off that loan of \$20 million US? Just seeking clarification. This payment of 134, would it clear off the \$20 million World Bank loan of \$20 million US?

Hon. Deyalsingh: So—

Mr. Imbert: Can I just intervene?

Hon. Deyalsingh: Please.

Mr. Imbert: This is a hundred—this is, sorry, let me just find out exactly what Members would have been told, because I have detailed notes.

Mr. Lee: Page 19.

Madam Chairman: The advance payment, page 19.

Mr. Lee: The World Bank loan is \$20 million US.

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Lee: At \$6.80 it is approximately \$36 million TT.

Mr. Imbert: The entire loan has not been drawn down. This is just one payment on the loan.

Mr. Lee: What was the total amount of the loan, Minister?

Mr. Imbert: Twenty million US.

Mr. Lee: Twenty million US.

Mr. Imbert: But it has not been fully disbursed.

Mr. Lee: Or, okay.

Mr. Imbert: Okay?

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister if I can just go back to 005/06/C250 which is the Health Services Support Programme. I know you indicated a number of projects under this programme. I just wanted to ask specifically because I am seeing from the Ministry of Health website a request for consultancy to conduct an assessment of the Ministry of Health's response to the

COVID-19 pandemic with regard to the HSSP Programme. Can you indicate whether this project will come under this expenditure as well?

Hon. Deyalsingh: This project is currently being re-evaluated, so most likely that will fall under this programme because it falls under the HSSP loan. Yes, it will fall under here, but we are evaluating the project right now. Especially now as WHO made this announcement today.

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Hon. Deyalsingh: So that is why I said we are re-evaluating the project.

Mr. Lee: Thank you Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 28 supplemented by the sum of \$692,975,753.

Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, \$508 million

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

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Government continues to support the Board of Commissioners of WASA as it continues to implement the transformation road map to put WASA on a sustainable path towards meeting its mandate to provide water and waste-water services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry will continue to keep the population up-to-date on key milestones, as key milestones are met by the Board of Commissioners. The supplementation before this Committee, Madam Chair, is fairly straightforward, that is to enable WASA to meet the payments of wages, salaries and related allowances to September 2023.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 39 be supplemented by the sum of \$508

million.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members—oh, sorry, it looked like you were just exercising your pencil. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Why you are unkind to the Madam Chairman?

Madam Chairman: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, line Item to the hon. Minister of Public Utilities has to do with 06/004/51, and there are increases in several areas here of overtime and contract employment. Can the hon. Minister indicate to us, what would have accounted for these increases over the last financial year to satisfy these payments?

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, I would not say that they are increases, they are projections to take, or to allow the authority to meet projected expenditure toward September the 30th, 2023.

Mr. Padarath: Hon. Minister, what changes can be expected at WASA regarding staffing in light of these supplementation?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not anticipate anything.

Mr. Padarath: You do not, sorry?

Hon. Gonzales: I do not anticipate any changes.

Mr. Padarath: Any changes. Okay. And you indicated the supplementation under Contract Employment for \$328 million. Can you indicate how many employees would that impact?

Hon. Gonzales: Madam Chair, there are 800 permanent employees in the Water and Sewerage Authority, 1,175 daily rated employees, and—that is 1,632, sorry, daily rated employees, 2,827 monthly paid employees and 800 permanent employees.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 39 supplemented by the sum of \$508 million.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Ministers, thank you PS, thank you other members of the Water and Sewerage Authority.

Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$600 million.

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

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries Health is charged with the mandate to managing this county's mineral resources.

Question proposed: That Head 40 be supplemented by the sum of \$600 million.

6.50 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister the request is for additional 600 million for subsidy, arrears, between National Petroleum Marketing and also UNIPET. And there is a breakdown—I am being disturbed Saddam. Saddam—

Madam Chairman: Members, Members, Member for Barataria/San Juan and Member for San Fernando West, I am always happy when my Members across the floor are in a very convivial mood, but Member for Pointe-a-Pierre cannot hear himself. Thank you.

Mr. Saddam: We apologize.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, Minister, question. Based on the additional \$600 million in arrears for subsidy payments between National Petroleum Marketing and UNIPET, there is a breakdown there in the notes, could you just say what period these arrears are for?

Hon. Young: These are really to facilitate the payment of arrears that are built up. So the actual amount owing as at the 31st of March is about \$490.3 million. But then you also have payments that are owing for LPG as well. All right. And then what we are looking at is we know going forward, using a \$80 for a barrel of oil going forward and our projections that there is going to be some subsidy as well to the sum of about \$289.1 million. So it is actually just a certain amount for us to take going forward.

Mr. Lee: Okay, so out of this \$600 million it carries us up by a projection, up until, let us say, financial period ends in September. Is that fair to say based on what you just stated out of the \$600 million?

Hon. Young: Well, actually, currently, because we are still carrying—this is actually going to take us up to the end of March.

Mr. Lee: Okay, the end of March then.

Hon. Young: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: So this \$600 million is up to the end of March?

Hon. Young: Yeah.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Minister I just want to ask, and maybe either you or the Minister of Finance, the request is—total was \$1 billion, now it is \$600 million, so it is \$1.6 billion. Could you state based on the Subsidy Fund that we get some funding from oil companies if this \$1.6 out of this amount, what it relates to the Subsidy Fund from the oil companies?

Hon. Young: So what I could tell you for the period of—a comparative period for 2022, but of course prices were a lot higher in 2022, we only got \$561.7 million from the Petroleum Product Subsidy Fund and the rest had to be paid from Consolidated Fund and what we have allocated towards it. So it would be around the same, because it is a formula, so it would be around the same this year. So I

cannot tell you right now what the Petroleum Product Subsidy Fund would generate. So far for the year we have paid \$245 million from it. But I cannot predict where it will end up. But what I can tell you it would not be a small proportion, it is just about a third of what the full amount always is.

Mr. Lee: Okay. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 40 supplemented by the sum of \$600,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you to the Minister, PS and to the other technocrats.

Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, \$160,017,235.

Madam Chairman: 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.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. As the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government I make myself available to answer colleagues questions in this Committee.

Hon. Members: “A, a, a”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Question proposed: That Head 42 be supplemented by the sum of \$160,017,235.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you very much Madam. Under Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government I observed that the CEPEP Company has an additional \$46.5 million and in the details it indicates that this is for a RDC—sorry, the \$46 million under CEPEP. Can you indicate what operational expenditure this is to meet?

Hon. Al-Rawi: Thank you hon. Member. Madam Chair, I just like to remind hon. Members that with respect to the supplementation of appropriation which we are doing, at the budget period in the original Appropriation I put it on the record that we would be coming back at mid-year in respect of a number of items that we had catered only for projections as at the beginning of year. So the supplementation we are asking for across all of the entities, that is all 14 Corporations, RDC and CEPEP, represents Estimates that we knew that we would have to make at mid-year.

To answer the hon. Member's question, the specific sum under CEPEP is to capture two aspects. Number one, there are three judgments against the company in respect of Orders by way of consent before the court for three contractors. That is roughly \$19.5 million and the balance of the money is to take us to meet the year end expenditure for the balance of the financial year. So CEPEP is effectively in two categories, roughly \$20 million in respect of three judgments against the company and that includes interest and then the balance of the money is to take the company to meet the year end expenditure.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you. Through you, Madam Chair, are there any other contractors who have sued CEPEP for non-payment of work done who may have judgment against the State for?

Madam Chairman: Just a minute. Again that is a very wide ranging question. This is very clear. It is for three. This is what we are dealing with. So that I cannot allow that question Member. If you wish there are other fora where you will be able to ask—

Ms. Ameen: Okay. If I could rephrase, I really wanted to find out if this amount would cover all the moneys, because you indicated this is to pay based on a judgment. Are there any other payments that would be outstanding or does this

cover all the judgments that are against the company?

Madam Chairman: You mean cover the three judgments? Would this money cover the three judgments?

Ms. Ameen: Yeah. The Minister indicated that this sum covers three judgments.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Ameen: So I am asking if there are any others that are not covered.

Madam Chairman: But that is the same question you asked in a different way which I ruled against just now.

Ms. Ameen: Under that same Head 04/011/07 and 10, these RDC—these loans, Demand Loan Facility. Can you provide the information, usually the budget books they will have a number, a reference number so you can find the details of the loan. Can you provide that in writing and can you indicate why, if these payments, I mean, this is an ongoing loan payments, why they were not budgeted for.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Well, Madam Chair, I do not need to detail what is in the published books already, right. The yellow books are available for this financial year so the line items are clear, 04/011/07, 04/011/10, they are already in the Budget Estimates at appropriation. With respect to the first part, which is the \$100 million demand loan, the interest that we are asking for to be met is \$257,345, and that is simply because the life of the loan was extended for a three months roll over period and this is the additional interest required to take us to meet that.

Similarly, for the \$200 million fixed rate loan, that is the same loan as in the Appropriation Bill for the same financial Head and these are as a result of financing adjustments that we had to make. So this will take us to currency within the period of the financial year that is left.

7.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister. Minister, I want to make reference to line Item 06/005/32, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, for an additional \$4.6 million, and in the explanation provided it is:

“...to enable them to meet operational costs”—where—“salaries and COLA, wages and COLA, allowances, pensions and gratuities, scavenging, water trucking...”—et cetera.

Minister, can you provide us with a breakdown of how this \$4.6 million is going to be allocated to these Items? Because during the budget presentation and when we go through this exercise, after the budget each one of these Items have a Vote, whereas it is all lumped together here. So can you provide us with some clarification of how it is actually going to be disbursed?

Hon. Al-Rawi: Sure. That immediately \$3.6 million with respect to scavenging, and \$1 million with respect to maintenance of state traces, local roads, et cetera, cleaning of drains and watercourses.

Ms. Ameen: Minister, if I may? While you are on Couva, can I ask you to provide the details for all—

Madam Chairman: Just a minute, please. Member for Couva North, are you finished?

Mr. Ratiram: No I am not. I have another question for follow-up from the Minister.

Ms. Ameen: Go ahead.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, hon. Minister, for providing us with that breakdown of \$1 million supplemental funding for the 14 electoral districts in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation to deal with maintenance of roads and traces, mobile patching; to deal with maintenance of watercourses. When we

have short staff we do not have a full cadre of employees down there. I did not hear any being allocated towards wages and COLA out of that 4.6. So it is clear that during the rest of this financial term the corporation will not be in a position to bring on additional staff to assist with the health team, to assist in the cleaning of these watercourses. I made representation on multiple occasions that several of these watercourses were maintained by Caroni (1975) Limited, has been abandoned by Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries resulting in flooding across the entire constituency and I am not hearing any additional funding being allocated towards these Votes that the corporation needs to effectively deliver the services to our burgesses. Can you provide us with a little further detail in terms of what solutions at this point in time, whether any amendment can be made in going forward so that we can have a greater supplemental funding being allocated to this corporation so that they can effectively execute the work?

Madam Chairman: Member, regrettably—just one minute. Members? No, no, no.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine, two wrongs do not make a right. Okay? Member for Port of Spain South, I know it is most probably kind of late in the evening, so we may all need to keep our anxiety under control. Okay? Yes. Okay? Member for St. Augustine, let us stop and get on with it please. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: In addition to the hon. Minister—

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North—

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam.

Madam Chairman:—I am sure that the matters you are asking are important—

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—but regrettably they cannot be asked here in this exercise. Okay? So I am sure you will have another forum to ask that question.

Mr. Ratiram: So just in clarifying what the Minister provided us with, just one final question if I may, Madam Chair?

Madam Chairman: Let us hear what it is, yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Through you, with respect to the million dollars that is being allocated for those Items that you have identified, can you provide us with a breakdown of how that million dollars which are projects that the Ministry has approved for the utilization of that million dollars?

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Sure. Madam Chair, it is not what has the Ministry has approved. It is what the corporation has requested as well. So the projects and planning units have dealt with it. I want to remind the hon. Member that there are alternate ways to meet needs. There is the IDF, there is the virement of funds, et cetera. What I can say, Madam Chair, is that we are several hundred percentage points higher in supplemental funding and that is on top of the hundreds of percentage points in the PSIP and other works. I mean this is a matter for work out. So I regrettably cannot provide the details that the hon. Minister has asked for it is just not possible.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Chairman. Madam Chair, I would like to move the Minister's attention to line Item 06/005/34: Siparia Regional Corporation, \$5.48 million is being allocated to this regional corporation. Minister, can you give us a breakdown of how this \$5.4 million is going to be disbursed to the corporation?

Hon. Al-Rawi: Sure. The sum of \$3.9 million for natural disasters, and the sum of \$1.5 million together aggregating to \$5.4 million. The latter being under

scavenging.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, at this point in time going through this exercise on this same line Item, it is where we meet the shortfall in the funding for the regional corporation and Minister, I am not hearing any funding being made available to Siparia Regional Corporation for roads, cleaning of watercourse, et cetera. Can you provide us an explanation why?

Madam Chairman: Member, again as I said, I think you are seasoned enough to know that there will be another fora open to you for you to utilize at your wish to deal with those issues you think that have not been addressed here.

Mr. Ratiram: Sure.

Madam Chairman: Okay?

Mr. Ratiram: Moving on to line Item 06/005/28: Diego Martin—

Mr. Hinds: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Ratiram: Laventille West, can you show some order in here, man. He is disturbing me here, Madam Chair. Laventille West, always disturbing.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Members, it is 7.06 p.m.—

Hon. Member: We want to go home.

Madam Chairman: No, we do not want to go home. We want to use our time very prudently on a Friday evening at 7.06 p.m. All right? So I ask all Members if we focus on these papers before us we will not run afoul of even the slightest thing. So let us get on.

Hon. Al-Rawi: That is 28?

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, so moving on to line Item 06/005/28: Diego Martin Regional Corporation, \$2.3 million is being allocated to the Diego Martin Regional Corporation. Can the hon. Minister advise us if any of this \$2.3 million is going to be used for the upgrade of the Diego

Martin Regional Corporation to borough status?

Hon. Al-Rawi: No. The borough status, we have dealt with that in terms of the legislation. If you want to know what the breakdown is for, 1.1 million is for natural disasters, that Head; and the sum of \$1.2 million for scavenging.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Can I go into Chaguanas Regional Corporation, 27—

Hon. Al-Rawi: “Mm-hmm.”

Mr. Ratiram:—if we can have a breakdown also for what that \$3 million is going to be utilized for?

Hon. Al-Rawi: Sure. For Chaguanas we are looking at \$3 million for natural disasters.

Mr. Ratiram: And for the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation?

Hon. Al-Rawi: Sure. Sangre Grande, \$3 million, natural disasters.

Mr. Ratiram: The Mayaro Regional Corporation.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Mayaro Regional Corporation, \$3 million, natural disasters.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Ms. Ameen: Realizing the—oh, sorry.

Madam Chairman: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you for recognizing me, Madam Chair. Seeing as the trend is going, usually after a budget we will have some details for each regional corporation in terms of which Head and Sub-Head these would be going to. Because we do not have that at the mid-year review, I know the various regional corporations would usually be given such a document after this exercise. Can you provide us with the details in terms of which Head and Sub-Heads these moneys will be going to for Sub-Item 005 and the Sub-Item 23 straight to 36 which is all the regional corporations?

Hon. Al-Rawi: I can do that immediately.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you.

Hon. Al-Rawi: We have already done that. It is on the record for Diego Martin. San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, 9.866326, that is broken down wages and COLA with sick leave bonus, 4.366326. Natural disasters, \$3.5 million; scavenging, \$2 million. Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, \$17.4 million; the sum of 17,443,576 that is going for scavenging. Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, we have already answered. Couva/Tabaquite, we have already answered. Mayaro we have already answered. Siparia we have answered. Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, natural disasters \$3,866,178.

7.10 p.m.

Princes Town, we have already answered. Port of Spain City Corporation, the sum of \$43,600,000, that is specifically for backpay due to implementation of revised collective agreement which is due to be paid this month as a matter of fact, \$25,500,000. Wages and C.O.L.A. in respect of implementation of that revised collective agreement which the Amalgamated Workers Union signed, \$6.2 million. Allowances for daily-rated employees, \$900,000; Salaries and C.O.L.A., \$700,000; Pensions, \$2.5 million; Gratuities, \$1.28 million, Gratuities to non-pensionable daily-rated employees, \$6 million.

San Fernando City Corporation, Pensions and Gratuities, \$3,306,400; Scavenging, \$3.1 million; Natural Disasters, \$2.5 million. In total that aggregating \$8.906,400. Arima Borough Corporation, \$2.4 million broken up into Salaries and C.O.L.A. \$1 million; Pensions and Gratuities, \$1.4 million. Point Fortin Borough Corporation, \$1.4 million solely in natural disasters. Chaguanas, we have already answered and that is it. That is everything you have asked for.

Ms. Ameen: Right. So would you be able to share that document with the Opposition?

Hon. Al-Rawi: I just did. It is on the record.

Ms. Ameen: To share the document in writing to the Opposition.

Hon. Al-Rawi: The *Hansard* is available.

Ms. Ameen: Pardon?

Hon. Al-Rawi: The *Hansard* is available. It is live transcript.

Ms. Ameen: Okay, thank you. Madam Chair, Sub-Item 96, the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company, this company was announced in the mid-year of last year 2022, the mid-year review.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Yeah.

Ms. Ameen: Sub-Item 96 on the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: If you could help me.

Ms. Ameen: Page 27 on the Schedule. Yeah it is.

Hon. Al-Rawi: It is the reduction of a hundred million?

Madam Chairman: No, no, no, I do not see—

Ms. Ameen: Head 42 Sub-Item 96.

Madam Chairman: Yeah but Member—

Hon. Al-Rawi: We are on supplementation.

Madam Chairman: One minute. When we are setting the table, I think we take it for granted. All right. What we said is Item 1, we were dealing with the supplementation. Okay, so what we are dealing with here now is with supplementation.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Not variation.

Madam Chairman: And if you check, Item 96 is a decrease so that is under variation, we will come variation. So you might be a little early, we will come to that eventually.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Oh yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Minister.

Hon. Al-Rawi: Yes?

Mr. Indarsingh: I see that of this aggregate sum of \$112,294,500 has to do with portion for pensions and gratuities and I heard you speak of an agreement with the Amalgamated Workers Union and I could remember that the Minister of Finance spoke in a very gleeful manner about a daily-paid contributory pension plan. Has there been any agreement and any portion of this money allocated for any daily-paid contributory pension plan?

Hon. Al-Rawi: No, that is not before us.

Madam Chairman: Member, I think that plan you are talking about, we know that it is not here, I do commend you for trying to find it out but I think you know as well as I know. Okay?

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, the employees are demotivated.

Madam Chairman: Yes, okay but I am sure with all your goodwill towards your employees, you will find a way to show your interest appropriately. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Chair. I would just like to bring the Minister's attention to Sub-Item 27, the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. Minister, can you kindly confirm that the revised provision for 2023 that we are approving here is \$736,395,900 as in the Schedule page 27?

Hon. Al-Rawi: Well what is printed is printed.

Madam Chairman: I do not understand. That is what is there. Yes?

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Right. Okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 42 supplemented by the sum of \$160,017,235.

Madam Chairman: Thank you to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, to the PS and the other supporting staff.

Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport, \$300,000,000.

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

Hon. Sinanan: Thank you. Good evening to all and as Minister of Works and Transport, I am here to answer any question on the supplementation and variation of estimates 2023. Thank you.

Question proposed: That Head 43 be supplemented by the sum of \$300,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just some quick brief questions to the Minister. Minister, at Item 02/005/28, you have Other Contracted Services \$67 million a bit more and \$100 million. I just wanted to ask you if you could make a commitment, an undertaking, to indicate to the committee the list of projects related to drainage, bridge repair, slope stabilization road, road rehabilitation, which are due to be completed in fiscal 2023 for which this is the moneys that you are asking for as a supplementary Vote.

Hon. Sinanan: No problem, I mean I will give you a list of the projects that will be started and what stages they are. Completion will be based on weather permitting and so on but I can give you a listing now, not a problem.

Dr. Moonilal: On the related point now, could you also include in your list the projects, the estimated cost and the contractors that are conducting the work?

Hon. Sinanan: Sure. Again, I cannot give you contractors. We can only give you contractors when the jobs are tendered out and awarded.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure. Well—

Hon. Sinanan: We due use competitive tendering at the Ministry so we can award— I can only give you the names once the contracts have been awarded.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure. I could move on to—

Hon. Sinanan: Sure.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. I can move on to the page 22 on the matters involving several loan arrangements. Now I can ask one blanket question that captures everything if it is possible. [*Interruption*] Yeah, I am noting the time. I am at 04/008/01 and we come down. There are several loan arrangements here as you notice for which you are requesting supplementary funding for interest payment, principal and so on. If we can just get some more detail on each one in terms of the nature of the loan, which financial institution it was taken out with, the duration, the terms, and for specifically what job, per job. You see you have, like for example, construction of the Diego Martin Pedestrian Bridge, East-West Corridor Transportation Project. So for each Item, some more details on it if it is possible. That can be done?

Hon. Sinanan: Because I have it here but it will take some time to go through each individual and I will send it to you in writing.

Dr. Moonilal: And you can circulate it.

Hon. Sinanan: I can give it to you here right now but it will just take up.

Dr. Moonilal: Since it is already in your possession, could you—

Hon. Sinanan: I have the information here but in the interest of time, maybe I could—okay, if you want to go to 02.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*] it is not part of the report.

SenHon Sinanan: I do not mind furnishing you in writing with the information.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah. Since you already have the information in your possession,

you can just make it available to us before the debate on this matter in the next couple of days and so on.

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, you will be able to get that.

Dr. Moonilal: The next question now related not on detail of loan and so on but just if you can give us a brief explanation because you are requesting money for the East West—

Hon. Sinanan: What is the Line Item?

Dr. Moonilal: The line Item is 04/011/46 on the top of page 23. Now you are requesting some funding here as you see for the East-West Corridor Transportation project. This is supplementary funding so could you just give us an update on where this project is and how much money has been expended so far—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, that is for a loan.

Dr. Moonilal:—that you will request this additional \$7.8 million?

Hon. Sinanan: “Dais ah loan.”

Mr. Imbert: That is a loan.

Hon. Member: For what?

Dr. Moonilal: Could I—I am asking.

Mr. Imbert: Interest rate, tender, financial institutions, et cetera.

Hon. Member: Purpose, purpose.

7.20 p.m.

Now that you have come to us and kindly requesting our support for 7.8 million dollars pursuant to satisfying the requirement of a loan for a specific item, you can tell us the item and where we are in terms of project itself.

Hon. Imbert: No, Madam Chairman I asked for your ruling.

Dr. Moonilal: So you want the money and you do not want to tell us what for?

Hon. Imbert: The member can only ask about the loan.

Dr. Moonilal: The loan is for what? And what is that about?

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I ask your ruling on this please. Which—.

Dr. Moonilal: No but it is a loan that you want money for something. Tell us what it is about and it is a supplementary allocation so meaning moneys are being spent already. And you can give us an update this particular project.

Hon. Imbert: This is just an interest payment in other words.

Dr. Moonilal: I do not—I cannot understand why the Finance—

Madam Chairman: One minute, one minute, we see it is with regard to principle payments on the above loans. That is what I see. Okay? A loan which was finalized and executed after the finalization of the 2023 budget. That is what I see. So I will allow the question in terms of giving some idea of what the project is.

Dr. Moonilal: Very kind.

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Dr. Moonilal: Ignore that finance Minister.

Hon. Sinanan: Madam Chair, this is for a loan under the East/West corridor transformation project, which includes several projects including but not limited to things like the interchange projects and so.

Dr. Moonilal: Like bridges 'ent'?

Hon. Sinanan: Yeah, I said the interchange projects and so. Remember the East/West corridor project is an ongoing project, which started some time ago which includes projects under the Curepe interchange, the—you have several projects under that.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay, maybe you can—

Hon. Sinanan: Then you have—because you have—

Dr. Moonilal: —maybe you can undertake just to list the related projects.

Hon. Sinanan: —then you have culvert—

Dr. Moonilal: —and give us.

Hon. Sinanan: —projects and so where you change culverts along the highways and things like that so its several—it comprise several projects.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure. Could I you ask to give a—they can just, instead of saying several projects so you can just list it and circulate it to us. That would be fine.

Hon. Sinanan: Yes sure.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, thank you Madam Chair. The question would have been responded to based on what the—

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, thank you very much Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I refer the Minister's attention to the line Items for Wages and C.O.L.A, supplemental funding totalling 20 million is required to facilitate payment under the above Sub-Item as a result of filling of 690 daily paid vacancies; Highways Drainage, 140, and Maintenance 275 Divisions to September 30th 2023. Minister can you advise how many persons would be—this payment or this supplemental fund will be contributing towards within the Central Division, under the Drainage Division in the Ministry of Works and Transport?

Hon. Sinanan: This allocation is for filling the vacancies on the cadre. In terms of the amount, under the different Drainage, Highways, Maintenance, I could always furnish you with that.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, we have a lot of drainage issues within the Central Division. I have personally conducted site visits in areas—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I would like the Members that are disturbing this meeting to please contain themselves. This will be my last warning.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yes Minister so we have conducted several site visits with representatives from the Ministry of Works and Transport, Central Division, Draining Department, Orange Field Road, Southern Main Road in Edinburgh et cetera. And one of the keep-backs in getting these works done to clean these water courses is the short staff, within the Central Division.

7.25 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Can you tell us how many vacant positions within central division is going to be filled?

Hon. Sinanan: There is a process to fill the vacant positions, as you will appreciate. It is a collaboration between the representative unions and so. That process is ongoing. We have to do it at the different regions. However, this is really the maintenance in-house staff. A lot of the watercourses and so you would have visited, they are cleared under different Votes, and so. But this is really the in-house staff. Now, they do some maintenance, but they only do maintenance in

certain areas where equipment and so, cannot go. All right? I mean I will give you different areas but we fill the vacancies based on the different regions under the Ministry. In terms of the central area—

Mr. Ratiram: Can you give me a breakdown in writing of it?

Hon. Sinanan: Yes, sure I will furnish you with that.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. And for line Item 02/002/28: Other Contracted Services of \$100 million, can you provide us with a breakdown of what are the contracts that this \$100 million is going to supplement?

Hon. Sinanan: The Member for Oropouche East already requested that.

Mr. Ratiram: Also for 005, right.

Hon. Sinanan: Does that mean I have to send two sets? I am going to send a set for the Member for Oropouche East. I would probably send two sets for everybody. But it will be furnished. And this was as a result of the inclement weather last year. So, that is why this Vote would have been increased.

Madam Chairman: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, if I can take you to the Schedule, page 31, 011: Transfers to State Enterprises, I just want to take four areas in a block, Madam Chair, 05: Nidco 25, 31, 32. Now, you are asking for increases. Let us take 05: 12.5 million, 10 million, 10 million, 10 million. But, Madam Chair, through you to the Minister, the original budget estimate back in October would have been exactly in the column revised provision 2023. So, for example, 05: Nidco Repayment to Aranguéz/El Socorro Overpass, in October was 25.6 million that we had budgeted. Now, you are asking for 12.5 million today. Where would you have spent that \$12.5 million within the Ministry?

Hon. Sinanan: Some went to drainage. Some of it was transferred to Lake Asphalt.

Mr. Lee: So, you would have moved around money within the Ministry. I do not know when the Minister of Finance, when we would be able to note those movements within the Ministry?

Mr. Imbert: Closing of accounts.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, line Item 02/005/28: Other Contracted Services, I see there is a sum of 67 million that is going towards, in some part towards bridge repair. In Caroni East, we have the Cunupia Bridge on the Southern Main Road. The pedestrian railing is completely destroyed and there is open access to the open watercourse below. It is very dangerous for pedestrians. Would consideration be given to fix this, under this line Item?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, before that is dealt with, I distinctly recall the Member for Oropouche East asking for full particulars with respect to 002/28 and 005/28. And I distinctly remember the Minister saying he would provide all of the information: the names of the projects, location, cost, status of construction, name of contractor, côté ci côté la. So, that question, as far as I am concerned, respectfully, Madam Speaker, is redundant.

Madam Chairman: Any other question Member for Caroni East?

Dr. Seecheran: No.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 43 supplemented by the sum of \$300 million.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister. Thank you PS.

Head 61: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, \$40,771,000.

Madam Chairman: I will invite the Minister of Housing and Urban Development

to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development continues to be at the forefront of the Government's public social policy, and is charged with the responsibility of providing adequate and affordable housing solutions for citizens as well as contributing to the development of our nation's urban environment.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry remains committed to working assiduously to provide these housing solutions for all citizens who are in need of such solutions as well as—

Madam Chairman: Minister, one minute. I just want to advise Members that dinner is available. So, maybe for those Members who wish to relax a bit and refresh themselves, they are quite welcome to leave the meeting and relax and have their dinner and then return. For those who remain, we will seriously conduct the business that we are about. Minister, thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, as I was saying, the Ministry remains committed to working assiduously to provide adequate and affordable housing solutions for all citizens who are in need of such solutions and to provide grants to citizens for the development of their housing requirements.

The Ministry also contributes to the development of the nation's urban environment, as guided by our *National Strategic Plan, Vision 2030*, and the Roadmap for Trinidad and Tobago: Transforming to a New Economy and a New Society. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Question proposed: That Head 61 be supplemented by the sum of \$40,771,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just one question to the Minister. Minister, on this heading 04/009/01, which is the only Item here under housing and urban development, there is a matter of 40.7 million. My only question is, it is being asked for as well to replenish funds which were vired from this Sub-Item, 21.3 million. Could you just indicate what were the funds vired to, to which area?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, the purpose of the virement was to supplement funds in order to facilitate a principal and interest payment on the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation loan that was taken in 2012. And this loan was the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation/UDeCOTT principal payment on the sum of 213 million on a fixed rate loan that was taken in 2012.

Dr. Moonilal: Just a follow-up. Yes, that is the first part of the three lines. There are two lines or 2.25 lines here; \$19.4 million which you just indicated. But it says here, I am reading:

“...as well as to replenish funds which were vired from this Sub-Item, 21.3 million.”

What was the 21.3 million vired to? That is the point, not the earlier part of the loan.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Oh, sorry. The 21 million was, as I said, it was required to pay on the fixed rate loan to facilitate principal payment on the UDeCOTT/NCB loan of 213 million, which was a fixed rate government-guaranteed loan, and it was done in May 2023.

7.35 p.m.

Dr. Moonilal: So you took that to pay one loan and now you are taking this to pay another loan?

Standing Finance Committee
Head 61 Ministry of Housing and Urban Development

2023.05.05

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Essentially, to repay what we took from the loan. Sorry, to repay what we took from the loan that is existing.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 61 supplemented by the sum of \$40,771,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Ministers. Thank you, PS. Thank you representatives from the Housing and Development Corporation.

Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, \$100,000,000.

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

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Having so done in respect of the generality of the Ministry of National Security, Head 22, I am available for any questions that my colleagues here would have in respect of the Head 64. Thank you very much. I have of course—

Question proposed: That Head 64 be supplemented by the sum of \$100,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Simple questions. Under the Development Programme \$27 million, the sum is need to meet the cost of fleet expansion for Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, would any of these vehicles be equipped with dashboard cameras, since they are new to the fleet?

Hon. Hinds: Answer to the question is yes. Continuing development of that programme on vehicles in the police service.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Yes. In terms of the cars that would be acquired, is there a policy in terms of allocation? And I would just give an example, would it be tied to a division having a response time of say 10/15 minutes whatever? Or is it just given

on the basis of request made by the divisional heads? Or is it tied to an output of reduced response time to if a citizen calls he would not hear that we do not have a car. A car would be available to cater for that output.

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Hinds: The Member for Naparima was swinging between the specific about a particular outcome and the very general about what a citizen “go say.” The position is that the police service on the basis of its operations, on the basis of its experience, on the basis of the resources available to it, will determine how it will allocate these cars. But generally speaking, they are indeed going to be structured. The distribution of them and all resources of the police service depending on the strategic goals and plans of the police service. And of course, it also takes into account distribution in accordance with divisions and branches and sections.

Mr. Charles: Another question. Maintenance of Vehicles, 38, it will be supplemented by \$38,043,500. When I look at the maintenance expenditure over the years it averages in 2021 \$25 million was spent. And I am just seeking clarification, \$25 million was spent, that is the actual. In 2022, it was 21, and in the 2023 Estimates it was increased by \$7 million to \$28 million. So we see that there is an average annual expenditure of about 25 probably 26 million. Now, it means that when you supplement 28 million with 38 million, we are now talking about close to \$60-something million. Is there a reason? There may be a valid reason for this jump by threefold over the previous years.

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Charles: And may I say that we are happy that the police service vehicles will be maintained if this figure is a justification for that increase.

Hon. Hinds: Yeah. Well, there are a number of factors. One, the fleet is ageing, and therefore would demand more in terms of maintenance and upkeep. There is

also the question of the very focused programme to return more of the vehicles that were needing service, into the fleet. That too would be a contributory factor, and of course, more robust maintenance. Those are the kinds of factors that you see inside of there.

Mr. Charles: Excellent. And just lastly, is there a maintenance—how are vehicles in the police service maintained? Is it a scheduled maintenance? Is it done by a centralized firm or is it breakdown maintenance? Is there some approach, policy approach to the maintenance of police vehicles?

Hon. Hinds: There is a well-designed policy on the business of maintenance as indeed there is policy in respect of various activities, various aspects of the police operation. To answer your question, yes, there is a vehicle maintenance policy.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And welcome to the Commissioner of Police to the Standing Finance Committee. On Development Programme, Madam Chair, 04/12/B/046: Purchase of Vehicles for the Police Service. Based on the explanation here given, the sum is needed to meet the cost of the fleet expansion for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. This allocation of 27 million, can the Minister just indicate to us how many vehicles will be added to the fleet with this allocation?

Hon. Hinds: About 103 vehicles in this regard.

Mr. Hosein: 103?

Hon. Hinds: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, can you be so kind to tell us what is the current fleet?

Hon. Hinds: The current fleet in respect of the police service, they have a total of 2,133 vehicles.

Mr. Hosein: Total?

Hon. Hinds: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein: And are all of those vehicles operational, Minister?

Hon. Hinds: No.

Madam Chairman: Member, I gave you a little leeway.

Mr. Hosein: Sorry.

Madam Chairman: But you know, let us focus on what we are here about.

Mr. Hosein: Madam, can I then ask it under 02/002/13 with respect to the Upkeep and Maintenance of Vehicles, can I then ask how many vehicles this allocation would be used to maintain that may not be operational?

Hon. Hinds: What is the question?

Mr. Hosein: Ask over the question? Yeah. Minister, under 02/002/13 Maintenance of Vehicles, this allocation of \$1.6 million, what it is the estimated number of vehicles would be maintained using this allocation?

Hon. Hinds: Seven-three.

Mr. Hosein: Seven-three, and Madam Chair, with your leave can I ask the Minister now, how many vehicles within the fleet are not operational?

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, are you permitting that question? You denied it earlier. Same question—

7.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Before the question could be completed, I am being asked another question.

Hon. Hinds: Okay.

Madam Chairman: So if you can wait. So, Member—

Hon. Hinds: Yeah.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: —please find another question.

Mr. Hosein: But that will be all, Ma'am.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you.

Mr. Hosein: I do not wish to detain you any longer again.

Madam Chairman: Excuse me?

Mr. Hosein: I do not wish to detain you any longer.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Just for the benefit of hon. Members opposite and the general public, when the decision was made to allocate a total of \$100 million in additional supplementary funding to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for the balance of fiscal 2023, the \$100 million was broken down into three categories. One is maintenance and the Member for Naparima he has pointed out that the additional allocation is in fact more than the original and there will be some \$60-odd million available for maintenance. The second category is to replace existing vehicles, so that is vehicles that are no longer serviceable, repairable, is to replace. So for the first category, maintenance, approximately \$40 million; for the second category, replacement of existing vehicles, approximately \$33 million; and then for fleet expansion, the third category, is the \$27 million. So it is three different categories of vehicle expenditure, okay?

Madam Chairman: Just a minute, Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima, you want to ask a question?

Mr. Charles: \$100 million is significant but are they tied in any way in justification to performance indicators that we could see a measurable improvement in the visibility of police officers, given this \$100 million—

Mr. Imbert: Let me just repeat, there was a request, and we felt it was justifiable that we should provide the police service with a significant sum, to increase its mobility. And we felt the request of \$100 million was justifiable. I cannot speak to how the mobility of the police will be after this. That is not my remit.

Mr. Charles: So the remit of the Cabinet is not to give expectations for moneys spent, to say, look, we are the Government, we need our response time of five minutes; this allocation, whatever it may be, \$100 million, \$200 million, \$600 million, will meet that objective and therefore the population can see that the money is being spent in a way that could advance their safety and security.

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, I might say to the Member for the Naparima that these things are in existence, but they are to be found in the Police Service's strategic operational plans. So they are there. And I also would like to say, if he wants to become a little more granular in this regard, as a citizen myself, I have observed, personally observed, and I have taken the time to do so, not merely as a citizen, but as Minister of National Security, to look sometimes to see where and how these vehicles, as far as I can observe, are posted, arranged, distributed on the ground, as a citizen might. And I have been taking note of the fact that the police have within recent months implemented what this Parliament by now should be very familiar with, the direct active strategic—what is the name of it? Direct, active, targeted patrols.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Hinds: And, Madam Speaker, I have seen these vehicles located at particular places identified by the police service. And if you want proof of how they work—because the police have been reporting to me that it works. And I am able to say that within recent times the police have been having far more interceptions; far more contacts with criminals, in many cases, fleeing from the

scene of their crimes. This is a fact—intercepting them, confronting them and having greater success in this regard.

Mr. Charles: Madam Chairman, a question.

Madam Chairman: Okay. One minute. I am seeing plenty hands up. So we will take Naparima—

Hon. Hinds: Yes.

Madam Chairman: —then Siparia—sorry, Chaguanas West—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: —you are in the wrong place, and Member for Couva North.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, you see deep down, I get the impression the police service does not want to create problems but they are not given the equipment they asked for. Now, the Minister says that he has seen a policy document that speaks to the kind of indicators that I have spoken of. So I ask the Minister—I could tell you the response time in the NYPD is 10 minutes. Could you tell me the response time of the TTPS in Trinidad given this expenditure?

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So I have given a little leeway for all these lovely discussions but unfortunately, I cannot allow a further discussion on these matters. Thank you. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Chair, I too wanted to know whether there was a standard—maybe not standard, but whether there was a response time that the police service was working with and what is that time response.

Hon. Hinds: The answer is yes.

Madam Chairman: I just said—

Hon. Hinds: The answer is yes.

Madam Chairman: I just said, Minister, that we are not going down that road.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister with respect to line Item 004/12/B/046: Purchase of Vehicles for the Police Service, \$27 million, and can the hon. Minister advise if a complete needs analysis has been conducted for police for the supply of vehicles to the police service across Trinidad and Tobago, the various divisions—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, can I ask you to rule on that, please?

Mr. Ratiram: —and if there is any shortfall in fulfilling this needs analysis with the purchasing of these vehicles, will there still be a need for more vehicles at this time?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I believe the question was asked, how many vehicles this will purchase. The answer was 103, and I believe that is the end of it.

Madam Chairman: Member, again, a question of that nature, I think is for another forum. Okay?

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Minister, please.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I take note of the response from the Minister of Finance and I also take note of the response from the Minister of National Security to my colleague from Naparima, when he indicated that my colleague was being specific, but then moved to the general of what a citizens says. Madam Chair, it is not a generalized statement of what a citizens says with respect to police not showing up in a timely manner because of the lack of police vehicles. That is a specific response that we get across the country when it is incidents are

happening. Just today another person was murdered, right in St. Mary's Junction, in my constituency, just a stone's throw away from the police station.

Madam Chairman: So, Member—

Mr. Ratiram: So I am asking the question to the hon. Minister, we are spending moneys here and we are allocating supplemental financing to the TTPS to provide vehicles. At the end of this exercise, Minister, can you say if the TTPS will have all the required resources, that being police vehicles, to effectively and efficiently execute their responsibility to keep each citizen of Trinidad Tobago safe, seeing that you really do not think it is your responsibility to do such?

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, Member, I have allowed you your statement. That is a very similar question to what I did not allow for Naparima and which I did not allow for Chaguanas West in this exercise. Okay?

Question put and agreed to.

Head 64 supplemented by the sum of \$100,000,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister of National Security.

Hon. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Commissioner of Police, and to the other representatives from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

7.55 p.m.

Head 65: Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, \$49,956,823.

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

Hon. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs is completely focused on our critical mandate, and we work hard every day to elevate the standard of our diplomacy and to enhance Trinidad

and Tobago's relations with other countries and external agencies. The Ministry is very mindful of the need to ensure proper management of funds allocated to facilitate the delivery of services and to maintain an active agenda.

In the course of undertaking this mandate, there have been areas in which there is need for additional financial support. In some circumstances, the initial allocation has not been sufficient to cover the required expenditure. It is therefore, expected, that this exercise that we are engaged in, would provide the requisite resources to cover planned and anticipated expenditure to the end of this fiscal. And I stand here, I sit here representing the hardworking staff of this Ministry, and I am available to respond to any questions from Members of the Committee to best of my ability. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 65 be supplemented by the sum of \$49,956,823.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Repairs and Maintenance-Buildings, 2.2 million, 02/001/21:

Funding is required to meet expenditure for the completion of repairs at the High Commission in London; refurbishment works at the High Commission in Jamaica.

I am just asking for a breakdown of these two expenditures, given that in January 2023, at a Standing Finance Committee Meeting:

“...a sum of \$3.1 million was transferred to meet the cost...”

And I am quoting here from the Minutes of the Standing Finance Committee:

“..,of critical remedial works to the facade and roof of the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission in London.”

It was 3.1 million. The simple question is: What is the total?

Hon. Dr. Browne: The answer for the question, with respect to the line Item being examined by the committee Member, this funding is required to meet expenditure for the completion of additional repairs at the High Commission in London, as well as refurbishment at the High Commission in Jamaica. With respect to the London project, some additional works requirements were not visible and identifiable, at the time that the initial scope of works was being prepared in 2022. And while those works were underway, as happens in a number of infrastructural projects, some items of electrical and plumbing work were visualized, identified by the contractor and repairs undertaken. So, that is with respect to London.

With respect to Jamaica, this expenditure is related to roof repairs and structural work required at the Chancery. This is a building of some vintage, and all of the proprietary work has taken place. We are looking to replace steel to reinforce columns that have rotted over time, and caused the migration of the concrete cover; installation of a standby generator, installation of an elevator, which is a statutory requirement under Jamaican law and the structure must be friendly to differently-abled persons, so some advancements there; repair to the reinforced concrete work to stop the intrusion of water. This cost includes, repainting of the facility, replacement of ceiling, tiles, replacement of some shelving in the vault area and the vault room has some repairs as well to be done. And we are of the view that this additional allocation by the Ministry of Finance would be sufficient to cover those two projects.

Mr. Charles: Question? 04/003/04: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, \$10 million. I refer to the yellow book which says that United Nations Peace Keeping Operation, for 13 million Actual in 2021—13, 1-3—but then the Revised Estimate

was 5 million in 2022, and only 1.5 million budgeted for 2023, and two questions: Is it that the allocations fluctuate and, therefore, what you submitted in the 2023 estimates was a reflection of a down cycle? And, secondly, if we know that the annual—what we have to pay is around 13 million, 10 million, why did we not budget for that before?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Well, Chair, I am surprised at the question in two regards, because the Member has held up some level of experience in treating with UN matters. So, he would know, the Member would know that these contributions with respect to peacekeeping—

Mr. Charles: But that is standard—

Hon. Dr. Browne—no, they vary. That is number one. Well, I mean, we are all human. So, I am not going to hold you over the coals for that. But the other aspect is—I am not speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Finance. They do the budget allocations. We make the request. So when you are asking, based on the allocation, I am not the Minister of Finance. So, I will give you a direct response.

Mr. Charles: I know he is the culprit.

Hon. Dr. Browne: No, no, no. It is not a matter of culprit. You see, you want to drag me over the coals, but you do not want me to drag you over the coals. Member, the direct answer is, these contributions vary. That is number one. And, secondly, the allocation that was made was not sufficient. I would go further to provide context to indicate, as the Member is aware, Madam Chair, we are in a very important endeavour with the United Nations with respect to the Presidency of the General Assembly and it is deemed to be particularly important, in this case, to be proactive with our contributions.

So, there is a little bit of an error in the details provided. This is not for 2022. We are up-to-date with 2022. This is for 2023, and whereby such payment

would normally be made in June of the following year, at the end of the fiscal cycle of the UN Peacekeepers, we are being proactive, in this case, based on the contributions identified. That is the broadest explanation I could probably give.

Mr. Charles: Precisely, and I hear what you are saying, but that is precisely why there is no conceivable way that 1.5 million, which was the estimate for 2023, would have met the requirement for the peacekeeping operations, no way. So, therefore, in anticipation of the fact that we were taking the President of the General Assembly, I would have ensured that there were adequate funds to meet that situation.

Hon. Dr. Browne: But hold on, hold on. You see, again, the Member, Madam Chair, is straying back into the error that he made initially. There is an error. There is an error. This is not after the fact. These actions by the Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, are properly described as proactive. As I said, this is due in June next year, forward looking. So, do not construe it in the wrong manner.

Mr. Charles: Item 02/001/66, and it is simple question, 20 million, no obfuscation. The sum is needed to meet the cost of Hosting the 45th Regular Meeting of the Conference of—

Madam Chairman: Where are you?

Mr. Charles: This is 02/001/66, the second Item. I am not dreaming.

Madam Chairman: This is the one with Hosting of Conferences?

8.05 p.m.

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Charles: "...Seminars and other Functions", \$20 million:

“The sum is needed to meet the cost of...Hosting...the 45th Regular Meeting...the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community and related celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of CARICOM by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago during the period...03-06...”

—for three days. We have just held a very—what you have described as a very successful meeting—right?—in terms of the—what?—crime as a public health emergency, and the figure fluctuated from 1.3 million to 1.5 million, and today we are told that when we bring in the ancillary cost, it will be 3.3. We are not sure of the cost, but what we do know that there was, by the accounts of the Government, a very successful meeting for 3.3 million. So all I am asking, we are looking at \$20 million in a “guava season” time and I am asking you just to give us a breakdown of this cost and, do you think that it is justified in the circumstances in which we find ourselves financially?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, in response to the question, again, first of all these are the allocations identified by the Ministry of Finance. There is no commitment that all of these funds will be expended. This is an important generous allocation being made which will allow for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to host a number of very important events. One of them is the 45th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads and Government of Caricom. It is public regional knowledge that Trinidad and Tobago, given the fact that this is the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, will be hosting that CARICOM heads meeting in July of this year. It is the 50th anniversary.

We have estimated \$10 million as the expenditure associated. Before the Member goes any further into examination of that estimate, I would want the Committee to be aware, Madam Chair, that in 2013 Trinidad and Tobago, under a

different governing administration, had the honour of hosting the 40th anniversary celebrations of CARICOM and a Heads of Government Conference. The expenditure associated—estimated expenditure associated with that 40th anniversary hosting was \$9.923 million. So we are projecting and estimating \$10 million for the 50th anniversary, which is very significant and it is an honour for Trinidad and Tobago to bring CARICOM back to Chaguaramas, back to Port of Spain, back to Trinidad and Tobago for that event.

We have also factored in this \$20 million allocation that was requested and granted by the Ministry as supplemental, \$800,000, as the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs' contribution to that total that you have mentioned as expended by the Government on the regional symposium. So that is factored into here as well as. We are also projecting cost for this Ministry's contribution to some very important Emancipation Day celebrations. This is going to be a special Emancipation Day because we are hosting the king of the Ashanti Empire of Ghana as the special guest for Emancipation Day, and this is also an Emancipation Day that comes at the end—toward the end of the international decade for people of African descent. So there are a number of factors that come together to make these emancipation celebrations particularly prominent. We have estimated a total contribution from the Ministry of \$2.5 million, and you know the cost associated with hosting royalty and the entourage, and so on. It could be quite significant. So there is that.

We have also just hosted the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan on an official visit with his delegation and that is included here in terms of invoices that are coming in to support this. There are some additional costs, not much out of this figure, about \$25,000, being identified for the rounding off of our PGA campaign, so there will be a local event that diplomats and former diplomats here

in this country will be invited to, to participate to be introduced to the candidate.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. Browne: Sorry?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. Browne: Maybe not all, most will be invited to, to participate to be availed of the strength of our candidate and there will also be what is traditional, and those with experience would know this; at the end of the campaign period, on the eve of the election there is normally a modest event that takes place in New York at the United Nations as well to thank those who have endorsed and given support.

So, Madam Chair, I believe I have responded to the request for some breakdown. There will be some other events as well covered here. We are looking to—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, I am not sure—the Member has asked me but I am not sure if he is—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. Browne: Okay. As you know, we have had a very important foundation—

Mr. Charles: You are talking too much.

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

Hon. Dr. Browne: Now, you see, Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: One minute. One minute. You know, it is lovely for us to have, you know, a little banter and so on, but we must know when we are being rude—okay?—and, you know, very regard to the 70—how many years you remind us of all the time, I expect you to show time honoured traditions in your behaviour.

Okay?

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, the Member knows these questions could be responded to very differently but I am honouring this Committee to provide as full a body of information as possible.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. Browne: I could do it very differently. So the final appointment I was making, Madam Chair, before the Member went off on a different avenue is, we have a foundation role in the ICC and there is a planning underway for a special seminar which would highlight Trinidad and Tobago's foundation role at the International Criminal Court. So that is the breakdown I can provide.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister wish to indicate who were the competitors for the post because it was one of the things you have identified for President of the General Assembly, to enlighten us?

Hon. Dr. Browne: I am pleased to inform this Committee that due to the diligence and the diplomatic work of Trinidad and Tobago, thus far there are no other candidates that have come forward. Trinidad and Tobago is the sole candidate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. Browne: The Member should know, and if he did not know would have been informed via some output that occurred a few weeks ago, that up to the eve of the election, up to 48 hours before the election, another candidate can be offered, so nothing must be taken for granted.

Mr. Charles: Yes. And the Minister would admit that every 10 years someone from CARICOM becomes President of the General Assembly unopposed for the past 40 years. So that—it was Ash, ambassador Ash—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, I am asking, what is the point being made?

Mr. Charles: In 2013—

Hon. Member: What is your point?

Mr. Charles: It was—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: We just spoke about being rude, so I guess what happens is the Member for Naparima most probably is just giving us a history to “big us up”. Is that so?

Mr. Charles: Excuse me.

Madam Chairman: Right. As history to “big up” the country.

Mr. Charles: Yeah. I am “bigging up” the country.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Charles: But I am “bigging up” the country but give credit where credit is due. It is due to us—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles:—in 2013 who put up our—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North, you asked a question?

Mr. Imbert:—irrelevant.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North. Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, and I thank the Minister for elaborating on his response to my colleague from Naparima on line Item 02/001/66, Hosting of Conference, Seminars and other Functions, and attempting to give us a breakdown of that \$20 million. Some is going to be expended in the upcoming activities and some is to pay invoices for work already

completed. Can the hon. Minister provide us with a detailed breakdown of the service providers with respect to the works already executed, who provided the services and the amount to those service providers that this \$20 million is going to be utilized?

8.15 p.m.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Which services are you asking about?

Mr. Ratiram: Hon. Minister, in your explanation from what I understand, some of this 20 million is going to go towards outstanding payments for activities that have already been completed, and we have the upcoming regular meeting—

Hon. Dr. Browne: Hold on, just to clarify, because I want your question to be based on fact, through you, Madam Chair. What I indicated was that there are still invoices with respect to specifically the symposium on Violent Crime as a Public Health Issue. It was not generalized, it was very specific.

Mr. Ratiram: So hon. Minister, a percentage of this 20 million is going to be utilized to pay those invoices?

Hon. Dr. Browne: I do not know—well, we could work out the percentage. It is 800,000. The Minister of Finance is the mathematics expert.

Mr. Ratiram: So if you can kindly give us what part of this funding is going to pay outstanding expenses, or expenses that—

Hon. Dr. Browne: 3.72 per cent has already been advised by the Minister, whose advice we take on matters of computation.

Mr. Ratiram: Hon. Minister, may I ask the question please? Thank you. So what I am asking you is the service providers, if you can provide us with a breakdown of the service providers and the amount that they are to be paid, along with the futuristic expenses that have been budgeted for, to make up this 20 million. If you can give us the total breakdown of what this 20 million will

breakdown for. From the explanation provided by—

Madam Chairman: One minute please. Before the Minister gives this undertaking. What is meant by “breakdown of futuristic expenses”?

Mr. Ratiram: So, upcoming expenditure.

Madam Chairman: But they have not happened as yet.

Mr. Ratiram: And what is projected. In terms of the expenses, what the Minister anticipates that this \$20 million is going to be utilized for with respect to the projected budgeted expenses.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Madam Chair, I will try to assist the Member, to separate what is achievable from what is a fantasy. With respect to the achievable, yes Member, through you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ratiram: Not fantasy, in terms of upcoming expenses. Not a fantasy but upcoming expenses.

Hon. Dr. Browne: Allow me to respond as best as I could. So with respect to the breakdown of the invoices, for the symposium, yes that can be provided in writing to Members of the Committee, from Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM affairs. With respect to details on events not yet formulated or planned, that goes into the realm that we cannot provide a breakdown. What we can do, what I have done already is to indicate that with respect to the 50th anniversary conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM, the estimated expenditure is \$10 million. I do not know what further the Member would anticipate on that.

I went further to indicate that with respect to the hosting of the events for the campaign of the 78th Session Presidency of the General Assembly, I gave the figure for that. So Madam Chair, I think I have taken this matter as far as possible with respect to details. With that commitment to provide a breakdown on the invoicing for the symposium.

Mr. Ratiram: Minister, what we are looking for is transparency in the allocation of this 20 million. Yes, you have indicated 10 million plus the symposium expenditure. However, what I am asking for is detailed, if what is being projected, how it is this 20 million is going to be utilized, what has been budgeted for.

Madam Chairman: Member, I think the Minister has explained. The details which you seek can be given with respect to events that have occurred, because there will be invoices. As far as other events, he says that with one he has an estimate. Okay? “Ah think ah will spend \$10 million.” As far as the others, where no planning, he cannot even say, “Ah think I will spend \$5 million”. I think in the simplest Trini language, that is how I understand it. So if there are no other questions.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, if that being the case then what we are doing we are allocating moneys without any commitment of how this money is going to be spent, when I can tell you in Couva—

Madam Chairman: Member, I would say this, I would say this. We have been through exercises like this at least twice every year since 2020. I think we all know, after these estimates are done and what a budget is, we get a chance sometime later down to interrogate actuals. I think we all know that.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chairman, I still have questions.

Member: The Member has something to say.

Mr. Ratiram: I still have questions!

Question put and agreed to.

Head 65 is supplemented by the sum of \$49,956,823.

Mr. Ratiram: I still have questions, Chair. Madam Chair, you are ignoring me.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Minister. Thank you, PS. Thank you, Members.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Head 79: Ministry of Sport and Community Development, \$2,110,000.

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

Hon. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Sport and Community Development seeks to build our nation's human capital through the development of athletic talent and community life. The Ministry's main focus is to maximize the interconnection of the three divisions, physical education and sport, community development and mediation, to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

The Ministry's mandate is supported by the three state entities under its purview, the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Commission for Self-Help Limited and the Export Centres Company Limited.

I sit before you here, Madam Chair, as the Export Centres are being granted an additional \$2-plus million, and I am open to accept questions, statements at this time.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. To the hon. Minister. I see this allocation is to facilitate payment of gratuities and retirement benefits, as well as operating expenses. Would the Minister be so kind as to disaggregate the two figures to arrive at the 2.1 million?

Hon. Cudjoe: For gratuity and payments for retirement, that allocation is \$751,387. For training and development, we are looking at \$564,000, and for operational costs to compensate the increase in staff in filling key positions, \$860,761.

Madam Chairman: Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, just to follow up please. In respect of the new staff, can you indicate how many new staff will be taken on?

Hon. Cudjoe: During the COVID period the handicraft sector was somewhat slowed, because we did not have cruise ships coming in, we did not have much activity taking place, and we were making that transition from one board to another board. Since then we have a new strategic plan and a new focus. I should say renewed focus and renewed energy in the state enterprise.

So we have filled the positions that were vacant. The CEO position is now filled, the manager for accounting and finance. The auditor position is now filled. The HR manager position is now filled. Facilities and Assistant Manager is now filled and the Procurement Officer.

Mr. Ram: Just in terms of the retirement benefits, this would meet all the expenditure to September 30, 2023 or there will be additional—

Hon. Cudjoe: This is to September 30, 2023.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 79 supplemented by the sum of \$2,110,000.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, PS. Thank you, other representatives from the Ministry of Sport and Community Development.

8.25 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Appropriation for fiscal year 2023 supplemented by the sum of \$3,852,055,829.

Madam Chairman: Item number two, variation. Hon. Members, we shall now consider the proposals for variations for fiscal year 2023. The proposal for decreases will be considered first, followed by the proposals for increases. Hon. Members, we shall now consider the proposals for decreases for fiscal year 2023.

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

Hon. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I hold myself available to answer any question hon. Members opposite may have on this specific line item.

Question proposed: That Head 42 be varied by a decrease in the sum of \$100,000,00.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister, can you provide us with some details of the projects this \$100 million is going to be allocated to?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: This is a subtraction.

Hon. Imbert: That too is impossible. I am not a mystic.

Mr. Ram: Under the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Madam Chairman: This—no. Let us be serious now. This is a decrease.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 42 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$100,000,000.

Madam Chairman: We now move on—I thank you, Minister of Finance—to increases. Hon. Members, we shall now consider the proposals for increase the fiscal year 2023.

Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport \$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.

Hon. Imbert: Again, Madam Chairman, I hold myself available to answer any questions that are relevant.

Question proposed: That Head 43 be varied by an increase in the sum of

\$100,000,000.

8.30 p.m.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, through you, Chair, the \$100 million is now moved to the Ministry of Works and Transport, when it was originally set up it was for rural development roads, has that concept changed since it has now gone to the Ministry of Works and Transport?

Hon. Imbert: The words “rural development” do not appear in any commentary on this matter, perhaps you would like to rephrase the question.

Hon. Member: No, no, no, let him rephrase the question.

Mr. Lee: Let me rephrase the question. The \$100 million that has now moved to the Ministry of Works and Transport what would it be used for?

Hon. Imbert: Secondary roads.

Mr. Lee: Secondary roads within the Ministry of Works and Transport or outside of the Ministry of Works and Transport?

Hon. Imbert: Roads are classified in Trinidad and Tobago as main roads and highways and secondary roads.

Hon. Member: And orphan roads.

Hon. Imbert: Well, and then they have roads that have no owner and they are euphemistically called orphan roads.

Mr. Lee: And just a final question, Madam Chair. This allocation has moved to the Ministry of Works and Transport and it is for secondary roads, would the Ministry of Works and Transport be working closely with the rural and local government boroughs in respect of this funding?

Hon. Imbert: I would hope so.

Mr. Lee: Thank you Minister.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much Madam Chair, and Madam Chair, to the

hon. Minister. When the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited was under the purview of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, local government practitioners were all asked to submit to the Ministry roads that fall within their electoral district that this programme will take into consideration to have repaired, will those request now be transferred also to the Ministry of Works and Transport?

Hon. Imbert: The company was transferred so all the records of the company were transferred.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 43 varied by the sum of \$100 million.

Madam Chairman: Thank you to the Minister of Finance; thank you to the PS, Ministry of Works and Transport.

Question put and agreed to.

Appropriation for fiscal year 2023 varied by the sum of \$100 million.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, please note that the debate for the adoption of the Committee's Report will take place on Wednesday, May 10, 2023, at 1.30 p.m. This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is now adjourned. I wish you all a pleasant weekend and a safe journey home.

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