



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

# Debates of the House of Representatives

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**OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE  
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE  
DEPUTY SPEAKER

**Friday 16th October, 2015**

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE: JACQUI SAMPSON-MEIGUEL**

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## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2015	
[Sixth Day] ... ..	1



THE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
*IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2015*

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SESSION 2015—2016

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, October 16, 2015*

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2015

[Sixth Day]

*The Standing Finance Committee (Third Day) of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill and Estimates.*

[Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George]

**1.30 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** The meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is now resumed. Good afternoon everybody.

**Hon. Members:** Good afternoon.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, before we proceed with today's schedule, can we have some agreement on two issues. The first is: are we meeting tomorrow and the times of the tomorrow's meeting?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much for this opportunity, Madam Chairman. I had discussed with the Chief Whip that we would meet tomorrow from 10 o'clock to four o'clock and again on Monday. So, yes, we will be meeting tomorrow.

**Madam Chairman:** We will be meeting tomorrow?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** And as far as tomorrow, can I also ask if we can identify the Heads of Expenditure to be examined so that the proper notifications can go to the accounting officers?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, Madam Chairman, and I know that the identification of the Heads is within the purview of the Opposition Benches. So I would leave that to them. Thank you very much.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Well, first let me preface it by saying it depends on how much we can get today out of the way. But if we will end today with the Estimates for the President, we can continue tomorrow at No. 18 and look at six hours more or less, look at Service Commissions, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Rural Development—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Sorry, hon. Member, you are going a little fast. I am just trying to make sure we have it.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Oh, you do not have it.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** I have the list, but I am just ticking off.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Items 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24.

**Madam Chairman:** So as we have agreed today, we are going to start with the Central Administrative Services, Tobago.

*Head 16.*

**Madam Chairman:** Head 16, Central Administrative Services, Tobago, \$84,482,450. I will now invite the Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Hon. Minister.

**Hon. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. First of all let me thank the people of Tobago, and more specifically Tobago East for the overwhelming support. Over the last five years what should have worked as an arrangement to bring positive changes to the lives of Tobagonians, in fact acted as a yoke around the neck of our development agenda.

Madam Chair, I want to assure Tobago, and the Tobago public, that the days of playing with their development and the empowerment of our people for the sake of political mischief, those days are over. This administration and, in particular, the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services, Tobago, is committed to undertaking a collaborative approach in the delivery of service to the people of Tobago. We will work alongside all Ministries, state institutions and the Tobago House of Assembly to ensure that Tobagonians benefit fully from all that the country has to offer.

We are satisfied with the allocation for CAST in the 2016 *Draft Estimates*. The allocation will facilitate improvements in service delivery by way of completion of our file and registry tracking system, and our fixed assets and inventory tracking and monitoring. The allocation will allow us to complete the

construction and commissioning of the Meteorological Services building at Crowne Point, a project which was started under the previous administration. In addition, we will be able to explore opportunities for the delivery of service in the Windward Tobago and answer an urgent call by our senior citizens for easier access to government services in Tobago East.

Madam Chair, I want to reassure the Tobago public that any action taken thus far has been for the public good. When I became Member of Parliament and Minister of State, I no longer saw colours of jerseys but people, my people who I took an oath to service without fair or favour. Madam Chair, I strive to always operate with my oath of office and the mandate of CAST as my guide.

In closing, I wish to reiterate to the public that CAST operates under the Sixth and Seventh Schedule of the Tobago House of Assembly Act. As such, our mandate as CAST will include the Prices, Weights and Measures Inspectorate; Meteorological Services; the Registrar General Department; the Sub-Treasury Department; and the Co-ordination of Matters relating to Tobago Affairs and the delivery of Central Government Services to Tobago in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly.

Thank you.

*Question proposed:* That Head 16 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$84,482,450 for Head 16, Central Administrative Services, Tobago, is comprised of moneys proposed for Expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, we are at page 61, 001, General Administration. Hon Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** We have seen here the information in regard to what is the Estimate for 2016, and this is a transfer from the Ministry of Tobago Development, which is now CAST. Unfortunately, we do not have any comparison—[*Interruption*—all right, I will find it under Tobago Development. It would have been nice to have it side by side, but we do not have it.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Caroni East, I think this is the standard form for the presentation. Over the years that is established practice, so I do not think it is anything unusual with respect to the format.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So we will find it under Tobago Development.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, I am just trying to get a clarification. There is \$84 million on the Schedule, but you refer to page 60.

**Madam Chairman:** I referred to page 61—

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:**—and we are dealing with the Item 01.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But Head 16. If you look at the some of the expenditure there, you have \$71,982,450, but on this document—

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Tabaquite, if I may be permitted? The Minister will tell me if I am mistaken, I believe the difference is, amounts to direct charges which we have been told are not appropriated. So they will not be within the Appropriation Bill.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I think the difference, Madam Chair, is the \$12.5 million Development Programme that is added in here in this Draft Estimates of Expenditure.

**Madam Chairman:** Would the DP not be a direct charge?

**Mr. Imbert:** No. Madam Chairman, it is \$12.5 million for DP and \$71.982 million for recurrent, a total of \$84.5 million.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, but we examine the entire \$84.482 in any event. Okay? So can we return Item 001, General Administration?

Moving on, Item 002, Trade and Industry.

Moving on we are at page 62, Item 005, Meteorological Services. Item 007, Registrar General. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services. Item 01, hon. Member for Oropouche.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I am on page 63 and I just want to make a query to the hon. Minister. At No. 16, I see Contract Employment \$2.5 million. This division, of course, was transferred from the former Ministry of Tobago Development, where there was a provision for \$5.5 million previously. I just wanted to get the comment from the Minister and to enquire really my question, whether this is a result of the reduction in Contract Employment; and for the Minister to confirm whether it is true that yesterday 92 employees of the former Ministry of Tobago Development were sent home.

**Hon. Webster-Roy:** I will give you your response in writing.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Sure.



**Madam Chairman:** Any other—Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Could the hon. Minister just give us some explanation of the \$3.5 million for Short-Term Employment, vis-a-vis, the Contract Employment. When you say short-term versus contract, what is the differentiation?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I will answer that because that is throughout the Ministries across the board. Short-Term Employment is not attached to any position. It is employment for six months or less to meet the exigencies of the service. So from time to time you may need to take on somebody for three months, four months, five months, to deal with a particular pressing need. So that is what that allocation is for.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** [*Inaudible*] envisages that you will need more short-term employment rather than contract employment because the budgetary allocation is larger than the Contract Employment figure.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is merely an allocation, and the Ministry is free to vire among Heads as the need arises. So if they feel they need more for Contract Employment, they will shift from Short-Term Employment.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 002, Trade and Industry on page 64. Item 005, Meteorological Services. Item 007, Registrar General, which is on page 67. On page 66, I am sorry. Moving on to Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases. Member for Siparia.

**1.45 p.m.**

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. At line Item 001, under General Administration, I note there has been no allocation for Vehicles and therefore I would want to ask, at the present time, there being no allocation, how many vehicles are under this Head for CAST?

Similarly, under the Met Services, Vehicles, no allocation and under Registrar General—all on the same page, under 03 Minor Equipment Purchases. All three items, no allocations have been made for Vehicles. So for each of them, how many vehicles are there present for each of these?

**Hon. Webster-Roy:** In terms of no allocation, we would have acquired new vehicles last year so we would not have a need. In terms of the quantity, I will give you that in writing.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** How many you acquired last year, fiscal 2015?

**Hon. Webster-Roy:** Actually, five new ones last year.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Excellent, well equipped.

**Mr. Imbert:** Did not work.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The vehicles did not work?

**Madam Chairman:** Can we move on then, therefore? [*Crosstalk*] Members, please. Can we move on, therefore, to Sub-Head 04?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I was hearing the hon. Minister of Finance saying that the vehicle—they did not work. And I am asking then, do you have an allocation if they are not working? Are the vehicles working or not working?

**Mr. Imbert:** No, the political ploy did not work.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Very nice.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 04, Current—hon. Member for Siparia, please, let us carry on. Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 005.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, Human Capital Development Facilitation Company. What is the purpose of this company? Has it produced any public reports? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that there is value for money, transparency and accountability of this company?

**Mr. Imbert:** Apparently, this was a company set up under the former Minister for Tobago Affairs which was interfering with the statutory rights and responsibilities of the Tobago House of Assembly. Unfortunately, the former Government committed the State to certain obligations, so this appropriation is to deal with outstanding liabilities from that ill-fated programme. And if savings are achieved, they will be transferred to other more deserving Heads.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** No, it is okay.

**Madam Chairman:** So can we, therefore, go on to the Development Programme? 09 Development Programme and it is at page 52 of the Development Programme, Draft Estimates; Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chairman, this is directed to the hon. Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister. I noticed that the Development Programme consists mainly of the meteorological building which is a vote of about \$10 million. Is that the only contemplated development plan you have for Tobago? If you do have others, where are they incorporated in this Development

Programme? Out of \$12.5 million, I see about \$10 million for the meteorological building.

**Hon. Webster-Roy:** Madam Chairman, our programmes are actually in the allocation here. So number one would be the computerization and networking of CAST to improve our registry and filing tracking systems; and also the restoration of the Central Administrative Services building in Tobago, the restoration of it is as an historical building, and we want to have that restoration done, and it is allocated for in addition to the completion of the Met building.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the question is that the sum of \$84,482,450—[*Interruption*] I would like if all Members will direct their communication to me.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Sorry.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 16 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** I would like to thank the members of staff from the Central Administrative Services for coming to assist the committee. I wish you all a safe return journey.

Head 13. I am sorry, Members, can we go to Head—Minister of Finance, are we ready to do Head 18?

**Mr. Imbert:** I am always ready.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Imbert:** Could you just allow my staff to assemble?

**Madam Chairman:** Could we crave your indulgence for a little, while the technocrats assemble? Hon. Members, I propose that we suspend for five minutes while the technocrats get in place.

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

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

**Madam Chairman:** This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is resumed.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to indicate that the Minister of Finance has indicated that there is a little delay because his staff was here but upstairs. So we apologize for the delay.

I also want to indicate that the Chief Whip had indicated to us that whenever the Prime Minister came, that they would be ready to examine Office of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is here today, so I will like to know whether there will be the examination of the Office of the Prime today, or if you would like to do it on another occasion, given the fact that you had indicated previously that whenever he is here, you would be willing to do it.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Chair, we did indicate that we would like to know when it would be convenient, whenever it would be convenient him to attend on us. Last evening we fixed the agenda for today. We would like to stay with that agenda, and tonight when we are fixing the agenda for tomorrow, I would then ask the hon. Members if the hon. Prime Minister would be available, so we may consider him for tomorrow, but in the circumstances we have set our agenda, and as—

**Mr. Imbert:** You said you wanted to see him.

**Dr. Moonilal:**—and we would like to proceed with the agenda we agreed to last evening.

**Mr. Imbert:** That was not what you said. You said whenever he comes you want to examine him.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Chair, we would like to proceed with the agenda that we agreed last evening before we suspended.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam, I would just like us to return to the original moorings of the discussion that we did have, and originally it was said that given what happened on the first day, the Prime Minister could not be here, and Office of the Prime Minister was to be examined, he could not be here.

However, we were given the assurance by the other side that whenever he is here, they would be willing to examine Office of the Prime Minister. Madam Chairman, the Prime Minister is here. He is ready for Office of the Prime Minister to be examined. The staff of the Office of the Prime Minister is here, and I would think that my colleagues on the other side, being persons who I assume keep their word, would revert to what they said originally, which was, and I repeat, whenever the Prime Minister is here they would be willing to do Office of the Prime Minister, which would have indicated to anyone listening that they were

ready at any time, even if it was not included in the stated agenda. Whenever the Prime Minister was here, Office of the Prime Minister would be examined. The Prime Minister is here.

**Madam Chairman:** My understanding, the statement was whenever the Prime Minister made himself available, he would have been taken. In fact, in my fixing for today, I had it as a possibility as if he came, we would have taken him. So I think if the hon. Prime Minister is here, I do not think it is a very big Item—

**Dr. Moonilal:** Ma'am, could I repeat please? I would like to see the words that were used.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** We could find it in the *Hansard*.

**Dr. Moonilal:** We can find it, but let me make the point very clear. Last evening we agreed; at no time did Members opposite ask us last evening when we were setting the agenda, that is it possible that the Prime Minister, if he is available, can be taken. We have set an agenda. I am just asking you please, could we follow our agenda?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, may I say something?

**Dr. Moonilal:** When we set our agenda, later in the evening, today at whatever time we are setting our agenda for tomorrow, I ask my hon. colleagues that they can raise that issue, but I think we are keeping back precious time now from a very critical Ministry. And please, I am asking that we proceed.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, if the Opposition is unable or unwilling, then I guess we have to move on.

*Head 18.*

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So we are ready now with Head 18: Ministry of Finance, the sum of \$7,386,691,220. I will now invite the hon. Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, it will be very brief, Madam Chairman. The Ministry of Finance has the responsibility for providing funds to all government departments and agencies. It has the responsibility to manage the economy, to manage the public debt, to manage the fiscal balances and to ensure that the fiscal targets are met and maintained.

*Question proposed:* That Head 18 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$7,386,691,220 for Head 18: the Ministry of Finance is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under

the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure and the Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are at Page 74, 01 Personnel Expenditure; 001 General Administration.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The Ministry of Finance, based on what the hon. Minister said, will also be responsible for aspects of revenue, and we do have draft estimates of revenue. I know we are now looking at recurrent expenditure and then we go to DP. For guidance from you, hon. Chair, the revenue estimates, we would want to raise some questions with respect to revenue estimates, which are under the collection drive of the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am told this was not done last year and it is not the practice.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No, it is whether it is within the Standing Orders.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, if you would just permit me a minute to check the relevant Standing Order.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, if you go to Standing Order 81, it is estimates of expenditure.

**Madam Chairman:** Well, I think the combination of Standing Order 81 and 82 make that clear, because Standing Order 82 which deals with the Standing Finance Committee deals with the estimates and the Appropriation Bill. Then when we go back to Standing Order 81(1), it deals with the “financial requirements for expenditure”. So that it is only expenditure that the Standing Finance Committee is entitled to examine.

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you. That is my belief too.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Chair, we are provided with the Standing Finance Committee Members’ Manual, a guide for the Members of the committee, published by the Parliament. At page five:

The budget is presented in the form of an appropriation Bill. The corresponding draft estimates and other required budget documents are laid and automatically referred to the Standing Finance Committee.

Madam, if the documents are referred to us, they cannot be referred to us not to enquire, not to consider, not to approve. This is a relevant budget document laid and automatically referred to the Standing Finance Committee.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, if you will permit me. That cannot supersede the Standing Order which says:

- “(1) Any Bill containing the estimated financial requirements for expenditure on all the services of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago...shall be known as an ‘Appropriation Bill’.
- (2) Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements shall be presented at the same time as any such Bill and shall immediately stand referred to the Standing Finance Committee.”

So the estimates that we are to consider are the estimates of expenditure, that document cannot supersede this document.

**Dr. Moonilal:** They did not say that.

**Hon. Imbert:** It says estimates of expenditure.

**Madam Chairman:** Members! Members!

**Hon. Imbert:** It is clear.

**Dr. Moonilal:** “Why you hiding dat?”

**Madam Chairman:** We are guided by the Standing Orders. My ruling is the combination of Standing Order 81 and Standing Order 82, which governs only expenditure. What the hon. Member for Oropouche East read, which is the Guidance Manual, I do not think it is at variance with this, but if it is, it cannot override what is the Standing Order. Okay? So may we proceed, please? 01 Personnel Expenditure.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam, if I could please refer you to page 50 of the Standing Orders.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Siparia, I have already ruled, and we are moving forward.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Page 50 of the Standing Orders, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Might I proceed, please? Item 001 General Administration. [*Interruption*] This is—Members, this is at page 74.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam would you allow us some general questions. I do not know at what point we can raise those, whether at the start or during the process—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** We would like to raise some questions at page 72.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—general questions on this Head of recurrent expenditure.

**Madam Chairman:** Are the general questions based on what is contained in the estimates?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, I might not—what is contained in the estimates.

**Madam Chairman:** Are the general questions based on what is contained in the estimates?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is based on what we have on page 73.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so we will hear what it is.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, I want to refer you to 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies and Goods and Services, 02. When we look at the estimates of 2015 of \$7.381 billion for Current Transfers and Subsidies; and Goods and Services, \$537 million, we have a total there of seven billion, approximately 800 million.

### **2.15 p.m.**

And when we looked at the revised estimates for 2015, we saw that \$4.88 billion was spent for Current Transfers and Subsidies and \$318 million for Goods and Services. So, when we looked at the revised estimates for 2015, it means the past Government did not spend \$2.7 billion as was in the estimates for 2015. So, the past Government, which is our Government, did not spend \$2.712 billion based on when the price of oil and gas was reduced and when we met the economic difficulties in January 2015.

So, I want to draw to the attention of the present Government that the Government of 2010—2015, when the economic crunch came, we reduced expenditure by \$2.712 billion based on the figures that we have for the revised estimates versus the estimates. That is the first important point I want to show, that we did not spend \$2.712 billion that was supposed to have been spent, because we were prudent in our management of the economic situation in Trinidad.

**Hon. Imbert:** Where is this, Madam Chairman?

**Madam Chairman:** We are looking at the summary page, page 73. It is one of those general questions which I have allowed on the summary page.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** What is the question please, hon. Member for Caroni East?



**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The question now is that I see with a decrease in the price of oil and a decrease in the price of gas, the present administration is expected to spend an increase of \$473 million plus \$111 million which is \$584 million in addition to what—\$584 million.

**Madam Chairman:** Is it a question or a statement?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I want to know whether this is the intention of the Government to have an increased expenditure of \$584 million over the revised estimates of 2015 despite the price of oil being down and the price of gas being down, particularly on Goods and Services and Current Transfers and Subsidies?

**Hon. Imbert:** The question is a bit confusing. Could you repeat? [*Laughter*]

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Caroni East, is that not a purely arithmetical exercise? Hon. Member for Caroni East, is it not purely an arithmetical exercise based on the figures that are here?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is much more than that. What our mathematical calculation shows is that the present Government is spending \$584 million—

**Madam Chairman:** And that is what I am asking. Is it a statement or a question?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is a question I am asking, if that is the expenditure that you are going to be having for 2016, an increase of \$584 million above 2015 revised estimates? Yes or no?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, the first problem I am having, Madam Chairman, is that on page 73, the difference is \$325 million, not \$500 million. So that is the first bit of confusion. The second bit of confusion that befuddles me is: are you asking whether this number is a typographical error?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, I am asking whether you can confirm that this is in fact so.

**Hon. Imbert:** You are asking me whether the numbers here are correct.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, whether this is in fact so?

**Hon. Imbert:** So, you are asking me whether the estimates—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Whether you are spending \$584 million more in 2016 on Goods and Services and Current Transfers and Subsidies over 2015? That is the question.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, am I being asked whether the estimates laid in this honourable Chamber are correct?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, I am not asking you that. Do not interpret it as that.

**Madam Chairman:** I think the figure that the hon. Member is asking appears to me to be a different figure from this figure here, so could you just answer the question as was asked please, so that we can go on?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, I cannot answer the question.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Oh really?

**Hon. Imbert:** Where are you getting your figures from?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is before you here.

**Hon. Imbert:** It says \$325 million.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, you are subtracting the decrease in debt servicing of \$246 million, and that is how you are coming up with \$325 million.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am on page 73, I have gone on to the bottom right-hand corner of page 73, it says: "Net Increase/(Decrease)". I go to the bottom right-hand corner, it is not in brackets, so it means it is an increase and it says \$325,578,660.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, I am asking about two specific items. As my colleague said, the Leader of Opposition said—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, while I might understand your intent, that is not the question you have asked, and the question you have asked I think the Minister has answered you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no, no.

**Madam Chairman:** You asked him whether it is \$500-and-something million and he says no.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, I ask it again for clarification. Line item number 02, Goods and Services, there is an increase of \$111 million over 2015 revised estimates, and item 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, \$473 million above the revised estimates of 2015; together they add up to approximately \$584 million over those areas in 02 and 04 than the revised estimates of 2015. Is that in fact so?

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, would you kindly answer the question?

**Hon. Imbert:** There is no typographical error here.

**Madam Chairman:** I take it that the figures there are in fact the figures.

**Hon. Imbert:** This is what it is, it is in black and white. So, can we proceed, please?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Would the Minister kindly point us to where in your expenditure here is the sum of the \$5 billion allocation for wage hikes, and would he give us a breakdown of how this \$5 billion is comprised?

**Hon. Imbert:** Are you on 01?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am looking at page 73 which is the global amounts for the Head under recurrent expenditure.

**Hon. Imbert:** I know, but which line item are you on?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am dealing with the global allocation for recurrent expenditure which deals with personnel and so on; I am asking, where is the \$5 billion?

**Hon. Imbert:** It has gone up by \$17 million, where did you get \$5 billion from?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** This is what you repeatedly told this honourable House.

**Hon. Imbert:** I have to deal with what is here. That is what is in your head. Madam Chairman, I am lost.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance, is it that it would not be shown on the sheet on this page?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am struggling. The former Prime Minister, now Leader of the Opposition, is referring to a figure which does not appear on this page. I cannot answer a question about an imaginary event. Could you please refer to the line item?

**Madam Chairman:** Therefore, I would answer that and say that the figure that is referred to is not on this page.

**Hon. Imbert:** But she knows that.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we move on please? Hon. Member for Caroni Central, and I am asking Members, please.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I want the truth.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Siparia, I think it would be much easier for all of us, Minister of Finance, if all questions be directed to me.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Item 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies, I just want to confirm that in the 2016 estimates that there is an increase of \$473,102,850 under Transfers and Subsidies.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Are these general questions?—because I am really very confused now because that is what I am seeing here. So I do not know if the question that is being asked of the hon. Minister of Finance is whether this is a correct figure or an incorrect figure, because I am seeing here \$473,102,850. I think that is what I am seeing here. So Member for Caroni Central, if what you are asking is, “Is it an error?”—I would allow it. If that is not the question, I do not allow it because that is what is there in our faces. Okay? I have ruled. Hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I am asking in the context of Personnel Expenditure, 01, where there is an increase of \$17 million and I am quoting from the budget speech, if I may, where the Minister of Finance said and I quote:

However, we have managed through prudent fiscal discipline to contain most of this extraordinary expenditure in 2016, but regrettably because of this unprecedented \$5 billion liability on the personnel expenditure side.

I am just asking if this is reflected anywhere.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, this is now the second Member of the Opposition that is referring to a figure that is not on this page. I cannot answer an imaginary question. I could only deal with the numbers that are here.

**Madam Chairman:** So, Members, can we go on to page 74, Item 001, General Administration?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Chair, I have a problem and I would like to raise the matter here. This is a budget debate.

**Hon. Imbert:** It is not.

**Dr. Tewarie:** The finance—

**Madam Chairman:** Members, could we allow the Member for Caroni Central to finish his question, and then as we indicate, you would be allowed the opportunity to respond? Thank you very much.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Thank you very much, Ma'am. We are involved in a budget debate and part of the budgetary arrangement is that we shall have a Finance Committee. The Finance Committee is a committee of the whole which examines the budget, line by line, within the context of budgetary allocations for expenditure. I cannot understand why we are being so circumscribed that we have to deal with item by item, line by line, without extrapolating any issues that are pertinent to the matter of the budget. [*Desk thumping*]

For instance, the budget articulates the position that Subsidies and Transfers are something that need to be curtailed. Here we have nearly half a billion dollars extra additional cost added on the expenditure side for Transfers and Subsidies. Is it not reasonable to confirm that that is in fact so, given the position of the Minister? [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, it is not our fault if the Members opposite do not read the Standing Orders. Standing Orders 84(1) says:

“The Standing Finance Committee shall consider the Estimates of Expenditure in relation to the Heads of Expenditure in the order submitted by the Leader of the Opposition.”

We must go through each head one by one, and I just want to make— [*Interruption*—Madam Chairman, the Leader of the Opposition is interrupting me.

**Madam Chairman:** Continue please.

**Hon. Imbert:** I did not say a word.

**Madam Chairman:** Continue please, Minister.

**Hon. Imbert:** I just want to make the point, it is not our fault if the Members opposite are not aware that the budget debate is finished. It was completed several days ago when I did my winding-up and begged to move the question. We are now in the examination of the estimates, and if Members opposite do not read their Standing Orders, do not understand what we are doing here and try to revive something that has already been debated and concluded, that is your business, but we are guided by Standing Orders and these Standing Orders call for detailed examination of heads of expenditure, not something else that is in their mind.

**2.30 p.m.**

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you very much, and I totally agree with the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, the hon. Minister of Finance. The Standing Order refers us to the Heads of Expenditure and the Heads of Expenditure are the 41 Heads—

**Hon. Imbert:** No.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—and the Ministry of Finance is one, Head 18; that is why—the Heads are identified and we decide we are doing these Heads. The Head is, Head one down to 18, 25, 41. These are the Heads. We are now under Head 18: Ministry of Finance, and that is what we are dealing with.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not so, you are trying to discuss things that are not here. It is not so.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance, one minute, please. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Thank you, Madam Chairman, I would not say anything.

**Hon. Imbert:** Good.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So, as far as the point that we are in a budget debate, I would refer Members to Standing Order 81(6), right?—that says the debate, when resumed, all right, and that is dealing with—so we are not in a budget debate, and therefore—

**Dr. Tewarie:** Chair, you see—

**Madam Chairman:** Members, please, I am proceeding.

**Hon. Imbert:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance, I would like when I speak that nobody else speaks, please.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Chair—

**Madam Chairman:** I would like when I speak nobody else speaks unless I recognize them, please.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I would like your permission to address you, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** I have said, I would like when I speak nobody else speaks unless I recognize them. I think I have allowed sufficient time for us to ventilate this issue and I now rule that we proceed with the examination of the

Heads of Expenditure as we have been doing, as you all have always done in accordance with the estimates set out here. We are now at page 74, Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure; Item 001 General Administration. If there is no question I go on to Item 002 Budget Division. This is at page 75. Item 003, Customs and Excise Division.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** We see on Sub-Item 01 a reduction of salaries and cost of living allowance only of \$1 million. We heard from the Government that there is the consideration of the revenue authority and Customs and Excise Division and the Board of Inland Revenue, which is on the next page are premised to be merged together to form the revenue authority. Could the Minister explain the 2016 estimates of \$67 million, first of all, for Customs and Excise? Where does it stand in relation to the proposed revenue authority if and when it is formed? Where does this expense go in terms of the proposed revenue authority? And when we come to the next page I will ask you, on the Inland Revenue Division, which has also an expenditure of \$90 million, where do these two go, those expenditures for personnel—for Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you very much. The allocations for the Customs and Excise Division, well this allocation for Customs and Excise is in the context of the existing situation—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is in the context of the existing—

**Hon. Imbert:**—of the existing situation.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay. Right, and with the proposed revenue authority where does this fit in?

**Hon. Imbert:** If and when the proposed revenue authority is implemented in fiscal 2016, which is the target, that by the end of September 2016 the revenue authority will be created and functional, then in 2017 the allocation that you now see under Customs and Excise would be subsumed within the revenue authority.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay, so if I am reading you correctly that this expenditure on salaries and COLA for 2015/2016 there will be no revenue authority during this year so there would be no need to transfer that money to any revenue authority?

**Hon. Imbert:** The target is that the new revenue authority would be operational by September 30, 2016; in other words, by the end of the fiscal year.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** If we are able to achieve an accelerated implementation then, obviously, an adjustment would be made prior to September 30, 2016, but the plan at this point in time is that this will be the allocation for all of 2016 unless the revenue authority is operational before that, but we do not expect that it would be operational before September 30.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to clarify then, the \$20,738,000 that is due to be cut, decreased from Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance under Inland Revenue Division on page 76, plus the \$1 million—

**Hon. Imbert:** You are moving on to another Sub-Head?

**Madam Chairman:** No, we are in Item 003, Customs and Excise.

**Dr. Rambachan:** All right, I will ask the question under Customs and Excise, does the \$1 million represent any retrenchment of workers in the Customs and Excise Division?—because I will ask it for the bigger \$20 million also.

**Hon. Imbert:** No.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Can the Minister say what that \$1 million will represent?—because in 2015 you had an estimate of \$58 million that went up to \$68 million, \$10 million more, and now you are keeping it at \$67 million but you are cutting one, but, you know, well I cannot refer to it because the Chairman would not allow me to refer to the Inland Revenue Division, but I will come to it under Inland Revenue Division.

**Hon. Imbert:** It is just a \$1 million variation in allocation of \$67 million. It is neither here nor there.

**Dr. Rambachan:** You are cutting people—

**Hon. Imbert:** That is not true. It is neither here nor there. If this vote needs to be supplemented it will be, but it includes provisions for vacant posts, that is there in the explanation. So, clearly, if all the vacant posts are not filled then the entire \$67 million would not be utilized. It is a small variation and it is really of little consequence.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** No, Ma'am, I am on the next Item when you reach there.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Okay. Hon. Member for Caroni East.



**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The Minister might be free not to answer this question, but does he envisage, with the formation of the revenue authority, that the wages and salaries and COLA under Customs and Excise will be reduced in the next financial year 2016/2017? I am just asking him this, he might need to answer it or not.

**Hon. Imbert:** Which Head are you talking about?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Same under Customs and Excise, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

**Hon. Imbert:** So you are asking me about 2017?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 2016/2017.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, well we are not looking at that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. I just wanted to get the guarantee that no jobs are going to be lost.

**Hon. Imbert:** We are not looking at 2017.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance—I think, Member for Caroni East, I think that is an unfair question, none of us can really see in the future.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is why I asked my question—

**Madam Chairman:** No, you asked a question he gave an answer. All right, can we go on now to Item 004.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Hon. Minister, I am looking at Item 004, page 76, Inland Revenue Division, and I wanted to get an estimate from the Minister as to—given the fact that he has decreased VAT and will bring many products, many goods from the zero-rated list onto the VAT at 12.5 per cent, is this a proper estimation for staff requirements given that we have not yet received a list from the Ministry of Finance or the Minister of all those items expected to constitute the \$6 billion more in collection from VAT? It is \$12 billion, \$6 billion more.

Is this staff requirement that we are seeing here under wages and salaries where there is a significant decrease of \$20 million plus, would this staff requirement be sufficient for the expansive work that you intend to do by taking an unknown list of items from zero-rated, putting them onto the 12.5 per cent VAT? You estimate to collect \$6 billion more, which we do not know how you will do that because you have not shared with us the items that will be removed

from the zero-rated list. What are the staff requirements to do that work given the expenditure cut here before us?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East, I am not sure I understand the question you are asking. Are you asking whether the estimate of \$90,720,000 estimated for salaries and COLA, is that sufficient, meaning adequate per person, having regard to the cost of living? That is what you are asking?

**Dr. Moonilal:** No. What I am asking is that given the decrease in this area which is before us of \$20 million plus, what are the implications for that on the staffing at that division given that you are now removing what could be thousands of items off the zero-rated list onto your 12.5 per cent new VAT figure? Would this staffing quantum be enough for that?—the appropriation. Would it be sufficient given that?

**Mr. Imbert:** If the hon. Member will look at page 76, Item 004 Inland Revenue Division, Sub-Item 01 Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, 2015 original estimates, you will see the budgeted allocation for this division was \$85 million. If you look now at the 2016 estimates you will see the budgeted allocation for this Division is \$90,720,000 and, therefore, it is more than what was allocated originally in 2015.

The variation between—Madam Chairman, I am being disturbed by the Member for Siparia—the variation between the 2015 original estimate of \$85 million and the 2015 revised estimate of \$111,458,240 is reflective of the fact that in fiscal 2015 the former administration settled a number of collective agreements, specifically one with public servants, and in fiscal 2015 the Inland Revenue Division had arrears to pay to employees, all of which were paid; and, therefore, the difference of \$20,738,240 reflects the fact that arrears of salary were paid in 2015, which are no longer required to be paid in 2016. And, therefore, it should be obvious that the \$90 million is more than adequate to satisfy the staffing needs of the Inland Revenue Division for fiscal 2016.

**Dr. Moonilal:** A follow-up question, please.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes, so the Minister is confirming that the \$90 million is adequate given his expansive work in that area where he has told this House that there is \$6 billion, which we believe to be the hoax of the century, that you will have \$6 billion more collected by VAT—

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, is this really appropriate?

**Dr. Moonilal:** I am asking whether the Minister can confirm.

**Hon. Imbert:** He keeps making a speech.

**Dr. Moonilal:** My question is, you are satisfied that you can collect the extra \$6 billion with the staffing structure?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I must object. The hon. Members opposite are using the question time to make political speeches. I would ask that they ask questions. I ask for you to intervene in this, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Can you put the question? It is whether the \$6 million—

**Dr. Moonilal:** The \$6 billion he anticipates, whether that can be properly collected with the same staffing quantum. That is the question.

**Madam Chairman:** If that is the question, I allow the question. Could we have—

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I cannot answer the question with this cacophony of noise over there. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Members, I think now we have had enough time to ventilate, let us get back to the business of the day, okay? Hon. Minister of Finance.

**2.45 p.m.**

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, we intend to implement the adjustments in the VAT regime from January 01, 2016. That is clearly stated in the budget statement. Therefore, between today and December 31, 2015, we will be examining the requirements of the Inland Revenue Division. I did say during my winding-up, and also at post-budget forums that we will be hiring an army of young people, graduates and others and training them to do VAT collections. It appears that the Members opposite do not listen, do not read, do not follow anything. So between now and December 31, 2015, we will be reviewing the staffing requirements required to enhance collections, and we will make appropriate adjustments to the allocation.

**Madam Chairman:** Members, before we proceed, I just want to remind us of Standing Order 45(1), which deals with the time limits, and that takes us to Appendix one, which is on page 71. I call these things tools; I hope everybody has their tools. Page 71:

In Committee

“All members—unlimited periods not exceeding 5 minutes each.”

That is with respect to asking the question and giving your answer. I would want to advise from here on it is going to be strictly enforced.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** My colleague asked the question which I was contemplating.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. Item 005 which is at page 77. Moving on, Item 008 Investment Division. Moving on, Item 009 Central Tenders Board.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I have one question on the Central Tenders Board, and that is that the allocation for the CTB is made for the entire year. I want to ask the question: Is anything having to do with the realization of the procurement legislation going to have a bearing on this allocation?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I said in the budget statement and elsewhere that the Government is going to move swiftly to make the necessary amendments to the Procurement Act and shortly thereafter move quickly to fully operationalize the new procurement system. One of the issues that has to be dealt with initially is the appointment of a procurement regulator. You may have heard His Excellency the President refer to this matter during his address to this honourable Chamber, where he said he is in the process of initiating the necessary mechanism for the engagement of a procurement regulator.

If all goes according to plan, before the end of the fiscal year the new procurement system should be operational. At that time, the Central Tenders Board would cease to exist and, therefore, whatever unused allocation is still remaining would be transferred to other more needy areas.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we move on then? We are at 010 Valuation Division, page 78.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chairman, through you, I want to ask the Minister of Finance: Would this be the division valuing the properties that he is contemplating to bring under the new property tax? If this is the department that is going to look after the valuations of the properties across Trinidad and Tobago, does he see this as adequate or he intends to bring on more personnel? He spoke about some young cadre of people doing things across the country. Would that be part of this exercise and the financing for this Valuation Division? Is this the division that is going to be looking after the valuation of properties under the property tax?

**Hon. Imbert:** In the first place, Madam Chairman, the property tax is not new. It has been in force since you were in government for the last five years. All that has occurred is that an amendment has been made each year waiving the implementation of that legislation, but that legislation is in force, so it is nothing new about this.

Secondly, we have made it clear, and I have said this in other places as well as in this honourable Chamber, that what is required now is to identify the properties that would be the subject of valuations. My understanding is that approximately one-third of the properties in Trinidad and Tobago have been properly identified. We are going to use the local government system, and in each local government region we will hire another army of young people to go outside there and properly identify the properties that will become the subject of a valuation. And, yes, the Valuation Division is responsible at this time for the valuation of properties.

I must say that in this case once again, the sum of \$16 million in 2015 revised includes arrears which were fully paid off in 2015 and, as such, are no longer required in 2016. If you look at the estimate for 2016 for the Valuation Division it is more than \$1 million in excess of the estimate for 2015. So we think this is appropriate at this time, and as soon as we organize the mechanism within the various municipal regions to hire temporary staff to go outside there and identify properties—it is a two-stage process.

First you have to identify the property in terms of its physical characteristics, in terms of its location, as to whether it is a residence or whether it is a commercial property. That has to be identified, so you need to map it. Now, there is a point of view that this has all been already done using aerial photography and GPS mapping and so on. This is something that has been told to me, and it is certainly something I am going to explore, because if, in fact, all of the properties in Trinidad and Tobago have been mapped already by aerial photography and GPS mapping, then it would make our life much easier. It would mean that the field agents that go out to identify the properties would have the benefit of aerial photographs and GPS mapping. But that is the first stage: identify the property, identify what type of property it is. Then the Valuation Division, based on that identification, would assign a value to the property.

So for the time being, we consider this to be appropriate. It is when we begin the exercise of identification of properties, then we would see whether we need to supplement this vote or not.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Just a follow-up question to that. In the budget statement, the hon.

Minister of Finance indicated the application of 2009 rates. Am I to understand that is going to be applied for this fiscal year, that is to say land and building taxes rates of 2009, and that the valuation exercise would be something that then dovetails into a rate for the 2017 fiscal year?

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you very much. At the present time, a number of properties are not on the register, not on the rolls, so that the rolls are incomplete. What we have decided to do is to start the process using the levels and rates. It is a combination of levels and rates that applied in 2009, which is the last time that land and building taxes were paid, and that would apply to the properties that are on the rolls. But there are a number of properties not on the rolls. So that as the field agents go out and identify and the Valuation Division comes in and puts an appropriate value, then we will start to add these properties into the system.

So what is going to happen in 2016 is a combination of existing—well, old levels and rates applied to properties already on the rolls, and then new properties as they come in, we will have to formulate how we are going to apply a rate and a level to those new properties so there is some sort of equity within the first year. Then as we go along and we get more information, and as we further refine the system and build the database properly, then we will have to look at amendments to the existing legislation.

In fact, an amendment may be required; that is the additional advice I have received, and I am getting a second opinion on that, as to whether we need to amend the legislation immediately in order to allow ourselves to implement the old levels and the old rates. So this is going to an evolving process throughout 2016.

**Mr. Singh:** Just for purposes of follow-up for that question: when you increase the annual rateable value, then you effectively increase water rates and sewerage rates, and nothing is mentioned about that.

**Hon. Imbert:** One of the things we will be looking at is the percentage and the way in which the ATV and the ARV are applied. I welcome that piece of advice and we will take due note of that. Thank you very much.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Just a follow-up to the answer he gave. Would the personnel involved in the local or in the regional authorities become part of the Valuation Division? How are they going to be linked, from a governance perspective, as the employees doing the valuation from the local government bodies?

**Hon. Imbert:** I am lost. What line item is this? Local government?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, it is the same thing, the valuation. You remember you said the regional authorities—

**Hon. Imbert:** No, I did not say that. I said within the municipal regions. I was talking geography.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Municipal regions.

**Hon. Imbert:** Within the boundaries of the municipal regions.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The employees within the municipal regions, emanating from the municipal regions, what is the governance structure that will link them to the Valuation Division? How are they going to do that, independently, without guidance from here?

**Hon. Imbert:** What I said, I will repeat because it is obvious that this is something that needs explanation over and over. So I will explain again that what we intend to do is to send field agents out to identify properties. The information obtained from the field surveys will then be given to the Valuation Division who would assign the values. So the valuation itself is going to be done by the Valuation Division, but they will use a database created by the field agents.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I crave your indulgence to ask a short question. The valuations on properties which you said include commercial, in the commercial aspect of properties does that include plant and equipment of commercial properties?

**Hon. Imbert:** The Property Tax Act which has been in force since 2009, and has been the subject of amendments in this honourable House for all of the five years that you were in government, refers not only to buildings, but also to plant and equipment. I suggest you go and read the Property Tax Act.

**Madam Chairman:** Has the question been answered?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we go on, please, to 011 National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal, which is on page 79. Moving on, Item 014 Financial Intelligence Unit which is on page 79. Moving on, Item 017 Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency, which is on page 80. *[Interruption]*

**3.00 p.m.**

*[A Member's glass falls to the floor]*

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The books pushing down the glasses. *[Crosstalk]*

**Madam Chairman:** That might be nature in sympathy with what is going on here. So let us press on. Okay? So, 02 Goods and Services, page 80. 001 General Administration. Hon. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item Other Contracted Services, 28, at the end of the page. I note that this provision includes provision for Legal Counsel and Advisory Services. Now the total increase as shown on the line Item is \$65 million. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Members. Members.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And out of that, Legal Counsel and Advisory Services is \$64 million. So really, you know, 99 per cent of that increase has to do with legal counsel. Much ado has been made in this House about legal fees. I would be very happy, given that there is a new administration who has indicated they want to make changes in procurement for legal services. How would this \$65 million be comprised—\$64 million for legal fees—and what would be the method for procurement in the new regime with respect to that?

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** I first must compliment the Member for Siparia for being *au courant*, finally, with a Head of expenditure. Now it is a fact that this Head— [*Crosstalk*] I complimented her.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance, could you just kindly answer the question without an introduction.

**Hon. Imbert:** This Head is for Legal Counsel and Advisory Services for World Bank advisory services and for consultants to the Ministry of Finance among other things. As the hon. Member would be aware the bulk of this is to deal with the Clico matter. That is the main item for which legal services are required. It has come to my attention that the method of selection of attorneys to deal with various matters relating to the bailout of the CL Financial Group and other related matters, that the method of procurement of legal services was inconsistent with best practice. And in fact there are a number of familiar names that crop up on the list of attorneys very similar to the list read out by the acting hon. Attorney General?—or the soon to be acting hon. Attorney General.

And therefore, we in the Ministry of Finance are going to review the procurement of attorneys that took place under the former regime and make appropriate adjustments, using best practice, to make sure that we select persons



who are competent, persons who are experienced and persons who have a good track record and can give dispassionate and professional advice.

**Madam Chairman:** So can we go on to 002 Budget Division? 003 Customs and Excise Division. 004 Inland Revenue Division. Hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Item 08 Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, and I will just ask the question in the context of a general expenditure in that area because we will see it as we move to Treasury Division and the Central Tenders Board. The question I would like to ask the hon. Minister is, could he give us a sense—not a sense—specific information on the total allocation for rent/lease by the Ministry of Finance?—the total allocation. And whether these leases or the rental options are, and I asked it yesterday, on the basis of an analysis of the lease, purchase or rent option. And finally, I would be grateful if we could get a list of the top 10 landlords who will be supplying space to the Ministry of Finance. Thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I would be very happy to oblige, but—

**Madam Chairman:** You need to do that in writing?

**Hon. Imbert:** No. No. It is not that. This Sub-Item relates to Inland Revenue, does it not? So why are you asking about all the other divisions?

**Mr. Charles:** I am making the general point because it is a standard increase, it would seem, as we go along. I do not wish to ask it under every Item.

**Madam Chairman:** I think best if you can find it here under Inland Revenue, and if it is that the response is the same, then the Minister will find a very succinct way to advise you.

**Hon. Imbert:** So you just deal with Rent/Lease, Inland Revenue.

**Mr. Charles:** Yes. Inland Revenue.

**Hon. Imbert:** So what is the question now with respect to Inland Revenue?

**Mr. Charles:** The question is, what accounts for the \$4.4 million increase and then could we get a sense of who is the landlord? And secondly, has the option been done in the context of an informed analysis of the lease/purchase/rent option? Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay. I am told that during fiscal 2015 the Inland Revenue Division or part of Inland Revenue Division was relocated, and as a result of

relocation there are arrears of rent due under the contract. Well it is you that did it not me, and we are now stuck with this liability as a result of a decision taken by the former administration which has incurred a liability for arrears of rent.

**Mr. Charles:** Some of the \$4 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes. This is the advice I received, that the Inland Revenue was relocated by the former administration and this has incurred a liability for the new administration of \$4 million.

**Mr. Charles:** My understanding is that they are still on St. Vincent Street.

**Hon. Imbert:** We are talking about the VAT Division. Okay?

**Madam Chairman:** Moving on, 005 Treasury Division. 008 Investments Division. Hon. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Eighty-six, under Treasury at line—I am sorry. Janitorial Services line 37. I note that there is an increase of about 264 per cent here from the \$687,000 that was in 2015. I am looking at page 85, Madam, under line Item—[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** I thought you said 86.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yeah. I switched back. My apologies. At page 85, 37, Janitorial Services revised 2015—\$687,000, 2016—\$2.5 million, \$1.8 million increase which is about 264 per cent. Can we get an explanation, a rationale as to why this large increase here under Janitorial Services, and what does Janitorial Services entail? The Security Services has also increased which is the line Sub-Item 43. So those two there are some increases, would you kindly explain why? 37 and 43.

**Hon. Imbert:** Well Janitorial Services would be, the simple English meaning of janitorial services—cleaning and so on. Security Services is the simple English meaning of security, which means securing things. And the reason for the increase is that there is a new responsibility, an IHRIS system. This is the Integrated Human Resource Information System offices, which were not catered for under this Head before. So it is simply increased responsibilities for Janitorial Services and Security Services to cater for the Integrated Human Resource Information System offices.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So we are moving on. 008 Investments Division, this is at page 86. 009 Central Tenders Board.

**Mr. Charles:** I suppose, Madam Chairman, I will get the same answer for the rest.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Naparima, are you asking a question?

**Mr. Charles:** Yes. I am.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, please.

**Mr. Charles:** Okay. That is why I was trying to ask a generic question. So I will ask it with respect to the Central Tenders Board, to explain the nearly \$1 million rent allocation? It is on page 87.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am advised that this was the renegotiation of a rental contract by the former UNC administration resulting in an increased rental payment. You increased the rent. Yes. Okay?

**Madam Chairman:** 010 Valuation Division. 011 National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** A similar question at 08 of rental increase \$286,000.

**Hon. Imbert:** It has gone down. It has decreased.

**Mr. Charles:** No. No. Oh, yes. Sorry.

**Hon. Imbert:** You “doh” have a question anymore?

**Mr. Charles:** I was dealing with the Financial Intelligence Unit. Is that what we are dealing with?

**Madam Chairman:** No. No. No. We are now at 011 which is the National Insurance Appeal Board. 014 Financial Intelligence Unit. Hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** The question arises again. The increase in rent—\$286,000.

**Hon. Imbert:** Again, the former administration rented car parking facilities thereby causing an increase in rental payments for the FIU.

**Madam Chairman:** 017 Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. 03 Minor Equipment Purchases. 001 General Administration. This is at page 91. 002

Budget Division. 003 Customs and Excise Division. 004 Inland Revenue Division. 005 Treasury Division. 008 Investments Division. 009 Central Tenders Board. 010—hon. Member for Naparima, can I proceed? 010 Valuation Division. 011 National Insurance Appeal Board Tribunal. 014 Financial Intelligence Unit. Hon. Member for Naparima, 014.

**Mr. Charles:** I want it on 011.

**Madam Chairman:** 014. 017 Office of the Supervisor of Insolvency. 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies. 001 Regional Bodies. 002 Commonwealth Bodies. Hon. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I have a question on 011, Item 23 Agricultural Development Bank. This is on page 99.

**Madam Chairman:** Ninety five. Thank you.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Oh, sorry I made an error.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Households 007.

**Madam Chairman:** We have not reached there as yet.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** So can we go on to 005 Non-Profit Institutions. 007 Households and I recognize the hon. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you. I note at line Sub-Item 06 Food Price Support Programme, there is a decrease of about \$6 million from the previous year and I would like to understand how this would impact in the time of inflation with the increase in food prices? How would this impact on those in need of the Food Price Support Programme. There has been a decrease recorded here in the allocation.

**Hon. Imbert:** Could you tell me the exact line Item, please?

**Madam Chairman:** 06 on page 97 under Item 007.

**Hon. Imbert:** It seems that this is for food cards?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am asking why is it being decreased?

**Hon. Imbert:** From \$294 million to \$288 million, a decrease of \$6 million.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yeah.

**3.15 p.m.**

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, as you would know former Prime Minister, a lot of food cards were given out indiscriminately in the run-up to the general election, including in my own constituency where the defeated UNC candidate just gave out food cards. So that we are bringing order, discipline, integrity, honesty and efficiency to the Food Price Support Programme, and we think a modest decrease of \$6 million in a total sum of \$288 million is not unachievable, since we are going to be cutting out corruption, waste and mismanagement.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009 Other Transfers. Hon. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I was looking at 007 Households still, because we have not finished. Just after the Leader of the Opposition asked about the 06, can I ask—

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, so you are carrying us back?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, further down to Inland Revenue Division on the same page 97.

**Madam Chairman:** Page 97, where are you, Sir?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Item No. 15 Inland Revenue Division.

**Madam Chairman:** That is what I am saying, you are carrying us back. Right? Because that is under—*[Interruption]* No, I am in Other Transfers 009.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no, no.

**Madam Chairman:** So, I am just asking for clarification that the hon. Member is carrying us back, and I think I am correct. Page 97, and I am allowing it.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** And you are where, hon. Member?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Inland Revenue Division, Item No. 15 Government's Contribution to the Children's Life Fund. Are Members of Parliament or Members of Government going to be contributing to this life fund as well?

**Hon. Imbert:** We will put that in writing.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, I asked you.

**Hon. Imbert:** I just answered you.

**Dr. Moonilal:** You will put in writing whether you will.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You will put your answer in writing whether you will contribute as Members of Government?

**Hon. Imbert:** I think I just said that.

**Madam Chairman:** Any other questions on 007 Households? The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Chair. Yes, 007 under 16, Payment to Maxi Taxi Owners. Through you, Madam Chair, can the Minister indicate what exactly is this payment related to?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance, we are at page—

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Ninety-seven.

**Madam Chairman:** No, we are still in Households, 007, payment to maxi-taxis, line Item 16.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is payment in lieu of remission of taxes.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** What is it?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is what it is.

**Madam Chairman:** Maybe some explanation might assist, please, hon. Minister of Finance. This is a new Member. Please!

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay. It represents a refund on taxes paid on maxi-taxis.

**Madam Chairman:** And maybe hon. Minister of Finance, for the assistance of all of us, I think the Member for Chaguanas West may like to assist in the understanding of his colleague.

**Mr. Singh:** That was a commitment given some time in 2005 and it is a follow-through in the years ahead, and what you have there is a consequence of that.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, can I get a ruling on this, please? Is one Opposition Member allowed to answer a question from another Opposition Member?

**Madam Chairman:** Well, the point about it, hon. Minister of Finance, I allowed it in that it gave some clarification for all who may be new here in an appreciation of a question that was asked. Okay?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, I am very grateful for that, because I wish that they had been doing that for the last four days.

**Madam Chairman:** Member! Member, excuse me please. Member for Couva South.

**Hon. Imbert:** Explain to yourselves what you did.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance! Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much. Just as a follow-up to that, I think this matter has been languishing for about 10 or more years, as the Member for Chaguanas West indicated, this allocation of \$12,862,090, will this fully relinquish the debt that is owed to all the maxi-taxi owners who are entitled under this rebate?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** Based on what has just happened, I am tempted to refer the question to the Member for Chaguanas West.

**Madam Chairman:** Is that the answer to the question, hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** That is arrogance on the part of—

**Madam Chairman:** Could we get that answer in writing? Please, let us go on.

**Mr. Singh:** I will put it in writing.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West. Okay, so can we go on to the next Item, 011?

**Dr. Tewarie:** No, could I just—

**Madam Chairman:** Are we—one minute, please. I did not see any other hands go up.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I indicated, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So, I am entertaining the Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** But the matter I want to raise is 007, 15, the life fund. I see that the amount has actually been increased for 2016, and I take that as confirmation

that the Government and the Minister of Finance are going to sustain this fund, and I simply want to compliment the Minister of Finance on this matter.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, thank you. Moving on, [Laughter] I will recognize the Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Would the hon. Minister of Finance give us some information on Item 23, Caricom Development Fund, which is a new item on the estimates of 2016.

**Madam Chairman:** Where are we?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Page 98.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, but remember we are not going by pages. We are really going by Items, so we are still in 007. Hon. Member for Naparima, is yours in 007? Hon. Member for Siparia, is yours in 007?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Item 008.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009 Other Transfers and Subsidies, I recognize the Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Would the hon. Minister of Finance give some explanation of what is this \$65 million for the Caricom Development Fund?

**Madam Chairman:** Line Item 23.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is a new Item under the 2016 estimates. What are the details related to this expenditure?

**Hon. Imbert:** This is number 23?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, please.

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay. The former Government, of which you were a part, agreed to fund the Caricom Development Fund starting in 2016.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Siparia.



**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Line Item 26 Colonial Life Insurance Company, Clico, I note a \$20 million estimated allocation, and kindly ask: what is the purpose of this allocation for Clico? It was not there in 14, 15 and so on.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am advised that this is really a financing item and should be properly included under debt servicing. It is part of the Clico bonds. The cost of the Clico bonds.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So, it should not be here?

**Hon. Imbert:** It should be under debt servicing. But, it is the same item which is financing the Clico bailout. It is part of the cost of raising the Clico bonds.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Item 20 First Citizens Bank Limited indemnity calls, I see a \$30 million increase again. Minister, kindly tell us why this has been increased to \$30 million.

**Hon. Imbert:** Sure. In 2009 the Government signed an MOU with CL Financial, following that group's inability to meet its liabilities to its depositors. The assistance of FCB was sought in the restructuring. It was agreed that FCB would purchase Caribbean Money Market Brokers. In order to ensure that the capital adequacy ratio of First Citizens would not fall below 10 per cent of its international credit rating, the Government signed a liquidity support agreement with First Citizens. Included in that agreement is that the Republic shall, within 30 days of being notified of any indemnified claim, reimburse First Citizens accordingly. First Citizens has advised that claims for 2016 will amount to \$195 million. Because of budgetary constraints, we have made a partial allocation of \$60 million, and the Central Bank would advance any additional amounts as and when required.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Line Item 38 on the same page, please. I note what appears to be a new Item, it does indicate it is a new Sub-Item here, Community Improvement Programme. Would the Minister kindly indicate what this programme is about?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is brand new.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And under which Ministry would it fall?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is under this Ministry.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, your Ministry would give the money, like GATE, for example.

**Hon. Imbert:** Obviously.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** But another Ministry would implement it?

**Hon. Imbert:** The purpose of this, you would know as a long-standing elected parliamentary representative, as I am as well, that from time to time things arise within communities. You have emergencies; your bridge might collapse or some other emergency.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Contingency.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes, this is simply a contingency fund to deal with extraordinary emergencies that may arise from time to time. Obviously, the Ministry involved would have to make a case, whether it is the Ministry of Works and Transport or another Ministry, and then the Ministry of Finance would disburse out of this amount. We just thought that, you know, rather than burden those Ministries, because sometimes things come up that could exhaust the entire allocation of a particular Head. So, we just thought we would put this sum inside of there to deal with unforeseen emergencies.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** No, the Member for Siparia asked the question.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I just want to ask, how does this relate to the emergency fund that exists?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is completely different. This is really infrastructure related. So, as I said, if an unforeseen event comes up and the particular Ministry is unable to manage that expenditure, because, as you know having been in a Ministry for some time, sometimes your vote would be exhausted and an emergency arises; you know, a land slip, a bridge collapse and so on, and we just felt we would have this here as a contingency fund to help those Ministries in the event of emergencies.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Chair, number 32 and number 37, the G-Pan Patent, which is an increase. The 2016 estimates is \$5 million. From \$800,000 to \$5 million, could you just give a short explanation on that?

**Madam Chairman:** This is line Item 32 G-Pan Patent.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, G-Pan Patent.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is the cost of the patent.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** “Ah”?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is the cost of the patent.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Is that a payment to Prof. Copeland for it?

**Hon. Imbert:** My understanding is an arrangement was reached with Prof. Copeland quite a while ago when you were in Government, and I think the Government has a role in the patent. This is for overseas fees for the patent. So, it is Government’s obligation or partial obligation with respect to payment of patent fees for the G-Pan.

**Madam Chairman:** I think you asked a two-pronged question.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, I just wanted shortly. The Betting Levy Board, that is being transferred from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, \$68 million there—

**Madam Chairman:** Line Item 37.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But I remember the Betting Levy Board had an Item of just \$10 million, so I am seeing \$68 million for the Betting Levy Board, and I think you may remember that as well, Madam Chair.

**Hon. Imbert:** We will get back to you in writing on that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, can I then call on the hon. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Line Item 17 Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Fund (GATE). For clarification, I note in the estimates here we have 2015 revised of \$650 million, and, of course the identical sum being allocated for 2016. But in the Social Sector Investment Programme we have the revised estimates had been \$712 million, so which one of these is the accurate number in this here?

**Hon. Imbert:** This is the allocation at this point in time. If we need to supplement or if there are savings—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sorry, Sir—

**Hon. Imbert:** No, I am just saying—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—that is not the question.

**Hon. Imbert:** This is the allocation in this Head at this point in time. If we need to supplement, increase to \$700-odd million, or if there is a reduction, we will make the appropriate adjustments. This is simply an allocation at this point in time.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure, Sir, through you, my question is, why is it in the Social Sector Investment Programme, why is it listed in the table at page 231? Why is the revised listed at \$712 million, but in these estimates it is listed as \$650 million? Which one is the correct one?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will have to get back to you in writing on that.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Please. Page 231 of the SSI.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, no, I will get back to you on it. Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. May I ask, through you, the hon. Minister of Finance, whether there is any—*[Interruption]* Yes, when he is finished.

**Hon. Imbert:** Okay, actually I got an explanation. Yes, Madam Chairman, for the 650, but let us deal with this question first. We could deal with that?

**Mr. Karim:** You can go ahead and then I will—

**Hon. Imbert:** Expenditure could be a roll-over from the previous year. This is simply the allocation for this year. The expenditure could be more than the allocation.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** My question is not about the allocation amount. The question is, that in 2015 in your SSIP, page 231, you said the revised 2015 is \$712 million. In your draft estimates of expenditure, Head 18 under, under that same Item GATE, you said the revised estimate for 2015 is 650, and I am saying it is two different numbers. Which is the correct one? You have two books with two things you gave us, two sets of numbers. They are inconsistent.

**Hon. Imbert:** This shows allocation. This shows the allocation. That shows the expenditure, and that expenditure includes a carry-over from the previous fiscal year.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well they are both listed as revised 2015, eh.

**Hon. Imbert:** They are both correct.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And each number is different.

**Hon. Imbert:** They are both correct.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And they are both correct? Okay.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am advised by the Director of Budgets and the PS Finance, one is an allocation, one is expenditure, and they are both correct. If you want a written explanation as to that I would most certainly give it.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** That would be nice. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Sorry, we were at Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, to the hon. Minister of Finance. Hon. Minister of Finance, through the Chair, it is clear that the sum of 650 continues to be consistent in the allocation.

**Hon. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mr. Karim:** On page 35 of your budget presentation you indicated that you were going to expand the GATE programme, but this figure does not show any expansion. The question I want to also ask is, you had indicated, and through the Minister of Education in his contribution, that was an additional expense for 67 students pursuing medical education at Mona, I just want to know whether that increase that you just responded to the Member for Siparia, are those 67 persons included in that?

**Hon. Imbert:** All right, as you know being a former Minister of Tertiary Education, GATE is funded by a special fund, and there are transfers to that fund from time to time, usually at the time of the Appropriation Bill. So, this \$650 million is a transfer into the GATE fund, which has a balance in it. Therefore, when you add this \$650 to what is there you would have the required amount to pay for the expenditure of \$700-odd million in 2016. So, we are comfortable at this point in time with the balance that already exists within the GATE fund, that this transfer of \$650 million is adequate to meet all the demands of this fund in fiscal 2016, including the payment for the medical students who were denied GATE funding by you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mr. Karim:** Can I have a follow-up to—Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** I will just take you after hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Chair. Under Sub-Head 009, line 19 Caricom Petroleum Fund, I understand, through you, Madam Chair, to the hon. Minister of Finance, that this fund was really established to provide relief to Caricom Member States experiencing economic hardship resulting from persistently high international prices for crude oil and petroleum products. I am just asking, if this fund is relevant in today's oil and gas economy? Thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** Again, this is a special fund, and you have to understand the difference between expenditure and a transfer. So, there was a transfer into the GATE fund of 650, but the expenditure could be more because of the balance in that fund. Currently, the petroleum fund has \$239 million in it. We are appropriating \$100 million so that would increase the balance in that fund, but there are certain conditions by which Caricom Member States can draw down, and those conditions are related to the price of oil. So, they cannot draw down just so. There is a certain cut-off point below which they cannot draw down and a cut-off point above which they can draw down. Okay? Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister of Finance line Item 14.

**Madam Chairman:** Which page?

**Mr. Karim:** Page 98, line Item 14—

**Madam Chairman:** That is Training Fund.

**Mr. Karim:**—could you just indicate as to why this is discontinued for daily rated workers?

**Hon. Imbert:** We will have to get back to you in writing on that.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Line Item 17. We heard that the hon. Prime Minister indicated that they are going to use a means test for the GATE Programme—

**Hon. Imbert:** No, no, no, I could answer you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—and if they are using a means test for the GATE programme—

**Madam Chairman:** You went back to 17.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—how much are you reducing the GATE Programme, because obviously you would weed out some other students if you use a means test? So, could you give us an explanation on the means test and how it would affect your appropriation here?

**Hon. Imbert:** No, but if you were listening to your hon. colleague to your left, he said that we had said we are going to expand the GATE Programme.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But your Prime Minister said he is going to introduce a means test.

**Hon. Imbert:** So, therefore if you take a combination of expansion and the means test, it may be revenue neutral, you add and you subtract, and you might get the same figure.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So, you will expand the programme but do a means test to take away some other students, and therefore you may come to the same figure of 700?

**Hon. Imbert:** Obviously. But, this is something that we as a country need to talk about, as to whether somebody who is earning \$100,000 a month should be given the privilege of free university education. We need to talk about it as a country, that whether the very rich, whether the wealthy should also be entitled to free education. We need to talk about it. We need to have a dialogue on this. I am sure you will agree we need to talk about this.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Time has expired.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, no, I only used two minutes out of the five. So, I would welcome your input as a former Minister of Education, to tell me whether somebody earning \$100,000 a month, or \$200,000 a month should continue, or their offspring should continue to be entitled to free higher education. We need to talk about these things as a country.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I know education is equitable, I give him my advice now, education should be equitable and accessible.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, please, I think the discussion—hon. Member for Caroni East—[*Interruption*—hon. Member for Caroni East and hon. Minister of Finance, I do not think we are discussing policy here! Item 011 Transfers to State Enterprises, page 99. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Today, the Minister

of Finance, I will just remind him that in the budget there was this statement at page 24:

“The Agricultural Development Bank will be adequately resourced to allow farmers readily accessible credit.”

When I look at the Agricultural Development Bank there is violent slash in the funds, down by \$60 million, the Agricultural Development Bank—

**Madam Chairman:** By how many million?

**Hon. Member:** \$50 million.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Fifty million dollars—50—so, it has been brutally, savagely slashed by 66 per cent, while boasting about adequately resourcing the ADB to allow readily accessible credit.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East, maybe you could assist me?

**Dr. Moonilal:** The question is, why did you violently cut/slash the ADB—

**Madam Chairman:** No, that is why I want assistance. I wonder how is violence done with the stroke of a pen or the print of a—

**Dr. Moonilal:** The pen is mightier than the sword, Ma’am.

**Madam Chairman:** I just wanted violently, you know. I wish you would remove that word.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes, I will withdraw that word.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, thank you.

**Dr. Moonilal:** The Minister presided over the slashing of that ADB estimate, the allocation, by 66 per cent, \$50 million, and yet, just a few days ago was boasting about the ADB being adequately resourced.

**Madam Chairman:** And the question is?

**Dr. Moonilal:** I have a second question.

**Madam Chairman:** And the question is?

**Dr. Moonilal:** The question is, I am asking the Minister to explain that contradiction between his words and his actions.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you.



**Dr. Moonilal:** That is the question. I have a second question.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, you just made a ruling that we should not be discussing policy, so is any part of that question policy? Could you assist me?

**Madam Chairman:** Well, the question is, why the decrease of \$50 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** So, therefore I am not obligated to answer the second part of that question?

**Madam Chairman:** The question is, why is there a decrease by \$50 million?

**Hon. Imbert:** Very well. Madam Chairman, Member for Oropouche East, as you should know since you were a Member of the previous Government, the Agricultural Development Bank was given \$75 million in 2015 to assist it with loans to farmers. As you should also know, since you are a Member of the previous Government—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** They are in the estimates.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am being interrupted by the Member for Siparia.

**Madam Chairman:** I am hearing you.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I have a second question.

**Hon. Imbert:** I would have to repeat. As you should also know, the Agricultural Development Bank did not “un-lend” one cent under the previous UNC administration. So, the entire \$75 million disbursed to the Agricultural Development Bank in 2015 under the former administration is still in its bank account. They did not disburse a single cent to farmers. And therefore with this \$25 million, that is because it was given to them. So, let me just explain why it says \$75 million revised. The policy was to give them \$75 million, they got it. Every single cent remains in their bank account. They did not “un-lend” a cent to farmers. So, we are now giving them another 25, which will take their balance up to \$100 million, and we are hoping that in this year, with the reform of the ADB, with a new board in place, with a new Minister of Agriculture, with a new Government, we can finally initiate the process of “un-lending” to deserving farmers in Trinidad and Tobago. They will now have \$100 million available to them.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, please! I now recognize the hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** I think the question was asked.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Question to the hon. Member, is that the adequate resource that they speak about for the ADB? Would that constitute adequate resource for the ADB?

**Hon. Imbert:** I would think that if they got \$75 million from you and did not lend a cent, if they get now an aggregate total of \$100 million, that should be enough for this year.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** No, no, no.

**Dr. Moonilal:** A next question.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** No. 57, Caribbean Airlines. There is also a decrease of \$107.8 million, and I want to ask the Minister of Finance, is this part of his strategy to reduce funding and support to Caribbean Airlines with the intention to privatize and sell out the assets of that airline as part of his sale of assets strategy announced in the budget? Is this one state enterprise that you would sell out?

**Hon. Imbert:** As the hon. Member will recall, when the PNM demitted office we left Caribbean Airlines with \$1 billion in its bank account. You blew the entire billion and then incurred losses of another \$2 billion. However, there has been a conscious effort at Caribbean Airlines over the last 12 months to try and turn away from the profligacy of the UNC years, so we have given them an allocation in 2016 that we believe is adequate. We do believe that in 2016 the support required for Caribbean Airlines would be far less than the billions of dollars that you managed to waste in the last five years, and we do think this airline will become efficient, and we have no intention of selling it.

*[Dr. Moonilal raises hand]*

**Madam Chairman:** Is this a follow-up question from Caribbean Airlines?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes. Would this slashing of the support for Caribbean Airlines result in any reduction in services, and job losses, and increase in airfares?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, firstly I do not understand what you mean by slashing. We have given an allocation of \$92 million. The revised estimate for 2015 was

\$200 million, as you can see previously, 2014, it was \$452 million. We believe the \$92 million is adequate. We believe the airline will continue its operations.

**3.45 p.m.**

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Under Item 40, Sugar Manufacturing Co. Ltd, I am seeing an increase of \$2,412,230. Could the Minister of Finance indicate what this increase is being used for and also at Caroni (1975) Limited, \$3,059,000.

**Hon. Imbert:** As the hon. Member will know, this allocation is for the winding-up of the company, something that you would have done.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Chair, I want to place on record, the PNM was the administration that took the political decision to close down Caroni (1975) Limited.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Couva South, is that a question?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** It is a statement, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** We are only allowing questions and responses. Hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, back to Item 57, Caribbean Airlines Limited. I note well that the hon. Minister of Finance had said that Caribbean Airlines over the last 12 months has been trying to decrease its dependence on the State, which was also a directive given to the company by the former Government. I would like to know whether the \$92 million is that low because it has anything to do with a reduction in the fuel subsidy to Caribbean Airlines?

**Hon. Imbert:** You would realize that the oil price has been down now for some time. It started out about \$80 in September 2015, and then started to drop and hit \$45, maybe about four to five months ago. So that the requirement for the fuel subsidy, of course, is significantly reduced so that Caribbean Airline has been able to reduce its need for support on the Treasury because of lower fuel prices.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So that is reflected in this?

**Hon. Imbert:** Certainly. But we do, I have been told, I do not want to talk too soon, because you never know, that the airline is trying its best to achieve profitability, but we will wait and see how 2016 turns out if Caribbean Airlines can significantly reduce its losses and put itself on a path to profitability. I think everybody in Trinidad and Tobago will be very happy no matter what political persuasion we are.

**Dr. Rambachan:** One follow-up question.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Tabaquite, is it on the same airline?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes. Hon. Minister then, would it not be good for you to do or have you done an analysis to show how much is being saved as a result of the drop in fuel prices as against how much is being saved as a result of more efficient measures being implemented by Caribbean Airlines? So that we will know, really and truly, whether the management of Caribbean Airlines is really doing what it is supposed to do in order to bring down the losses.

**Hon. Imbert:** That all sounds very nice, but what does that have to do with this line Item? Because you expect me to present on each Head a detailed dossier? I am just asking.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I did not say that you would present, I said we would like to know—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Imbert:** But these are the estimates.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, I know. But if the estimate is \$92 million and you are agreeing that a portion of that, maybe a large portion, because it came down to that compared to the other years, it is due to fuel savings, subsidy savings. But you are arguing that they are also claiming that they are efficient and so on. Then how do you separate what has been gained from more efficient management compared to just the sectional fuel subsidy? That is all.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite, on the figures, I do not think that is a fair question that the Minister can answer.

**Hon. Imbert:** I do not understand. This has nothing to do with this line Item. You want a detailed explanation on everything.

**Madam Chairman:** May I move on, please. Hon. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Madam Chair, I just want to stay on that line Item 57, please, Caribbean Airlines Limited. Will the hon. Minister indicate whether this significant slash will have any impact on staff, routes, aircraft equipment and service?

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I object to the word “slash”. If a group of individuals, management on board are making the best effort to reduce the dependence of a state enterprise on the Treasury and to return the enterprise to profitability, how could you call that a slash? This is a subvention that is given to

a state enterprise in the event of losses, and if it is the mandate of the state enterprise to become profitable and the subvention given to them for their losses is reduced based on their business plan, based on their performance, based on their projection going forward, that is not a slash.

And with respect to routes, the decision was taken by the former administration, as you very well know, to cut the London route, and in fact, this was announced in the newspapers sometime in July or August. So the only route that I am aware of which you took a decision to cut, is the London route.

**Madam Chairman:** The Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Chairman, I just want to return to a matter, the Minister gave some information earlier and I would just ask the Minister to—

**Madam Chairman:** And we are still on Sub-Head 011, Transfers to State Enterprises.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes, Agricultural Development Bank. I just want the Minister to confirm, and you can do that in writing, because the Minister informed the committee that the \$75 million allocated in 2015 to the ADB, not a cent was used. My understanding is that \$35 million, indeed, that sum was used and at the ADB now would be more in the vicinity of about \$40 million to \$45 million. So, I am not saying that you would deliberately misinform the committee, but you should check that information, you can get back to us in writing. But what the implication of that is, are you correct or are you wrong? That is the issue.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is the question?

**Dr. Moonilal:** That is the question. But my follow-up question to that is, if you are incorrect then that is a much lower allocation in 2016 than in 2015?

**Hon. Imbert:** What is the question?

**Dr. Moonilal:** The question is, are you correct or not?

**Hon. Imbert:** This is the information provided to me by the PS of Finance and the Director of Budgets. That is why they are here.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I ask you to just check it.

**Hon. Imbert:** And since you have now cast doubt on the information provided to me, I will check it.

**Madam Chairman:** Members, in any event, this was said that it would be delivered in writing. Okay? So can we move on?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, no, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** On the question of Caribbean Airlines, I want to ask whether the decrease in subvention will result in an increase in airfare by the airline?

**Madam Chairman:** I believe that question was asked.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, it was not answered. I was waiting for that answer.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, Madam Chairman, I am troubled. And you will have to forgive me from time to time. I am flabbergasted by some of the questions coming opposite and I am only human, and I have to express befuddlement from time to time. The airfares are set by the airlines. The Government does not set airfares. The airfares are set based on commercial conditions, based on business planning, based on competition on the route—

**Madam Chairman:** I think you have answered—it is set by the airline.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I did not ask you who is setting it.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we move on, please! I am moving on to Sub-Head 014, Loans to Other Governments. Then, can we move on to Sub-Head 07, Debt Servicing, Item 001, Interest—Local Loans. We have reached page 100. Item 009, Interest on Overdraft, page 101. Sub-Head 011, Principal Repayment—Local Loans.

I am now going on to Sub-Head 09, Development Programme, and that is at page 56 of the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the Financial Year 2016*. [Interruption]

**Mr. Singh:** Madam Chair, Debt Servicing.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 005—I have left Debt Services. Sub-Head 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Are we all there? Page 56. Hon. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to give us some information with respect to the development? That is Item 017, Development of an Integrated Financial Management Information System where he estimates to spend \$20 million under the Development Fund.

**Madam Chairman:** Line Item 017.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Item 017, and what are the objectives of it basically?

**Hon. Imbert:** This project is going to be partly funded by the IDB through a loan facility negotiated by you. This allocation will facilitate the implementation of a software solution that will monitor cash flows and assist with preparing forecasts so as to make dealing with public finances more efficient. I suggest you refer that matter to the Member for Caroni Central because he would have negotiated this IDB loan.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, you have answered it.

**Hon. Imbert:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Madam Chair, I see that there is an allocation at Item 045 for Whistle Blowing Technologies. Could the Member enlighten Members of the committee as to what that represents?

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, you will—well, I hope, you know, that in our manifesto, which is now official government policy, which I referred to in the budget speech, the fact that it is official government policy, that one of the things we have promised to implement is whistle-blower legislation. And in order to do that one must get a sense of best practice. So this money is to get the best advice possible on whistle-blower legislation and whistle-blower methodologies so that we can move swiftly towards implementing, not just legislation, but the entire process of facilitating whistle-blowers.

**Mr. Singh:** The issue of technology, it is not technology—

**Hon. Imbert:** It is the whole thing. It is the technology, it is the legislation, it is everything associated with putting in place a proper whistle-blower regime. Protection for whistle-blowers—

**Mr. Singh:** Eavesdropping technologies.

**Hon. Imbert:** No, protection for whistle-blowers—not eavesdropping—when people want to squeal on some corrupt activity that they are protected. I wish we had this in place over the last five years.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, Item 046, Facilitating the Process of the P.P.P. Development Model, and I noticed that no money has been allocated, although the Minister, I believe, made reference in the budget to the use of private/public partnerships in terms of the development process.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** I am advised that it is now funded under recurrent, but I will find the exact Head for you—

**Dr. Rambachan:** That is okay.

**Hon. Imbert:** That is what I am told.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche West.

**Hon. Imbert:** Twenty million dollars, okay?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you Madam Chair. I am looking at line 043. And if the hon. Minister could explain the movement of—or the change from \$500,000 to \$5 million in fiscal year. Just some explanation for that.

**Hon. Imbert:** Sure. One of the problems that the last Government had and we also had is that it is not easy to monitor the multitude of state enterprises that we have in this country. I am advised when you add all together, statutory authorities, state enterprises, subsidiaries, et cetera, the number crosses 100.

So that what this is designed to do is to use an electronic integrated information system so we could have real time reporting by state enterprises on whether they are meeting performance targets, what is their level of expenditure, whether they are incurring any debt, and so on. So this is really to bring the monitoring of state enterprises into the modern age. If we do not do this then we will continue in the situation where state enterprises are doing their own thing and Finance and the rest of the Government could be unaware of what is happening in the state enterprises until it is too late.

And as I said, this would have affected the former administration and even the administration before that. It is very difficult to monitor over 100 state enterprises using a manual system.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you kindly.

**4.00 p.m.**

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 18 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you so much to the representatives from the Ministry of Finance for attending and assisting us in the committee. Can we now call Head 43, the Ministry of Works and Transport? Members, I propose that we will break around 4.30, so let us see how we could make the best use of this 30 minutes. [*Pause*]



In the meantime, we are going to page 300, the *Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Members, while the technocrats from the Ministry of Works and Transport settle, we have some housekeeping for tomorrow. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, if you could just call out, so that the Parliament staff can notify—I am sorry, I just did it according to your order, but I think we need to call out—what we did was just the order numbers here, but I need to call it out so that the parliamentary staff can notify the Ministries we intend to have tomorrow.

So I think we have Service Commissions, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Integrity Commission, Elections and Boundaries Commission, Statutory Authorities Service Commission and the Judiciary. Yes?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes. Tomorrow we are sitting from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00.p.m.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Some of these, even though the numbers may seem the same—total numbers to be covered—some of them are very small ones.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So I am suggesting we add one in the event—

**Madam Chairman:** It is up to you. You want to put OPM then?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** No.

**Mr. Imbert:** What it is with OPM? “All yuh afraid OPM?”

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Environmental Commission.

**Dr. Moonilal:** He has to go to the end of the line.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So 18 to 26, inclusive.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Siparia, what I have been advised is that the Parliament had already notified the Judiciary that they would be taken on Monday morning, and as far as Environmental Commission, the accounting officer is not in Trinidad today to be able to come before us tomorrow. Could you suggest some other Ministry here that you consider small?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well, we will go 18 to 24, Madam, if these people are not available tomorrow.

**Madam Chairman:** 18 to 24.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, Ma'am, as per the agenda here.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. All right. So, Service Commissions, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Integrity Commission, Elections and Boundaries Commission, Statutory Authorities Service Commission. Okay?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, Madam. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** You are welcome.

*Head 43.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the hon. Minister of Works and Transport to make a brief opening statement, not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Hinds:** Thank you very warmly, Madam Chairman. I must begin, as I must, by thanking God for his divine intervention a few weeks ago. It is that intervention that caused my colleagues and me to assume this part of the House, and to thank the people of Trinidad and Tobago for their collective wisdom in defence of Trinidad and Tobago.

Over the past few days, Madam Chair, serious examples of wastage have been put before us in the course of the debate. I want to say to this Parliament, which, of course, has the responsibility of being a check and balance on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—I want to give the assurance that under my watch in respect of the Ministry of Works and Transport, those matters must never be heard of again.

I believe—and this is the thought that will underpin all that we would do in the Ministry of Works and Transport—that with the little money that we have, once we cut out waste and cut out deliberate waste or corruption, we could do, with the little we have, as much as the past Government has done, and possibly more, since we propose in this Ministry to spend once, and efficiently, and fairly on what has to be done.

Finally, Madam Chairman, I have in my possession the 2014 Report of the Auditor General which identified certain issues in respect of the matters that are now in front of us: expenditure control; register of contracts and such like. I give the Auditor General and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and, more importantly, this Parliament, the assurance as well, that I should do all within my power, along with my Permanent Secretary, Madam Verna Johnson, and the team,

to ensure that the Auditor General is not so troubled in the next fiscal year and in the other fiscal years in the foreseeable future, at least the next five.

I thank you very much and we are open to discussions on these matters.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I just wanted to raise a matter—

**Madam Chairman:** The Minister was invited to make a brief statement which he has made, and, therefore—

**Dr. Moonilal:** Ma'am—

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Oropouche East—and therefore we go on now to the examination of the document.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I seek your guidance on a matter.

**Madam Chairman:** I am saying at this stage I am proceeding to the examination of the details.

**Dr. Moonilal:** So I cannot seek your guidance on a matter?

*Head 43:*

*Question proposed:* That Head 43 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,832,290,592 for Head 43, the Ministry of Works and Transport, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items, to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*: Subhead 01, Personnel Expenditure, Item 001, General Administration. Hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just take the opportunity, since the members of the technical staff of the Ministry of Works and Transport are here, to thank them for their tremendous hard work they did in moving this country forward under the previous administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chair, Item 12, Settlement of Arrears to Public Officers, I noted here there are no arrears to be settled. Is it that everyone has been paid what is due to them, and with the recent wage negotiations and what have you, that everything has been settled?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Works and Transport.

**Hon. Hinds:** We should put that one in writing, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we go on? Item 002, Highways. Item 003, Traffic Management. Item 004, Central Planning Unit. Item 005, Drainage. Hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just want to ask the Minister whether he believes that \$5 million is sufficient for salaries and cost of living in order to deal with the management of drainage issues that exist all over the country, and for which there have been many, many complaints over the last couple of months?

**Hon. Hinds:** Madam Chairman, we propose to review that and to balance that off against what was allocated previously. However, let me say, we have made requests for certain sums and this is what we were allocated. We will review that and probably indicate to the Member at a later stage.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Can the Minister also let us know, maybe in writing, what are the vacant posts that are there under Drainage that need to be filled?

**Hon. Hinds:** I will certainly get that in writing for you. That will require some research.

**4.15 p.m.**

**Dr. Rambachan:** And also, the vacant posts, I would like to know the technical names of the posts.

**Madam Chairman:** So we are under 08?

**Dr. Rambachan:** 051. Well, under Drainage.

**Madam Chairman:** 005. Is the line Sub-Item 08?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, yes, yes. Vacant posts, yes. Sorry.

**Madam Chairman:** 006 Mechanical Services. 007 Maintenance. Sorry. Hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** You say you are continuing allocation for vacant posts. I want to know what is the current establishment and what are the proposed increases that will take care of this \$4.8 million.

**Hon. Hinds:** We will put that in writing. That would require some time and research. We will forward that in writing to the hon. Member.

**Madam Chairman:** 008 Construction. 012 Unemployment Relief Programme. Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Chairman:** All right. 013 General Administration (Transport). 014 Transport. 015 Maritime Services. Sub-Head 02 Goods and Services. We are at Item 015? Okay? So Item 001, are we under General Administration? Hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Sub-Item 08 Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. I see a figure close to \$10 million. Again, I will ask—it is page 306.

**Madam Chairman:** Page 306 and it is Sub-Item 08.

**Mr. Charles:** Is this something that we started, or is it a new allocation for new premises; and will the necessary lease/rental/purchase option be explored to make an informed decision that would lead to value for money for the citizens of the country?

**Hon. Hinds:** This is not a new item. Its specific purport I will investigate and again inform this House in writing, but I am assured that it is not a new item.

**Mr. Charles:** Okay. So you are sure it is not a new item, but you are going to investigate?

**Hon. Hinds:** Yes.

**Mr. Charles:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** 002 Highways. 003 Traffic Management. 004 Central Planning Unit. Hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, you went very, very fast. Very, very fast.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. You see, I am not seeing any movement. All right, hon. Member for Tabaquite, where are you?

**Dr. Rambachan:** I am on Highways, page 308. Under Other Contracted Services there is a large sum of \$114 million. What I would like to find out from the Minister is what kind of services are envisaged under these Other Contracted Services?

**Hon. Hinds:** This allocation, hon. Member, is to facilitate the award of contracts for roadworks, culverts, patching, box drains in respect of local government roads that have been transferred to the Ministry of Works and Transport in certain districts.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So you are going to be building box drains under this?

**Hon. Hinds:** Say again?

**Dr. Rambachan:** You are going to be building box drains under this allocation?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman—

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance, please allow the hon. Minister of Works and Transport to answer.

**Hon. Hinds:** I just answered. I said specifically what the allocation was for.

**Dr. Rambachan:** May I, Madam Chairman? Under Sub-Items 13 and 15, under Highways—

**Madam Chairman:** Which one you want to take first? Maintenance of Vehicles?

**Dr. Rambachan:** I have the same question with respect to both. There is a perpetual complaint by workers in the Ministry about the fact that equipment is always not available, that when you go to the different outlying districts a lot of equipment is there that is in an unserviceable state and have not been maintained. I am looking at the provision of just \$300,000 for the repairs—and I emphasize repairs—and maintenance of this equipment because the lack of this equipment is proving to cause some very serious problems of servicing the communities, and I think that in my own view, having been there, that this amount is not realistic.

**Hon. Hinds:** My information is, and the records will show that it was the same \$300,000 last year.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So we will vire?

**Hon. Hinds:** We will exert best efforts to ensure that the equipment that is needed to carry out the job effectively is provided.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Chair, will you go back to Goods and Services?

**Madam Chairman:** Goods and Services? We are in Highways.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Page 307.

**Madam Chairman:** We are in 002. If fact, I was in 004 and was accused of going too quickly, and that is why I went back to 002. So I am very sorry. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** My question is in 002 as well, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Well, we are in 002. I am not going back to 001.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** No, no, no.

**Madam Chairman:** Line Item, if you could assist us.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, line 37, Janitorial Services. Why is there such an exorbitant—

**Hon. Hinds:** Where are we speaking about?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** 307.

**Madam Chairman:** We are on page 308, 002 Highways, and therefore, that is what I am saying. I have just said to the hon. Member for Couva South that I am in 002 because I had reached 004 and I was accused of going too quickly, and therefore, I went back to 002. I am at page 308, 002 Highways.

Hon. Member for Cumuto-Manzanilla that is where you are?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Go ahead, Madam Chair. If you want to move on, it is not a problem.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you so much. 003, which is at page 309. 004 Central Planning Unit, which is page 310. Item 005 Drainage. Hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you very much. Again, I raise the question of rents for office accommodation, rent/lease for vehicles, and if in fact it is that we paid \$7.1 million and therefore they are continuing what component of corruption existed that means either you are continuing it, or you have eliminated it. So it should be reduced.

**Madam Chairman:** So we are at page 310, Sub-Item 08.

**Mr. Charles:** 310, 08, what accounts for the \$7.1 million? And I am noting a recurrent high rental bill—taxpayers' money.

**Hon. Hinds:** I understand the Member to be asking, Madam Chair, for me to identify some of the mismanagement that he understood existed. So we will investigate that and we will put it in writing for the benefit of the hon. Member.

**Mr. Charles:** Madam Chair—

**Madam Chairman:** Members, please. I know sometimes that some contributions may evoke a response, but let us try to keep a little order.

**Mr. Charles:** Madam Chair—I was just quoting your own words and I am still asking the question and, please, I need it in writing without the editorializing.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Naparima, I think the answer is that you will get it in writing.

**Mr. Charles:** Good. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** All assurances—Member for Barataria/San Juan. Please! All of these are considered assurances? Okay. Good. Right. I just have a clean ear. All right, Members, let us have a little order. Item 005 at page 10, Drainage.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Page 311.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Just now. We are under Item 005, anyway, I will take it, I recognize the hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, there is \$10 million for the Rent/Lease of Vehicles and Equipment under Drainage, what I would like the hon. Minister to provide for us is what is his drainage plan for the year; the programme of work for the year under drainage?

**Madam Chairman:** What Item Head are you on?

**Dr. Rambachan:** I am under Rent/Lease of Vehicles and Equipment. But vehicles and equipment have to be related to a programme of work, and if you are telling me that you are going to spend \$10 million, I have no problem with it, it might have been more, but can I get from the hon. Minister how this \$10 million, the equipment that is being leased to the programme of work that is envisaged for 2016?

**Hon. Hinds:** Well, the Minister must be aware that Drainage was not within his own portfolio up to a few weeks ago.

**Dr. Rambachan:** No, it was not?

**Hon. Hinds:** It has only now come. So we will investigate that and we will put the response in writing for you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Are we under 02 Goods and Services?

**Mr. Imbert:** Since I am the one who did these allocations, I can assist the hon. Member. If you go to Head 28 on the next page, you will see \$145 million and that will be for the engagement of contractors to do drainage works.



**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** That is where I am trying to go, Goods and Services.

**Madam Chairman:** So, hon. Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I thank you very much. Line Sub-Item on page 311, under Goods and Services, Other Contracted Services. There is an allocation of \$145 million and we would appreciate from the hon. Minister a breakdown of how this \$145 million is to be spent. The amounts being allocated under this item.

**Hon. Hinds:** Most certainly, we will note that in our response.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, if I may, very quickly. Just to add to what the Leader of the Opposition has asked. And if that information that is going to be given, is going to be given by area. In other words—

**Madam Chairman:** You mean geographic area?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Geographic. The spread of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Hinds:** By district you mean? Okay. Most certainly.

**Madam Chairman:** So 006 Mechanical Services. That is page 311. 007 Maintenance.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, No. 13.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, I just want to ask the Minister whether this figure of \$1 million is based upon an audit of the condition of existing vehicles in the Mechanical Services Division of the Ministry. Because if I may lean back on my own experience, the condition of vehicles are way beyond a million dollars in term of repairs and maintenance.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Certainly.

**Hon. Hinds:** I will give the Members the assurance that one of the things that we will be doing is an audit of the vehicular stock in the entire Ministry, and whatever is required to maintain those that we retain will be done. So we are yet to embark on that. We are just about three weeks or four weeks in the business, but we certainly intend, as we have been doing in other respects, to rationalize the vehicle stock in all Ministries. It will start with ours. Again, with a view of eliminating waste.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, as the hon. Minister will know, hon. former Minister I mean, and also the former Minister for the environment, I think that is what it was called Environment and Water Resources, that Mechanical Services is the division that provides equipment to deal with emergencies and natural disasters and so on. In my opinion this is a very important division, so I will anxiously await the review being done by the new Minister of Works and Transport so that we can see how we can assist the Mechanical Services Division to improve its plant and equipment, and improve its efficiency, and they will have my support.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Siparia. You are okay?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** You are welcome. Can we go on to Item 007, which is Maintenance on page 312? Item 008, Construction, do we have any questions under that? All right. So that it is now 4.30 p.m. and we shall resume at five o'clock. Thank you.

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

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

**Madam Chairman:** Members, we resume the Standing Finance Committee. We were examining the Ministry of Works and Transport and we have reached—

**Hon. Hinds:** Construction.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, hon. Minister. And that is Item 009, Environmental Health and Safety Unit. It is on page 313.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chairman, I would just like to enquire from the Minister, Contract Employment in this unit is \$5.1 million. Is it that all the officers in this Environmental Health and Safety Unit continue to be contracted officers and are there full-time officers in this unit?

**Madam Chairman:** Might I ask what Item number? Where are you asking?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Or, sorry, 009, Sub-Item 16.

**Hon. Hinds:** As far as I am advised, there are 45 contract positions therein. I am not able to say whether that is the entirety of the staff, but certainly there are 45 contract positions. But I can ascertain that and advise you a bit later in writing.

**Madam Chairman:** In writing, okay.

**Dr. Rambachan:** My best recollection is that they are all contracted.

**Hon. Hinds:** The entirety of the department?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, and I have always found that to be very strange.

**Hon. Hinds:** I am not surprised, you would know.

**Madam Chairman:** 010, Traffic Warden Unit.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you very much. Item 16, Contract Employment. Is it that all the traffic wardens are on contract or—so the question is: what is the proportion of permanent as opposed to contracted employees in the Traffic Warden Unit?

**Hon. Hinds:** All the traffic wardens are contracted persons.

**Mr. Charles:** And the permanent staff is comprised of what percentage?

**Hon. Hinds:** They are all contracted. as I have said.

**Mr. Charles:** Oh, okay.

**Dr. Rambachan:** If you look at Contract Employment, \$26.5 million, permit me, Madam Chairman, but that last year, it was \$23 million. Does the increase of \$3.5 million indicate that the traffic wardens are going to be getting an increase in pay? Or is it that you are going to be recruiting new traffic wardens in order to get up to the 700 which has been approved by Cabinet?

**Hon. Hinds:** We have employed some more traffic wardens. In September 2015, we employed about 87 more to operate across Trinidad. That was some in September 2015.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Can you say how many traffic wardens are now employed in total?

**Hon. Hinds:** I think it is in the region—and I can get the specific figure but it should be in the region of about 388.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, I would have liked to see a little more support for the training aspect of that. You have \$500,000 for your traffic wardens, so if you are moving up your figure, I think there is need for a little increased training for traffic wardens.

**Hon. Hinds:** I should not doubt that and we will look at that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So perhaps you could vire from somewhere to there to get it.

**Hon. Hinds:** A useful thought. We will look at it.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, the training needs to be improved.

**Hon. Hinds:** Thank you very much. Although, I must add, you know, from my observation as a citizen, I think they do a remarkably good job.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** They do a good job but we could—

**Hon. Hinds:** And they have earned public respect as well.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, but there is room for improvement.

**Hon. Hinds:** Most certainly.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Through you, Madam Chairman, to the Minister of Works and Transport, regarding the Traffic Warden Unit, what was the process by which the 86 persons were hired? Was there an ad put out? And if so—

**Hon. Hinds:** That happened before September 07, that significant day, so I should make an enquiry and I would advise you. I hope it was done properly.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And I would like to know, with the indication that there will be an increase—

**Hon. Hinds:** I am sorry?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** You indicated that it will be increased. Not so?

**Hon. Hinds:** Numbers, yes, have been increased.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay, so there is no intention to increase in the near future?

**Hon. Hinds:** Well, I cannot say that now. But as we speak, it was increased just before the elections.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** All right, okay. Thank you.

**Hon. Hinds:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 011, Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Unit; Item 012, Unemployment Relief Programme; Item 013, General Administration (Transport). We are at page 316. Item 014, Transport Division; Item 015, Maritime Services Division, which is at page 318. We now go on to Sub-Head 03,

Minor Equipment Purchases, page 319; Item 001, General Administration; Item 002, Highways; Item 003, Traffic Management; Item 004, Central Planning Unit; Item 005, Drainage; Item 006, Mechanical Services; Item 007, Maintenance; Item 008, Construction; Item 009, Environmental Health and Safety Unit. We are now at page 322. Item 010, Traffic Warden Unit.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes, Ma'am. I would like to know under Minor Equipment Purchases, whether there is inclusion there for radios for traffic wardens? Because the traffic wardens find it very difficult to operate if they have to operate, let us say, 200 yards between each other, as happens, for example, in Gasparillo and other areas, and they need to communicate. If I give you an example, quickly. They are coordinating three or four different streets and they need radios. Are radios included?

**Hon. Hinds:** Unable to say at this time and I should advise in writing later.

**Mr. Imbert:** But there is an allocation of \$6,013,000 for Other Minor Equipment as you can see.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I would like the Minister to consider the radios for the traffic wardens—they will become more efficient.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Item 011, Programme Monitoring Evaluation Unit; Item 012, Unemployment Relief Programme; Item 013, General Administration (Transport). We are on page 323. Item 014, Transport; Item 015, Maritime Services. We are now on page 324, Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 001, Regional Bodies; Item 003, United Nations Organization; Item 005, Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007, Households; Item 008, Subsidies; Item 009, Other Transfers.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Subsidies, 008.

**Madam Chairman:** And that is on page 325 it commences on.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes. I just want to confirm something. The \$284 million that is the estimate, I want to confirm that that is the deficit on the operation of the coastal steamers. Is that therefore the totality of the subsidies to running the coastal steamers between Port of Spain and Scarborough?

**Mr. Imbert:** Let me answer that since we made the allocation. The subsidies towards the coastal steamers—well, the fast ferries to Tobago—we are going to do a comprehensive review. The Minister will be mandated to do a comprehensive review of this service because the two fast ferries were acquired 10 years ago, and when they were acquired, they were not new. One of them, at

the time, was about 10 years old, that is *Express*; and the *Spirit* would have been about three years old. So one is almost 20 years old and now the other one is 13 or 14 years old, so we have to look at this very seriously.

You will see in the budget statement that I referred to new fast ferries. So we would have to do a replacement programme. And then there was a proposal by the former Minister of Transport to look at retrofitting these vessels to use compressed natural gas. There was a view that this would save considerable sums in terms of expenditure on fuel and lubricants.

So that the Minister is going to be mandated to do a comprehensive review of this. This would be a contribution towards the deficit. So, in other words, the ferry service earns money and expends money and the Government—this has been going on for many, many years. When I was there, this was going on, way back in 1992. The Government had to subsidize the ferry service. So this is the contribution towards the deficit on the operation of the ferries.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And is it possible, through you, Madam Chairman, to know what is the earnings or income gained by the ferry service so that we can know the difference between the deficit here and the income gained? If you add the two, therefore, you will know exactly what is cost—

**Hon. Hinds:** Most certainly. I should forward that to you in writing. Yeah, I will get the information and do so.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 009, Other Transfers.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you. Agua Santa, that is under 009, 02. Agua Santa, as far as I know, is an asphalt plant that we continue to spend \$6 million in order to keep that plant going. I would like to ask the Minister whether he intends to review whether the Ministry needs to keep in the business of producing asphalt or whether it may be better to buy asphalt from operators who are geared up to do it.

**Hon. Hinds:** In keeping with the philosophy that I articulated at the top of my presentation here today, everything is up for review; that will certainly be a part of it.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Because the Minister might like to know that under the PURE Programme, when the price of oil fell, we were able to reduce the supply of asphalt, put in place—that is supply, rolling and everything—from \$700 and some dollars—I cannot remember the figure—to \$690 a tonne. And you actually brought down the price from suppliers and that did—supply of, transport and

rolling in place. So when the Minister spoke about value for money, I just wanted to give you an example of how we were achieving value for money also in the Ministry.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to indicate to the Minister that a decision was taken, in the context of recycling, to utilize crumb rubber to be utilized by Agua Santa and other state enterprises that deal with asphalt, to create rubberized asphalt in order to—certainly from my recollection, it will be a thinner layer, it will last longer and it will also, therefore, impact upon your value for money, and certainly would lend itself in the environmental asset.

**5.15 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Item 011 Transfers to State Enterprises. Is it a question? Because I notice you have been making statements?

**Dr. Rambachan:** No, Madam, I have a question.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I notice under 009, 05, that the subsidy to the Water Taxi Service, the transfer is \$39.4 million and in 2015, it was \$37.855 million. Is this, therefore, the amount that it is costing us, beyond income, to keep the Water Taxi Service in operation and does this include, for example, maintenance as well as any other contracts we have with the people who have been hired to operate the service?

**Hon. Hinds:** As far as I am aware it includes an element of maintenance but I should get more specific information and forward that to you later.

**Dr. Rambachan:** But at this stage we can say it costs about \$40 million to subsidize the Water Taxi Service.

**Hon. Hinds:** Well the figures are here.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 011 Transfers to State Enterprises.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I have a couple questions, Madam Chair. The matter of the repayment of the Trinidad Rapid Rail Transit System, \$22.8 million, more or less, could we have an indication of how much more is owing on this repayment for the rapid rail transit system?

Secondly, Sub-Item 12 Interim Funding For Extension of Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Page 326.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Page 326. I am at 12. Am I reading correctly, there is no funding for the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin? And what is the Government's position on the continuation of that highway, vis à vis financing structure?

**Hon. Hinds:** The Minister of Finance would answer the second part.

**Dr. Moonilal:** I anticipated that.

**Mr. Imbert:** Sure. You should have asked me then. If you look at Item 12, you will see that you made no allocation in 2014 or in 2015. It should be obvious, therefore, that this method of funding came to an end since 2014. This project is a source of considerable stress to the Exchequer, because it was never properly funded and it is now a challenge that the Ministry of Finance will have to face to put in place proper funding arrangements for the Point Fortin Highway.

**Dr. Moonilal:** So you do not have a clue of what you are going to do? Okay, thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

**Mr. Imbert:** I will put in writing. Madam Chairman, I have to answer those pejorative remarks. I do have a clue that you entered into an \$8.5 billion contract without a source of funds. I do have a clue that you have been funding this out of general revenues and I do have a plan and I will write you and tell you what I will do about your mismanagement of this project.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we move on, please? Item 011, Member—  
[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Hinds:** With respect to the first part, the rapid rail, I am not in a position at this time to indicate the amount due and owing and that should be forthcoming later.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chairman, the hon. Minister of Finance said that the previous Government entered into an \$8.5 billion contract; as Minister of Works, I am not aware of any \$8.5 billion contract.

**Mr. Imbert:** What? Is that a question?

**Dr. Rambachan:** I know of a \$5.2 billion contract—plus.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is an \$8 billion plus contract. That is a matter of public record. You reported that to this House in 2015, \$8.5 billion.

**Dr. Rambachan:** There is no \$8 billion contract.

**Hon. Hinds:** Is there a question being asked?



**Dr. Rambachan:** I want to ask the Minister to bring to the House or to bring, before we finish this part of the debate, the evidence that there is an \$8.5 billion contract. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Hinds:** That comes under what Item?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Sorry?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Solomon Hochoy Highway.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Solomon Hochoy Highway. But the question I have to ask the Minister of Finance is this: given what he has just said, is it the intention— [*Interruption*]

**Madam Chairman:** Who is he, you want the Minister of Finance?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Or the Minister of Works and Transport. Is it the intention of the Government to complete the highway to Point Fortin going from the Mosquito Creek end, and as well to complete the segment going now from Ghandi Village right on to Mon Desir?

**Mr. Imbert:** If you look in our manifesto, which is referred to in the budget statement, what we said was that we would complete this project that is in the best interest of all concerned, in a manner that is in the best interest of all concerned.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chairman, if I heard the hon. Minister of Finance indicate that no money was put in 2014 and 2015 for the Solomon Hochoy Highway, if we look to page 471, what was the original— [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Stop misquoting me. I never said that. Stop misquoting me.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Caroni East, what the statement that was made by the hon. Minister of Finance was in response to a specific question asked on a specific line, Sub-Item, 12.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well I am speaking on 12.

**Madam Chairman:** What I have before me, there are no figures.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** If you look at page 471 you would see that.

**Madam Chairman:** On Sub-Item 12, what I have before me have no figures 2014/actual, 2015/estimates and it was with respect to Sub-Item 12.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I am speaking about item 12. Now item 12 was brought over. If you look, it was Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Now it is Ministry of Works and Transport. And when we look at Ministry of Works and

Infrastructure under item 12, we see that in 2014, \$900 million was allocated to it in 2014—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Imbert:** What Head are you on?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—negating what the hon. Minister of Finance said.

**Mr. Imbert:** What Head are you on?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Caroni East, could you refer me to the page?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Page 471, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Are we talking about the same thing?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, we are talking about the same thing. It was formerly Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, item 12, under Transfer to State Enterprises.

**Dr. Moonilal:** The man is misleading us.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** He is misleading the House and it is the same thing, item 12, under Ministry of Works and Transport.

**Mr. Imbert:** No allocation for 2015.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You said 2014 and 2015.

**Mr. Imbert:** Well there is none for 2015.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You are wrong. So there was an allocation of \$900 million for 2014.

**Mr. Imbert:** And none in 2015.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well all right, 2015 there is none.

**Mr. Imbert:** You all are not serious.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is settled.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Can I ask on the rapid rail issue? Item 07, rapid rail, Repayment of Trinidad Rapid Rail Transit System, on our page 326, there is none for 2014 and 2015 here but I would refer you to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. So we now have to pay \$22 million in 2016 for the rapid rail project. Would the Minister say if this is correct, that in 2014, we paid \$97 million

for the rapid rail and in 2015, we paid \$58 million for the rapid rail? So 2014 and 2015, we paid \$155 million and in 2016 now we would have to pay another \$22 million, so it is about \$177 million.

**Madam Chairman:** So, the question you are asking is that—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** How much more we have to pay for the rapid rail feasibility?

**Dr. Moonilal:** My follow-up question.

**Mr. Imbert:** Asked and answered.

**Madam Chairman:** One minute please.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, how much more we have to—*[Interruption]*

**Madam Chairman:** One minute, please—if the hon. Minister of Works and Transport would be allowed an opportunity to address the point that has been raised.

**Hon. Hinds:** I was asked that question by, I think it was the Member for Oropouche East, and I was pellucidly clear in my response.

**Madam Chairman:** All right? So that hon. Member for Oropouche East, I think you have a follow-up question.

**Dr. Moonilal:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Okay, so can we move on? We are now at 06 Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, Item 004 Statutory Bodies.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chairperson, you have here, in line with what I have been asking, in terms of other current transfers, Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, \$210,870,000. I want to ask the same question for three items, if you permit me.

Port Authority, who have to get \$138,304,000 and the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC), is supported by \$370,463,125. And while you have said earlier that we cannot go into revenue, I would like to find out on each of these items, what is the revenue that is derived by the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, the revenue derived by Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the revenue derived by the Public Transport Service Corporation, so one can arrive at some determination also by looking at these revenues or income streams exactly how these organizations are operating if compared internationally.

**Madam Chairman:** But I think you have answered the question by your own introduction, with respect to the ruling that I had made that we are not going forward in revenue.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I know, but I am asking the question whether that information can be provided to us?

**Hon. Hinds:** If the question is not allowed, how can I respond to it? I will be breaking the rules like you.

**Madam Chairman:** No, I would also say to the hon. Member for Tabaquite, we all know that there are other opportunities for you to ask questions maybe of that nature and get a response.

**Mr. Singh:** Madam Chair, in an effort to assist the committee, perhaps, we can look at page 398 of the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies 2016*, and the question would be answered there.

**Madam Chairman:** I am so happy. I crave your indulgence, hon. Member for Chaguanas West, to maybe help guide some of those on your Bench who may not have the familiarity with the documents that you have. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Imbert:** I think we should put all the questions to him from now on.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chair, I think that is, with due respect, a bit unfair.

**Madam Chairman:** And I did not direct it to anybody for it to be unfair.

**Dr. Rambachan:** No, it is a bit unfair because there are members of the public who are looking on at us, which you yourself said, to be very respectful to you, and they would like to know also the details of the answers to the questions I am asking. That is all I want to find out.

**Madam Chairman:** And I would like to say this, while members of the public may be looking on and they would have a myriad of questions, we are always bound by the Standing Orders, and I think the members of the public would need to appreciate that too. Everything has rules, and we know our processes and maybe we will explain to them when we meet them one-on-one.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I would file it as a question in this House.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. I think they are now informed. All right, so can we go on to DP 09 and this is page 147 of your *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. 001 Pre-Investment. So we have nothing under 001

Pre-Investment; 003 Economic Infrastructure, page 150; 005 Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 153.

And now we go on to the Infrastructure Development Fund, Head 701. 001 Pre-Investment, we are at page 316. Have we reached there? 003 Economic Infrastructure, page 317. Page 320.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chairman, under Drainage and Irrigation, National Programme for the Upgrade of Drainage Channels, Flood Mitigation - Erosion Control Programme, on those two items, again I do not think I am permitted to refer to other books, but since I cannot, I would like to get from the Minister what are the specific projects, geographically, that are going to be undertaken as a result of this expenditure?

**5.30 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Well, I just want say this, hon. Member for Tabaquite, again as you referred to the members of the public. I do not think it is accurate to say that we not allowed to refer to other books. Members here have referred to the budget statement, et cetera, et cetera. What I am saying is that we cannot ask questions on Items of revenue, and therefore you are asking—having corrected that, you are asking—you say at page 317, under Drainage, is it flood mitigation?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes? What is your question, please?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Under these programmes, Flood Mitigation and the National Programme for the Upgrade of Drainage Channels, I would like to know specifically which are the drainage channels, and the Flood Mitigation Programmes geographically and where are they located?

**Madam Chairman:** I guess that will have to be given in writing, because that will call for some level of detail.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Chair. Through you, Chair, if the hon. Minister can identify specifically for projects in Cumuto/Manzanilla, please? Thank you.

**Hon. Hinds:** What was that?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Continuing on the request.

**Hon. Hinds:** Most certainly.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Sir.

**Madam Chairman:** So, is it that therefore these projects must be identified by geographic—

**Hon. Hinds:** By constituency.

**Madam Chairman:** Or constituency?

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just would like to get a status report, perhaps in writing, on the Ravine Sable/Caparo Water Treatment Facility, Retention Reservoir Project. I know it will take a while, so by that time we can get a status report.

**Hon. Hinds:** Most certainly.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Minister of Works and Transport, while you are on the same exercise for Cumuto/Manzanilla, I know we have been having a similar issue from Guayaguayare in terms of the coastal erosion. I know from the former Minister that there was some work by the Coastal Erosion Unit. So perhaps some information as to how far along we are, and what positive news I can take back to my constituents when next we meet in terms of what is the next step in the exercise. Thank you.

**Hon. Hinds:** Most certainly.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, could I just ask what line Item is that?

**Madam Chairman:** Is this flood mitigation?

**Mr. Imbert:** No, but there has to be a line Item. Which one is it?

**Madam Chairman:** Flood Mitigation Erosion Control Programme, 007.

**Mr. Imbert:** No, he is talking about coastal erosion. Which line Item are you talking about?

**Mr. Paray:** 001, Coastal Protection.

**Mr. Imbert:** South Cocos Bay?

**Mr. Paray:** No, no, no.

**Mr. Imbert:** North Cocos Bay? Shore of Peace? Manzanilla? Cocos? Where? Which line Item?

**Mr. Paray:** The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla was referring to the Manzanilla piece, and I simply asked the Minister that while he is on that Item, if he could have looked at the Guayaguayare/Mayaro piece for us also.

**Mr. Imbert:** There is no line Item for that.

**Madam Chairman:** While there is no line Item, I guess he can make a plea, and the Minister of Works and Transport has answered.

**Mr. Singh:** Madam Chair, just for clarification. I think the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla asked with respect to the National Programme for Upgrade of Drainage Channels. So that is what the Member for Mayaro—

**Mr. Imbert:** No, he is speaking about shoreline stabilization—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Item 15, 260, Port of Spain East-West Corridor Transportation Project, \$155 million. Could you, hon. Minister, give us an idea what that is? Is this the proposed mass transit or the rapid rail or is this just for roads? No. 260; page 380.

**Hon. Hinds:** That includes the very troubling Curepe Interchange. So we will be—like everything else, reviewing that and trying to see if we can rationalize that, and cut out waste, and get the thing done, giving the citizens of the country optimum value for money.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right, I heard. Can we go to the next one? 280, Construction of the San Fernando to Mayaro thing. There is no funding available for that. Would you like to comment on that hon. Minister?

**Madam Chairman:** Line Item 280 on page 318.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Item 280, Construction of the San Fernando to Mayaro—there is no funding for that.

**Mr. Imbert:** I will answer that. As you will observe, the total allocation under this Head is quite significant, \$795 million. So when in the context for the national budget, we must prioritize. However, this is a project that has been mentioned in our manifesto and, therefore, it is a project that is of great importance. So that during the year I expect that engineering will be completed, so that we can move swiftly to initiate this project as soon as possible.

**Miss Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister, 275, Bridges Reconstruction Programme, can we get a list of those bridges that you intend to reconstruct during fiscal 2016? Thanks.

**Hon. Hinds:** Most certainly.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I see that Item 286, Construction of the Chaguanas Ring Road an allocation of \$5 million.

**Mr. Imbert:** If you look in the budget statement, we have identified three population areas where we think they have reached the point where a ring road is required: Sangre Grande is one, Scarborough is another one and Chaguanas is one. And, therefore, we have committed during this year to do the necessary preliminary work to get cracking on these projects. So that is what the \$8 million is for. If the engineering does not use up all of that money, then we will initiate the process of construction.

But I can assure you that a ring road around Chaguanas, around Sangre Grande and around Scarborough is of the highest priority. That is why it is mentioned in the budget statement. These are areas which have outgrown themselves, unplanned settlements, arbitrary route alignments, and it is really desperately needed, especially Chaguanas, where you have, you know, it is very difficult to get from one side of the highway to the other as the hon. Member for Tabaquite will know. We collaborated some years ago on some projects to try and improve that problem.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Start with the ring road—

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** —at the request of the Mayor of Chaguanas. Madam Chairman, under Transport, Roads and Bridges, Item 281, is the Minister of Works and Transport aware that under the PURE Programme the designs are about 75 per cent completed, and that work was about to commence on the San Fernando to Princes Town Highway?

**Hon. Hinds:** He did not make himself very clear. Would you be kind enough—

**Dr. Rambachan:** He was being disturbed by the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Being prompted.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—being prompted. I can assure the Minister of Finance that—

**Hon. Hinds:** No, the Minister of Finance was saying that the “P” in PURE means “programme”, so you do not have to say under the PURE Programme. That was what he was saying, and he is right.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am tired of you saying that.

**Hon. Hinds:** You did not make yourself very clear. Would you take your chance to do it again?



**Dr. Rambachan:** The San Fernando to Princes Town Highway, is the Minister of Works and Transport aware that the designs for that portion of the highway was virtually completed by PURE, and that it is ready to start? Does \$3 million facilitate at all, the start of this project? Or is this just a nominal sum that is intended to fool the people?

**Mr. Imbert:** I will answer that. As the former Minister of Works in 2010, we actually put that project out to tender. So that the designs were actually completed in 2010. I do not know what you have been doing between 2010 and 2015. But we are going to make sure that this project is done properly, with integrity, with cost effectiveness, with transparency and we are cutting out the corruption, waste and mismanagement. [*Desk thumping*] So anything you did, we are going to review it.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Then why are you placing \$40 million to review the plans, when the plans are already reviewed for that section of the highway?

**Mr. Imbert:** There is no \$40 million to review anything. We were reviewing what you were going to spend. How you were going to spend it, and who you were going to give the money to.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Through you, Madam Chair, I was encouraged to hear that the Minister of Finance said he was going to start very soon on the ring road in Sangre Grande, Chaguanas and Tobago. I am wondering if the Minister can give a commitment as to when you will start the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway Extension to Manzanilla, the upgrade of the road.

**Madam Chairman:** Line 284?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Line 284.

**Hon. Hinds:** I can tell you that those projects would be treated or are being treated with the utmost urgency. They are high on our priority listing.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Sir.

**Madam Chairman:** At page 320, Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 43 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** I would like to thank the representatives from the Ministry of Works and Transport, for coming and being of assistance to the committee, and they are now relieved. Thank you hon. Minister.

**Hon. Hinds:** Thank you very much. Might I thank my Permanent Secretary, and her very hard-working team? Thank you all very much. Madam PS, thank you very much. It was a pleasure. God bless you, tomorrow.

*Head 75.*

**Madam Chairman:** This is Equal Opportunity Tribunal.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Chair, I just want to raise a matter with you for your guidance. This process we are engaged in, this Standing Finance Committee meeting, as my understanding is, as the practice was last year, when some of us, but not all participated in this. It was our understanding—and we would like to know if that has changed—is that the opening statement by a Minister, allowed five minutes, is a statement to give us some summary of his policy items, his expenditure, tell us in a nutshell about his estimates, highlight a couple items quickly that he may like to emphasize in the coming year. It is not meant to be a political statement, a continuation of the budget debate which has closed. Is that still our understanding? Or is that five minutes to be used, and can be used for political statements?

**Mr. Imbert:** And that is also not true what you have just said. I was here last year. You all made political statements non-stop.

**Dr. Moonilal:** That is my understanding, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** I understand. It is noted. Are we ready with the—hon. Minister of Finance are you responsible for the Equal Opportunity Tribunal?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, as Members opposite will be aware, all the Items that did not have a line Minister will be addressed by me.

**Madam Chairman:** Are you ready? Are your technical people here?

**Mr. Imbert:** Equal Opportunity is here.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. Head 75, Equal Opportunity Tribunal, \$3,122,300. I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Consistent with the statement made by the Member opposite, Equal Opportunity Tribunal is an institution established to ensure that there is equal opportunity for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, with respect to access to employment, services and other things that all of us as citizens are guaranteed under the Constitution, under sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution.

The allocation for the Equal Opportunity Tribunal which is \$5,383,500 in the recurrent and one would assume there will be some item of development programme. The various Heads would be: Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services, Minor Equipment Purchases.

**5.45 p.m.**

This is really a superior court of record which handles matters of discrimination. Is that good enough for you?

*Question proposed:* That Head 75 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$3,122,300 for Head 75, Equal Opportunity Tribunal is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, could I just point out that there are Direct Charges with respect to this Head involving salaries, allowances and Government's contribution to national insurance totalling approximately \$2 million and, therefore, the actual total is in fact in excess of \$5,383,500.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so can we begin? We are at page 521, Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure; 001, General Administration; Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services; 001, General Administration; Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases; 001, General Administration.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 75 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** I would like to thank the representatives of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal for attending and assisting the committee and they are now relieved. Can we go on to Head 77?

*Head 77.*

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, are you taking Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

**Mr. Imbert:** No, Madam Chairman. I had indicated that where there is no line Minister, I would take it. There is a line Minister for agriculture, that is Minister Rambharat and he should be in the building, if you could just give him two minutes to arrive.

**Hon. Members:** He is here.

**Mr. Imbert:** And he is here. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** All right Members, we are at page 537, Head 77. We are just waiting for you all to settle and indicate that you all are ready. Head 77, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, \$1,177,523,359. I would now invite the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is made up of the former Ministries of Food Production, Land and Marine Resources and it is also made up of the Forestry Division from the former Ministry of the Environment.

The first step in the Ministry within the first year we expect to integrate those former Ministries to create this Agriculture, Land and Fisheries Ministry. The allocations were previously in the different Ministries. We are currently going through an exercise to rationalize that, in particular, to look at those areas which have been duplicated; for example, human resources and accounts across the two Ministries and the Forestry Division. So that exercise is taking up some time and some of the information we would be able to give today and some we would have to give in writing subsequently.

*Question proposed:* That Head 77 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, hon. Minister. Hon. Members, the sum of \$1,177,523,359 for Head 77, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure: Item 001, General Administration. Hon. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. First, let me congratulate Minister Rambharat for his appointment to the Cabinet as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. I am very glad that you are there. I know you and I, we have walked our constituency. I know you, more than anyone else, would know the plights of my constituents. I am thankful that you are there, Sir.

Madam Chairman, I know we have a ditto rule that we were following over the last couple days, and in terms of quite a few of the headings as we go along, I would probably want to invoke that ditto rule in terms of Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances.

**Madam Chairman:** If you would call it, and then we would say, if it is covered, that the undertaking given with respect to that is applicable.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. Items 01 and 08, both line items.

**Madam Chairman:** Those are, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances?

**Mr. Paray:** That is correct.

**Madam Chairman:** And Vacant Post, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowances.

**Mr. Paray:** That is correct.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance, would this be under your general undertaking or do I need to get this from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, once it is an item of Personnel Expenditure, I would give an assurance that an explanation would be given for any variation, increases, decreases on all items relating to all units, departments, Ministries, agencies, “toute bagai”.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. So can we go on?

**Mr. Paray:** Yes, just both items and line Items 02 and 08, we would just like, in writing, exactly how much of these posts are vacant. What are the classifications of these vacant posts and are there any guarantees?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Mayaro, I think that is what—and that is why I allowed the Minister to recite it so that it would bind us today.

**Mr. Paray:** Okay, so that is it for Personnel Expenditure.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so Item 002, Agriculture. This is on page 538.

**Mr. Paray:** Again, Madam Chairman, through you, same exercise, Items 01 and 29.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 01 and Item 29.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, in order to save time, the undertaking I gave is for the entire Personnel Expenditure of \$439 million which would include every division, every unit.

**Mr. Paray:** I thought Madam Chairman wanted each one, okay?

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so we go on to Item 003; Item 004, Horticulture; Item 005, Land and Marine Resources; Item 006, Surveys and Mapping; Item 007, Land Management; Item 008, Fisheries; Item 009, Agricultural Land Administration Division; Item 010, Forestry. Sub-Head 02. We are on page 543. Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services; Item 001, General Administration.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you. On 02, Goods and Services, line 07, through you, Madam Chair, could the Minister indicate what is the house rate? Who determines the house rate? How many houses would have to be paid from this vote?

**Madam Chairman:** 02, Goods and Services, Item 07 on page 543. Hon. Member, if you could look at page xi—

**Mr. Imbert:** In writing.

**Madam Chairman:**—the current expenditure, you would see a definition of house rates there.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Who determines the house rates? How is it determined?

**Mr. Imbert:** I think that needs to be provided in writing.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** You could give it in writing, it is not a problem. Just let me repeat what it is I requested, if you do not mind me, Madam Chair. It is, who determines the house rate? How the house rates are determined and how many houses have to be paid from this vote?

**Madam Chairman:** Sure.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Might I ask, is that a question that is properly for agriculture or is that a question for local government?

**Mr. Imbert:** I find it odd because house rates are usually associated with boroughs and cities. It is peculiar, and that is why I think we better write and indicate whether this line should be somewhere else, whether it is properly located under this Head, and what it is for, who determines the house rates, et cetera.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I see under Contract Employment you have an allocation of \$25 million, and it takes into consideration provision for graduate employment. Could you give a breakdown of how the Ministry intends to monitor or review this contract employment; and how many persons may be employed and the classification of contract employment in terms of the different jobs? Also, I am seeing Short-Term Employment of \$2,250,000 and if you could give an explanation of what this allocation of fees of \$4.5 million is?

**6.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, I think the Minister can give further details in writing, but, just to repeat, short-term employment is employment for six months or less. It is not really associated with positions, and it is to deal with the exigencies of the service. With respect to fees, these would be licences and other fees that the Ministry would have to pay as a result of being a member of certain organizations, and so on. But I think the Minister could also give further elucidation in writing with respect to contract employment, and so on.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** What I appreciate, and this short-term—well, graduate employment and short-term will be advertised, how will these persons be recruited?

**Mr. Imbert:** As I indicated yesterday, I am in the process of finalizing the terms and conditions for graduate employment and this will be communicated to all the Ministries shortly. I would not want to prejudge but, of course, we are going to engage in advertisement.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. To the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, there is a line Item, Sub-Item 28, Other Contracted Services, for \$33 million, could the Minister give us an idea of what are some of those contracted services?—the categories. And, secondly, are these services normally advertised or would they normally be based on sole selections? Thank you.

**Mr. Imbert:** In all of these Ministries, Contracted Services has a range of services so the best thing to do is to give you a written explanation for that, because it will cover so many different things.

**Madam Chairman:** The Member for Couva North. You no longer—all right, so can we move on, please? We are now at Item 002 Agriculture, which is on page 545. Item 003 Animal Production and Health. Item 004 Horticulture. Item 005 Land and Marine Resources. The hon. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Again, I go to Sub-Item 08, Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, a sum of \$1.9 million, and the question is, in the context of the fact that we have left an excellent office complex for you in Chaguanas, and your stated intention to move to that building, would it not make sense as a cost-saving device to house this Item, this accommodation item, in that excellent facility which we left?

**Madam Chairman:** I think the hon. Member is at Item 005 Land and Marine Resources, Sub-Item 08 Rent/Lease – Office Accommodation and Storage, which is on page 547. I believe that is where you are.

**Mr. Charles:** Yes.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, there will be contractual obligations which would have been entered into by the former administration. There would be rental of offices in various places and, therefore, this all needs to be rationalized during 2016, and this is why the Ministry of Finance has given them an allocation of \$1.9 million. Surely and certainly, if the move to Chaguanas can be done quickly and efficiently then there would be a savings here, but, I must say, the former Government opened a lot of buildings but they were just shells, empty shells. There was nothing in them. It was just a facade. When you go behind, all you see is concrete and steel, so we do not really know how soon it will be possible for the Minister to move into the building in Chaguanas—and that is specific to that building which is just an empty shell.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Couva North.

**Miss Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Chairman, under Item 005 Land and Marine Resources, Sub-Item 16, Contract Employment, I am seeing \$7 million for contract employment. Can the Minister kindly give us the information with respect to the contractual positions that exist at this cost?

**Madam Chairman:** And that will be done in writing.

**Miss Ramdial:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you. We are moving on, Item 006 Surveys and Mapping. Item 007 Land Management. Item 008 Fisheries. Item 009 Agricultural Land Administration Division. Item 010 Forestry. Sub-Head 03 Minor Equipment Purchases. We are at page 553. Item 001 General Administration. Item 002 Agriculture. Item 003 Animal Production and Health. Item 004 Horticulture. Item 005 Land and Marine Resources. Item 006 Surveys and Mapping. Item 007 Land Management. Item 008 Fisheries. Item 009 Agricultural Land Administration



Division, and we are at page 556. Item 010 Forestry. We now move on to Sub-Head 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies, and that is at page 556. Item 002 Commonwealth Bodies. Item 003 United Nations Organizations. Item 005 Non-profit Institutions—Hon. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Just for the benefit of our viewing audience, there are some allocations in terms of the Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development for \$11 million, Sub-Item 02, Caribbean Agriculture Research Development Institute for \$5.5 million, and Sub-Item 04 Sugar Cane Feeds Centre for \$14 million. I know these are all research organizations but could the Minister, or would the Minister be able to give us an indication in terms of—very, very brief—what are some of the projects or the plans for these agencies in terms of their research?—in terms of moving the agricultural vision that was described in the budget forward. If you can give us a little idea, Sir. Thank you.

**Hon. Rambharat:** Well what we have found is that we have at least seven agencies in the country involved in fisheries. Six of them are in this Ministry, one is under Education, that is the Institute of Marine Affairs. What we have also found is a lot of duplication, in particular in research, so, for example, Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute is a relic from a Caricom initiative. It is still involved in research, it is also involved in some processing, it is also involved in safety training for people going out to sea. In the case of Sugar Cane Feeds Centre, that is also essentially a research institution; it is a holdover from an old arrangement with Canada. It is involved in some processing, slaughter of animals, a range of activities. So, we are going through a process of rationalizing and streamlining to ensure that we do not have duplication in the Ministry. So, I expect some of those institutions to change over time once we understand where the duplication is and, you know, what changes we could make.

**Mr. Paray:** Okay. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chairman, have you reached page 558?

**Madam Chairman:** We have not reached there as yet so I will ask you to hold until we reach there, please. Item 007 Households. Item 008 Subsidies—hon. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Madam Chairman. In terms of Sub-Item 01 Agricultural Incentive Programme, can you give me an idea, Minister, who are

normally the recipients of that incentive programme? Who would be the recipients of that?

**Mr. Imbert:** That is a question going backwards, if you want to ask who is going to be the recipients then he could put that in writing for you.

**Mr. Paray:** Sure, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, again, Madam Chairman. I see an allocation of \$4.7 million for the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture. If the hon. Minister would be so kind as to give a breakdown of, or clear direction in terms of how this \$4.7 million will be utilized throughout Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to that, I am not seeing any kind of support. I know that there was a programme that was named Agriculture Now that was operating out of a former building of Caroni (1975) Limited in the constituency of Couva South for the last five years, and a number of the persons who have been working there for the last five years, and so on, they have approached me and indicated to me that they do not know of their future from an employment point of view in this particular Agriculture Now programme.

**Madam Chairman:** I call on the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. The hon. Member for Couva South has taken us beyond where we are so I just want to ask, are we finished with Item 008 Subsidies?—and, therefore, I am going to formally call—hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, you are on Item 008?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Yes, Item 008.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Couva South, if I could just ask you to hold on the response because we do not want to go back, so just let me finish Item 008. Thank you.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, I am aware of the subsidies as guided in your manifesto, which would have been various things that were already there, in light of the fact that those subsidies are already in place, what have you identified for your subsidies for this fiscal year?

**Madam Chairman:** We are under Item 008 Subsidies. Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, that is a general question that you are asking or is it related to one of these items?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Under Item 008, Subsidies, you have Sub-Item 01 Agricultural Incentive Programme, Incentive Programme in Sub-Item 02, and we were guided in your manifesto that there were so many incentives that you would put for agriculture, which in fact were already put in place by the previous administration—I am asking, have you revisited the incentive programme and can identify what are those programmes that you will be providing to farmers?

**Mr. Imbert:** Unfortunately, that entire question is based on a series of false premises. In the first instance, agricultural vehicles are still subject to Customs duty and motor vehicle tax; agricultural vessels are subject to Customs duty, and so on, and so on, and so on. It is a falsity for people to say that all of the things that we propose to do have already been done—that is just not true. It is like the \$35 million allegedly lent to farmers from the ADB—that also is not true.

We are not providing incentives in the form of an incentive on this line Item. What we are doing is we are waiving all taxes, duties, motor vehicle tax, value added tax, any other tax related to approved inputs to agriculture; approved vehicles, approved fishing vessels, and so on. So we are waiving taxes; that is the incentive we are giving specific to the point you are raising, in addition to also supporting the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in its overall programme of providing other types of incentives to farmers.

**6.15 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Can we go on to 009?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I do not know if the Minister would like me to repeat or he got a firm grasp of what I said.

**Mr. Imbert:** You would see we put an allocation for the Youth Apprentice Programme in Agriculture. We intend to focus on that programme in 2016. I do not know what line item Agriculture Now would be. Could you direct me to it?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No, no; I am saying that I know of a programme that was operating in the former building of Caroni (1975) Limited by the name of “Agriculture Now.” Is it part of the Youth Apprentice Programme in Agriculture, because I am seeing no line item for it? The entire complement of workers has come to me indicating that they know nothing of their future. In fact, I think that they have already been served with termination letters. I am just seeking clarification, and if this is part of the overall vision of expansion of the agricultural sector.

**Mr. Imbert:** Again, that information is incorrect. They were given short-term contracts which ended. The expiry in the contract that you gave them was September 30, 2015. However, we have put this allocation for the Youth Apprenticeship Programme to try to encourage young people to get involved in agriculture. We will examine all programmes, past and the ones going forward, to see which ones are most relevant. I will ask the Minister to look at this Agriculture Now thing, but it is not correct to say they have been terminated. You cannot terminate a contract that has come to an end.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You may have your own views.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I am still speaking.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I have experience in terms of what is continuous.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member, you have asked a question, you are getting the answer. Hon. Member, if you wish you can ask a supplemental question following from the answer, but let us get the answer and then another question if you wish.

**Mr. Imbert:** Chairman, this is across the board. The former administration entered into short-term contracts with an expiry date of September 30. These people have not been retrenched; their contracts came to an end and, as a union man, you should know that.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Persons who are involved in continuous employment over a five-year period cannot be defined as contract employment. This is the high-handedness of this Government—

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Couva South. Is the question that you are going to put that these are long-term contracts that have been rolling over? Is that the question you are going to put?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Well that is the direction of the discussion, Madam Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, no; I want to know if that is a question, because you just made a statement.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Well, I am entitled to guide the Minister of Finance. He is short on trade relations experience.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, these are pejorative statements. Short-term contracts for election could never be long-term contracts.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** For the last five years, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Imbert:** You had election contracts for five years?

**Dr. Rambachan:** To the hon. Minister. The Seafood Industry Development Company Limited was set up way back on March 31, 2006, as a wholly-owned state enterprise, that was there to modernize the fisheries and aquaculture sector. Does the Minister intend to do an analysis—a cost-benefit analysis—of this Seafood Industry Development Company Limited in order to see whether it is meeting its mandate, and whether these sums of money, like \$8 million on a yearly basis, justify the existence of this company in terms of its value added contribution over the last nine years?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Madam Chair, through you. I referred previously to the seven agencies involved in fisheries. The Seafood Industry Development Company is one of those agencies. We are doing the review and, based on that review, we will determine the future of the Seafood Industry Development Company.

**Mr. Karim:** Madam Chairman, to the hon. Minister. I notice in Other Transfers 05, I listened to the hon. Minister in his opening remarks when he indicated that he had found some duplication of opportunities in the Ministry. Could he elucidate for us with this \$3 million allocation on tourism development facilities?

**Hon. Rambharat:** This allocation deals with the facilities that fall under the parks responsibilities of the Ministry, so this covers the proposed development for San Fernando Hill, Fort St. George, Caura recreation facility, the Water Wheel in Diego Martin, Matura, where we have works planned and activities continuing and daily-paid workers employed.

**Mr. Charles:** Madam Chairman, looking at Item 03, Expansion and Development of the Farmers Market, would the hon. Minister give us some idea of the geographic areas in which this would be expanded; the reason for the expansion and whether the constituency of Naparima would be included in that expansion?

**Hon. Rambharat:** Madam Chair, through you, I would like to put that response in writing.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we go on to Item 010 Other Transfers Abroad. Item 011 Transfers to State Enterprises.

**Dr. Lee:** Madam Chair, under 08, line item Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago, in 2015 the revised estimate was approximately \$2.7 million, and the

2016 estimate is \$4.3 million. Through you to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. What would give rise to this increase of approximately \$1.6 million?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, as you may recall, or as Members should know, the former Minister was continuously embroiled in a battle, including litigation, with the Agricultural Society, and there are copious news reports—copious, many—to the effect that he refused to give them any money. But we in the PNM intend to resolve the issues with the Agricultural Society and that is why we have put an allocation for them, where you gave them nothing.

**Mr. Paray:** To the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries referring to Item 011, Sub-Item 01, Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago, an allocation of \$14 million. The cocoa industry has been receiving some issues, some problems, troubles over the last few years, and I am interested, and for the benefit of the viewing audience—with this injection of \$14 million into that company, what can we expect in terms of an outcome, based on this investment, over the next probably 12 to 24 months? Thank you.

**Mr. Imbert:** The Members opposite should know—unless they have temporary amnesia—that is another thing. I remember during a debate in Parliament asking the former Minister a question about why did he shut down the Cocoa Development Board, and he said they were irrelevant. He said the Ministry of Agriculture could handle the functions of the Cocoa Development Board. So this is the new entity that has been formed to handle cocoa, and there are some issues from the closure of the board and the cavalier manner in which the former Minister dealt with the Cocoa Board that have to be resolved. So this funding is to deal with the mess that you all created, plus going forward to put cocoa on a strong footing.

**Madam Chairman:** The hon. Member for Tabaquite has leapfrogged us into Sub-Head 06. Can we go back and just complete the prior Item, which is 011?

**Mr. Paray:** Just to follow up the question that I had before. What the hon. Minister of Finance is saying is that this is now a defunct board, there is a new board in place—[*Interruption*] sorry, that is not what you are saying—

**Mr. Imbert:** That is a company, a new entity. The board was made defunct.

**Mr. Paray:** The question that I have is that none of that \$14 million is going towards an investment opportunity in that board. What I am saying, in order for the industry—you have now said it is to clear up the mess left by the old board, so

I just need some clarity, if there is any part of that \$14 million that is actually going into the development of the industry? Thank you.

**Mr. Imbert:** This is for expenditure going forward. If you look lower down at 10, under 06, you are seeing it on the same page, 0610, and you see the explanation? The board disbanded in accordance with Cabinet Minute 2907, dated October 17, 2013. So you mash up the board; that is what that money is for.

**Mr. Paray:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 06 Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, and that is on page 560. Therefore we can now go to Sub-Head 09, Development Programme. We are at item 001 Pre-Investment. We are at page 366 in the Development Programme estimates. At page 367. Sorry, we are looking at the IDF. So we are at page 251, 001 Pre-Investment; 002 Productive Sectors, that is at page 262; Item 003, Economic Infrastructure.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Tech-Packs for New Product Development and Provision of Facilities. Where are these tech-packs to be located and what is the nature of this tech-pack? Tech-Packs—packaging, sorry. What are these? What is it you have in mind here?

**6.30 p.m.**

**Mr. Imbert:** You will get more details in writing, but it is something that NAMDEVCO develops.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Oh, I see.

**Mr. Imbert:** But you will get more information on that in writing.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Chair. To the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, through you, Chair. 003 line Item 285 and 286. 285, have you determined what is the total cost of this project? I know there is an allocation. Was any research conducted prior to the establishment of this project to determine its feasibility?

**Mr. Imbert:** You are referring to 285 or 286?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** 285.

**Mr. Imbert:** You asked about feasibility.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** 285.

**Mr. Imbert:** Okay. I will forgive you because you are new. The Carenage Fishing Complex was under construction when the PNM demitted office in 2010, and then it became a pappyshow for the next five years. It was just left abandoned, and we intend to complete this project which has been in progress now for many, many years. So it is not new.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Couva North.

**Miss Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Under 003 Economic Infrastructure, 280 Orange Valley Wholesale Fish Market (Upgrade) for \$1 million. Can the Minister tell us exactly what this upgrade will entail?

**Mr. Imbert:** I am advised that it is a NAMDEVCO project, and I will look at this, since you have raised it and see whether we need to supplement this vote during the fiscal year.

**Miss Ramdial:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are welcome.

**Dr. Rambachan:** As the Minister is on the matter of increasing this vote, I will like to draw the Minister's attention to the Las Cuevas Fishing Facilities.

**Madam Chairman:** Is that listed here?

**Dr. Rambachan:** It is not here. It is not here, but I want to draw the Minister's attention to it because I visited it and it is in a very dilapidated state, and fish products are being processed and sold under some very, very poor conditions, unsanitary conditions.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am very happy the Member is visiting areas outside of Mayo.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Tabaquite.

**Mr. Imbert:** I know.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Mayo is only one village in Tabaquite.

**Mr. Imbert:** I know what I am saying. I am very pleased that you have zeroed-in on a PNM constituency and it will be given favourable consideration.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Like all constituencies.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Do not talk about the health—you are only fixing in—



**Madam Chairman:** Item 004 Social Infrastructure. Item 005 Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. It is at page 259. And can we go now to the Infrastructure Development Fund. That is where I was initially taking us. Page 365 I believe. Page 367. Thank you, hon. Minister.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chairman, you went to Infrastructure already?

**Madam Chairman:** Excuse me?

**Dr. Rambachan:** You have gone to infrastructure?

**Madam Chairman:** We have gone to—Yes. Yes. Because we have finished.

**Dr. Rambachan:** There is just one Item I need to ask a question which was 536 on page 255.

**Madam Chairman:** One question?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes. One question.

**Madam Chairman:** You are taking us back for one question?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well it is an important question.

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah. I have no problem, I just want to limit us to one question.

**Dr. Rambachan:** How are people going to—

**Madam Chairman:** Page what again, please?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Page 255.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Establishment of Community Based Aquaculture Programmes. How are communities going to access this programme and access this funding? [*Crosstalk*] “Nah, doh do that nah man.” You know we are not going to get anything.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is your programme.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Tabaquite, you cannot say that you are not going to get anything.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Madam Chairman, over a million things they have said that they are going to put in writing. You know it is not going to happen. It is not going to happen.

**Madam Chairman:** There is a committee of government assurances.

**Dr. Rambachan:** It is not going to happen.

**Mr. Imbert:** But it is your programme. Why are you asking us about your programmes, as if you “doh” know?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, are we at the Infrastructure Development Fund?

**Mr. Imbert:** We will look for the corruption in the programme.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** We are at page 256.

**Madam Chairman:** No. That is where I am, please. Okay? We are at page 367 Item 003 Economic Infrastructure. Item 004 Social Infrastructure, which is on page 368.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 77 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

I want to thank the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and his technocrats for attending to assist the committee, and they are now relieved. Can we move on to Head 09 Tax Appeal Board?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** And can I take it that, the Minister of Finance, this is under you? Tax Appeal Board.

**Hon. Member:** You again?

**Mr. Imbert:** Omnipresent.

**Madam Chairman:** We are at page 45 in the Recurrent Expenditure. Are we ready, hon. Minister? Okay?

*Head 09.*

I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Imbert:** The Tax Appeal Board adjudicates on challenges or objections to determinations made by the Board of Inland Revenue and by the Customs and Excise Division. It is a court of superior record.

*Question proposed:* That head 09 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$8,583,800 for Head 09 Tax Appeal Board is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 01 Personnel Expenditure Item 001 General Administration. Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just directing this question to the Minister of Finance, through you, Chair. Just noticing under 01/01 Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance that there was a 35 per cent decrease. I am not asking for it in writing. I just want to know, is this as a result of persons being sent home?

**Hon. Imbert:** No. This is arrears of salary and COLA.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** All right. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 02 Goods and Services Item 1.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I want to ask about Sub-Head 01.

**Madam Chairman:** So, you are on Sub-Head 01 Personnel Expenditure?

**Dr. Rambachan:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Item 001.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Is the Minister satisfied that the funding that is under Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, as well as the Members of the Tax Appeal Board, is it sufficient to do the work of the Tax Appeal Board in an efficient manner, a very responsive and an on-time manner or is it that there are many matters before this Tax Appeal Board that are languishing because of lack of staff?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will have to get back to you in writing on that. But what I would say is that the allocations for Personnel Expenditure are based on the Ninety-eighth Report of the Salaries Review Commission.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Based on the?—

**Hon. Imbert:** Ninety-eighth Report of the Salaries Review Commission because the members of this tribunal, their terms and conditions are determined by the Salaries Review Commission and there some vacant posts. I personally am of the view that all of these entities like the Auditor General's Office and the Tax Appeal Board need to be supported and strengthened where required. So now that you have brought that up, I would be in consultation with the Tax Appeal Board

to ensure that this appropriation is adequate because it is consistent with previous years. And any additional funding that they require I will most certainly see what can be done to assist them.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Can I ask one more question? This Tax Appeal Board, because there is remuneration to the board members as direct charge, how often do they meet?

**Hon. Imbert:** Every day.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Okay. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 02 Goods and Services. Item 1 General Administration.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Madam Chair, just to follow up on the question from my colleague to Minister. Is it that the Tax Appeal Board they meet every day to determine appeals?

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** Sorry. I was just consulting with the public servants. Could you repeat, please?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** You were indicating that they meet every day, is that to review appeals that come before them?

**Hon. Imbert:** That is to determine appeals.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay.

**Hon. Imbert:** It is a court and they meet every day. There are three members of the tribunal and a chairman and they settle about 100 matters a year, and I am told that there is a backlog, but not substantial. But I still will see what can be done to assist them further.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Sir.

**Hon. Imbert:** Apparently there are difficulties with accommodation.

**Dr. Rambachan:** That was the basis of—what is the backlog about?

**Hon. Imbert:** I will have to put that in writing. The information that I have is that they do about 100 matters a year and there is a slight backlog, but if you want to know the actual backlog and a sort of historical perspective, I will provide that—

**Dr. Rambachan:** But 100 matters a year is eight matters a month.

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, remember they do not sit on Saturdays and Sundays and so on, and it is a 100 matters a year that they are doing. So every three days they will be determining a matter more or less. Okay?

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 02 Goods and Services. Item 1 General Administration. Sub-Head 03 Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001 General Administration. Sub-Head 09, we going to the Development Programme and this is on page 15 of the *Draft Estimate for the Development Programme*. Item 005 Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I noticed under 004 Upgrade of Library. I have not jumped, right?

**Madam Chairman:** No. No. You are in the right place.

**6.45 p.m.**

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** All right. Good. Nice. I am just looking at it and I am seeing that there is an estimated 300 per cent increase in the revised estimate costing for the library. Is this as a result of the increase of goods and services due to the incentives being removed from the fuel and so forth? What is the—  
[*Interruption*]

**Madam Chairman:** What is the reason for the change?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Yeah, thank you.

**Hon. Imbert:** You wish to know why the allocation for the library has been increased. That is the question?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. That is the question, hon. Minister.

**Hon. Imbert:** Well, in percentage terms it may seem big but it is just \$1.2 million. So it is not huge in the overall scheme of things. And what I am advised is that this money is for the collection development process, reconfiguration of the lighting, development and improvement of the tax, judgment data base and implementation of radio frequency identification in the library (RFIL). So it is really to just upgrade the library which has been in a bad way for some time. So it is just really to bring them into the modern era.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 09 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** I would like to thank the Registrar and the other representative from the Tax Appeal Board for attending, and you are relieved. Thank you very much.

Hon. Minister of Finance, do I take it that you are also with the other two Heads. Could we, therefore, break for just about 15 minutes to give— [Crosstalk]—10 minutes, for the hon. Minister to have an opportunity to recharge himself? [Laughter] Members, this meeting is suspended.

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

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

**Madam Chairman:** The Standing Finance Committee is now resumed. We are at Head 04, Industrial Court. And just for guidance of Members, we are on page 19 of the *Draft Estimates, Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the Financial Year 2016*.

*Head 04.*

Industrial Court, \$28,241,710. I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you very much. The Industrial Court is a creature of statute. It is defined in section 4 of the Industrial Relations Act and it is comprised of judges, although my hon. Member opposite has told me that the correct terminology is, “Members of the court”, and it deals with industrial relations disputes.

*Question proposed:* That Head 04 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, the sum of \$28,241,710 for Head 04: Industrial Court is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration.

And again just for repetition, all matters concerning increases, decreases and so on, under this item would be covered by the undertaking of the Minister of Finance. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. We are going on to page 20.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I note that for all these line Items there has been a decrease in every one, Item 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, right down to Item 27, so all those there to start, Goods and Services and if the Minister

would be kind enough to indicate whether these are no longer important or what is the reason for the decreases for 2016.

**Hon. Imbert:** Of course they are important.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Books and Periodicals, Materials and Supplies, et cetera.

**Hon. Imbert:** Of course they are important and if the Industrial Court requires supplementation during the year we would most certainly seek to oblige them within the context of the overall budget.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** But why was there a decrease in the first place, in the allocation?

**Hon. Imbert:** It is part of a budgeting exercise.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you hon. Minister.

**Madam Chairman:** Sub-Head 002, South Office which is on page 21. Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001, General Administration. This is on page 21. And might we now go to Sub-Head 09, Development Programme and that is on page 7 of the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the Financial Year, 2016*. Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Under Administrative Services, Item 001, Computerization to the Industrial Court. Has this started?

**Hon. Imbert:** If I answer that I would just point out that every single Head under the Development Programme has been increased for 2016, and I will now get the answer. There are a number of projects and it is ongoing.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Do we anticipate any disruption as a result of the transference from manual to computerization?

**Hon. Imbert:** They are ongoing. They have been in progress for some time.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Okay.

**Hon. Imbert:** There is no anticipated disruption.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 04 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

I would like to thank the representatives from the Industrial Court for coming, and you are relieved. Thanks a lot.

**Madam Chairman:** Head 01. I take it again, Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Imbert:** By the way, the Acting Attorney General is seated behind me. If there were any operational questions on the Industrial Court—but there were not any.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you for so advising the committee. Okay, Members, we are on page 1 of the *Draft Estimates, Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the Financial Year 2016*.

*Head 01.*

President, \$23,146,310. I now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Hon. Imbert:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The Office of the President, the President is the Head of State for Trinidad and Tobago elected by the Electoral College every five years. The present incumbent is His Excellency Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, SC, ORTT. And the various Heads and Sub-Heads and Sub-Items of expenditure would be to run the Office of the President and allow the President to perform its functions which will include, very important functions with respect to Service Commissions and other matters that are stated in various laws of our country.

**7.05 p.m.**

*Question proposed:* That Head 01 stand part of the Schedule.

**Madam Chairman:** The sum of \$23,146,310 for Head 01, President, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items are to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Sub-Head 01, Personnel Expenditure, Item 001. And, again, if there are any issues with respect to increases, decreases, et cetera, the hon. Minister of Finance's undertaking is in place. Can we go on to Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services? Item 001, General Administration. Item 002, Tobago Services. Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001, General Administration.

**Hon. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I just wish to point out that the actual total for this Head 01, the President, which includes Direct Charges is, in fact, \$25,867,000.



**Madam Chairman:** So it is an additional \$2 million or so.

**Hon. Imbert:** Because of the Direct Charges, yes.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 01 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.*

**Madam Chairman:** I want to thank the representatives under the Head, President, for attending and I now relieve them.

**Mr. Imbert:** I just want to clarify that the Development Programme is handled by other Ministries. I also want to make a statement, that if the office of the President requires supplementary funding, this would be viewed very favourably by the Ministry of Finance within the context of the overall budget.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. You all are relieved. Thank you for coming.

Members, I really want to congratulate you all, and it just shows what a little cooperation can achieve, and I hope that tomorrow we can have a similar level of cooperation. I am sure the Minister of Finance would like this. This is within the budgeted time.

So tomorrow morning, Members, we resume at 10.00 a.m. I think Members sufficiently know what Heads we will be considering tomorrow.

**Hon. Members:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** This meeting is now suspended. Please reach home safely.

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