

Gopee-Scoon hails strong performance of non-energy exports

■ Melissa Maynard

MINISTER of Trade and Industry Paula Gopee- Scoon says this country's non-energy exports are performing strongly. She was speaking yesterday to the media after touring the Blue Waters facility.

Blue Waters copped the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) award titled 'Manufacturer of the Year Large 2023'.

TTMA, in collaboration with the ministry, is visiting companies who emerged as winners in last year's award ceremony.

Gopee-Scoon said Blue Waters' excellence is being celebrated, adding: 'We are proud to visit this exceptional factory to listen to what's in store, and to understand their growth level and what is driving it...They have on board 600 happy employees, and that says something good for the management of Blue Waters'.

Blue Waters was recognised for its exceptional performance in 2023 as it achieved a 20% year-on-year growth, with a 57% increase in export sales and a 22.2% increase in its production volume for the same period.

Noting that overall, the non-energy exports are doing very well, Gopee- Scoon said in the last Moody's report, growth in the Trinidad and Tobago economy has been driven largely by the non-energy sector.

'Looking at the food and beverage sector, speaking just generally now compared to 2019, we have moved from a figure of \$2.4 billion in exports-non-energy food and beverages sector exports-to a remarkable \$3.2 billion. Essentially you're seeing a growth of 30% over the last five years, which is really a blessing to us in terms of the ability to earn foreign exchange and putting our products out there on a global stage. Out of that, water would have reached an impressive \$521 million in 2023,' Gopee-Scoon explained.

According to the minister, there has been even more growth between 2023 and 2025. She added that the ministry is 'very pleased with what we have seen here, and I note as well that they do plan to expand again, just shy of 400,000 square feet. I think they are one of the larger plants that we ever visited in Trinidad and Tobago. They are in expansion mode as well there'.

The minister acknowledged the company's healthy relationship with EXIMBANK and said Blue Waters is utilising EXIMBANK's loan regime to develop its range of machinery and equipment.

Blue Waters managing director Dominic Hadeed noted: 'We do continue to improve and expand.'

He said the arrival of new equipment to support further expansion will result in more jobs and 'more taxes.'

He additionally disclosed that the company also works with MIC Institute of Technology, saying that MIC 'actually started to tailor their programmes to what we need; because they would bring people they graduated-but they are not necessarily graduating with the skillset that we require. So, we sat down and worked with them (MIC).'

Giving an example, Hadeed said the skills the company sought in trainees were in automation, engineering, and the electronic field, to name a few. He explained that the partnership between Blue Waters and MIC now allows them to hire graduates without having to retrain them.

Meanwhile, in response to a question about property taxes on businesses and machinery, the minister assured that is not the plan.

'But let me give you the position of the Government: that is not on the table right now...in the last budget there is no mention of an introduction of property tax on businesses. I have no idea when, but I am sure it will come sometime in the future; but as I said, there would be discussions and conversation with the business community before,' Gopee-Scoon explained.