

Gas dealers want forex facility

■ Kim Boodram

kim.boodram@trinidadexpress.com

THE Owners and Dealers Association (ODA) of Trinidad and Tobago has listed among its 2025 'budget wishes' the introduction of a foreign exchange facility for that industry.

In a statement to the *Express* last Friday, ODA president Reval Chattergoon advocated for the 'allocation of foreign exchange to the retail fuel industry for Owner Dealers that qualify'.

Chattergoon said currently, Owner Dealers who own their station and equipment are required to maintain monthly, quarterly and/or annual software subscriptions for their operations and purchase equipment for the general upkeep of their operations.

He reported increasing pressure on Owner Dealers to keep up with their forex needs, and suggested consultation with an aim to accommodating the industry amidst an apparent shortage of foreign exchange.

The Association is also calling for 'a fair tax system for the retail fuel industry'.

Chattergoon cited an urgent need to review the current tax structure which mandates taxes on fuel sales, instead of the commission on sale as seen for the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB), which is taxed on commission through a system similar to that of insurance and travel agencies.

He called for the fair allocation of commissions between fuel wholesalers and Owner Dealers, based on the investment into owning, building and maintain gas stations.

'The present allocation appears to favour reliance on government grants, subsidies, write-offs which often times are paid for by taxpayers,' he stated.

Chattergoon said a range of benefits could be gathered through 'reform of the relationship between the Government, wholesaler and retailer – in an industry that is heavily taxed on commissions. He noted that Owner Dealers undergo bi-annual and annual inspections by governmental agencies but said 'no consultation occurs between Government and retailers, specifically those who fall under the Owner Dealer category'. The ODA in addition called for the 'reform of the price structure of fuel'.

National security, agriculture

The ODA has said it also hopes to see the Government 'provide meaningful allocation on national security'.

Chattergoon acknowledged that national security 'receives one of the top three largest budgetary allocations annually with a focus underfunded or under resourced police stations'.

In addition more funding and resources to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) and other national security agencies, Chattergoon called for the TTPS to be held accountable for the spending of allocations and use and management of resources.

The Association said more provisions should also be made available to the T&T Bureau of Standards.

Chattergoon said the agency should be outfitted with the necessary funding to obtain equipment which was needed to calibrate Road Tank Wagons.

He said while gas stations are mandated by the TTBS to calibrate their equipment, the Bureau does not have equipment to calibrate Road Tank Wagons. Chattergoon said the apparatus was necessary in ensuring dealers get accurate quantities of fuel, purchased from respective wholesalers.

Ease of business should also be high on the Government's agenda, Chattergoon stated.

He said decentralised government services facilitate ease of doing business including reopening, relocating or adding additional offices.

Decentralised public services also better facilitate payment of statutory obligations due to the Government and help businesses stay compliant with laws and regulations, including vehicle inspections, he said.

The ODA has also expressed concern for T&T's social climate, and called for the reintroduction of equitable relief for the less fortunate. Chattergoon said applications should be thoroughly vetting applications for these services, so that the relief goes to those who are genuinely in need.

Calling on the Government to provide transparent criteria for prioritising infrastructure spending. Chattergoon said such spending should benefit citizens throughout the country including rural/remote areas.

He said the area of food security was of concern to all stakeholders in the country, adding that the ODA hoped to see the 'reiterating or increasing of incentives for the agriculture industry'. Chattergoon said this should be aimed at encouraging investment within the industry, and at reducing the import bill and while increasing exports.

The ODA would also like to see 'an audit into the billions of dollars being granted in subsidies and for any misappropriation to be identified and persons held accountable'.