

Tobago Chamber seeks budget relief for contractors

TOBAGO

■ Elizabeth Williams

CHAIRMAN of the Tobago division of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Curtis Williams, is hopeful that the long-standing issue of outstanding payments to contractors will finally be addressed in the upcoming Tobago House of Assembly (THA) budget, especially in light of the recent change in Government.

'We would like the THA to prioritise prompt settlements of payments to service providers and suppliers.

There are service providers that have long overdue bills and we would like them to treat with those because without a cash flow in the private sector it undermines business confidence and it really adds pressure on your cash flow,' Williams said via phone on Monday.

His comments come as the THA prepares to present its 2025/2026 budget estimates this month. Historically, the budget is presented by the Finance Secretary.

Petal-Ann Roberts will present the budget.

Williams said, following two meetings last month, the Tobago division of the Chamber presented a list of its recommendations to the Division of Finance.

These included a commercial port, a cruise ship terminal and marina, and a waste management programme, particularly focused on addressing the issues at the Studley Park dump.

'The establishment of the Tobago Development Fund. We asked about that because it was something mentioned before, and we want to know where they are with it to get that going, because there were folks who were trying to get on to the Government Loan Assistance Programme and apparently the funds ran out for that programme. So, the bank approved them, but there were no funds in the account,' he said.

Williams said, he expects the Assembly to receive a more favourable slice of the pie this time around, following a meeting last month between THA Chief Secretary Farley Augustine and Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Williams said the meeting appeared successful.

'And there was a bit of negotiations going on there and I am looking forward to it,' he said. 'We are all excited to see what is there for the mid-year review and let's see how the Central Government now as we have a good relationship, from the media release that we have seen so far. Let's see what the new Government would be doing for Tobago.'

In June 2024, Chief Secretary and Finance Secretary Farley Augustine presented a \$3.956 billion budget.

Last September, then-finance minister Colm Imbert announced a \$2.599 billion budget allocation for Tobago.