

‘He may not have all the info now’

Swaratsingh challenges Central Bank Governor’s no forex cartel claim



Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development Kennedy Swaratsingh



Finance Minister Davendranath Tancoo

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Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development Kennedy Swaratsingh has challenged Central Bank Governor's assertion that there is no evidence of a foreign exchange cartel, saying the lack of proof does not guarantee one does not exist.

Swaratsingh, who also holds the ministerial portfolio of Minister in the Ministry of Finance, yesterday offered a contrasting view to Larry Howai's claim of last week.

He suggested to Guardian Media that Howai's perspective was perhaps limited to "what he's seeing at this time" and that a more comprehensive view, including other information and historical context, is necessary to fully assess the situation.

"The reason why I suspect the governor would have suggested that information, is based on what

he's seeing at this time, but that is not all the information that there is to that. That is not all the information that we would have had over the period of time," Swaratsingh said.

However, at a media engagement last Thursday at the Central Bank, Howai said, "From our perspective, we have no evidence of a cartel."

His statements appeared to be at odds with that of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar's claim that there is a foreign exchange "cartel" operating in T&T.

The Prime Minister had described the process of obtaining information like a "bed of thorns or pulling teeth," reinforcing the Government's belief that an unfair and non-transparent forex system is at play.

To address these concerns, the Prime Minister mandated a report on the forex distribution system to identify and expose the main facilitators of an alleged cartel.

Speaking at a post-Cabinet news conference on May 15, Persad-Bissessar mandated three of her ministers to produce a report on foreign exchange distribution and leakage over the past ten years.

"Then this report, as I say, will be made public to identify the main users, the main facilitators of this unfair distribution, and explain to the public how this entire foreign exchange distribution cartel and conspiracy between certain operatives and businesses was functioning," Persad-Bissessar said then.

However, when asked for an update on the progress of the report, Swaratsingh described the document as a "comprehensive thing."

"I can't discuss that with you because again, that's a comprehensive thing that will encompass and the Governor will really be the one, the person to speak on that ... I would not be the correct person to speak on that," he added.

Guardian Media also sent several messages to Finance Minister Dave Tancoo regarding Howai's statements of no evidence of a forex cartel but the minister did not respond.