

PM prioritises forex allocation

To meet with CBTT, bankers next week



Minister of Finance, Vishnu Dhanpaul, right, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Hassel Bacchus and Minister of Housing Adrian Leonce at yesterday's post-Cabinet press briefing at Whitehall, Port-of-Spain, yesterday. PHOTO BY ROGER JACOB

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Newly minted Prime Minister Stuart Young will meet the banking sector next Tuesday concerning the allocation of foreign exchange to the public.

The Prime Minister made the announcement during the post-Cabinet news conference yesterday, at which he said new Minister of Finance Vishnu Dhanpaul would also be a part of the meeting.

He said, "I have invited the Central Bank and the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago, and I'm hoping all the CEOs, the chief executive officers of the banks that operate in Trinidad and Tobago, to meet with myself, the Minister of Finance right here at White Hall. I intend to address immediately, and it will happen on Tuesday next week, the issue of foreign exchange and forex, and allocation of forex as one of the first items on my list of priorities."

The minister said the meeting would take place at 2.30pm, with the media invited to witness the start of the meeting.

“After that meeting, you all will then be told in a transparent manner what was the outcome of that meeting. I intend to raise at that meeting, this issue of foreign exchange, and how it is that we can address the foreign exchange. The fact is that we have less foreign exchange than we used to. That is the fact of life. However, how do we look at the allocation of the foreign exchange that is available to us, amongst our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago,” he said.

In the wake of the announcement, Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, president Kiran Maharaj said, “We are happy that the Prime Minister has called such a meeting as it signals that he is placing priority on the matter.”

However, she asked that a similar meeting be held with business groups as the T&T Chamber has long expressed its own concerns about the issue.

The chamber president said the chamber had also made previous recommendations to former finance minister Colm Imbert, which she encouraged the Prime Minister to review.

The Chaguanas Chamber of Commerce said it welcomed the announcement. In a statement sent by chamber president Baldath Maharaj, the group called for greater clarity concerning the allocation of foreign exchange while expressing concern that SMEs remained disadvantaged by the distribution of foreign currency.

The statement said, “This lack of oversight has created an environment where banks, receiving forex from the Central Bank, seem to be prioritising their own profit margins rather than ensuring fair and equitable distribution.

Many businesses continue to report difficulties in accessing foreign currency, forcing them to resort to costly alternatives that further strain their operations.”

The call for clarity was also shared by Trinidad and Tobago Automotive Dealers Association president Visham Babwah, who noted that there needed to be more transparency concerning the distribution by commercial banks.

“It still comes down to the commercial banks, when they distribute the forex that they receive.

This is where a lot of the concern comes from. There is where the emphasis should be placed,” he said.

It is not the first time the Government has proposed a meeting with stakeholders concerning the matter.

In November, former finance minister Colm Imbert announced plans to consult with stakeholders on changing the method of allocating foreign exchange to address concerns of SMEs.