



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

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MEDIA RELEASE

MISLEADING FOREX ACCESS STORIES IN TRINIDAD EXPRESS

The Minister of Finance, Hon. Colm Imbert, MP, has noticed yet another series of misleading and inaccurate stories about access to foreign exchange being peddled by the *Trinidad Express* as if these stories were factual. This media campaign is clearly mischievous, and it is necessary to set the record straight.

EXIMBANK's PURPOSE

A perusal of the EXIMBANK of Trinidad and Tobago's website reveals that its mandate is to, ***“facilitate the growth and expansion of the non-energy export and manufacturing sectors in order to enhance the foreign exchange earnings of Trinidad and Tobago, and to create and sustain employment through our trade finance product portfolio's coverage to the exporting community.”***

In brief, the purpose of the Eximbank is to provide foreign exchange support to exporters in our non-energy and manufacturing sector as part of this government's ongoing goal of economic expansion and diversification.

COVID-ERA ACCESS to EXIMBANK FOREX

In 2020, as a result of the looming trade crisis brought on by the pandemic, this government took the decision to temporarily allow wholesale importers of essential goods access to EXIMBANK services. The entire initiative was again outlined in my Budget 2025 speech, which I am certain all media houses have a copy of. In the speech the following was indicated:

*“Since April 2020, 110 distributors of essential goods such as basic foods and medicines accessed the Essentials Forex Window, which allocated **US\$1.18 billion** to purchase these key staples. This Facility has mitigated the significant risk of national shortages of basic items and is geared at companies that have an existing or previous history of importing approved essential items. In this process applicants submit their financial*

statements, as well as Know Your Client – KYC, documentation and projected trade payables to be enrolled.”

Once enrolled in the Forex Window Facility, clients submit their trade invoices together with the requisite TT dollars. Subsequently, the EXIMBANK wires US dollars directly to the international suppliers for settlement. The local company does not receive US dollars directly.”

This arrangement was a temporary one, put in place to ensure the citizens of the country had access to all of its essential items in terms of food, medicine and safety supplies during a pandemic. It is not and was never intended to be a permanent entitlement and prior to this arrangement, all importers obtained their forex from their respective commercial banks. This facility, which gave them preferential access to forex was created to ensure the survival of our citizens during the Covid-19 period.

Contrary to misleading and mischievous reports in the Express, foreign exchange from the EXIMBANK has never been allocated to import vehicles: new or used.

Nor for that matter, is the forex distributed by the Eximbank allocated for the importation of luxury items or non-essentials, such as fireworks.

Instead, forex from the EXIMBANK has only ever been allocated for importing essential goods, such as basic food and medicine during the Covid-19 period, and principally, for inputs into manufacturing, such as raw materials and equipment.

Again, contrary to misleading reports in the Express, foreign exchange from the EXIMBANK has never been sent directly to any importer.

All foreign payments, once verified, are made directly by the EximBank to vetted and validated international suppliers.

It is a matter of record that wholesale Importers were aware that the forex window for essential imports was temporary. They were also informed in August of 2024, well before Budget 2025 was delivered, that the forex facility was under review and would be amended to return the programme to its original intent and purpose.

It is unfortunate that some wholesale importers sought to make purchases without ensuring their source of funds, thus creating problems for themselves.

The direct provision of foreign exchange by the Government through the EximBank is designed to encourage export manufacturing and economic activity and is a policy intended to promote and support diversification, which no sensible person could object to.

However, the addition of a second forex window at the EximBank for essential imports during the Covid-19 pandemic cannot create a situation where, four years later, the

Government is being held liable by certain private sector businessmen for the items they ordered and received without paying for them.

Further, the public should not be held to ransom with a threat of increased prices for the restructuring and rationalisation of a service that was introduced as a temporary measure during the Covid-19 emergency, and which it was well known was always subject to periodic review.

END

The Hon. Colm Imbert M.P
Minister of Finance