



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

For immediate release

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MEDIA RELEASE

THE EXIMBANK FOREX WINDOW FOR THE IMPORTATION OF ESSENTIAL ITEMS HAS BEEN RESUMED AFTER CAREFUL REVIEW

After careful consideration and a comprehensive review by the Ministry of Finance and the EximBank over the last month, Cabinet, at its regular weekly meeting last week, which was held on Friday, November 1st 2024, agreed to a recommendation from the Minister of Finance that the forex window at the EximBank for essential imports, which was created by the Ministry of Finance in 2020 in response to an urgent and critical need during the COVID-19 pandemic, be resumed, in a restructured format.

The base dataset used for the review was the final list of zero-rated items that came into effect on February 1st, 2016, by the Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) Order 2016: items not manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago and items not specifically pandemic-related.

Items outside these definitions should not be considered essential and should not qualify for preferential access to the Government's foreign exchange through the EximBank.

This special forex window at the EximBank has consumed US\$30 million monthly over the last 4 years since its inception in 2020. It included forex for items such as cleaning supplies, bleach, sanitary equipment, protective gear, face masks, respirators, toothpaste, hand sanitisers, hand soap, tissue paper, hygiene products like deodorant, vaccines and over-the-counter drugs like cough syrup, as well as pharmaceuticals and essential foods.

It has been decided that the list of foods, pharmaceuticals, and essential hygiene products, such as sanitary napkins and pads, which qualified for this special forex window from 2020 to September 2024 will remain unchanged going forward. However, it will be subject to periodic review to see whether items should be added or deleted, as necessary. For example, retaining borderline food items (on the margin between essential and non-essential) such as sausages is arguable.

For the avoidance of doubt, COVID-19 pandemic-related items such as hand soap, toothpaste, face masks, deodorant, respirators, and hand sanitisers are no longer considered to be "essential" imports.

In this context, the role and impact of locally manufactured products, which substitute for imports, are being carefully examined. Greater access to forex for inputs for local consumption will be considered shortly. Further details of this aspect of forex distribution will be announced after consultation with stakeholders.

The Government's allocation of US dollars to the EximBank for this essential imports facility will now be US\$25 million per month, a US\$5M reduction from the COVID-19 list of imports. This is considered to be adequate at this time. It should also be noted that the forex window for export manufacturers is not being adjusted and will remain.

The resumption of the forex window for essential imports, in its restructured format, is effective from November 1, 2024.

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The Honourable Colm Imbert MP
Minister of Finance