



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Trade and Industry

REMARKS

BY

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MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

AT THE

LAUNCH OF THE STEELPAN TUNER APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

L16, Nicholas Tower, Ministry of Trade and Industry
21 March 2025 | 10:30 a.m.

SALUTATIONS

- Mr. Randall Karim – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade and Industry
- Mr. Videsh Maharaj, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts
- Professor Emeritus Clément Imbert – Chairman, MIC Institute of Technology
- Mr. Anil Ramnarine – Chief Executive Officer, MIC Institute of Technology
- Keiba Jacob Mottley – Chief Executive Officer, National Carnival Commission
- Members of the National Steelpan Steering Committee
- Members of the Steelpan Community
- Specially Invited Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning,

It is with great pleasure that we officially launch the Steelpan Tuner Apprenticeship Programme. It is a landmark initiative that underscores the Government's commitment to both preserving and advancing the art form of steelpan and building the quality of our products for the export market.

First, I would like to commend the MIC-Institute of Technology, with whom the Ministry of Trade and Industry is partnering, to make this programme a reality. The Institute has been instrumental in formulating this programme and is working with us in executing a suite of initiatives that create a robust and sustainable future not only for steelpan, but for other key areas in the non-energy sector – with a total spend of **TT\$ 27Mn over the last three (3) years**.

Today's launch comes on the heels of a bumper Carnival and an exhilarating National Panorama and Junior Panorama. It also follows the UN Declaration of World Steelpan Day on August 11th, which recognizes the steelpan as the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago and the only acoustic musical instrument invented in the 20th century. Further, our Government has legislated and declared the steelpan our national instrument.

From its humble beginnings in the streets of Port of Spain, the steelpan has evolved into a world-renowned cultural export, representing our nation on the global stage. The symbolism must not be forgotten, representing the link between the energy and non-

energy sector. From a discarded oil drum, which had little to no value, to something never before seen or heard, created through inspiration, imagination and intuition.

Significance of Steelpan

The craft of steelpan tuning is at the heart of its sound. It is an intricate, delicate process that requires a deep understanding of both the musical and physical properties of the instrument. Steelpan tuners are more than just craftsmen, ensuring that the instrument produces its unique and unmistakable sound and melody.

Need for Apprenticeship Programme

It is a fact that there has been a decline in the number of skilled steelpan tuners, with many of the great masters of the craft either retiring or no longer with us.

This programme, at a cost of **TT\$1.95 Mn**, has been designed to ensure that the next generation of tuners is trained in the authentic and meticulous methods of this vital craft, and can carry forward the knowledge, traditions and skills necessary to sustain the industry. This programme is not just about teaching a trade—it's about preserving and nurturing an art form that is central to our cultural identity and has significant economic potential.

Impact of the Programme

This programme is not just an investment in the craft of steelpan tuning, but in our cultural heritage and the future of Trinidad and Tobago. By ensuring the preservation and growth of steelpan tuning expertise, we are fostering the continued development of the steelpan industry, in the areas of education, music production, and even international performances. Additionally, this programme will create jobs, help sustain local pan yards, and expand the larger steelpan ecosystem within our communities.

Manufacture and Export of Steelpans and Accessories

The steelpan is part of our cultural heritage, but it is often overlooked as a tool for economic transformation. Given our history and legacy, we have a unique opportunity for stimulating economic activity, generating revenue and boosting exports.

Our Government is continuing to pursue a holistic approach to developing the steelpan industry by assisting steelpan manufacturers in boosting exports and accessing new markets, creating a governance structure for long-term growth and development, and building capacity as we are with the Tuner Apprenticeship Programme.

Steering Committee for the Development of the Steelpan Industry

To develop the future of the steelpan industry, a Steering Committee was established in June 2023, comprising members from the public and private sector, charged with developing a National Governance Framework for the Steelpan industry.

The Committee work has focused on bolstering critical aspects of the steelpan ecosystem in Trinidad and Tobago, including the manufacturing, archiving, education, recording, marketing, entertainment, funding, standards, and research and development. After a

year of engaging with various stakeholders and conducting the required research, the Committee has put forward several initiatives for implementation, one of which was the Steelpan Tuner Apprenticeship Programme. This illustrates the coalescing of experience and skills from Government, academia and private sector, to create a suite of mutually beneficial initiatives to build the industry holistically and sustainably.

Other plans include:

- the creation of a **mechanism to connect** tuners, players arrangers, composers and manufacturers to collaborate and work together to build the industry.
- a comprehensive **gap analysis** of the industry to tailor training and capacity building endeavors for both the pan fraternity and the general public.
- a **recording fund** for steelbands so that their performances can be recorded and marketed internationally;
- a thorough review of existing tax benefits to propose **targeted incentives** to encourage support of the Industry; and
- the development of a **website** to allow all stakeholders along the value chain—production, tuning, chroming, branding, marketing and promotion—to offer their products and services to both local and foreign consumers.

The people and the future of the steelpan industry is in good hands with this Government.

Financial Support for the Industry

More than just plans, our Government has been providing financing such as under the Grant Fund Facility, which allows for funding for the acquisition of new machinery, equipment, software, tools, raw materials and training. Since the introduction of this Facility in 2020, the exports of steelband instruments have increased by 72% from approximately TT\$ 1.9 million in 2020 to over TT\$ 3.1 million in 2023. This is a clear indication of the success of the Grant in stimulating exports and the potential of domestic firms in creating world-class products. With Government's continued support and the expansion of other initiatives to help boost the capabilities of manufacturers, we expect this trend to continue.

One such recipient, involved in the chroming of pans, was able to access this grant and recommence its operations after several years. This allows local manufacturers and tuners to avoid the unnecessary hassle and added costs of shipping pans abroad to chrome, enabling them to boost their capacity and sell their products at more internationally competitive prices.

To date, nine (9) businesses have benefitted from the Facility, in the amount of approximately \$3 million dollars. The recipients have exported steelpans to regional markets such as Barbados, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Cuba, Belize, St. Thomas and the US Virgin Islands; the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, France, Japan, China, Germany and Australia.

Conclusion

Whether you're an aspiring tuner or someone passionate about learning the craft, this is your chance to become part of something extraordinary.

The Steelpan Tuner Apprenticeship Programme will touch the lives of more than just 15 individuals and will, in fact, last more than just two years. It is an opportunity to safeguard the future of our cultural legacy, honor our ancestors, and create new pathways of economic prosperity for decades to come.

The steelpan is rooted in our history, but it also has a place in our future. The inclusion of the national instrument on our Coat of Arms is not a revision of our history, but rather the retelling of a story that refocuses on us and our achievements. The steelpan does just that.

Together, we will ensure that the sound of the steelpan continues to resonate around the world for generations to come. Thank you, and I look forward to seeing the many talented apprentices who will emerge from this programme and pave the way for generations to come.

Thank you.