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Row over remittance \$\$...

Pan body threatens to boycott Panorama

SEAN NERO

Officials of Pan Trinbago say there might not be a Panorama competition next Carnival season unless Arts and Multiculturalism Minister Winston "Gypsy" Peters backs down on his plan to pay a \$1,000 remittance to pan players only at the advanced stages of the competition.

Peters has told the steelband body that the structure of the remittance programme, which has been in place for the past seven years, is flawed.

Pan Trinbago insists, however, that the system does not need to be fixed.

At a media conference at the organisation's head office at Victoria Suites, Park Street, Port-of-Spain, yesterday, Pan Trinbago president Keith Diaz warned that there might be no Panorama competition next year if the minister goes ahead with his plan.

Diaz, vice-president Byron

Serrette and secretary Richard Forteau told reporters that at a meeting with Peters on December 6, the minister compared the preliminary round of Panorama to a calypsonian with a guitar going to an audition and failing to qualify, but receiving payment.

According to Serrette, at that meeting Peters told them: "Okay. So, if we don't pay players \$1,000 what are they going to do? Not play pan? Go and commit crime? The police will deal with them!"

The budget for the player remittance programme is \$7.3 million—for 7,300 panmen—and it is part of the \$34 million prize structure for the Panorama competition, inclusive of transport.

Pan Trinbago officials will be discussing the issue with their membership at a meeting today at 5 pm at the Communications Worker's Union Hall, Henry Street, Port-of-Spain.

In addition, the steelband



Pan Trinbago president Keith Diaz, centre, with the organisation's secretary Richard Forteau, left, and vice-president Byron Serrette.

PHOTO: SHIRLEY BAHADUR

body is demanding an apology from Peters for his claim that the Panorama competition is "killing pan."

Diaz said: "Panorama has improved the steelband movement. Panorama has development musicians. Panorama has gone up the Caribbean, New York, Canada, Switzerland and Australia.

"They are using the same model. We have to be careful what we say about the instrument."

Forteau lamented that 2011 marked the 75th anniversary of the steelpan, as well as the 60th anniversary of the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra trip to the festival of Britain in 1951.

He said back then, the State was reluctant to give to panmen and six decades on the state's attitude had not changed much.

In a statement yesterday, the Arts and Multiculturalism Minister said his comments, which were in a December 12 Sunday Guardian article headlined "Pan Trinbago Eyesore," were not intended as a personal attack on the steelband body as an institution or its executives.

He said his ministry supports the strategic objectives and plans of Pan Trinbago.

"However, Trinidad and Tobago—like many other countries across the world—is facing a changing economic reality," Peters said.

"Institutions, including the Government of this country, must take these new realities into account.

"Given this, I am of the belief that those organisations which have traditionally depended on the State for funding of their activities must begin to seek out and undertake new partnerships and opportunities to continue and accelerate their work."

Peters said these organisations needed to "embrace the opportunity to enhance their operations, including becoming more accountable.

"Let me also say that our cultural and arts activities are important economic assets...They are an investment that should pay dividends back to the public many times over and my simple wish is that this should begin with stakeholders such as Pan Trinbago," he said.