

■ After Customs disruption...

T&T Chamber urges infrastructure upgrades

THE Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is calling for urgent improvements to infrastructure resilience and business continuity planning across key government systems, following the recent disruption at the Customs and Excise Division.

On Monday, the Customs and Excise Division announced the unavailability of the Customs Border Control System (ASYCUDA), citing water leaks at Custom House, Government Campus Plaza, Port of Spain, as the cause of the disruption.

'All services are therefore affected, and those that can be processed will be done manually, which may result in some delays,' the division stated. The system was restored yesterday.

'Whilst we acknowledge the timely restoration of the system, the Chamber stresses the urgent need for greater infrastructure redundancy and robust business continuity planning at the Customs and Excise Division, as well as all other critical government systems and services,' it stated.

'The Chamber strongly recommends that the authorities invest in reliable back-up systems and contingency protocols to ensure that critical services remain operational-or can be quickly restored-even if primary infrastructure is compromised. Strengthening the resilience of our Customs infrastructure will help protect the economy from similar shocks in the future,' the T& T Chamber stated.

T& T Chamber president Sonji Pierre-Chase underscored the urgency of the matter, saying: 'This incident highlights the critical need to strengthen business continuity plans for essential services. Robust disaster recovery and backup systems are no longer optional-they are a necessity to safeguard national productivity and economic resilience.'

The T& T Chamber said it remained committed to working with all relevant agencies to support the implementation of business continuity measures.

'Our foremost priority is safeguarding the flow of commerce and ensuring that the country's economic activities are protected against such disruptions going forward. The T& T Chamber, therefore, stands ready to collaborate in developing longer-term solutions that will bolster the reliability of our trade and customs systems,' it stated.

Couva/Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce (CPLCC) president Deoraj Mahase yesterday expressed deep concern over broader systemic issues within the Customs and Excise Division, particularly those affecting container clearance and causing delays at the Container Examination Stations (CES).

In a WhatsApp exchange with the *Express*, Mahase said, 'A significant amount of cost for rent and demurrage is being incurred by importers, exporters, manufacturers and other stakeholders. Shipments are being affected with lengthy delays and rising cost, which is negatively impacting persons and businesses. The Chamber is pleading for additional action to be taken to end or at least provide some relief to stakeholders.'

He also noted that members are appealing to organisations and associates that impose demurrage charges to 'consider waivers as well since these increased demurrage costs are very high.'

'We are well aware that national security is priority and Customs regulations must be followed. However, we strongly recommend a review of the current processes, appointment times, delays, cost incursion and negative impact it is having on the delivery of cargo to the business community which should be avoided at this time so as to assist the growth and development of businesses nationally,' he said.

He added that the CPLCC planned to seek meetings and send formal correspondence to officials within Customs and the Ministry of National Security to further discuss the concerns and request relief on behalf of its members and the wider business community.