

Trump tariffs worry business groups



Newly appointed T&T Chamber president Sonji Pierre-Chase PHOTO BY ANISTO ALVES

Business groups yesterday expressed concern that the baseline 10 per cent tariff imposed on T&T by the US will negatively impact this country and even worsen the foreign exchange situation.

The T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce said the measures threaten to disrupt the flow of goods, spike consumer prices and undermine export competitiveness across the Caribbean.

Of concern, the T&T Chamber noted, is the baseline 10 per cent tariff on all goods entering the US and the US\$1 million fee proposed on all Chinese-built vessel docking at US ports.

It said the US accounts for 37 per cent of T&T's exports and 39 per cent of its imports, making the local economy highly vulnerable to the shifts.

Newly appointed T&T Chamber president Sonji Pierre-Chase stressed, "These developments underscore the urgency of building trade resilience. We must act now—with unity and resolve—to protect our economy and our people."

Weighing in on the issue, president of the T&T Manufacturers Association Roger Roach said the tariffs can force T&T's goods to face stiffer competition in the United States.

"What essentially is going to happen is that the distributors or the importers of those goods will now have to pay a 10 per cent tariff on goods that are imported into the United States. That on its own could cause some competitive shocks."

However, Roach said that given that these tariffs are far-reaching due to the number of countries involved it is hard to ascertain the impact until data is available.

Also, the Energy Chamber said yesterday it is consulting with member companies who are major exporters to the US, and with Government officials and other stakeholders in order to fully understand any potential impacts of new tariffs and identify any actions it should take on behalf of its members.

The Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce (GTCIC) executive director Jason Roach said, "We would like to see some definite policy in response and against the backdrop of trade agreements that exist between the US and Caricom.

This is not to take a retaliatory approach, but such an important question is necessary to ask at this time.

Moreover, it is not only the US we need to pay attention to, we need to begin examining our own position on how we can keep our exporters sustainable and position them for growth."

Meanwhile, Ricardo Mohammed, Vice chairman of the Confederation of Regional Business Chambers (CRBC) and Fyzabad Chamber of Commerce president Angie Jairam said the uncertainty created by tariffs and trade policies could impact foreign direct investment (FDI) in T&T. Investors may be less likely to invest in the steel and aluminium sectors, given the uncertain market environment in the US and its consequences for Trinidad exports.