

# **Business chambers want talks with Govt on flooding issues**



Penal/Debe Chamber of Commerce president Motilal Ramsingh



Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce president Baldath Maharaj



Downtown Owners and Merchants Association president Gregory Aboud

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As the Wet Season commences, some business chambers say they are willing to give the new Government a grace period on the issue of flooding. However, they have some suggestions in hand to mitigate the impact of flooding, which they are willing to share with the new administration.

The Penal/Debe Chamber of Commerce told Guardian Media that regrettably, flooding has become a way of life in the community.

President Motilal Ramsingh explained, “The location does not help because 60 per cent of Penal/ Debe is under sea level, so that is the biggest challenge. When we face heavy floods, we usually get a double whammy because a lot of rain falls and then the tide is high. So, people here, they get flooded out, they try to take precautions and then you just try to get back to your life.”

Ramsingh is, however, calling for the stricter enforcement of laws relating to building codes, as he claimed people are developing the land without proper drainage.

“What contributes to it is the filling of the land. It’s a low-lying area so when you fill it up, the water gets displaced and it has to go somewhere else, and that is basically the problem here. You cannot get away from it. Over the years the lagoons collected the water, people started to fill it and develop and that displaced the water.”

Ramsingh is also suggesting water containment areas to be built on state lands.

“The southern range, we need to have some sort of containment area. And we are saying that there is a lot of state land where large ponds can be developed there that could assist in storing that water and releasing it on a slower basis.”

Meanwhile, the Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce (CCIC) will be seeking a meeting with the relevant ministries in early June to discuss its concerns with flooding.

CCIC president Baldath Maharaj explained, “Apart from Endeavour, we have close to the Chaguanas Police Station, you tend to have a lot of flash flooding. In Derrick Road and Orange Field, in that area there is a backup of the river. We did not see too much rain over the weekend, but the rain has started.”

Maharaj said he will also be raising issues with the Honda River.

“That river comes from Caparo and it flows under the Solomon Hochoy Highway, the last government did clear it a year ago, but we are starting to see a build-up again and we did not see much clearing during the dry season.”

And while flash flooding is a major issue in the capital, Downtown Owners and Merchants Association (DOMA) president Gregory Aboud believes other parts of the country may deserve more attention at this time.

Aboud told Guardian Media, “We do have that problem of protecting the city and the tens of thousands of people who live around Port-of-Spain from the overflow of the East Dry River and the Maraval River when too much debris comes down the river and gets stuck under the various bridges. That is a problem that needs attention, but I would want to admit that there are other areas of the country, low-lying areas of the country, that suffer far worse than Port-of-Spain, and we don’t want to call for too much attention just yet until we feel that other areas which are more badly affected will be addressed.”

Aboud said it would be unrealistic to expect the new administration to have any impact on flooding just yet.

“But we do feel that from the point of view of infrastructure, and from the point of view of quality of life for the citizens, that this is a massive issue that has not received the attention that it deserves,” he said.

The DOMA president lamented that the previous administration was “impervious” to the association’s opinions and advice on the matter.

“We are hoping now that there will be more reception to the ideas that come from the persons who experience all of these difficulties, that their ideas will be taken on board a little bit more readily than in the past.”