

Businessmen blame new ministry for delay in clearing containers at Port

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Some business owners are raising concerns over mounting costs and prolonged delays, as containers consigned to a non-gazetted Government ministry remain stuck at the Port of Port-of-Spain.

Port sources said containers addressed to the Ministry of National Security remain stranded, unable to clear Customs, following the ministry's recent rebranding as the Ministry of Homeland Security, a name that had not yet been officially gazetted up to yesterday.

The delay in publishing the new ministry in the Gazette, the Government's legal journal, has rendered the Ministry of Homeland Security effectively invisible in the eyes of Customs systems and legal frameworks.

As a result, containers addressed to the former Ministry of National Security cannot be reassigned or cleared under the new name.

"The system simply doesn't recognise them," one customs officer noted.

"Without gazetting, it's like the ministry doesn't exist in the eyes of the law," said port and Customs sources.

A business owner, importing goods on behalf of the ministry or involved in its supply chain, said they are now paying thousands in port fees. With daily storage charges averaging \$300 to \$600 per container, the owner, who asked not to be named, said other companies are affected and have reported losses exceeding \$25,000 per shipment.

Coordinator of the Confederation of Regional Business Chambers Jai Leladharsingh has issued a public appeal for clarity and urgent action from Government agencies, especially in light of the recent political transition.

"I know that the new UNC and Coalition of Interests Government is currently transitioning and getting on with the work of the state," Leladharsingh said.

"What I would advise businesses that have containers at the port is to contact the Ministry of Defence."

He added that based on his understanding, Immigration and Customs now fall under the purview of Defence Minister Wayne Sturge.

He also appealed to the Customs and Excise Division to consider waiving demurrage and storage fees accrued since the April 28 General Election.

"These businesspeople need some relief. Now that they understand where Customs is located, the processes and procedures can take place seamlessly."

He emphasised that while the political transition is understandable, it should not come at the expense of struggling business owners, many of whom are already grappling with inflation, shipping delays, and economic uncertainty.

Also contacted, TT Chamber president and CEO Vashti Guyadeen said the Chamber had not received any concerns from its members on the issue.