

# Goods still backlogged on ports, business group complains



A container truck arrives at the port of Port-of-Spain. PHOTO BY ROGER JACOB

President of the Chaguana Chamber of Commerce, Baldath Maharaj, says while the ASYCUDA system is functional, there remains a backlog of goods at the ports that continues to frustrate business operations.

Calling for a more efficient system to be put in place, Maharaj told Guardian Media yesterday that chamber members as well as their brokers have reported that once customs entries are screened, it still takes an additional three to five days to secure a bay for the examination of containers.

He added that requests for container inspections at business premises are also delayed by three to four days after the application is submitted.

“These delays are primarily the result of the Comptroller’s current directive mandating 100 per cent physical examination of containers entering the CES (Container Examination Station). This includes bulk items such as cooking oil and bags of rice, goods that would not typically require intensive scrutiny,” he explained.

Maharaj said while the need for national security and proper customs oversight are supported, the chamber believes there must be a more balanced approach.

He said the current system is causing severe backlogs, increasing operational costs and significantly disrupting the supply chains of small and medium-sized businesses across the country.

Maharaj noted that two weeks a group of chamber heads and stakeholders met to discuss this growing concern, adding, "We are unified in our position that urgent intervention is needed to restore efficiency to the port system without compromising national security."

He said the Chaguanas Chamber remains committed to engaging with the Customs and Excise Division, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and other relevant stakeholders as the goal is to find practical, sustainable solutions that uphold both compliance and economic continuity.

"We will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide updates to the business community as developments occur," he added.

One businessman told Guardian Media that delays at the port are an "aged old problem" but hoped that with the advent of updated technology systems there would be more efficiency and that inspections would be done quicker.

When the ASYCUDA system was disrupted on June 30 following a water leak at the Customs House, Government Campus Plaza, Port of Spain, the T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce said this highlighted the need for improved infrastructure redundancy and business continuity planning within the Customs and Excise Division and across all critical Government services.

The chamber had recommended that authorities invest in backup systems and contingency protocols to maintain operational continuity or ensure swift restoration if primary infrastructure is affected.

It stated that enhancing the resilience of customs infrastructure is necessary to protect the national economy from future disruptions.