

DOMA president:

Port impasse costs businessmen millions in demurrage charges

✉ **Sherlan Ramsubhag**

THE port impasse over the past few weeks has cost businessmen millions of US dollars in demurrage charges.

So said the Downtown Owners and Merchants Association (DOMA) President Gregory Aboud yesterday in a phone interview with the *Express*.

Over the course of the past few weeks, workers at the Port of Port of Spain had abandoned duties to protest for an increase in wages which were among other agreements made with them in 2015 by the then People's Partnership government.

A shut down at the port on Monday propelled the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (PATT) and the Ministry of Works and Transport to seek an injunction from the Industrial Court which was granted on Tuesday.

Aboud said as far as the association was aware, port operations were beginning to normalise but it expects that it will take some time to clear backlogs, catch up with deliveries of local cargo and loading of export cargo.

He said, 'We know that there have been some lingering effects and there has been some impact on export containers being left behind in Trinidad because the vessels bypassed the Trinidad port in the last five or six days and we are waiting on those vessels to return probably next week.'

He added, 'There were reports coming in of millions of dollars in demurrage charges having been paid to the shipping lines for the delay in clearance of the cargo which was stuck on the port. In this case it is a rather unfortunate side effect because all of the demurrage has to be paid in US dollars and these costs were avoidable and unnecessary.' He also said that the association was grateful that the matter was being addressed and that the port was operational.

'We wish to express our hope that both parties involved in this matter will sit together and arrive at an amicable solution that serves the needs of all involved,' he said.

He added that 'Communication is an important strategy for resolution and healing. And we hope that constant communication will take place and that the parties will stop talking to each other in the media and meet face to face to discuss their differences.'