

Govt secures cargo barge for inter-island service



The Blue Wave Harmony docked at the Port-of-Spain ferry terminal on Tuesday. PHOTO BY ROGER JACOB

Chief Secretary Farley Augustine says a barge has been secured to move cargo to Tobago as an interim measure while repair work on the MV Blue Wave Harmony continues.

Speaking at the post-Executive Council Media Briefing yesterday, Augustine said the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago has engaged a 67-metre barge for a ten-day period, starting tomorrow, to transport cargo that cannot be carried on the passenger vessels. The barge will move loads over 7,000 kilogrammes, including dangerous cargo, livestock and bulk items, using an appointment-based booking system, and can accommodate about 30 trucks at a time, he said.

Augustine confirmed that final welding works to repair hull damage on the Blue Wave Harmony began on Wednesday and are expected to take four full

days. He said another inspection will follow, with NIDCO projecting the vessel's return to full service by Wednesday next week.

Addressing criticism over the disruption, Augustine said the incident could not have been prevented.

"There is literally nothing anyone in the Tobago House of Assembly or in the Ministry could have done to prevent what happened from happening," he said.

"I don't know if, as Chief Secretary, I could stop strong winds or stop the sea from misbehaving. Those are not powers I have."

He confirmed there are longterm plans to upgrade and expand the Port of Scarborough to improve safety and capacity but cautioned that even modernised infrastructure would not eliminate all risks.

"Nothing human beings build will ever be beyond destruction. Certainly, we can't outbuild and outperform nature itself," Augustine said, adding that climate change increases the risk to coastal infrastructure.

Opposition MP Marvin Gonzales, speaking earlier at a People's National Movement media conference, criticised the Government's handling of the seabridge, accusing government officials and critics of silence amid the current disruption.

"There's a breakdown of the seabridge in this country. Who's swimming from Tobago to Trinidad now? Where is Farley? Where is my good friend Diane Hadad? Why is the deafening silence?" Gonzales said.

He argued that the Government has offered little beyond reassurance to Tobagonians affected by the disruption.

"What we are hearing now are just assurances—stand by, wait, have patience. That is what Farley Augustine is telling the people," Gonzales said.

Gonzales claimed the fallout has already had serious economic consequences.

"The construction sector has ground to a halt in Tobago. Life has come to a standstill," he said.

He also called on the Government to provide an update on a previously issued request for proposals for a new cargo ferry.