

■ Tancoo to present mid-year review today...

## T&T deficit set to rise to \$8.7 billion

### PORT OF SPAIN

■ Ria Taitt

Political Editor

THE \$5.6 billion deficit is expected to rise to \$8.7 billion unless the Government can find new sources of revenue in this fiscal year.

When Finance Minister Davendranath Tancoo presents the midyear review today at 1.30 p.m. in the House of Representatives, at the Red House, Port of Spain, the country will know the answer to this question.

When former finance minister Colm Imbert presented the 2025 national budget last September, he projected a \$5.6 billion deficit in his \$59.7 billion fiscal package.

The documents presented at the Standing Finance Committee meeting on Monday by Tancoo indicate the minister plans to increase this appropriation by \$3.1 billion to \$62.8 billion in the remaining three months of this fiscal year and corresponding to the deficit from \$5.6 billion to \$8.7 billion.

The Standing Finance Committee on Monday night approved the supplementation of \$3.1 billion, with the largest share going to the Ministry of Health (\$728.5 billion); Public Utilities (\$489.4 million), Education (\$455.1 million); Public Utilities (\$325.8 million); Works and Infrastructure (\$325.2 million) and the Office of the Prime Minister (\$128.4 million).

The Finance Minister is expected to deliver a statement in which he will underline the state of the economy, as well as the status of the Trinidad and Tobago Treasury.

He is expected to indicate whether the oil and gas price projections given last September have held up or if there is need for an adjustment.

Tancoo is also expected to provide a full account of what has transpired over the last year as well as previous years under the PNM government. He has already said that the PNM 'crashed' the economy.

While the minister has the prerogative of announcing new measures, it is more likely he would choose to steady the economic ship as it heads towards the 2026 budget, which must be presented by September 30.

Based on what has been revealed at the Standing Finance Committee, the minister is making sure the operational costs of running the various ministries and Government departments are met.

Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has said the mid-year review will assist the Government in managing the country up to the end of the fiscal year and before the 2026 budget.

For example, the \$489.4 million increase in the Ministry of Public Utilities is to meet recurrent expenditure for the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (\$9,470,000) and the Water and Sewerage Authority (\$480,000,000).

The breakdown is as follows-\$ 184 million for Salaries and COLA; \$24 million for overtime for the daily rated and monthly paid; \$24 million for Government's contribution to NIS; \$8 million for allowances for daily rated workers; and \$227.8 for contract employment.

In explaining the situation at his ministry, Public Utilities Minister Barry Padarath said for too long the public utility sector had been burdened by inefficiency and a lack of coherent strategic direction.

'Our citizens have experienced the consequences of dry taps even in the rainy season, unreliable telecommunication and postal services and customer service. It frustrates more than it helps. The system doesn't require adjustment.

It requires evolution,' he said.

Padarath said that over the past month, in particular, the Ministry of Public Utilities had initiated a process of realigning its agencies with the Government's priority and the evolving needs of the population.

'Strategic services, reviews, and consultation with stakeholders are under way. We are acting decisively but responsibly to set this sector on a path towards lasting reform. We recognise that the population deserves public utilities that are reliable, modern and equitable, and the Ministry of Public Utilities, in keeping with this Government's mandate, is committed to making that a reality,' Padarath said.

He said that in the short space of time the United National Congress (UNC) has been in office, there have been changes with respect to the greater responsiveness from agencies like WASA, TSTT, T& TEC, TPOST and soon to come CEPEP, in terms of delivering to the people of T& T.

'And that is the mandate upon which we came in to fix the problems, but also to highlight the ten years of waste and mismanagement and massive corruption that is being unearthed in many of the State enterprises under the tenure of our friends opposite,' he said.