

## Economists urge Govt to reveal finance plans

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MINISTER of Finance Davendranath Tancoo's Independence statement sets the tone for what the country can expect in the near future, a leading economist has stated.

Tancoo on Sunday urged citizens to remain resilient in the face of ongoing economic challenges.

Tancoo assured the nation that the Government remains firmly committed to promoting economic growth and strengthening social stability.

The Finance Minister emphasised that the country's future progress would require 'clear goals, tough decisions, focused effort, and unwavering resolve'.

He added that with the solidarity of the nation's citizens, the Government is confident in its ability to make meaningful strides toward a more secure and prosperous future.

In his message to the nation, Tancoo stated that 'nothing happens overnight' as 'the progress we pursue requires clear goals, tough decisions, focused effort and unwavering resolve'.

Economist Dr Indera Sagewan yesterday described Tancoo's message as 'reasoned and honest', noting that it sets a constructive tone for public expectations moving forward.

'I certainly believe that the Minister of Finance's statement on Independence Day sets the tone in a very reasoned manner for what we are to expect,' said Sagewan during a phone interview. 'I'm optimistic that it will be well received. For some time, people have been going along not knowing what's going on. The minister is openly stating where the economy stands and while this isn't new information, it's heartening to hear him speak candidly with the nation. That kind of honesty is crucial for moving forward.'

Sagewan supported Tancoo's assertion that there is no 'quick fix' to the country's economic situation.

'This statement should serve as a reference point as we await the national budget. It signals what the Government may outline over the coming year to stabilise and reposition the economy toward sustainable development,' she said.

She acknowledged signs of progress, particularly in the energy sector, citing the ExxonMobil initiative and oil exploration activities as indicators that the Government is accelerating efforts to maintain the viability of traditional energy resources.

However, she called for more clarity on economic diversification efforts beyond energy.

'Citizens need to hear a more cohesive and consolidated approach when it comes to non-energy sectors,' she added. Sagewan commended the Government's transparency so far, noting that its openness has generally been received positively by the public.

'While I believe the public will accept this statement for what it is—the truth—it also sets a benchmark. Having been brave enough to be candid, the Minister has now invited the public to hold him accountable moving forward. That, in itself, speaks volumes,' she stated.

She also suggested that the statement may help temper unrealistic demands from some segments of the population.

'There were campaign promises made, and now that the former Opposition is in government, they have a clearer picture of the country's economic reality. This should serve as the foundation for the policies and programmes they present in the future,' Sagewan said.

### What are the changes?

Former minister in the Ministry of Finance Mariano Browne told the *Express* that Tancoo needed to make a clear statement of what difficulties the country was facing, and what were the proposed solutions and measures to ensure the country could get through these difficulties.

Browne said yesterday, 'I see his statement as a request for patience through the difficulties; a quest for support and patience, but these challenges are yet to be defined and how are we going to address it.'

He asked what were the changes that were going to be implemented, and what were the plans to tackle these.

'To put it nicely, I think the country understands that there are challenges but what are the changes that are going to be made? To be more specific, the Government says there will be no increases to water rates but we know that a substantial amount of expenditure has to be made on WASA to make it viable. We can't make it viable without increasing the revenue, which is low because the rates are low. T&TEC is exactly the same problem. T&TEC can't pay for the gas that it gets from the NGC (National Gas Company) because they are not full recovery rates. Nobody wants these to change. We know that foreign exchange is scarce but we have declining earnings. All the unions want more and expect to be paid higher increments, but the country is in deficit so where is it going to come from?' asked Browne.

'These are the challenges I understand them to be, and the Government's difficulties. But these have already made statements without identifying the measures that are going to allow us to afford these statements. These are the realities. We have 'X' amount of resources and the demands are greater than the resources that are available. So something has to get cut. Would it be the promises, or the expectations? They cannot all work together,' he said.

Browne added, 'Asking for patience and understanding through the trials and tribulations are fine, but it is empty statement. Tell us what is it you plan to do.'