

Worry over SoE fallout

'Foreign investment may be affected'

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LAST week, the state of emergency (SoE) was extended for three months following its declaration on December 31, 2024. While the crime-fighting aspect is understood, strategic security consultant Garvin Heerah believes one of the glaring economic consequences is the loss of business and investment opportunities.

He said this consequence is clear following a release from the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce last week which stated that the Chamber noticed newer investors have become hesitant to work in T& T.

The Chamber stated, 'Those investors who are more familiar with navigating such environments are more observant of the situation but remain open to opportunities while undertaking their due diligence. However, for those newer investors, there has been noticeable hesitation.'

Heerah explained that a reason for this development is that SoEs 'often signal instability to the international community'.

'One of the most glaring economic consequences is the loss of business and investment opportunities. As SoEs often signal instability to the international community, investors may delay or withdraw plans, adversely impacting foreign direct investment. Locally, businesses-especially in sectors like retail, entertainment, and tourism-experience reduced activity and revenue due to restricted operating hours and a subdued economic climate,' said Heerah in a telephone interview with the *Express*.

He added the official cost of an SoE, though, is multifaceted as additional manpower and human resource costs are incurred given law enforcement, military, and supporting personnel work extended hours with increased operational demands.

'This includes overtime, allowances, and deployment of reserve forces. Equipment and resource allocation-ranging from vehicles, drones, and surveillance tools to protective gear-also sees a sharp rise to support heightened security measures. Furthermore, logistical and operational costs, including transportation, communication, and sustenance for deployed teams, strain the already limited budget,' he said. Heerah added that the incarceration of additional people during an SoE also burdens the correctional system. From housing detainees to ensuring legal processes are followed, this requires increased expenditure, he said.

Cost to the economy

Asked about people suing the State for being arrested during the SoE with limited evidence, he said this is something the authorities would be exploring under the strategic intent known as predictive costs or forecasting.

His comment was in reference to the 2011 SoE, under the UNC administration, whereby dozens of people were arrested and held for a period of time under the Anti-Gang Act. However, they were released since most were held without sufficient evidence to support the use of the bill. Under that SoE, which lasted three months, eight men were held and received a settlement of \$400,000.

Heerah believes that the cumulative effect of these factors increases budgeting for national security and diverts funds from other essential developmental projects such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Delays and incomplete projects in these areas result, further compounding the economic strain on the nation, he stressed. 'While the objective of an SoE is to restore safety and order, the cost to the economy must be critically analysed and carefully managed. To mitigate these challenges, a comprehensive strategy is needed. This includes employing predictive intelligence for pre-emptive action, ensuring efficient resource allocation, and promoting transparent communication with citizens and stakeholders. A balanced approach to security and economic stability is imperative to ensure that the sacrifices made today do not disproportionately compromise the nation's future development,' Heerah explained.

He added that the leadership of T& T must prioritise not only the resolution of the immediate security threats but also the longterm economic recovery, ensuring that the implementation of an SoE is a transformative step toward a safer and more prosperous nation.

Criminologist and coordinator of the Criminology Unit at The University of the West Indies, Dr Randy Seepersad, believes that the cost may not be exorbitant unless the Ministry of National Security deploys additional resources.

'It'll be more of a case of using the same resources that you have but using it a little bit differently at probably minimal to no additional cost,' he said.

Seepersad added, however, that T& T under the SoE will disrupt the international image and hamper international investments.

'That is something that is really going to discourage foreign investors, but not only that, it's probably going to push out local business people who could leave as well because many commentators, including myself, will say that an SoE really isn't a solution to the crime problem,' he said.

He also believes that the SoE could be seen as an 'act of desperation' and does not tackle the issue at its core.

STATE OF EMERGENCY DAY 22



STRATEGIC SECURITY CONSULTANT: Garvin Heerah