

Bidaisee new UDeCOTT chair

■ Joel Julien

ATTORNEY Shankar Bidaisee has been appointed chairman of the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT), the State agency responsible for overseeing major infrastructure projects in the country.

Bidaisee previously served on UDeCOTT's board from 2010 to 2015, during a period when the current Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Jearlean John, was the agency's chair.

'UDeCOTT is poised to play a pivotal role in the country's infrastructural development and can be a powerful force for transformation as Trinidad and Tobago pivots toward economic diversification. I encourage the board to remain resolute and people-focused in the delivery of results that reflect UDeCOTT's guiding principle: 'Signed. Sealed. Delivered,' John stated during the official presentation of the instruments of appointment yesterday.

In an interview with the *Express* yesterday, Bidaisee said the newly constituted board intends to uphold principles of transparency and accountability while ensuring value for money on all projects.

'This board has already hit the ground running. We intend to conduct a situational analysis of UDeCOTT in order to determine, among other things, the status of its projects, financial status, including liabilities, and compliance,' Bidaisee said.

Bidaisee succeeds Noel Garcia, who resigned last month following the United National Congress' (UNC) general election victory on April 28.

Peter Kanhai, the UNC's general secretary, has been named UDeCOTT's deputy chairman.

Other members of the board include Dr Robelto Osborne, Indira Bansee, Hema Soondarsingh, and Omkarnath Supersad-Maharaj.

In an emailed response to the *Express*, Bidaisee outlined the board's key priorities: ● to ensure all projects are up to international standards and are delivered on time and within budget, to foster fiscal discipline for the benefit of the end-users: the people of Trinidad and Tobago ● to ensure compliance with the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, including the Public Procurement and Disposal of Property Act 2015 ● to ensure strict adherence to leading practices in corporate governance and transparency and accountability for overall integrity ● to ensure the public gets value for money.

'I am grateful to the honourable Prime Minister Mrs Kamla Persad- Bissessar, SC, and honourable Minister of Works and Infrastructure Ms Jearlean John for the confidence reposed in me to deliver on the mandate of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago,' Bidaisee said.

'Let us lead in a way that makes the country proud and contributes meaningfully to Trinidad and Tobago's progress,' he said.

In March 2010, John was first appointed to the UDeCOTT board by then prime minister Patrick Manning, replacing executive chairman Calder Hart, who resigned days before the release of the damning Uff Enquiry report.

The commission of enquiry, chaired by Prof John Uff, was established by the government to enquire into the public construction sector with a special focus on UDeCOTT.

Following the People's Partnership's victory in the May 2010 general election, Persad- Bissessar reappointed John as chair of the board.

In May 2013, only three members from the previous board were retained: John, Bidaisee, and then deputy chair Glenn Parmassar.

Apart from his prior tenure on the UDeCOTT board, where he also served as secretary of its Tenders Committee, Bidaisee was junior counsel to the Clico/ Hindu Credit Union Commission of Enquiry and has served in various capacities on the board of the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2022, he was appointed to the Mediation Board, and in 2023, he joined the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago. Established in 1994, UDeCOTT is a special purpose State company tasked with managing urban development projects and facilities across Trinidad and Tobago.

Ongoing projects under UDeCOTT's purview include the Central Block of the Port of Spain General Hospital, the Elections and Boundaries Commission's new headquarters, the construction and outfitting of 15 fire stations, and the Invaders Bay development.

'The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure extends heartfelt congratulations to the newly appointed board and offers its full support as they assume responsibility for strategic oversight and leadership.

'With their collective insight and commitment, UDeCOTT is well-positioned to continue shaping a modern and resilient infrastructural landscape for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago,' the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure stated yesterday.