

Tax revenues surge over first two months of year

BUOYANT tax revenues have strengthened the Government's scope for tax giveaways in October's pre-election Budget.

The Department of Finance revealed yesterday that €6.73billion in tax was collected in the first two months of this year, a year-on-year increase of €925million.

That's a jump of 15.9 per cent. 'It's very early to start predicting what might happen in next October's Budget but a continuation of the robust Exchequer receipts will clearly provide the minister with scope to cut taxes further,' said Peter Vale, tax partner at Grant Thornton.

'Any cuts will leave more money in circulation and provide a further boost to the economy next year,' Finance Minister Michael

By **Senan Molony**
Political Editor

Noonan described the figures as 'very strong'.

He added: 'They show an economy where there is consumer confidence again.'

Total income tax receipts of €2.88billion were collected to the end of February, up €183million year-on-year.

The increase reflects the increasing numbers now at work with the bedding down of the economic recovery.

The first two months of the year saw VAT receipts of €2.36billion collected, which represents an increase of €330million or 16.2 per cent, when compared to the corresponding period last year.

Excise duties totalled €778mil-

lion to the end of February, representing a year-on-year increase of €130million, or an improvement of one-fifth in a single year.

The figures 'are a further indication of improving domestic economic conditions, with tax receipts ahead of last year and also ahead of forecast', Mr Vale said. 'February is a quiet month for VAT so the figure of most interest is income tax receipts. These continue to remain buoyant, evidence of both more people at work and higher earnings.'

With most people also paying less income tax from the start of the year, there was a higher percentage of disposable income, evidenced by increased retail spending and strong VAT receipts, he said.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

We too must bloom and shine just like the lily does

SEE how the lilies of the field grow. They neither labour nor spin, yet Solomon in all his splendour was not dressed like one of these.' With those words, Jesus Christ decreed that the lilies should become our model in life. In this time of new growth, they can teach us how to be healthy, harmonious and happy.

Despite the frost, the spring flowers are on the rise. As they break through the soil, their colours glisten in the sun. Yellow, white, violet and pink, they appear as nothing less than the handiwork of heaven.

For most, they signify the beauty of spring, the glory of a season when all things are renewed. They lift the spirit and with it the fog of winter. They are solace for the soul, healing for the heart.

The daffodil, primrose and crocus announce the dawn of this splendid season. They will not last long, but they bring great joy while they do. They sing to the spirit and reconnect us to life beyond the back door.

To our eyes, they are perfect and beautiful. They are also miraculous in as much as they are not made but found. Their beauty is not something we create, but is inherent to the flower.

That explains why they are the subject of so much great art. To paint a flower is an attempt to capture pure beauty. It is an attempt to recreate the essence of natural splendour.

This is not to say that flowers exist for their beauty alone. Their primary purpose is to enable other plants to reproduce, to pollinate and disperse seed. As such, they are vital to a healthy eco system, which is why planting them is not a luxury but a necessity.

At so many levels, the flower is a symbol of life, growth and hope. However, it also contains a lesson in how to live, one which is the centrepiece of Christianity. In choosing the lilies of the field as a model of the good life, Christ showed how nature can become our teacher.

The lily has important work to do yet it moves at a gentle pace. If it is slightly late, it does not rush to meet its deadlines. It grows and blooms in its own time and is none the worse for that.

Like all flowers, it contains within itself all the power it requires to reach fruition. The lily does not suffer burn-out, but remains always in poise. It neither labours nor spins, yet its beauty is constant.

It rises with the sun and sleeps with

the moon. It loves heat and light, but it cannot truly bloom without rain. Nothing, it seems, is repellent to the flower.

Flowers do not try to be beautiful, but not even Solomon could outdo the smallest shrub. That is because they bloom from within. There is not superficial beauty, but the sort that lies latent within the human soul.

Tender and gentle, the flower does not fret or worry, but exists only to please. Like an innocent child, it beams all day long. Even when taken from the ground, it continues to brighten and delight.

Fragrant and lovely, the spring flower gives of itself during every moment of its brief existence. It holds nothing back as it opens up to the world. And then, as its glorious petals finally begin to fade, it bows its head and dies with dignity.

Such is the great message of a flower, one from which we can learn a great deal. To watch them grow is to witness a stunning example of how we can live to the full. For that is what flowers do: they give everything to life and bloom in the process.

The simple truth is that human life can be every bit as beautiful. We, too, can bloom and shine like the lilies of the field or the spring daffodils. We, too, can live each day in harmony and happiness.

JUST as there are beautiful flowers, there are also beautiful people. However, a truly beautiful person is one whose beauty shines from within. Like the flower, such a person does not hurry or worry, but moves calmly and serenely through life.

'Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?' No-one can, which is why we should emulate the flower by always striving to live on the sunny side. To work and walk with grace, to speak gently and smile brightly, is to learn from the lily. It is to discover the beauty within and to let it pour out on all who pass.

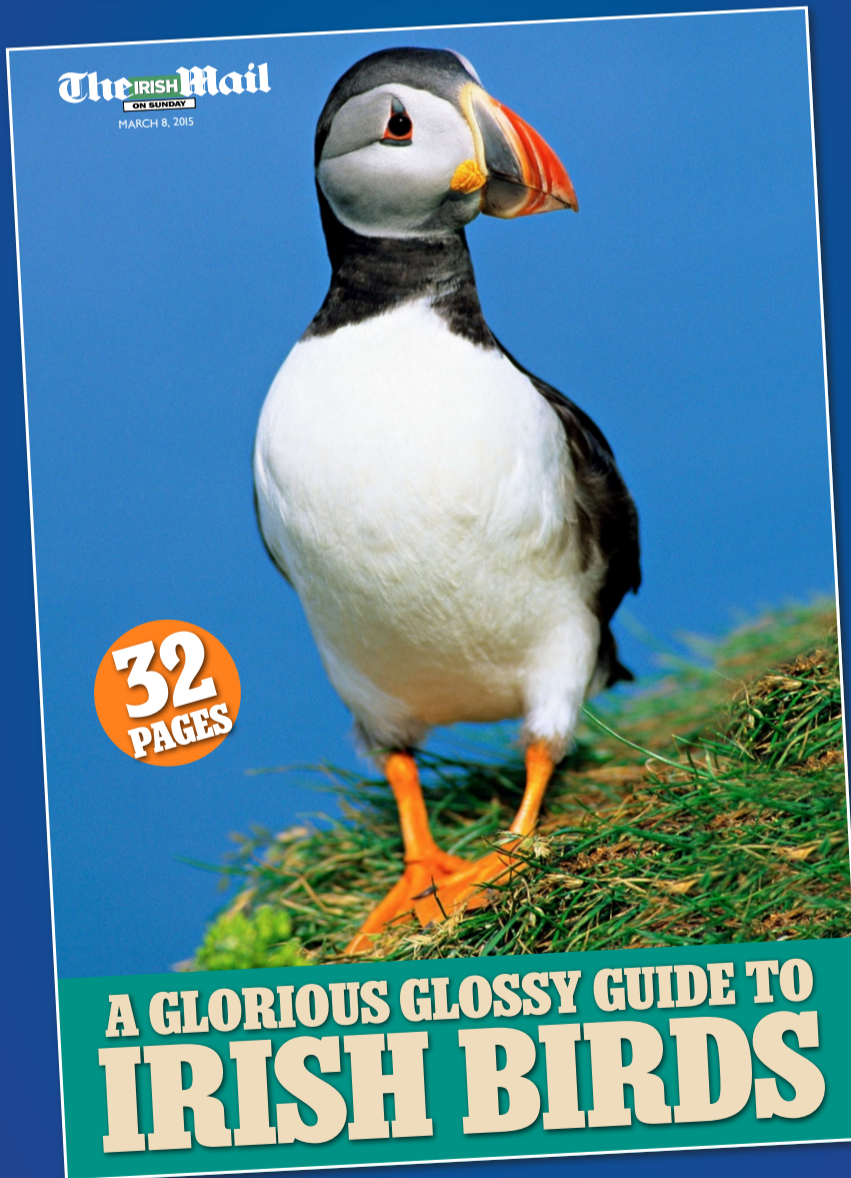
If flowers brighten up a room, it is because they never cease to shine. They give us joy because they reveal what it would be like to smile our way through life. They show us how to live without stress and yet how to live abundantly.

At the dawn of this new spring, let us look to the lilies of the field. Let us see in them, and in all our new blooms, how to live without strain or strife. In so doing, we shall discover how to work without worry and how to flourish without fail.

For that is what it means to bloom, and it is something we can do simply by revealing our inner beauty with a smile.

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