

Cabinet Approves Establishment of Independent Fiscal Council

CABINET HAS approved the establishment of an independent fiscal council as part of measures to strengthen Jamaica's Fiscal Responsibility Framework.

The move is consistent with plans by the Government to secure Jamaica's gains under successive economic reform programmes with the International Monetary Fund and build on the success of domestic partnership initiatives.

Finance and the Public Service Minister, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, said the Government has procured the services of experienced international experts who can help to develop the council's design.

The Minister was making a special presentation on 'Enhancing Fiscal Responsibility: Next Steps', at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel on May 10.

Dr. Clarke said the establishment of a fiscal council,



Finance and the Public Service Minister, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, delivers a special presentation on 'Enhancing Fiscal Responsibility: Next Steps', at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel on May 10.

which can be constructed as an enhancement of the partnership models from which Jamaica has benefited, offers several advantages.

"Fiscal councils foster greater transparency around fiscal policy by having legislated access to economic data, having sufficient analytical

capacity and by providing unbiased information to the public," he explained.

The Minister argued that it will deepen democratic accountability, as policymakers have to maintain credible policies or explain what might appear to be deviations.

The Finance Minister said the focus of the council in Jamaica will be guided by the availability of resources.

"The principal objective of an independent fiscal institution in Jamaica would be the guardian, interpreter and arbiter of Jamaica's fiscal rules. A Jamaican fiscal council could monitor the compliance with the rules and keep the public informed on economic matters according to a scheduled timetable," he noted.

Dr. Clarke added that the Government will be undertaking a consultative approach for the design of the council involving all stakeholders.

Prime Minister Emphasises Importance of Reading

PRIME MINISTER the Most Hon. Andrew Holness is imploring parents to be more involved in getting the children to hone their reading skills, as this will ensure their cognitive prowess is also developed.

"Reading is actually a learnt skill, and you have to be very involved in the development of the reading skill with your child," he said.

The Prime Minister was speaking to journalists after participating in a reading session with students of the St. Joseph's Infant School in downtown Kingston on May 8 as part of Read Across Jamaica Day.

Mr. Holness also distributed books to the students.

He lamented that parents may assume their children are able to read once they hear them speaking, but in fact, they have not developed the comprehension skills in order to understand what they are reading



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness (right) explains an aspect of a story he read to students of the St. Joseph's Infant School in downtown Kingston on May 8, as part of Read Across Jamaica Day. At left is Member of Parliament for West Kingston and Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie.

and are merely "counting words".

The Prime Minister pointed out that the active participation of parents in asking,

"what do you think this means?" or explaining to children what something they have read means, is an important part of the reading process.

Mr. Holness stressed that reading assists in building confidence from an early age and will help persons later in life.

Jamaica and US Amend Open Skies Agreement

JAMAICA AND the United States of America have revised their Open Skies Air Transport Agreement to further strengthen the aviation partnership between the two countries and deepen commercial and economic ties.

Under the amended agreement signed on May 10, the Governments will allow all cargo airlines from their respective countries to continue to third country destinations without having to return home first.

This amendment is expected to enhance business connectivity for Jamaica and the United States.

Minister of Transport and Mining, Hon. Robert Montague, in his remarks at the signing ceremony at the Ministry's Maxfield Avenue offices, noted that air services agreements smooth the progress of international and commercial air transport between territories.

He said Jamaica has signed such agreements with

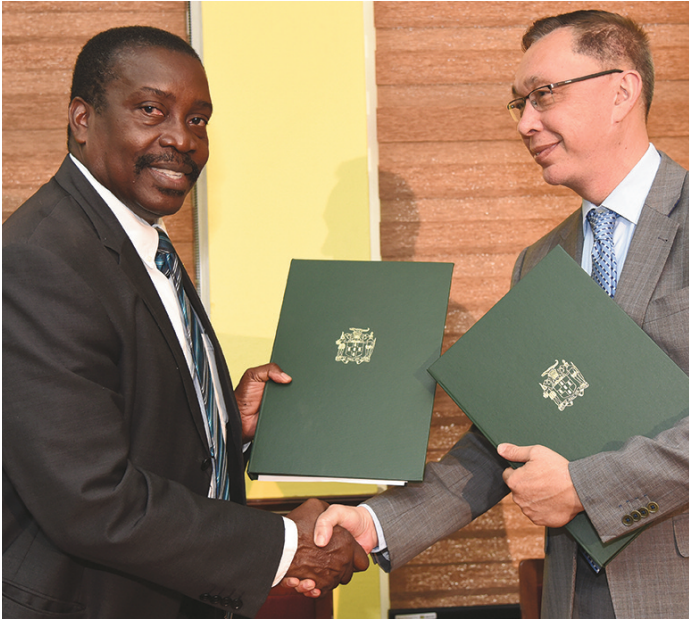
29 countries and is actively pursuing alliance with various others.

"Indeed, our desire for strengthened bilateral relationship between the United States and Jamaica is the basis for this amendment agreement today, and arose from negotiations at the 2017 International Conference on Air Services Negotiation held in Colombo, Sri Lanka," he said.

Minister Montague noted that air transport is a driver of growth, and the Government

is continuously seeking ways to increase connectivity through the Open Skies Policy.


Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of the United States, Eric Khant, who signed on behalf of his Government, said that expanding open skies agreements is a key part of the United States strategy for engagement in the Caribbean, creating an environment where greater growth-inducing commerce can take place.



Minister of Transport and Mining, Hon. Robert Montague (left), shakes hands with Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of the United States, Eric Khant, following the signing of an amended Open Skies Air Transport Agreement between the two countries at the Ministry's Maxfield Avenue offices on May 10.

Constable Davian Martin Cops 2018/19 LASCO/ JCF Police Officer of the Year Award

LASCO/Jamaica Constabulary Force 2018/19 Police Officer of the Year, Constable Davian Martin (left), accepts his trophy from National Security Minister, Hon. Dr. Horace Chang (centre), and Executive Chairman, LASCO Affiliated Companies, Lascelles Chin, at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel, on May 8.





\$1.2 Billion Injected Into National Service Corps

THE GOVERNMENT will be scaling up youth training and employment under the National Service Corps Programme (NSCP) through a massive financial injection of \$1.2 billion this financial year.

State Minister for Education, Youth and Information, Hon. Floyd Green, made the disclosure in his contribution to the 2018/19 Sectoral Debate in the House of Representatives on May 8.

"Last year, we put \$200 million into the National Service Corps programme. Because we are seeing the results, this year, it is budgeted that we will put, from the HEART Trust/NTA, \$800 million, and from the World Bank a further \$390 million into the programme," he explained.

The brainchild of Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, the NSCP aims to create an avenue for young people, aged 18 to 24, to be fully empowered through education, training and certification.

Minister Green said that of the 6,345 applications received, a total of 4,762




Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, Hon. Floyd Green

young people have been trained in core skills and work-ready behaviours required by the labour market.

Approximately 1,200 persons have been placed across 23 ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), including the: HEART Trust/NTA, Office of the Prime Minister; Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation; Ministry of Education, Youth and Information; National Land Agency; National Housing Trust; National Irrigation Commission; and the Ministry of Justice.

Housing Solutions for Tourism Workers

THE TOURISM Enhancement Fund (TEF) is to provide \$1 billion over the next five years for the provision of housing solutions for tourism workers.



Minister of Tourism, Hon. Edmund Bartlett

“This financial year, the TEF will provide \$170 million for the first phase of implementation.”

This was disclosed by Portfolio Minister, Hon. Edmund Bartlett, during his contribution to the 2018/19 Sectoral Debate in the House of Representatives on May 8.

He said that the different types of housing solutions will be provided through the Housing Agency of Jamaica (HAJ).

Through discussions with the TEF and the Housing Agency of Jamaica, a number of initiatives have been proposed, which include developing parcels of land identified for housing for tourism workers, and providing basic

infrastructure for informal settlements in which a number of tourism workers reside.

This financial year, the TEF will provide \$170 million for the first phase of implementation.

Mr. Bartlett said a survey of housing needs for tourism workers was conducted in the accommodations sector.

"When we did the research, we found that more than 88 per cent of the workers in the industry cannot even access National Housing Trust (NHT) solutions," the Minister said.