

Jamaica's Economic Performance Remains Strong

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund (IMF) has given high marks for Jamaica's performance under the Stand-By Arrangement (SBA), saying programme implementation remains strong, with public debt firmly on a downward trajectory.

In its recently released Executive Board Review, the Fund highlighted that strong programme implementation continues to anchor macro-economic stability.

"All quantitative performance criteria and structural benchmarks for end of December 2017 were met. Fiscal consolidation is ongoing; primary surplus is expected to be at least seven per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in financial year (FY) 2017/18 and a similar target is set in the FY 2018/19 Budget. Public debt is projected to be under

100 per cent of GDP by end-March 2019," the report stated.

The multilateral agency noted further that the unemployment rate is at a 10-year low, inflation and the current account are modest, international reserves are at a comfortable level, and external borrowing costs are at historical lows.

The Executive Board, in its review, pointed to the need to boost growth, which was estimated at 0.5 per cent in 2017, with the growth forecast revised down to 0.9 per cent in fiscal year 2017/2018. It was noted that weakness in agriculture, slow recovery in mining, and a deceleration in manufacturing had offset growth in tourism and construction.

The entity explained, further, that building the resilience



Head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Staff Mission Team to Jamaica, Dr. Uma Ramakrishnan

of agriculture to weather-related events, and investing in school attendance and youth training programmes will improve growth and social outcomes.

It added that continued reform implementation will not only safeguard hard-won gains but also deliver stronger growth and job creation.

More Than 500 Young Persons to be Certified Through HOPE

MORE THAN 500 young participants in the Housing, Opportunity, Production and Employment (HOPE) programme are to graduate by the end of June.

Speaking at a JIS 'Think Tank' on April 18, National Coordinator of the HOPE programme, Lt. Col. Martin Rickman, said the participants will receive certificates for having successfully completed their training and apprenticeship by the end of the second quarter of this year.

"The initial training, which is referred to as core skills training, includes a values and attitudes component, followed by basic skills training, after which they serve as



National Coordinator of the Housing, Opportunity, Production and Employment (HOPE) Programme, Lt. Col. Martin Rickman

apprentices and are paid a stipend," said Lt. Col. Rickman.

Upon completion, the candidates are assessed for

certification by HEART Trust/NTA, in accordance with the programme's guidelines.

The Coordinator further noted that certification carries dual benefits, as the person would have been certified as having served his country as well as being certified in a specific skill area.

"They can then go on to use this certification to secure gainful employment, or to start their own business ventures, if they so choose," noted Lt. Col. Rickman.

There are currently 5,000 participants in the programme, and of that number, 2,500 are actively engaged in specialised areas across various Agencies and Departments.

PM Urges UK Gov't to Quickly Address Windrush Matter

PRIME MINISTER the Most Hon. Andrew Holness has urged the United Kingdom (UK) Government to address the Windrush Generation matter.

The Prime Minister's response comes on the heels of the issue being discussed in the UK Parliament.

Despite living and working in the UK for decades, thousands of people who arrived in the country as children in the first wave of Commonwealth migration (called the Windrush Generation) were being threatened with deportation.

Many of those affected are of Jamaican and Caribbean heritage.

Speaking following a meeting with British Prime Minister Theresa May, in London on April 17, Prime Minister, Holness stressed the importance of outlining clear procedural steps that will ultimately ensure that the rights of Caribbean migrants are restored.

"It is extremely important to have procedural steps clearly outlined and widely

shared to ensure that people are aware of the requirements; that the evidentiary burden is reduced, the application process dramatically simplified and that pre-1973 Commonwealth Caribbean migrants currently detained as illegal immigrants are released," Prime Minister Holness emphasised.

He added that those who were deported are to be afforded the necessary UK assistance in having their cases urgently reviewed and their rights restored.

"We would like to encourage the UK government to use records at its disposal such as school, health, and tax records and that there be a presumption of legal residence on the part of the Windrush Generation while their cases are being reviewed," Mr Holness said.

He further commented that these individuals should continue to benefit from access to medical care, employment, and other services.



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness meets with UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, in London on April 17.

Supreme Court Gets New Courtrooms and Elevators

THE SUPREME Court, downtown Kingston, now has two additional courtrooms and two new elevators, which were provided by the Government at a cost of approximately \$35 million.

At the official handover ceremony on April 18, Minister of Justice, Hon. Delroy Chuck, said the provisions will allow the court to operate more efficiently by hearing more cases each day, thereby reducing the backlog as well as improving the turnaround time for the disposal of matters.

He said the handover comes on the heels of the signing of an \$846 million contract on April 17 that will provide for expansion of the

"It's all about improving the flow of cases through the court and also improving the delivery of justice."

Court of Appeal and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

"We are being very strategic and deliberate in the infrastructural works that we have been doing at the courts and other justice institutions. Last fiscal year alone, we spent close to \$700 million on infrastructural works, which represents (an)... increase of 250 per cent over the 2016/2017 fiscal year expenditure," Minister Chuck stated.

Chief Justice, Hon. Justice Bryan Sykes, who spoke to **JIS News**, said he was elated about the new courtrooms and the elevators.

"It's all about improving the flow of cases through the court and also improving the delivery of justice. So with more courtrooms... you should increase the rate of disposition of cases, which ultimately, over time, will translate into reduced wait time for cases," he pointed out.



Minister of Justice, Hon. Delroy Chuck (centre), hands over the keys for the two new courtrooms at the Supreme Court Building in downtown Kingston to Chief Justice, Hon. Bryan Sykes (left), on April 18. Sharing in the moment is Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice, Carol Palmer.

Grade Six Student Receives Tablet Computer



Education, Youth and Information Minister, Senator the Hon. Ruel Reid (left), presents a tablet computer to St. Cyprian's Preparatory School student, Alicia Blake (centre), who was one of seven students to sit the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) in hospital, during his visit to the institution in Highgate, St. Mary, on April 18. At right is Alicia's mother, Maria Bennett-Blake.

New Pharmacy to be Built at Linstead Hospital

RESIDENTS OF Linstead and surrounding communities in St. Catherine are to benefit from a new drug serv pharmacy to be built on the compound of the Linstead hospital.

Minister of Health, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, broke ground for the \$31 million facility on April 19.

Dr. Tufton said the new building should be completed in eight months, with more space for staff to deliver improved service.

Last year, the old pharmacy at the hospital received 30,000 visits, with over 50,000 prescriptions filled.

"There is no doubt about the value of the infrastructure to the community," Dr. Tufton told the audience.

He said the Government is making large investments in the improvement of infrastructure, as this is crucial to the delivery of quality health-care to persons who have to use the facilities.

"We have to continue to drive that process and find



Minister of Health, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton (3rd left), breaks ground for a \$31 million pharmacy at the Linstead Hospital in St. Catherine on April 19. Also taking part (from left) are Member of Parliament for North West St. Catherine, Robert Pickersgill; Parish Manager for the St. Catherine Health Services, Dr. Beverly Needham, and Chairman of the funding agency, the National Health Fund (NHF), Gregory Mair.

the resources to support it," the Minister said.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the funding agency, the National Health Fund (NHF), Gregory Mair, urged the contractor to deliver the project on time and within budget.

In February, the Government opened the expanded Accident and Emergency Department at the hospital, which was constructed at a cost of \$144 million, funded by the NHF.