The Honourable
LESTER MICHAEL HENRY CD, MP
Minister without Portfolio in the Office of the Prime Minister

Theme: ‘Now is the Time’
SECTORAL PRESENTATION 2019

HON. L. MICHAEL HENRY CD, MP
Minister without Portfolio, Office of the Prime Minister

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Mr. Speaker, in rising to report to this Honourable House on my areas of responsibility, I do so with the usual strong support and confidence of my family, including my political family in Central Clarendon.

With great pride and appreciation, I make note of the support of my dear wife, Dawn; my team of Councillors, Joel Williams, Kenneth Davis and Tanya-Lee Williams, and Councillor/Caretaker, Terrence Samuels; along with my faithful support staff led by Personal Assistant, Daphne Taylor; and Terrence Samuels, Loraine Mason and Sharon Morgan; the rest of my Constituency Executive Team and the overall support base. Collectively we strive to serve both Central Clarendon and the country at large.

My thanks also go to my support staff at the Office of the Prime Minister, from where I have the honour of serving the country.

Mr. Speaker, I also take this opportunity to thank the Most Honourable Prime Minister for his continued confidence in my ability to serve in Government at the Cabinet level, and recommit to put my best foot forward on behalf of the Government in service to the people of Jamaica.

In noting the significance of the present stage of the national political cycle, well into the fourth year of the Administration, I am happy, Mr. Speaker, to report on the work of the agencies and projects which are under my direct stewardship. This is, no doubt, of much significance, with the national focus on the successes so far, and the deliverables not too far ahead.

Indeed, it could be aptly said that ‘Now is the Time’ to have either delivered or be about to deliver in a pronounced manner on our pledges to the people of Jamaica, and I am presenting my report card today with a sense of real excitement in the air.

Jamaica Social Investment Fund

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the agencies under my stewardship, first the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF), which continues to contribute to the Government’s achievement of local and international development targets, including the outcomes of the Vision 2030 Jamaica - National Development Plan, and helping to position Jamaica to meet relevant goals for the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

JSIF’s activities are also aligned with the Medium-Term Socio-Economic Policy Framework and the priorities of the Government through strategic deployment of its resources.

The key areas in which JSIF continues work to support these goals are: Human Capacity Development, Access to Basic Services, Economic Growth, Security & Justice, Disaster Vulnerability Reduction, and Technical Assistance to Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).
Mr. Speaker, the fund currently has an active portfolio of approximately US$90 million. An analysis of the portfolio reflects a balance of approximately US$64.6 million or JA$8.4 billion to be disbursed over financial years 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 across four loan or grant portfolios. Funding agreements currently reflect the priority areas for national development, and future funding streams are also to be aligned to national goals.

The JSIF, as stated before, works within the context of the Government’s growth strategy as outlined in the PIOJ’s National Development Plan document, Medium-Term Socio-Economic Policy Framework 2018-2021. A key theme of the framework concerns improvements to National Security and Justice; as well as the GOJ’s systematic approach to crime reduction that involves targeted activities within communities that have been highly vulnerable to crime. These activities are being undertaken by several Government agencies which form part of the Community Renewal Programme, of which the JSIF is a key participant.

A related priority is improvement to economic stability, competitiveness and employment. The JSIF’s interventions include economic development projects, such as road infrastructure, tourism product development, creative industries, infrastructure and equipping for agricultural production.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the JSIF’s work focuses on the renewal of urban communities with investments in physical and environmental conditions, as well as the social capital of residents. The contribution to economic opportunities comes by way of investments in training and certification, which include temporary employment on work sites for infrastructure projects that provides hundreds of jobs to underprivileged community residents each year.

These investments in Jamaica’s labour force are also buoyed by initiatives that support the education and/or re-education of individuals from underserved communities, thereby facilitating them to access permanent employment. JSIF also provides members of poor communities across the island with access to skills development and vocational training programmes.

The JSIF’s scheduled portfolio initiatives are expected to support relevant achievements in 17 of the National Priority Areas, corresponding to six Priority National Outcomes and eight Vision 2030 Outcomes. At the international level, the JSIF is helping to position Jamaica to meet seven goals for the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Projects being undertaken with/for stakeholders and partners

Among the major projects that are now being undertaken by JSIF are the following:

A. Office of the Prime Minister (OPM): The Youth Employment in the Digital and Animation Industries Project. The project will support youth employment in the digital and animation industries, and is being implemented by the OPM.

There are three specific objectives of the project, and JSIF will be providing technical support/project expertise in relation to the third objective, a focus on building the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) framework in Jamaica.

The JSIF will therefore undertake technical support activities related to refurbishing and equipping of five community centres to support the operationalisation of youth and community centres as digital/tech centres.
B. Community Renewal Programme (CRP): The Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) co-ordinates the implementation of the CRP in 100 volatile and vulnerable communities in Kingston, St. Andrew, St. Catherine, Clarendon and St. James. JSIF is one of many agencies working in the communities through a number of project interventions involving infrastructure, training, capacity-building and social services.

Plans and Priority Programmes

Mr. Speaker, for the financial year 2019-2020, the JSIF will have under its management, a total of four portfolios from four funding sources. Of these, two are loans, that is, the Disaster Vulnerability Reduction Project (DVRP) and the Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP); and two are grants, that is, the Basic Needs Trust Ninth Programme (BNTF 9) and the Poverty Reduction Programme IV (PRP IV).

Beyond 2019, the JSIF will continue to focus on Education, Community Renewal and Security towards improving the perception of safety in vulnerable and volatile communities.

There will also be a targeted focus on assisting with reducing physical exposures and improving disaster resilience across the island.

Additionally, the island’s infrastructure for response and recovery are being strengthened through the provision of newly constructed facilities and equipment for the Jamaica Fire Brigade.

Top achievements for 2018-2019

Mr. Speaker, the JSIF’s top achievements for 2018-2019 included the following:

The projects have engaged youth at risk in communities prioritised by the national Community Renewal Programme (CRP) as follows:

1. Birth certificates were issued to 1,235 residents in vulnerable and volatile communities, enabling them to obtain identification cards, TRN and access to a range of social and other services.

2. Over 2,500 persons have been engaged and supported through employment, internships, skills training, certification and educational training.

3. Over 500 at-risk youth have been equipped with skills in non-traditional areas, such as storyboarding, fundamentals of software development, business process outsourcing, Internet income online, air-conditioning, sketching and 3D animation, with over 40 persons directly benefitting from employment opportunities.

4. Fifty-two teachers have been employed temporarily in tuition programmes targeting primary school leaving students across the 18 ICDP communities.

5. Thirty-five summer camps have been held to encourage positive education and behavioural outcomes, benefitting over 1,800 children, and employing approximately 210 persons.

6. One hundred and sixty-five community environmental wardens were employed to support proper management of solid waste and support public education and behaviour change among residents.

7. Educational attainment and outcomes have been enhanced in a number of schools.

8. Support for the Ministry of Education’s implementation of the School-Wide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) programme, including training for over 300 teachers, non-academic staff and other support personnel, aimed at enhanced learning and development of social and conflict mediation skills among at-risk youth.

9. Activities to support young persons at risk through behaviour change interventions, including life skills and creative arts, for 145 at-risk children and parents/guardians.

10. Interventions to improve Jamaica’s ability to prepare for, respond to and manage, disasters, were successfully implemented.

11. Drainage works at Church Pen were started, which will prevent flooding of the immediate community and the major Old Harbour transport corridor, affecting over 44,000 persons.

12. Solid waste management interventions have been provided to communities through resources, such as skips and garbage receptacles, to properly store and dispose of solid waste and encourage prompt and efficient solid waste removal, thus reducing vulnerability to flooding and vector-borne diseases.

Rule of Law and Timely Justice Outcomes

Mr. Speaker, JSIF has also supported critical aspects of the ‘Build’ phase in the two Zones of Special Operations (ZOSO) in Mt. Salem, St. James and Denham Town, Kingston, and in other communities where states of emergency were declared.
Social interventions were also focused on supporting overall efforts to restore the rule of law with investments in infrastructure and human capacity development in the critical and sometimes volatile peripheral communities of Ocho Rios, May Pen, Savanna-la-Mar, Montego Bay, Spanish Town and downtown Kingston.

These efforts by JSIF were among other initiatives the fund undertook in the area of justice and the rule of law.

Jamaica Information Service

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the Jamaica Information Service (JIS), the official public information and communication arm of the Government.

During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, the JIS will be guided by the Government’s five Strategic Priorities as outlined below, to plan and execute the agency’s programmes:

1. Inclusive and sustainable economic growth and job creation
2. The rule of law and timely justice outcomes
3. Debt reduction, macroeconomic stability and fiscal prudence
4. Human capital development
5. Social protection

In light of the foregoing, JIS will be embarking on programmes that will highlight the range of activities that are undertaken by each Ministry, within the context of:

- Law and order initiatives
- Social protection programmes
- Economic reform and growth
- Housing solutions and road works
- Job creation strategies
The following initiatives for the agency’s operation during the period are aligned with the Government’s Strategic Priorities:

1. Community Meetings
2. Panel Discussions
3. Quality Management System development and implementation
4. Intellectual Property Management
5. Digitisation and Digital Asset Management
6. Social Media Presence
7. Relocation of the JIS Television Department and full transition to a digital platform

Among the key policy initiatives ahead for the JIS are the following:

Community Meetings

Mr. Speaker, it is proposed to host a series of community meetings, to create an avenue for the Government to interface directly with citizens at the community level to discuss matters of local and national importance.

The forum will create opportunities for citizens to address Ministers and other Government officials as they air concerns and share ideas. It will also provide the avenue for Government to listen, offer explanations and assurance, as well as take on board ideas from the community.

These meetings will provide a platform for improved communication and better governance outcomes. The meetings will facilitate understanding between Government and its key stakeholders, the people of Jamaica, and lead to buy-in regarding existing and proposed Government projects and programmes.

Mr. Speaker, the JIS recognises the Government’s desire to talk to the people to mobilise the nation around the critical imperatives in the areas of economic reform and the growth agenda, and aims to use these meetings to increase public awareness and appreciation of the programmes being implemented. This will expand the agency’s current scope of community outreach activities on which it relies to build on-the-ground visibility of the work being done by the Government.

It should be noted that the Social Development Commission (SDC) will be asked to partner with the JIS in the communities that are chosen for the meetings.

Panel Discussions

It has been agreed that the JIS and the Public Broadcasting Corporation of Jamaica (PBCJ) will collaborate to produce a series of Panel Discussions focusing on the Government’s plans, policies and programmes. This communication tool will provide another avenue to enhance public awareness of the strategic priorities of the Government towards achieving the goal to make Jamaica the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business.
The Panel Discussions will be recorded monthly and aired on a rotation basis weekly on PBCJ, *beginning in September 2019.*

The overall subject matter will be based on topical issues in keeping with the imperatives of Government ministries.

**Summary of other strategic initiatives**

**Quality Management System - International Standardisation Organisation (ISO)**

The JIS is currently on a path to achieving certification in ISO 9001:2015 this year. The ISO Certification project is part of the Strategic Public Sector Transformation Project of the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service. The objective is to raise the quality of public service across the Jamaican public sector with an emphasis on executive agencies. It will mean deep transformation of our culture and systems, as assessment of our quality of service is monitored by a third party certification body, and transforms everyone into an ‘auditor’. The project is scheduled to end in January 2020.

**One of the requirements is to integrate Quality Management (QM) Principles into the agency’s daily activities, and provide the foundation to enhance performance.** The Quality Management System Manual that has been developed outlines the QM elements and commitment to:

1. Customer Focus
2. Leadership
3. Communications and Engagement of our people
4. Process Approach
5. Improvement
6. Risk and Opportunity as well as evidence-based decision making
7. Relationship Management

The certification project is being spearheaded by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries (MICAF).

i. Intellectual Property Management

**Mr. Speaker,** JIS has operationalised a programme to manage the agency’s intellectual property (IP). This follows the development of an IP Policy Manual, which directs the agency on the management and protection of its assets by providing procedural guidance. The development and implementation of the policy forms part of the agency’s modernisation thrust as we align the deployment of cutting-edge equipment and technologies with globally-relevant management systems and tools.

The treatment and management of IP has become a critical component of the agency’s functions. There has been an increasing demand for JIS content for use locally and internationally by creative and media enterprises, for websites, social media, as well as derivative productions, such as documentaries. JIS information is also used for teaching and instruction.
An Intellectual Property Management Committee (IPMC) has been formed, and is responsible for the administration of this policy, and for its periodic review and revision.

ii. Digitisation and Digital Asset Management

Mr. Speaker, the programme to convert the contents of JIS archives to digital format is in full operation. This follows the award of a grant in the sum of $28.78 million. The digitisation of content in the photo, television, radio and research and publications archives will set the stage for an integrated approach to transitioning from analogue to digital operations.

iii. Social Media Platform Presence

JIS continues to expand its social media footprint on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, increasing engagement with the younger demographic. The Studio 58A Facebook live interview programme, for example, is an increasingly popular communication tool which allows the agency to receive immediate feedback from the public.

iv. Relocation of Television Department and Full Transition to a Digital Platform

Mr. Speaker, the Television Department of the JIS has been relocated from Arnold Road to South Odeon Avenue. The move was successfully completed within one week. The relocation will facilitate full transition to digital operations, integrating the Digitisation and Digital Asset Management Project that is currently under way. Overall, the impending changes are expected to produce greater efficiencies in production and also drive revenue.

The relocation was financed through capital allocations from the Ministry of Finance, and has involved a full renovation of Building #2 on the property, and the construction of a state-of-the-art television and production studio. The renovation project was managed by the National Works Agency (NWA).

Registrar General’s Department
Mr. Speaker, in relation to the Registrar General’s Department, it should be noted that the agency which presently captures approximately 98 per cent of births nationally, is seeking to digitise its business processes. A key step in that direction is to implement an image management system, one that provides digital images of the record, which can be viewed and used in various other forms.

The software supporting the system is web-based, and it is the means by which images are scanned and indexed, and documents used to populate the agency’s electronic database.

While it is currently in use to a limited extent, the plan is to expand the same to encompass the over seven million manual records now in existence at the RGD, which are to be linked to the digitisation process.

This will result in greater efficiency in satisfying our customers, bolster the security checking features in relation to the records, and reduce storage costs in the long-run.

Also, to improve the services of the agency, Mr. Speaker, a complaints management system has been implemented in the call centre. This system tracks complaints with a view to identifying weaknesses which can be eliminated and/or improved. It is a way of receiving feedback from customers, and a necessary tool which assists in devising actions to achieve improvement. The upgrade of this system has been completed and will be re-launched by September 2019.

Another major initiative on the horizon for the RGD is the Electronic Production System. This will involve the evolution of the current Birth, Death and Marriage System (BDMS). The BDMS currently processes customer applications to produce printed certificates.

The current system will be modified to include image management, eliminating the need for the physical vital records when processing applications. The record will no longer be required to leave the vault, and the verification of information keyed will be by way of the ‘Type on Top’ methodology. A prototype is being worked on, and the applicable documentation is being prepared for the agency’s approval.

The initiative will enable the production process to move from manual to more digital, which will positively impact the production turnaround time.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to reduce the risk of loss of data, the RGD plans to create a secondary data site for disaster recovery. Not only will this prevent loss of data in a disaster, but it will also ensure that there is business continuity in the event of such a disaster occurring.

In support of the Government’s Strategic priorities, the RGD has systematically developed three core initiatives in alignment with the 2019-2020 objectives. These are noted below:

1. Facilitation of the digitising of the records

Mr. Speaker, the funding to digitise the RGD’s records is being facilitated by the NIDS project. By so doing, the RGD’s mandate of producing timely, accurate and vital data to respond to its customers’ requests for certified copies of registration, will be more efficient, timely and cost-effective.

2) Registration of undocumented Jamaicans island-wide
Mr. Speaker, the RGD, in collaboration with the NIDS project, has partnered to provide certified copies of birth certificates for undocumented Jamaicans.

It should also be noted that there still exist members of our population who were never registered and/or only partially registered (partially registered means the registration does not have the full name).

It is believed that most of these individuals were born before the introduction of bedside registration. When registration of these individuals is completed, a certified copy of a birth certificate will be issued.

2. Improving the quality of death registration through partnerships

Mr. Speaker, in a death validation study done for deaths occurring in 2008, the RGD’s database was found to have only captured approximately 76 per cent of the total number of persons dying. The shortfall was shown to be mainly due to delays and non-reporting of sudden and violent deaths to the Coroners’ Courts, and the consequent delays or non-production of the certification needed for the RGD to register these deaths. These challenges are being addressed, as the RGD, with consultants, is now working on re-engineering the process to improve the capture of this vital data.

The CHASE Fund

Mr. Speaker, the CHASE Fund has been busy supporting a wide array of public social needs across the country over the 2018-2019 financial year. These included funding a cancer treatment centre of excellence at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Kingston after a similar effort at the Cornwall Regional Hospital back in 2017, at a combined cost of US$16 million, of which the National Health Fund (NHF) contributed US$10 million, CHASE Fund US$5 million, and the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF), US$1 million.

Notably, those are the only two cancer treatment centres in the public health sector to offer a number of critical cancer treatment services.

It is expected that the centres will improve capacity, efficiency, access to and delivery of healthcare; benefit more patients, and reduce the waiting time for treatment.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with its holistic approach to development, CHASE provided funding to train four biomedical engineers, two medical radiation physicists and four radiation oncologists to work at the centres. The fund has also committed financing towards the Ministry of Health’s Oncology nurses’ training programme for the next five years.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, almost $400 million was provided to other health-related initiatives and facilities, including the Health Ministry and four hospitals, Jamaica Moves and the country’s vector control programme.

Further, there were some welcomed support of smaller facilities, including the provision of 13 standby generators for infirmaries.

In the area of arts and culture, $30 million was spent on the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission’s (JCDC) programme of activities over the 2018-2019 fiscal year. Another combined sum of almost $100 million was directed to support community and cultural facilities and initiatives.
In education, Mr. Speaker, a combination of schools and programmes benefitted from the CHASE Fund’s provision of almost $260 million over the operating year. These included provision of funding in support of early childhood education certification.

By way of priority programmes, funding to the tune of $64 million was approved for the establishment of a fully equipped cardiac unit at the Kingston Public Hospital. The project was approved in 2017-2018 and completed in 2019-2020.

With cardiovascular disease (CVD) now the leading cause of death and disability in Jamaica, the project is geared at acquiring critical pieces of equipment to establish the unit. Of note is that the cardiology unit will be the only one in the public health system in the southeast region, and will benefit a population of approximately 1.3 million.

Funding of $57 million has also been approved for the establishment of a 16-bed high-dependency unit (HDU) at the Kingston Public Hospital. The HDU will offer specialist nursing care and monitoring to seriously ill patients who require greater care than is available on a general ward, but less support than is given to patients in the Intensive Care Unit, and will decrease the pressure on the current ICU and Recovery Room.

Also, Mr. Speaker, with the increasing problem of hospitals having to accommodate discharged patients by utilising critical bed spaces, and the infirmaries either at capacity or overcrowded, there is dire need to relocate these social patients by expanding the current infirmaries to accommodate these institutional cases. Consideration is being given for the parish of Westmoreland to be selected as the priority parish in this regard, with a proposed new building to be constructed on the property of the Westmoreland Infirmary at a cost of $50 million. Similar expansions are proposed to be done at the Clarendon, St. Thomas and Portland infirmaries.

Mr. Speaker, with chronic kidney disease (CKD) now a significant national health problem and its prevalence increasing annually, and more demand for treatment by dialysis and kidney transplantation, and only one third of patients now receiving treatment in the public hospitals and private units island-wide, CHASE has embarked on a three-pronged approach to tackling the problem, including: prevention response, treatment response and the establishment of a data registry and research apparatus to address the challenges. As part of the initiative, the current dialysis facilities are to receive new machines, and the medium to long-term plan is for a new dialysis centre to be constructed in each of the four regional health authorities.

In education going forward, funding has been approved for the demolition of two sets of defective and termite-infested school buildings in Manchester and Clarendon, and there has been approval for the supply and installation of smart-teaching equipment for infant schools and departments across the country.
Funding has also been approved to install water harvesting and sanitation systems in five schools to prevent the spread of disease and other public health concerns. The schools are located in communities that lack access to reliable water supply, and are still using pit latrines.

The project includes the upgrading/construction of toilet facilities, installation of rain water harvesting tanks, and installation of gutters. Over 1,000 students are slated to benefit from improved health and hygiene.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of arts and culture in terms of the 2019-2020 financial year, a number of initiatives are to be supported by the CHASE Fund.

Jamaica-Gansu Industrial Park

Mr. Speaker, I now turn my attention to the Jamaica-Gansu Industrial Park (JGIP) project which was started with a non-binding agreement in September 2017 in Jiayuguan, China after the second Belt and Road Forum. This was followed by a Framework Agreement between the Government of Gansu Province and the Government of Jamaica. The Agreement was signed at Jamaica House by the Vice Governor of the Ganzu Province and the Honourable Dr. Horace Chang and myself.

The Vision of the JGIP is of an expansive Special Economic Zone, supported by the production of the Alpart refinery, supplying manufacturers with aluminium sheet and plate for manufacturing of end-products such as aluminium foil and aluminium sidings and roofing sheets for buildings and intermediary products such as extrusions for casings of refrigerators, washing machines and microwaves.

In May 2018, the first Joint Planning Meeting was held in China.
In September 2018, the second Joint Planning Meeting was held at the Third International Conference in Dunhuang, China, and was followed by a visit to Jamaica by Chairman Chen Chungming in February 2019.

The ground-breaking for the JGIP was originally scheduled for the first quarter of 2019, by which time the initial programme of rehabilitation and upgrading of the existing power plant and refinery at Alpart was expected to have been completed.

Mr. Speaker, the expanded rehabilitation and upgrading programme was started in 2018, and is now targeted for completion of stage one by the end of 2019 to the first quarter of 2020. This will result in production moving from the current level of 800,000 tonnes of alumina per annum, to a projected two million tonnes of alumina per year, providing critical raw material input for potential occupants of the Industrial Park.

Mr. Speaker, the unanticipated condition of the plant and the unreliable production to date, combined with a significant overall fall in alumina prices over the last two years, from a crisis high of US$700 per tonne, to the current level of below US$400 per tonne, have impacted the timeline for the JGIP.

The consequent refocussing of direction and resources have resulted in a reprogramming of many elements of the Alpart refinery programme, including the proposed new power house and the proposed LNG facility at Port Kaiser, which are critical to the development of the JGIP. As a consequence, the JGIP has also been rescheduled for after the completion and commissioning of the upgraded refinery and rehabilitated power plant.

A new approach is being examined in order to facilitate LNG. The railway from the plant to the port is being upgraded, and the port will be refurbished to accommodate the increased level of alumina production, which is necessary to drive the anchor facilities in the Industrial Park. The refurbished and expanded port facilities will support the materials coming in, and products going out, of the Industrial Park, as companies develop their operations within the proposed Special Economic Zone.

Also Mr. Speaker, in China, the Vice Governor of Gansu Province was replaced last year, which resulted in a temporary hold on the administrative focus on the JGIP. A new Vice Governor has been appointed, and we expect that the administrative process will now resume.

Additionally, in March 2019, the Chairman of JISCO was reassigned to the government structure of Gansu Province, and a new JISCO Chairman was appointed in April. This has also resulted in a hiatus of administrative decision-making until the new Chairman has been fully briefed and engaged on all aspects of the JISCO operations in China and Jamaica.

Notably also, Mr. Speaker, is that 52 Jamaican engineers who received specialised training from JISCO in China, have returned to employment at Alpart. Twenty five of them were trained in powerhouse management, and 27 in refinery management.

It is anticipated that the increased production of the upgraded refinery at two million tonnes of alumina per year, and the improved efficiency of the rehabilitated power plant, will impact profitability at the plant, on which much of the operations of the Industrial Park will depend.
Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the long-awaited Vernamfield development in South West Clarendon.

The Project Concept

The reactivation of the Vernamfield Aerodrome, which is to be a cargo-focused facility, has been in progress since late October 2018. The reactivation represents Phase One of the Vernamfield Development Project. In the long-term, the project concept is aimed at the development of a major international airport as the centrepiece of an aerotropolis (Aerotropolis Jamaica). The airport development was one element of the Millennium Programme, and the air logistic component of the already under way Jamaica Logistics Hub Initiative.

Aerotropolis Jamaica, with the development of aviation-related business clusters connected to the airport by an integrated multimodal transport network, will be the catalyst for growth of the aviation industry, all aviation-related sectors nationally, the tourism industry and its related sectors, and ultimately, the economy of Jamaica.

The Jamaica Logistics Hub Initiative: Market Analysis and Master Plan is the study that has guided the Vernamfield Development so far. The study which has produced a 500-page report, was commissioned by the PIOJ, and was conducted by Nathan and Associates Incorporated of the United States, with the Final Report submitted on December 13, 2017.
Mr. Speaker, in November of last year, the runway condition report concluded that the facility was in good condition after 70 years of being closed, and recommended rehabilitation by way of overlay options to restore the full length of the runway. In that very month, Cabinet gave the go-ahead to optimise the full potential of the existing asset at Vernamfield, with a reminder that the development of the aerodrome was a Manifesto Promise to which this Administration remains committed. Given this mandate, work began in earnest to rehabilitate the full asset.

Having completed the de-bushing of the verges of the main runway, several underground systems were uncovered. These had to be investigated. MA Services Limited, a specialist engineering firm, was engaged to investigate, trace and map the underground systems near the main runway.

To optimise the runway asset, Jentech Consultants Limited, having prepared a Runway Condition Report, was engaged to prepare an Engineering Design and Engineering Plan for the rehabilitation of the available 6,500 feet of runway pavement, and to add Runway End Safety Areas (RESA) to comply with current international civil aviation standards.

The Preliminary Report of the design and plan has been submitted to the Airports Authority of Jamaica (AAJ), and has been reviewed by the engineering staff of the AAJ and the Core Implementation Team operating from the Office of the Prime Minister. We now await the Final Report from Jentech, from which we expect to learn the cost and duration of the rehabilitation of the main runway to become fully operational.
Preparatory activities

Until the rehabilitation of the runway begins, the AAJ has been undertaking several preparatory activities. These include:

1. The acquisition of private lands and the transfer of crown lands near the runway. This will allow current compliance standards for runway geometry and obstacle limitation surface (OLS) requirements to be met.

2. The repair of leaking water mains in conjunction with the National Water Commission and the National Irrigation Commission. All plumbing traversing the runway strip and pavement will need to be removed and rerouted through accessible culverts in accordance with current international standards.

3. The concrete structures within the protected verges of the runway have been demolished and carted away, allowing OLS Standards to be met. To further meet OLS Standards, the JPS power lines along the Gimmi-mi-Bit main road will have to be rerouted or buried, and tree obstacles need to be removed.

4. Work on the community roads are due to commence later this month. Upon completion of the road repairs, traffic into Gimm-mi-Bit will no longer have to use the runway to access the district. Once the community road is repaired, the runway will be closed to vehicular traffic to facilitate the runway rehabilitation.

To coincide with the completion of the runway rehabilitation, basic facilities will be installed to allow for international general aviation flights, regional cargo flights, domestic airlines and flight training.

Notably, Mr. Speaker, Vernamfield will have the third longest runway in Jamaica and be the largest airport in terms of real estate available.

Compelling reasons for the development

It is on this real estate, Mr. Speaker, that, with foreign direct investment and with Jamaican partners, Jamaica’s future as a regional air transport and airport infrastructure player will be built.

It is from the development of this airport with a planned parallel runway of 14,000 feet, that we will allow our farmers and manufacturing and export sectors to move time-sensitive and perishable goods to other logistics hubs and nodes within 14 hours of non-stop flight and the global market within a day.

It is from Vernamfield that the productive capacity of time-sensitive goods from our industrial parks and agricultural parks will be exported by air to the most distant corners of the globe within a day.

It is from Vernamfield that we will return to producing the next generation of aviation professionals for Jamaica, the region and the global market.
It is from Vernamfield, being at 35 metres above sea level, Mr. Speaker, that Jamaica will be assured to withstand any coastal dislocation of airport infrastructure owing to sea-level rise as a result of global warming. It is from Vernamfield, Mr. Speaker, that Jamaica will be connected to the non-traditional markets of China, Africa, the Middle East and Asia Pacific, where the 20 and 30-year traffic forecasts are much higher than forecasts to our traditional market.

It is Aerotropolis Jamaica, Mr. Speaker, that has the potential to generate opportunities for the largest number of meaningful jobs for the new generation of technical skills and professionals who are bursting with enthusiasm to contribute to the development of their country. Each direct technical job will provide five other jobs in the service sector, according to the Nathan Report of December 2017.

It is Aerotropolis Jamaica, Mr. Speaker, that has the potential through an IPO for every Jamaican to participate in the ownership of one of our most valuable real estate assets with the long-term earning potential that will allow real wealth to pass from one generation to the next.

It is this development, Mr. Speaker, that has inspired so many Jamaicans in the Diaspora to be chomping at the bit to participate in the financing and implementation of the entire project along with local partners. It has inspired Jamaicans to return to establish aviation-related businesses in the planned Special Economic Zone. These businesses range from the research and development of manned and unmanned drones; maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) of large commercial aircraft; research and development of Jamaican-grown pharmaceutical products to combat the problematic effects of opioids; dry dock operations and cruise tourism on the coast of Clarendon; and motorsport, among others, Mr. Speaker.

These can all be accommodated in the South Western Clarendon Aerotropolis in a manner that avoids counter-impacting development agendas, Mr. Speaker.
It is in Aerotropolis Jamaica, Mr. Speaker, through which Jamaican will live up to our National Pledge through an approach that shows regional and global leadership by constructing the third in the world, and first in the Caribbean and Latin America, a zero-carbon emissions major international cargo logistics airport, and the construction of a surrounding business community with climate-friendly smart buildings and infrastructure, that will cause Jamaica to “increase in beauty, fellowship and prosperity, and play her part in advancing the welfare of the whole human race.”

**In Concluding**

It has often been said, Mr. Speaker, that Vernamfield is Mike Henry’s baby. But, when last I checked, Mr. Speaker, all my babies are now grown.

Vernamfield is a prime airport asset to which pre-independence Jamaica had no access when we developed our international airports on reclaimed coastal lands. Now this Government, and this generation of Jamaican men and women, can finally set our young nation on a path to true prosperity, a path that will allow us to be proud of the example we set for the world, and the legacy we leave to the many Jamaicans at home and abroad, who hope for a better economic future.

Mr. Speaker, successive Ministers of Transport, starting with the Honourable Dr. Peter Phillips in 2002, have pursued the bold path into liberalised bilateral air services agreements by signing open skies agreements. In 2010, as Minister of Transport, I got Cabinet’s approval to make open skies a national policy. These agreements have given Jamaica market access and liberalised traffic rights to over 50 states on every continent and in every region across the globe. To capitalise on these traffic rights, we need this airport infrastructure and runway capacity to further establish our air transport interconnectivity to the world.

According to Nathan and Associates, Mr. Speaker, with foreign direct investment of US$1.3 billion, our planners, our engineers, our architects, lawyers, accountants, financial institutions, our tradesmen, our transport operators, our farmers, teachers, aviation professionals, real estate developers, haulage contractors, our chefs, hoteliers, our medical professionals, our ICT professional and just about every category of worker you can imagine, will be able to participate in the construction and development of this air logistics hub within the next two to five years, and within a total of US$28 billion in foreign and local direct investment, the build-out of Aerotropolis Jamaica and the total Jamaica Logistics Hub initiative over the next two decades or more.

**Finally**

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let us establish that it doesn’t matter whose baby the development of Vernamfield and South West Clarendon is. What’s really important is that it is a baby that will grow into an adult of which we will all be proud. What is critical, Mr. Speaker and the other Members of this Honourable House, is that we deliver this baby NOW – in the months and years immediately before us!

Let’s hear it for Vernamfield!

‘**Now is the Time!’** for action.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for having afforded me this opportunity to address this Honourable House.