

# Focus on Growth Yielding Dividends - PM

**P**RIME MINISTER the Most Hon Andrew Holness says his Administration's emphasis on inclusive economic growth has paid great dividends, as in recent years, Jamaica has made an extraordinary economic turnaround.

**"The country's unemployment rate is 7.2 per cent recorded as at October 2019, and this is the lowest unemployment rate in the history of Jamaica."**

"The country has experienced 19 consecutive quarters of positive economic growth and the country's debt to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio has fallen to 93 per cent coming from a



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness gives a lecture at the University of Missouri where he spoke on the state of Jamaica's constitutional democracy.

high of 147 per cent in 2012," Mr. Holness said.

He noted that by the time the 2020/2021 fiscal budget is read, the debt to GDP ratio will be further reduced to 91 per cent.

The Prime Minister made the remarks during a lecture at the University of Missouri where he spoke on the state of Jamaica's constitutional democracy.

Mr. Holness noted that lower debt accumulations and servicing has resulted in the Government being able to redirect resources to invest in areas that will promote social development.

"For example, we have raised the threshold at which Jamaicans start to pay income tax to about US\$11,000 per year. The country's economic growth

has boosted job creation, as the country's unemployment rate is 7.2 per cent recorded as at October 2019, and this is the lowest unemployment rate in the history of Jamaica," he stated.

He further noted that this sustained level of economic growth has resulted in a surge in business and consumer confidence.

## Gov't Looking to Bolster Security in Schools

MINISTER WITH responsibility for Education, Youth and Information, Hon. Karl Samuda, says the Government is looking to provide the requisite resources to bolster security arrangements at schools in order to safeguard students, teachers and other stakeholder users.

"I have already initiated the discussions, but I am going to invite the Permanent Secretary [in the Ministry] and her senior staff to look into the budget and see to what extent we can make provisions for full-time security... [personnel] and equipment... while schools [are] in session and also on weekends," the Minister indicated.

He was addressing students and teachers of Vauxhall High School in

Kingston during a visit on February 5 to extend condolences and support in the aftermath of the untimely death of Grade-11 Coordinator, Carl Samuels, who was killed on the institution's campus on January 25.

Mr. Samuda, who described the incident as "a grave tragedy", said issues with security are among the challenges generally affecting the school system, noting that "we have incidents across the length and breadth of Jamaica" that remain a "genuine concern" for many well-thinking persons.

He assured them, after touring the campus, that the Ministry will be looking to take steps to ensure that their welfare, while at school, is safeguarded.



Minister with responsibility for Education, Youth and Information, Hon. Karl Samuda (centre), speaks with grade-nine student of Vauxhall High School in Kingston, Chrishanna Hedlam (right), during a visit to the institution on February 5. Looking on is Principal, Prudence Brown Pinnock.

## National Coronavirus Coordinating Mechanism Being Instituted

THE GOVERNMENT will be putting a national coordinating mechanism in place to monitor and contain the novel coronavirus, in the event of an outbreak.

Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, said the Cabinet-sanctioned measure will see a team, to be headed by the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), being established to lead Jamaica's heightened preparations.

He further advised that the Ministry will be liaising with various stakeholder partners to oversee the process.

"Normally, when you have threats of this type, it is better to create a national coordinating [body], which involves multiple stakeholders [and] Ministries. More often than not, it is led by ODPEM; and so ODPEM would play a



Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton (centre), addressing a press conference at the Ministry's New Kingston offices on February 5. Listening (from left) are Permanent Secretary in the Ministry, Dunstan Bryan (left), and Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Jacqueline Bisasor-McKenzie.

dominant role in pulling all the teams together," he said. Dr. Tufton made the announcements during a media briefing at the Ministry's offices in New Kingston on February 5.

He advised that the Ministry will be pivotal in pro-

viding technical health leadership, "and so over the next few days, we will be pulling together this national coordinating mechanism" on which "we have already started working".

Dr. Tufton said a similar team was established in

2014 to lead Jamaica's heightened ebola preparations.

He advised that heightened restrictions on travel from China remain in effect, noting that only Jamaican nationals, permanent residents and those with marriage exemption will be granted landing privileges subject to quarantine.

## Measures Being Implemented to Manage Drought

THE GOVERNMENT is implementing several measures to supply communities with water islandwide, during the current period of drought.

The Meteorological Service Branch has projected that the country will be experiencing near normal rainfall in some areas and moderately dry conditions up to at least April.

Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, Senator the Hon. Parnell Charles Jr., said the multi-sectoral approach to drought management is being undertaken to minimise the effects of the dry period on Jamaicans.

He was speaking at a press conference on drought



Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, Senator the Hon. Parnell Charles Jr.

mitigation, at Jamaica House, on February 6.

Senator Charles said a Drought Management Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Integrated Water Resources Management Council, has been

established to manage, in a proactive way, the execution of the drought management plan.

He further informed that 26 rural water system projects will be completed for 2020, which will bring water to an additional 56,000 Jamaican residents. Senator Charles said 18 will be completed by March, while eight will be completed by June.

Some of the projects include: Platfield Water Supply System, St. Mary; Charles Town/Kildare, Portland; Ticky Ticky, Manchester; Johnnies Hill and Portland Cottage, in Clarendon.

Additionally, Senator Charles said more trucks will be procured to assist in distributing water to the hardest hit areas.

## Registration for Tourism Workers' Pension Scheme to Begin Shortly

REGISTRATION FOR the Tourism Workers' Pension Scheme is expected to begin shortly.

Minister of Tourism, Hon. Edmund Bartlett, said that arrangements are being finalised to start the process.

More than 350,000 employees are expected to benefit immediately from the pension scheme, which became effective on January 31, 2020.

"This sets the stage now for the Board of Trustees to proceed to conclude arrangements with the fund manager and administrator," Minister Bartlett said.

He was addressing a press conference at the Ministry's New Kingston offices on February 3.

He further noted that the framework will now be established for the accompanying Regulations for the



Minister of Tourism, Hon. Edmund Bartlett

Tourism Workers' Pension Act, "which I am hoping to take to Parliament within the first few sittings of the new Parliamentary year".

Mr. Bartlett informed that the scheme is going to be the largest pension plan in the Caribbean, and could potentially impact up to 500,000 workers by 2030/2035 as the industry continues to grow.

The Tourism Workers' Pension Scheme is in keeping with the Government's focus on creating a social security network within the sector.

The Ministry of Tourism is providing \$1 billion to seed the fund, so that immediate benefits can accrue to qualified pensioners, who have met the vested period of five years.

## 30 Young Persons Begin Driver-Training Programme Under HOPE



Minister of Transport and Mining, Hon. Robert Montague (3rd left), with five participants in a driver-training programme, who were presented with their provisional licences during the official launch of the programme, at the Maxfield Avenue offices of the Ministry of Transport and Mining, on February 4. The participants (from left) are Kemar Webb, Tasha-Gaye Rose, Shaniel Sylvester, Dorothy Chambers and Ricardo Plummer. They are part of an initial batch of 30 persons from Kingston, recruited through the Housing, Opportunity, Production and Employment (HOPE) Programme.