

Increase in Credit to Businesses, Households - BOJ

THE BANK of Jamaica (BOJ) is reporting a significant increase in credit extended by deposit-taking institutions to businesses and households for the 12-month period, ending December 2019.

BOJ Governor, Richard Byles, said credit to businesses grew by 20.3 per cent, while the provision to households increased by 16.5 per cent.

"This growth was notably faster than the expansions of 15.4 per cent and 12 per cent in credit to businesses and households, respectively, which were recorded in 2018," he pointed out.

He said, further, that the number of firms securing financing from the issue of corporate bonds and equity is "encouraging".



Bank of Jamaica (BOJ) Governor, Richard Byles (left), addresses journalists at the quarterly media briefing held on February 20 at the BOJ in downtown Kingston. At right is Senior BOJ Deputy Governor, John Robinson.

The Governor was addressing the quarterly media briefing at the BOJ's downtown Kingston headquarters on February 20.

Mr. Byles said the buoyant growth in credit represents

"stronger signs" that the Central Bank's accommodative monetary policy stance "has been bearing fruit".

Accommodative monetary policy is where a central bank attempts to expand the overall money supply to boost the economy.

The Bank has maintained the policy interest rate on overnight placements from deposit-taking institutions at 0.50 per cent, having incrementally reduced the figure from 3.25 per cent at the start of 2018.

"In response, we have seen that the deposit-taking institutions - commercial banks, merchant banks and building societies have recorded strong growth in loans as well as marked reductions in lending rates on local currency loans," he pointed out.

Surpluses Generated Between April and December 2019

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT operations over the first nine months of the 2019/20 fiscal year (April to December) generated primary and fiscal surpluses of \$112.7 billion and just over \$24 billion, respectively.

This is according to the Government's 2020/21 Fiscal Policy Paper, which was tabled in the House of Representatives on February 11 by Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke.

The document indicates that the out-turn for the primary surplus, which stands at 6.5 per cent of budget, exceeded the nearly \$94 billion programmed target, while the fiscal surplus was more than \$21 billion better than the projected \$2 billion.

Both out-turns reflect the strong overall combined performance of revenues and grants, up by more than \$14.6 billion, which exceeded the budgeted target, coupled with lower than programmed Government expenditure, net of amortisation, which was down \$12.01 billion.



Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke

According to the policy paper, the main driver behind the revenue buoyancy was tax revenues, up \$10.9 billion.

Receipts for April to December 2019 totalled \$414.7 billion, some 2.7 per cent over budget and 6.7 per cent more than the corresponding period last year.

The document also cites prudent fiscal and monetary policy reforms among the factors contributing to fiscal surplus out-turns over the last three years, which concomitantly reduced Central Government's borrowing needs.

Upgraded Water Supply System for Watermount in St. Catherine

MORE THAN 7,000 residents in and around Watermount in St. Catherine should have adequate potable water in the next eight months from a \$150 million upgraded system in the area.



Member of Parliament for West Central St. Catherine, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton (3rd left), breaks ground for the \$150 million Watermount Water Supply System in St. Catherine on February 19. Also participating (from left) are Managing Director of the Rural Water Supply Limited (RWSL), Audley Thompson; Chairman of the RWSL, Councillor Homer Davis; Mayor of Spanish Town, Councillor Norman Scott; Director of the RWSL, Kevin Lue, and General Manager for Engineering at the water agency, Douglas Wilson.

"The work is ready to begin, and the resources are in place. Be responsible in accommodating the project, and be responsible in the usage of the infrastructure," Dr. Tufton, who is also Minister of Health and Wellness,

said at the ground-breaking ceremony in Watermount on February 19.

Water will be sourced from the William Gully Dam, which was earlier refurbished by the municipal corporation, with new transmission and

distribution lines installed, and construction of a storage tank and pump station.

In his address, Chairman of the RWSL, Councillor Homer Davis, said with an increased budget to the agency, they are reaching scores of communities with improved water systems, and the one in Watermount will "add value to the residents" in the areas to be served.

"The work is ready to begin, and the resources are in place."

The Watermount Water Supply System, which is being developed by the Rural Water Supply Limited (RWSL), will be turned over to the St. Catherine Municipal Corporation on completion, to serve some seven communities in the area.

The communities include Mendez, Back Pasture, Cudjoe's Hill, Old Works, Watermount, Barry and Pedro.

Welcoming the development, Minister of Health and Wellness and Member of Parliament for West Central St. Catherine, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, said it came out of many collaborations and advocacy.

Therapeutic Centre for Children Soon

A THERAPEUTIC centre that will offer psychological support to children who have undergone severe emotional trauma and are in need of therapeutic intervention will open soon.

This was disclosed by Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Rosalee Gage Grey, at the Mobile Mental Health Lecture, held at the Medallion Hall Hotel in St. Andrew on February 19.

Lands located at the Maxfield Park Children's Home in Kingston have been earmarked for the construction of the state-of-the-art therapeutic centre.

"We have, over time, seen an increase in the number of children who have suffered traumatic circumstances and who require medium to long-term therapeutic intervention. We do not have specialised facilities within Government for this,



Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) Chief Executive Officer, Rosalee Gage Grey (left), converses with (from 2nd left): Director of Programmes, CPFSA, P. Audrey Budhi; Children's Officer, Psychology Unit, CPFSA, Sassah-Gaye McPherson; and Team Leader, Children and Family Support Unit, CPFSA, Jean Duhaney, at the Mobile Mental Health Lecture, held at the Medallion Hall Hotel in St. Andrew on February 19.

and so we believe that creating this centre would go a long way in providing some ... therapy that the children need," Ms Gage Grey he told **JIS News**.

She said the design for the facility has been completed, adding that the initiative is being undertaken in partner-

ship with the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF), which is providing most of the money for the project.

"We are nearing the point of getting the plans approved by the municipal corporation and we are hoping that within a short time, we can break ground," she noted.

\$12.9B for Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project

THE GOVERNMENT will be spending \$12.91 billion during the upcoming fiscal year to begin various roadworks under the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP).

The money has been set aside in the 2020/21 Estimates of Expenditure, now before the House of Representatives.

Works include commencing construction on the Harbour View to Yallahs Bridge road corridor and achieving 20 per cent completion, and commencing roadworks along the Yallahs to Port Antonio leg.

In addition, land acquisition activities are to con-

tinue in order to gain access to 100 per cent of required parcels along the May Pen to Williamsfield road alignment.

Additionally, works are to commence and be completed on five new road construction packages along the Yallahs Bridge to Port Antonio road corridor.

The project, which is being jointly funded by the Government of Jamaica and the China Exim Bank, seeks to improve the alignment and capacity of the existing southern coastal main arterial road in order that it will be safe and efficient, free from flooding and provide for future development.

GG Tours National Gallery of Jamaica



Governor-General, His Excellency the Most Hon. Sir Patrick Allen (centre), listens to Chief Curator, National Gallery of Jamaica, O'Neil Lawrence (right), as he speaks about the various art pieces now on display during Reggae Month at the Gallery, in downtown Kingston, on February 19. At left is Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, Hon. Olivia Grange.