

No New Taxes to Fund 2021-2022 Budget

FINANCE AND the Public Service Minister, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, on March 9 announced that the Government will not be introducing any new taxes to fund the \$830.8-billion budget for 2021/22.

“We are prioritising economic recovery, which we want to achieve in the quickest possible time. Increasing taxes at this time would run counter to that objective,” Dr. Clarke said.

He was opening the 2021/22 Budget Debate in the House of Representatives on Tuesday (March 9).

Minister Clarke noted that “this is the sixth consecutive fiscal year where, on a net basis, we have not raised taxes and the fourth consecutive



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

fiscal year where there will be absolutely no new taxes”.

Meanwhile, Dr. Clarke told the House that the Govern-

ment will be abolishing the Customs Administrative Fee (CAF) for permanent exports of a value less than or equal to US\$500.

“This is estimated to cost \$70 million,” he said.

Customs has levied a CAF on the export of goods since 2013, replacing the customer user fee, which was deemed non-compliant by the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Dr. Clarke outlined that the CAF was set at \$3,000 per customs export declaration and has remained at that level for the past seven years.

He noted that the fee has made it difficult for exporters of local goods to remain competitive, most of whom are small business owners.

Gov't Prepared to Take More Stringent Measures – PM

PRIME MINISTER the Most Hon. Andrew Holness says the Government is prepared to take more stringent measures, including a national lockdown, if the number of positive cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to rise.



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness

“We are now in the danger zone. The numbers will continue to rise. It is the nature of the pandemic,” the Prime Minister noted.

“If we do not get these numbers down, it is likely that the mortality rate could also rise, so in this phase of the management of the pandemic, the Government has to remain strident; it has to remain resolute in the measures that we have implemented,” he pointed out.

“Yes, we are in the darkest hour of the pandemic, and yes, it will pass at some time, but exactly how that happens depends on how you as an individual, as a citizen, as a worker, as a mother, father – it depends on what you do,” he stressed.

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“These measures will have an impact on the economy. It will have even greater impact on your ability to move; it will have even greater impact on your ability to gather. It really depends on what you do at this point in time,” he said.

The Prime Minister, who was addressing a virtual press conference on March 8, said Jamaica is now in the danger zone with regard to the pandemic.

Public Health Nurse Is First in Jamaica to Receive COVID-19 Vaccine

PUBLIC HEALTH Nurse, Marcia Thomas-Yetman, is the first person in Jamaica to receive the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine.

She was vaccinated at The Good Samaritan's Inn in Kingston on March 10, exactly one year after the first case of the virus was confirmed in the island.

Nurse Thomas-Yetman, who is employed to the

South East Regional Health Authority (SERHA), falls within the category of professionals who were among the first set of persons designated by the Government to be vaccinated last week.

In an interview with media representatives immediately after she was inoculated, Nurse Thomas-Yetman said she was proud to be the first person to be vaccinated.

“I'm happy that I got it and I'm encouraging everyone to get their COVID-19 vaccine,” she said.

Former Prime Ministers, the Most Hon. PJ Patterson and Bruce Golding, as well as Professor of Public Health and Ageing, University of the West Indies (UWI), Dr. Denise Eldemire Shearer, also received the vaccine.

They joined the call for Jamaicans to take the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness has reported that 2,718 persons, or 83 per cent of those targeted to be inoculated with the COVID-19 vaccine on the first day of activating the COVID-19 Vaccine Implementation Programme received the vaccine.



Public Health Nurse, Marcia Thomas-Yetman (right), receives the first coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine to be given in Jamaica, on March 10, at The Good Samaritan's Inn in Kingston. Administering the vaccine is Nurse Fiona Ellis.



Professor of Public Health and Ageing, University of the West Indies (UWI), Professor Denise Eldemire-Shearer (left), receives the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine from nurse, Fiona Ellis, at The Good Samaritan's Inn in Kingston on March 10.

\$31.1 Billion Infrastructure Programme to Drive Jobs, Economic Activity

THE GOVERNMENT has allocated \$31.1 billion towards an infrastructure programme, which will drive jobs and economic activity, improve productivity and strengthen resilience.

Details of the programme were provided by Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon.

Nigel Clarke, as he opened the 2021/22 Budget Debate in the House of Representatives on March 9.

The initiative is being provided for under the \$60-billion Social and Economic Recovery and Vaccine (SERVE) Programme for Jamaica, which is being facilitated through a one-off Bank of

Jamaica (BOJ) dividend of \$33 billion.

Speaking about the infrastructure projects, Dr. Clarke said \$17.7 billion has been allocated to the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP) under the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation.

“This allocation will allow infrastructural improvements on roadways between Harbour View and Yallahs and for construction of the new toll road between May Pen in Clarendon and Williamsfield in Manchester to continue,” he said.

In addition, some \$8 billion has been allocated to a special public investment infrastructure programme to improve productivity and increase resilience, through the installation of drains, water, waste water and sewerage infrastructure, as well as the widening and dualisation of major thoroughfares.

Also under the programme, \$3.7 billion has been allocated to secondary roads, repairing roads across Jamaica, \$1.2 billion for the Montego Bay Bypass, and \$0.5 billion for the construction of a new police divisional headquarters in Westmoreland and a new forensic pathology suite.



The May Pen to Williamsfield leg of Highway 2000 under construction.

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Diagnostic Tests to be Administered to Grade Six Students

THE MINISTRY of Education, Youth and Information will be administering diagnostic tests to grade six students to identify and address gaps in the delivery of the National Standards Curriculum (NSC) due to the restrictions caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Speaking at a post-cabinet press briefing on March 10, Portfolio Minister, Hon. Fayval Williams, said that the diagnostic instrument will be administered by classroom teachers.

She said that data from the assessment will be sent to the high schools in which the students are placed. The NSC allows for aspects of the curriculum that were not covered at the primary level to be dealt with at grade seven.

Mrs. Williams noted, however, that this would require an extension in the number of school days.

As such, she informed that the Ministry's technical staff is preparing a retention document to lay out the criteria to be used by the Ministry to determine which students will be retained in their current class.

“Some of our students are going to repeat grades, so that they can get back to where they were before the pandemic,” she said.

The Government also announced that the Grade Six Ability Test, which was originally set for February 23 and rescheduled for March 25, will now take place on May 26.

Placement of students in high schools will be done using the Ability Test scores combined with the results of the Grade Four Performance Task exams in Language Arts and Mathematics that the students would have taken in 2019.



Minister of Education, Youth and Information, Hon. Fayval Williams, fields questions from journalists during a virtual post-Cabinet press briefing on March 10.