

Public Sector Contract Workers to Become Permanent Employees

MANY CONTRACT workers now employed in the public sector will be made permanent employees.

Ministry of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, made the disclosure as he opened the 2023/24 Budget Debate in the House of Representatives on March 7.

He said that the objective is to address the longstanding abuse of fixed-term contracts in Government.

"In sharing the gains of economic reform and recovery, this Government will regularise evergreen consistently renewed contract workers in Government, bringing them into structured, permanent employment," Dr. Clarke informed.

He said that the Finance Ministry, through its Strategic Human Resource Management Division will move to address this situation.

Dr. Clarke said the regularisation will come at a cost, as there are approximately 20,000



Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, uses abacus counting devices to make a point during the opening of the 2023/24 Budget Debate in the House of Representatives on March 7.

persons currently employed on contract or temporarily outside of establishment across the Public Service.

He noted that in many of these instances, the worker is disadvantaged with inferior access to benefits.

Regarding the affected workers, Dr. Clarke said post

codes will be created to elevate 716 cooks and assistant cooks in the school system from contract employment to permanent employment.

Post codes will also be created to elevate 367 regular watchmen and 659 caregivers in infant schools.

In addition, sanitation workers at the National Solid Waste Management Authority who have completed the necessary probationary periods will be made permanent employees.

The matter of employing doctors in the public service on contracts will also be addressed.

Tax Relief on Solar Systems and Importation of Horses

THE GOVERNMENT is providing tax relief totalling approximately \$153.33 million during fiscal year 2023/24.

This will result from the provision of Income Tax Credit, totalling \$100 million, on the installation of residential solar photovoltaic (PV) systems, and the removal of General Consumption Tax (GCT) on the importation of live horses, small ruminants, and pigs, amounting to \$53.33 million.

"That fiscal measure will be implemented by way of an amendment to the Income Tax Act."

Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, outlined the details while opening the 2023/24 Budget Debate in the House of Representatives, on March 7.

Dr. Clarke said householders installing solar PV systems will benefit from an income tax credit equiv-

alent to 30 per cent of the purchase price, up to a maximum of \$4 million.

"That fiscal measure will be implemented by way of an amendment to the Income Tax Act," the Minister informed the House.

He pointed out that incentivising solar PV systems is consistent with the removal of GCT from renewable solar energy inputs, among these, PV batteries and panels, and inverters. He noted that last year, the Government added lithium-ion batteries.

The Minister said measures relating to the importation of animals are aimed at ensuring food security and rejuvenating the horseracing industry by having high quality breeding stock, in support of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

It is anticipated that the Agriculture Ministry will import over 6,000 goats, sheep, and pigs over the next three to five years.

Gender and Gender Equity Integral in Policy Decisions - PM

THE GOVERNMENT continues to take a deliberate approach to dealing with the matter of gender and gender equity, says Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness.

"Gender is now a part of the matrix of consideration for whatever policies we put in. I would even say, in contemplation of the budget, gender is a specific parameter that we consider," he said.

The Prime Minister was addressing guests attending an International Women's Day breakfast, hosted by his wife and Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Most Hon. Juliet Holness, at Jamaica House in St. Andrew, on March 8.



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness (left) speaks at an International Women's Day breakfast, hosted by his wife and Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Most Hon. Juliet Holness (seated, left), at Jamaica House, on March 8.

The Prime Minister said legislative changes are being taken to address the issue of violence in Jamaica,

particularly gender-based violence.

These include amendments to the Offences

Against the Person Act and the Domestic Violence Act.

"We have taken the decision that we will bring them back. Those legislation which have already been reviewed and debated and the amendments even drafted, that we are going to bring them back on the front burner and have them dealt with in the coming financial year," he noted.

For her part, Mrs. Holness encouraged women to continue uplifting and supporting each other, pointing out that "we are here to highlight us, our achievements".

International Women's Day is celebrated annually on March 8 as a focal point in the women's rights movement.

128 Small Ganja Farmers Targeted for Support



Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Senator the Hon. Aubyn Hill, addresses journalists during a press conference on March 6.

SIXTEEN COMMUNITIES and approximately 128 small traditional cannabis farmers will be targeted for support over the next three to four years under the Alternative Development Programme 2.0.

The programme aims to eliminate illicit cultivation of cannabis by transitioning farmers into the legally regulated industry.

"Participating communities would be allowed to cultivate up to 10 acres of land. Each participating community will be required to sell output to a person who has a licence from the Cannabis Licensing Authority (CLA), and we expect that to be in place by April 2023," said Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Senator the Hon. Aubyn Hill.

He was speaking during a press conference at Jamaica House on March 6, during which he outlined assistance for small farmers in the medical cannabis industry.

Senator Hill highlighted further support, through the mother farm concept. This is a shared economy approach in which a licensed cannabis cultivator or processor enters into an agreement with a small-scale/traditional farmer to cultivate the crop and sell it back to the mother farm/licencee.

The press conference was convened to address the importation of cannabis from Canada.

Minister Hill clarified that only 44 pounds of cannabis was imported by Cannava Jamaica Limited, and the particular strain, tranquil elephantizer, is not found in the island.

"Each participating community will be required to sell output to a person who has a licence from the Cannabis Licensing Authority (CLA), and we expect that to be in place by April 2023."

Additional \$100 Million Allocated for Drought Response

THE GOVERNMENT will be spending an additional \$100 million to respond to the meteorological drought that the country is experiencing.

The sum is in addition to an initial \$50 million to support the response measures by the Government.

Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness made the announcement during a press conference at the Office of the Prime Minister, in St. Andrew, on March 3.

Mr. Holness said the response will be channelled through the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, the Ministry of Local

Government and Rural Development, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

He informed that the resources will be concentrated on the rural areas that are being impacted by the drought.

"We still have sufficient supplies in our catchment and treatment facilities and in our reservoirs, even though some of them are showing decline.

"The areas served largely by the NWC [National Water Commission] through metered water,... are not affected as badly as the rural areas. For this phase of our drought

response, we are going to be focusing on our rural parishes and we will be directing the funds by need," the Prime Minister said.

Mr. Holness added, however, that urban communities affected will also benefit from the allocation.

He said Members of Parliament will receive an allocation through the Constituency Development Fund, "but only in the parishes that have been assessed as being in need".

Additional trucks are being purchased by the NWC to increase the agency's capacity.

200 New Buses Over the Next Three Years for JUTC

THE JAMAICA Urban Transit Company's (JUTC) fleet of buses will be upgraded, with the addition of 200 electric vehicles over the next three years.

Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, said purchase of the buses will commence in the new financial year, with 100 slated to be delivered during 2024/25.

Opening the 2023/24 Budget Debate in the House of Representatives on March 7, the Minister said the buses are in addition to another 70, already paid for, which will be deployed in the system shortly.

He noted that of the 70 new buses to be added to the JUTC's fleet, 20 will use liquefied natural gas (LNG), adding that the company will be doing "more aggressive repairs" of some of the older buses, to ensure that adequate vehicles are available for its daily requirement.

Dr. Clarke told the House that the last set of buses were purchased in 2019, and the \$40 billion investment in the publicly owned transport company is to improve the travelling experience of Jamaicans.

Students March for Peace in Gregory Park



Students from the Gregory Park Primary School raise their voices against crime and violence in the community, during a Peace Day march on March 7, under the theme 'Mek Wi Grow in Peace'.