

Additional \$100 Million 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



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness addresses a press conference held at the Office of the Prime Minister on March 3.

in our reservoirs, even though some of them are showing decline.

"The areas served largely by the NWC (National Water Commission) through metered water, they 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 also being purchased by the NWC to increase the agency's capacity to distribute water.

IMF Approves US\$1.7 Billion for Jamaica

THE EXECUTIVE Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), on March 2, approved funding of approximately US\$1.7 billion for Jamaica under its Precautionary and Liquidity Line (PLL) and Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF).

Under a 24-month arrangement, the country will receive US\$968 million from the PLL, as insurance against risks from higher commodity prices, a global slowdown, tighter than envisaged global financial conditions, and new COVID-19 outbreaks.

The board also approved the provision of US\$764 million under the RSF to strengthen Jamaica's physical and fiscal resilience to climate change, advance decarbonisation of the economy, and manage transition risks.

The RSF is expected to catalyse funding for climate priorities from other official lenders and the private sector.

A communiqué posted on the IMF's website praised Jamaica's response to recent global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic,

the war in Ukraine, and ongoing tightening global financial conditions, noting that the measures have been "well designed". It pointed out that the fiscal

"Jamaica's strong track record of... prioritising macro-economic stability has aided the post-pandemic recovery."

cal policy response to COVID-19 was "nimble", supporting the economy in 2020, but then quickly resuming a downward path for the debt.

Deputy Managing Director and Acting Board Chair, Bo Li, said Jamaica's strong track record of building institutions and prioritising macro economic stability has aided the post-pandemic recovery.

He noted that the economy continues to recover strongly from COVID-19, with inflation expected to fall within the BOJ's target range by the end of 2023.

Contract Signed for Electronic Health Records System

THE MINISTRY of Health and Wellness has signed a US\$5-million contract for the implementation of an Electronic Health Records (EHR) System in the public health sector.

The system will be rolled out over the next 18 months in 13 health centres and hospitals across the island.

United Kingdom (UK)-based firm, The Phoenix Partnership (TPP), is the entity contracted to deliver the system.

Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, in his remarks at the contract signing held at the Spanish Town Hospital in St. Catherine on February 28, said that the EHR is "game changing" and will ensure greater efficiency in the delivery of patient care in the public system.

The Minister said the system will ensure seamless interface of critical diagnostic imaging that will enable doctors to see X-rays and computerised tomography (CT) scans on computers and tablets that have already been provided at the facilities.



Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton (centre), displays the signed contract for the US\$5million Electronic Health Records (EHR) system, at the signing ceremony held at the Spanish Town Hospital in St. Catherine on February 28. He is flanked by Inter-American Development Bank Country Representative, Tariq Alli (left), and Clinical Director at The Phoenix Partnership (TPP), Dr. John Parry.

The EHR system is being implemented as part of the Health Systems Strengthening Programme, for which Jamaica has received a loan of US\$50 million from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

It includes a patient registration system for appointment setting and assignment of patients in the triage process of a facility, which will mean shorter wait times for diagnosis and treatment, re-

duced cost in providing services, increased productivity, reduced staff frustration, and increased service satisfaction levels.

282 Trainee Constables Graduate



Police Commissioner, Major General Antony Anderson (left), presents the trophy for Best Leadership Qualities to Constable Marvin Evans, during the Passing Out Parade Ceremony for 282 trainees at the National Police College of Jamaica (NPCJ) in St. Catherine on February 28.

\$1.3 Billion Earmarked for Bridge Repairs and Maintenance During 2023/24

THE GOVERNMENT will be spending \$1.3 billion on bridge repairs and maintenance in the 2023/24 fiscal year.

This represents an increase over the \$70.7 million that was budgeted for the programme in 2022/23.

"We are particularly pleased with the increased allocation under the bridge development and construction head [of the 2023/24 Estimates of Expenditure]," Minister Without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, Hon. Everaldo Warmington said.

He was addressing members of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives on March 1.

The bridges targeted for reconstruction include Troy



Minister Without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, Hon. Everaldo Warmington

in Trelawny; Spring Village in St. Catherine; Shrewsbury and Longwood, Westmoreland; Southwood in Clarendon and Llandewey in St. Thomas.

The list also includes the border bridge linking St. Elizabeth and Westmoreland, Guanaboa Vale Bridge in St. Catherine, Alley Bridge in

Clarendon, and Junction Bridge in St. Ann.

Mr. Warmington, who said much needed maintenance work will be undertaken on selected structures island-wide, indicated that these include the bridge rails at Tatchwalk in St. Ann and another structure in St. Mary.

"The Ministry intends to ensure that the connectivity between communities is returned to its optimum," he said.

Opposition Spokesperson on Housing, Transportation and Works, Mikael Phillips, said the increased allocation for bridge maintenance and replacement "is a step in the right direction".

He said he was happy that the Troy Bridge, which collapsed in August 2021, is on the list to be replaced.

\$7 Billion Programmed for Water Infrastructure Projects in 2023/24

CAPITAL PROJECTS, totalling \$7 billion, which are programmed to upgrade Jamaica's water infrastructure during fiscal year 2023/24, represent the largest investment made in the sector to date.

This, according to Minister Without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, Senator the Hon. Matthew Samuda, who said the figure is a significant increase over the \$4 billion worth of investment made last year.

He was speaking during the Caribbean Maritime University (CMU) inaugural Port Royal Lecture Series on February 28 at the institution's Palisadoes Park campus in Kingston.

The upgrading works, being undertaken by the Na-



Minister Without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, Senator the Hon. Matthew Samuda

tional Water Commission (NWC), include building additional storage for increased capacity, energy optimisation, replacing decaying pipelines for improved distri-

bution, and reducing non-revenue water.

"It is all-island. It is more capital works than have been ever done, certainly in my lifetime. It will benefit citizens in every part of the country," he told JIS News.

Noting that Jamaica's cyclical drought seasons are exacerbated by the impact of climate change, Minister Samuda said these engagements will create greater resilience and further strengthen Jamaica's water sector.

"In 2016, 71 per cent of our water collected, stored and processed was either leaked or stolen. So, building up our resilient network is absolutely critical, and we are well on our way in that space," he stated.

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