

Alexis: Health first over beautification

THE GOVERNMENT'S decision to invest \$1.3 billion into an islandwide sanitation, drain cleaning and beautification programme is being met with some amount of objection from one medical doctor who feels that the money could be better spent on improving health facilities.

Opposition spokesman on health, Dr Shane Alexis, believes that the money should be invested in improving both the human resources and the physical plants within the health sector, as the mass migration of health professionals has impacted the country's ability to deal with health crises such as dengue fever, which has claimed at least 44 lives.

"When the prime minister announces \$1.3 billion or \$15 million to every member of parliament to fight a mosquito in potholes and gullies, the mosquito *Aedes aegypti* is a domestic

mosquito, it is not there and, yes, it is true that I am in representational politics and my opponent will receive that money, let me just say that, but it is not saving lives," Alexis told editors and reporters during a Gleaner Editors' Forum held last Thursday at the newspaper's North Street, Kingston offices.

"That \$15 million could have provided an ultrasound [machine] at the Annotto Bay Hospital that will save lives, so our priorities can't just be for expediency or to make big announcement with big numbers, it has to be driven by technical data and where you have the greatest impact," he said.

Prime Minister Andrew Holness had disclosed in Parliament recently that the \$1.3-billion mitigation programme will be rolled out in the 63 constituencies islandwide and will last for four months. He said the project would focus

primarily on the clearing of blocked drains and gullies; debushing of roadsides, gully banks and verges; and the collecting of municipal waste; as well as beautification of public spaces.

The mitigation exercise would be implemented by the National Works Agency in collaboration with the National Solid Waste Management Authority and the Ministry of Health and Wellness. While MPs would get the opportunity to identify the projects in their constituencies, the NWA would have the task of implementing the programme. An additional \$1 billion was also invested to fighting dengue.

But given the huge demand for health services, Alexis has questioned the decision to invest in this programme and not the health sector instead.

"We have not invested in our structure in a meaningful way in many years, and breaking ground and announcements are not saving lives," he lamented.

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Dr Shane Alexis, opposition spokesperson on health, addressing a Gleaner Editors' Forum at the newspaper's Kingston offices last Thursday.

Grange: Attend Beale's plays in tribute

THE ENTERTAINMENT community was thrust into mourning yesterday with the sudden death of playwright, Paul Beale.

Olivia Grange, minister of culture, gender, entertainment and sport, said she was saddened to learn of Beale's death, and paid tribute to him as "an outstanding playwright who dedicated his life to Jamaican theatre".

Beale passed away on Friday after returning from rehearsals for his latest productions.

"Paul's role in the development of the Jamaican theatre was invaluable," said Grange.

"He gave his all each time, whether in the role of writer, actor, director or producer. We must never forget his contribution and the characters that he's left with us."

She added: "As a tribute to Paul, I encourage everyone who is able to attend his latest plays – *Melita and the plumber* and *Rasta's Wedding Proposal* – on Sunday at Carter Hall, Holy Cross Church, Half-Way Tree, and give support to his family, friends and colleagues."

Grange also extended condolences to Paul Beale's family.



Paul O. Beale

'Big deal' conference for JLP

Holness to outline plans to build Jamaica

Erica Virtue
Senior Gleaner Writer

FOR THE second consecutive year, Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) leader Andrew Holness will face party faithful at an annual conference after losing a Cabinet minister under a cloud of corruption.

Holness, who is also the prime minister, lost Ruel Reid, his education and information minister, in March this year, following allegations of irregularities and financial impropriety at the Ministry of Education and its related agencies.

The JLP leader has said little to date on the Reid affair, which is the latest blow to the Government he leads, especially after his commitment to anti-corruption efforts at his 2016 swearing-in.

However, he admitted to Labourites during a party meeting that he was "saddened" by the stains on the party, and last week at a closed-door meeting in St Ann he spoke to the issue of corruption, warning the party's representatives.

Reid was arrested early last month, along with head of the Caribbean Maritime University (CMU) Professor Fritz Pinnock, following a raid in October conducted by the Major Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency (MOCA), Financial Investigations Division (FID) and the Constabulary Financial Unit of the Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime Division (CTOC). His wife and daughter, and a JLP councillor were also arrested in the early-morning raids.

A Holness insider said last week that the JLP remains the best choice to lead Jamaica at this time, and the "prime minister will outline plans to build Jamaica to make it clear that the opposition (People's National Party) is incapable".

INNOVATIVE POLICY IDEAS

Party Chairman Robert Montague said the conference will be a "big deal".

"Our 76th annual conference is going to be a big deal. This conference will see us engaging our base, hearing from them as we look to begin the long process of reviewing new and innovative policy ideas," said Montague in prepared responses to *The Sunday Gleaner*.

"We will be assessing our performance as a party in government, and checking to ensure that in our fourth year, we begin the process of candidate assessment and selection," Montague also said.

It is not known how many seats are yet to have a representative named by the JLP, but seats considered strongly in favour of the opposition are usually filled closer to the declaration of elections. It is also not known if the ailing Shahine Robinson, MP for St Ann North East, will contest the next election constitutionally due in 2021, but widely expected to be next year.

Sunday Gleaner sources say

the prime minister has sought to nudge some long-standing members of parliament away from representation, but there has been resistance to the efforts.

One sitting member of parliament is said to have chased a Holness supporter from a constituency this year, after it was made clear that permission was being sought to 'understudy' him. The MP is one of several "multiple-term" representatives the party is seeking to replace.

"We will use the conference to seek feedback, to see if we can adjust, where necessary, our programmes and policies to ensure that the gains we have already achieved keep delivering the prosperity that Jamaica deserves," said the chairman.

He said the conference will also report on the assessment of manifesto promises, highlight achievements and review of caretakers.

GOVERNMENT'S SUCCESSES

Holness will be boasting success at the Government's infrastructural development programme in sections of the city, despite the missed deadlines for works in the Corporate Area. Heavy islandwide rainfall in 2019 has also impacted completion dates. He can also celebrate record low unemployment levels and a relatively stable macroeconomic environment which has resulted in the reduction of the debt-to-GDP ratio.

But there is no escape from the stench of corruption hanging over the head of the Government led by the post-Independence-born prime minister.

Jamaica, in 2018, was seen as the 70th least corrupt nation out of 175 countries, according to the Corruption Perception Index reported by Transparency International. Jamaica ranked as average 72.32 from 1998 until 2018, and saw its best placement of 99 in 2009 and its worst, 45 in 2002. In the 2017 report, Jamaica placed 68th out of 180 countries.

The prime minister will also have to help raise trust in the Government and address crime, largely subdued by zones of special operations and localised states of emergency.

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PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER SERJU

As soon as The Gleaner's Christopher Serju explained he was from Jamaica and mentioned Usain Bolt, Koki asked "Bolto?" and struck the sprinter's trademark 'To the World' pose. Serju was visiting the Mashiki Chuo Elementary School in Mashiki, Japan, during his recent participation in the 2019 Japan Journalism Fellowship organised by the Association for Promotion of International Cooperation in collaboration with the Foreign Press Center Japan, and which this year is centred on the environment and disaster preparedness. See Serju's Reflections on Japan on Pages D9 and D10.

JUSTICE

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impact statement in respect of the impact of international arms trafficking on Jamaica," Llewellyn told *The Sunday Gleaner*.

A senior law-enforcement official revealed that the case was cracked through good old-fashioned police work.

"We collected scientific evidence at the warehouse. When we checked it against our system, nothing came up, so we sent it to the Americans and that's how Rhooms landed on our radar."

In a job at the Jamaican judiciary, the senior law-enforcement source said a decision was taken to repack the weapons and send them to the American authorities for Rhooms to be prosecuted there.

"All now he would not be tried in Jamaica. And even if he was convicted, he would get, what, four

months?" the source questioned.

Llewellyn steered clear of that assertion, explaining that the decision to allow US authorities to prosecute Rhooms was based on a "careful evaluation of all the circumstances".

EXTENSIVE DISCUSSIONS

"I don't want to get into some of it publicly, but after extensive discussions with two senior members of my staff who worked closely with law enforcement [Jamaican and US] and since he was domiciled there, we thought that it be best dealt with over there," she said.

"The most important thing is that the interest of justice has been well served. To me, it matters not whether it's in Jamaica or in the US. It shows the collaboration and cooperation between the prosecuting authorities and law enforcement in both our countries, which ultimately serves the ends of justice."

According to newly released details, Jamaican law-enforcement

authorities zeroed in on the Adolph Levy Warehouse on July 20, 2017 after the local intelligence community was alerted about two suspicious containers.

"The first container was searched and what appeared to be a decoy strategy was employed by the criminal. This was in the form of toy guns and what appeared to be useless household items," one source revealed.

But the team hit pay dirt during a search of the second container when the guns and ammunition were found almost in plain sight in a blue barrel that was shipped in the name of 'Roy Ricketts' and consigned to 'Eric Ricketts' of a Kingston 20 address, one source disclosed.

"Based on what we saw, the

shipper seemed to have had a lot of confidence that the shipment would have gone through without detection because, away from the fact that the weapons were lightly wrapped in various layers of tape and carbon papers, there was very little attempt to disguise them. They were almost at the top of the barrel," the source continued.

Rhooms was deported from the United Kingdom to Jamaica in May 2008 after two drug-related convictions in April 2002 and February 2006, according to police sources. But months later, he reportedly 'moved' to the US and was arrested on drug charges in Florida in February last year.

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NOTICE

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Venue: The Gazebo
Time: 2:00 p.m.
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8 20 22 34 35 1				
Match	\$200 TICKET	WINNERS	\$300 TICKET	WINNERS
Match 5 + Super Ball	\$1,450,000	No Winner	\$2.2 Million	No Winner
Match 4 + Super Ball	\$80,000	No Winner	\$120,000	No Winner
Match 4	\$10,000	7 Winners	\$15,000	4 Winners
Match 3 + Super Ball	\$2,600	20 Winners	\$4,000	13 Winners
Match 3	\$400	223 Winners	\$600	150 Winners
Match 2 + Super Ball	\$400	234 Winners	\$600	157 Winners
Match 1 + Super Ball	\$200	739 Winners	\$300	500 Winners
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