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TUESDAY - JANUARY 29TH, 2019

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PM: "SECURE OUR MIDDLE CLASS"

MINNIS GOV'T CALLED "A DISASTER"

BY LEAH COOPER
 Journal Staff Writer

Prime Minister Dr. Hubert Minnis last night expressed that the country must expand more and increase efforts to secure the middle class and to move more Bahamians out of poverty. The Prime Minister gave the first of a series of three national reports last night covering economic growth, job creation, and greater opportunities for Bahamians. He said while the country is making economic progress and the economy is growing, there is still much work to do to boost jobs, especially among young

Bahamians. Dr. Minnis said, "economic growth must be inclusive and must be felt across the country for all Bahamians." For the current fiscal year, the Prime Minister noted that government vowed support in \$5.5 million for loans, grants and equity injections into Bahamian small businesses. In collaboration with private sector partners, some \$7 million will be funded directly to Bahamian entrepreneurs and small businesses. Dr. Minnis said that \$450,000 will be spent to provide grants to young underprivileged Bahamians from

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▶ Prime Minister the Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis (File photo)



▶ Leader of the Opposition, Philip Davis (File photo)

Calling the Minnis administration "a disaster," the leader of the Opposition, Philip Davis says, "Bahamians were treated from their Prime Minister to a litany of non-performance" in a national address last night. Mr.

Davis in a press statement said, "what a travesty this address was. A nothing burger trying to pass for sensible public policy and accomplishment."

"Mr. Prime Minister,

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POLICE SEIZE MARIJUANA SHIPMENT

BY LICEC BASTIAN
 Journal Staff Writer

Police seized more than 100 pounds of suspected marijuana from a cargo flight at the Lynden Pindling International

Airport on Sunday. The flight originated in Jamaica.

National Security Minister, Marvin Dames, during his remarks, at a

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Minister Hopes For National Drug Plan

BY LICEC BASTIAN
 Journal Staff Writer

Minister of National Security Marvin Dames told Law Enforcement Agencies gathered for a National Drug Planning

Workshop with the Inter-American Drug Control Commission (CICAD) that he is looking forward to receiving a plan that can be implemented over

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Customs Dept Being Modernized

BY BERTHONY MCDERMOTT
 Journal Staff Writer

The Customs Department is in the process of modernizing in an effort to make all procedures at the department electronic.

Acting Comptroller in the Customs Dr. Geannine Moss said this process has been in the works since 2012.

She said, "one of the

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CARICOM OPTIMISTIC OF PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO VENEZUELAN CRISIS



▶ Caribbean Community (CARICOM) leaders have ended a meeting with United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, expressing optimism that the UN will assist in establishing the road map towards peace and security for Venezuela. CARICOM Chairman and St. Kitts-Nevis Prime Minister Dr. Timothy Harris led a delegation that included his Trinidad and Tobago counterpart, Dr. Keith Rowley, and Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley to the talks on the possibility of the UN intervening in the ongoing political situation in the South American country.




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ALL THE NEWS YOU NEED TO READ IN THE MORNING

Minister Underscores Airlift Problems For Southern Islands

BY JAMEELHA MISSICK
Journal Staff Writer

The uptick in tourism numbers not reflected in how things shaped up in the southern islands, and Minister of Tourism, Dionisio D'Aguilar, is blaming that on a lift problem.

Airlines he said, want to see demand before they can put on the lift.

"We have to create something that's going to move the airlines to want to put on the additional

lift," he said.

"Now you could say throw on the planes, but if the planes are going empty then that's not accomplishing the purpose.

"Then you have to market these by in large smaller lodges, and that is always a challenge and you know how to solve that problem is indeed vexing," said the Minister.

As for cruise ships, most family islands are included on a 3-4 day

voyage.

The problem is - the further you go down the chain, the more unattractive it reportedly becomes.

"The cruise companies love private islands, they would love to develop more and none of them that I'm aware of, have come to us and say hey we're interested in your southern islands.

"They're always looking at the Bimini's, the Berry's, New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco,

that's what they're interested in.

"I'm sure we have pointed out to them, and I'm sure they're aware of those islands, but for whatever reason they ain't there yet.

"So it may get there as options in the northern Bahamas fall away and now they're looking to further move down but they're not there yet," the Minister said.

When asked if there was a strategy to make it more compelling for

cruise lines and visitors to want to visit the southern islands,

Minister D'Aguilar said, "it can't get more attractive than what it already is.

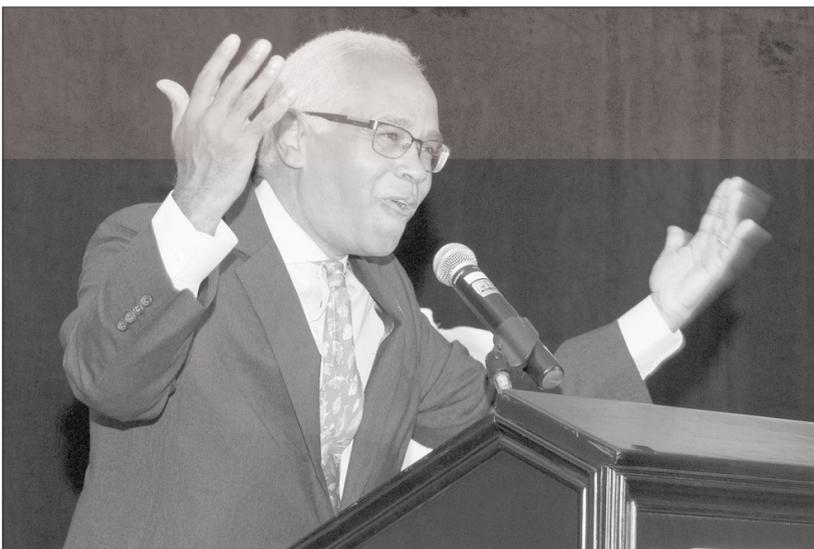
"We almost give you the land, you don't pay any import taxes on anything that you build, you don't pay any VAT, you pay no duty, you bring your people off the boat, you employ some local people," he said.

"It is extremely attractive based on the constructs of the past, I don't necessar-

ily agree with some of those constructs and how one sided they were, but those were the constructs that were available in the past.

"We gave everything to the cruise companies. There wasn't anything they couldn't get, the got acres of land, use of land for dollar a year," he added.

Minister D'Aguilar's comments came as a guest on the weekly talk show, Jones and Company.



► Minister of Tourism Dionisio D'Aguilar (File photo)



MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD (USCG) ACADEMY 4 YEAR MILITARY DEGREE PROGRAM

The Bahamian Government in collaboration with the United States Embassy (Nassau) invites all qualified persons who are interested in applying for a four-year degree scholarship at the United States Coast Guard Academy in Connecticut, United States, to submit their applications to the Royal Bahamas Defence Force Headquarters, Coral Harbour Base by 31st January, 2019.

To qualify, applicants must:

- Be a Bahamian citizen
- Be between the ages of 17-22 years old
- Be unmarried and with no dependents
- Be willing to serve in the Royal Bahamas Defence Force for a minimum of five years on completion.
- Must be physically fit
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- Have a high school diploma
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Bachelor's Degree Programs are offered in:

- Civil Engineering
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- Naval Architecture
- Operations Research
- Marine and Environmental Sciences
- Government
- Mechanical Engineering
- Management

Deadline for submission of application is 31st January, 2019.

Deadline for registration for SAT examination is 8th February, 2019 for the 9th March, 2019 test date (results from March test are only accepted if results from previous test are received by 1st March, 2019).

Students may register at:

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/international>

The USCGA code number for the SAT exam is 5807.

Deadline for ACT registration is 11th January, 2019 for 8th February, 2019 test date.

Students can register at <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act-non-us.html>

The USCGA code number for the ACT exam is 0600.

Applicants can make application to sit the SAT/ACT at local SAT Centers in New Providence as follows: Aquinas College, St. Andrew's School, St. Anne's School, The University of The Bahamas, Government High School and Queen's College.

For further information, please contact the Royal Bahamas Defence Force Human Resource Officer, Lieutenant Commander Michael Hanna at telephone 362-3705 or 362-3711 or via email at michaelhanna@rbdf.gov.bs or visit the website www.rbdf.gov.bs

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PM: "SECURE OUR MIDDLE CLASS"

Continued from / PAGE 1...

throughout the country, from poor neighborhoods and poor families – to support their business aspirations.

Through the Small Business Development Center, he indicated that seven companies have been approved for funding to either begin or to expand their businesses for a collective total of \$1.5 million, with more credit to be extended.

He said, "once these small businesses are provided with capital, they can contribute to the fabric of the economy by providing new businesses by Bahamian entrepreneurs and jobs for Bahamians. The government has also committed to enhanced training for aspiring entrepreneurs through the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) and the University of The Bahamas (UB)."

The 'Be Your Own Boss' (BYOB) Scholarship, he noted, offers \$1,000 in tuition support to students between the ages of 18 and 25, that "will enroll full time in preparatory, certificate, diploma and associate degree programs, which will train them with the necessary technical and vocational skills to start a business or secure employment".

He added, "equipping our students with these types of opportunities will create both jobs and products to help grow the economy. We anticipate expanding this initiative in the upcoming budget."

The Prime Minister also noted that the country's growth and expansion agenda includes "a dynamic mix of Bahamians and foreign direct investment".

In an effort to help new business startups, Dr. Minnis said that the Ministry of Finance

recently announced the roll out of a provisional business license implemented by the Department of Inland Revenue.

This will allow those wishing to start a new low-risk business to do so in five days or less.

Once granted the provisional license, which will be valid for 90 days, businesses will be allowed to be up and running, while they work to complete the full business license process by obtaining all the necessary documents for completion.

The fee for starting a new business has also been waived, he said, and the application process has been consolidated through one application through the Department of Inland Revenue.

He added, "this has made the process much easier for those wishing to launch a new business." We will ensure that we continue to refine the process even more."

The Prime Minister said that he also pressed his ministers to address the unacceptable amount of time it takes for Bahamians and foreigners alike to open a bank account.

He noted the importance of the 'Know Your Customer' Rules, however he said that it was just as important that Bahamians be able to go to a bank and open an account with little hassle, once they have the proper identification.

He added, "instead of finding excuses as to why it cannot happen, I want the Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance, the commercial banks and the private sector to tell me how it will happen."

Since mid-2017, the Minnis Administration approved an estimated \$3.7 billion of foreign investment projects.

Dr. Minnis added that many of these projects,

once approved, will immediately contract Bahamian firms for legal, accounting, project management, engineering, environmental, architectural, consulting and other professional services.

He said, "the success in Foreign Direct Investment is due in part to the increase of Information C o m m u n i c a t i o n Technology enterprises and boutique financial services investments as companies look to make The Bahamas their regional headquarters for the Caribbean."

He added, "New Providence received 55 percent of the inward flows of Foreign Direct Investment since 2017. This includes: the approval of a number financial services companies, and a number of back office administrative firms approved including Baptist Health International Services, CITGO Petroleum; and the Disargo Group of Companies."

Dr. Minnis said to increase Bahamian and international partnerships and foreign direct investment, the government will restructure the Bahamas Investment Authority by establishing a promotional arm.

This promotional arm, he said, will be critical for economic expansion and growth.

He added that it will facilitate investment promotion tours with participation of both private and public stakeholders.

In the coming weeks, the Prime Minister said that he plans to release two more reports.

The second will social issues like crime fighting, healthcare, education, housing, and home ownership.

The third will cover environment and climate change, energy reform, and land reform.

MINNIS GOV'T CALLED

Continued from / PAGE 1...

after twenty months in office you must surely know you cannot simply pronounce something as truth - that which is clearly false. You have fallen short.

"The Prime Minister stapled together every piece of paper he could to try to make the government look 'busy'. It's the kind of thing that children do when the teacher walks into class. But nothing that he said tonight can hide the fact that his government is failing.

"Some of what he promoted as 'successes', are simply processes. For example, we hardly need a plan to clean up Bay Street. It simply needs to be done. Just clean it up!" said Mr. Davis.

Saying he wished to isolate the claim of unemployment being down on Grand Bahama, the PLP leader stated: "Here we go again with yet another example of a selective

story that bears no match to reality. The reality on the ground is that after twenty months the FNM has made things worse in Grand Bahama. Just ask the people of Grand Bahama if unemployment is down.

"In any event the figures show that unemployment is up in the country at large. This is simply breathtaking and inexcusable. It is due to the ruinous stop, review and cancel mantra of the FNM and Prime Minister Minnis.

"This ruinous policy represents an existential threat to the Bahamian people.

How can you fire thousands of people, hire your cronies, then claim that unemployment is down?" Mr. Davis asked.

The MP for Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador said, "the Hubert Minnis and his administration have been a disaster for this country. The facts show it. Everything is

going in the wrong direction. Most of all, there is no feel good factor in the country for him and the FNM. The misery index is up in The Bahamas.

"The Prime Minister confirmed why he has failed. The pity is he just doesn't get it."

Mr. Davis said, " a PLP administration for its part would have announced the airport had been started in Exuma; the school in Black Point and its clinic fixed and functional; and announced a buyer and operator for the hotel in Grand Bahama complete with the requisite supporting airlift. Further, Ragged Island would be well on its way to being back on its feet again; the construction of a new runway at the Lynden Pindling International Airport (LPIA) would be well underway.

"The PLP would have said something to give people hope in other words," Mr. Davis said.



West Bay Street Road Rehabilitation Project

Important Notice

Traffic Diversion

West Bay Street between Blake Road and Tropical Gardens

Road will be closed to traffic on Thursday, January 24th 2019 between the hours of 9:30am and 8:00pm. The motoring public is asked to adhere to all posted diversion routes. Provisions will be made to accommodate all necessary local traffic during the duration of the work.

We apologize for any inconvenience caused to the public during this period. For further information or assistance please contact any of the following:

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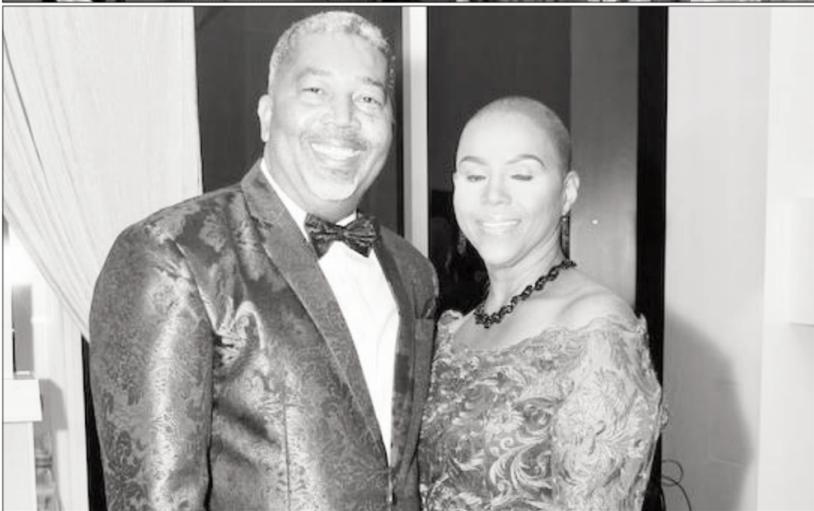
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Annual Red Cross Ball Highlights



► The Annual Red Cross Ball with its usual sparkle took place at Baha Mar on Saturday evening, attended by Governor General, Her Excellency the Most Hon. Dame Marguerite Pindling; Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis and Mrs. Minnis; and Minister of Social Services and Urban Development the Hon. Frankie Campbell and Mrs. Campbell; and other dignitaries. Mrs. Nancy Kelly was the 2019 Red Cross Individual Honouree. Photos show highlights. **(BIS Photos/Kristaan Ingraham)**

Celebration of Chinese SPRING FESTIVAL



► Governor-General Her Excellency the Most Hon. Dame Marguerite Pindling joined Deputy Prime Minister K. Peter Turnquest, a number of Cabinet Ministers, senior Government officials and diplomatic stakeholders, in celebrating the Chinese New Year with People's Republic of China Ambassador His Excellency Huang Qinguo and his wife, Madame Zheng Chuncao, on January 23, 2019, at the British Colonial Hilton. Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs the Hon. Brent Symonette brought remarks on behalf of Minister Darren Henfield, joining with other community leaders and stakeholders bringing greetings at the podium. Among those present included Minister of Health the Hon. Duane Sands; Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture the Hon. Lanisha Rolle; Minister of the Public Service and National Insurance the Hon. Brensil Rolle; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Jack Thompson, Foreign Affairs Director General Ambassador Sharon Brennen-Haylock; Director of Works Melanie Roach; and President of the Bahamas China Friendship Association Gershan Major. Students of the University of The Bahamas and St. Andrew's School performed songs in Mandarin. **(BIS Photos / Eric Rose)**

WARNING SHOT



By Jerry Hutchinson

Auditor General Reports: Time to End the Charade

The mandate of the Auditor General as stated in The Constitution of The Bahamas Article 136 is as follows:

- The Auditor-General shall submit his reports made under paragraph (3) of this Article without undue delay to the Speaker (or, if the office of Speaker is vacant or the Speaker is for any reason unable to perform the functions of his office, to the Deputy Speaker) who shall cause them to be laid before the House of Assembly without undue delay.
- In the exercise of his functions under the provisions of paragraphs (3) and (4) of this Article, the Auditor-General shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.
- The accounts of the department of the Auditor General shall be audited and reported on by the Minister of Finance.

Another year and another auditor general report years after the event. One may be forgiven if they view this as a pointless exercise, especially as very few persons appear to have ever been held accountable for their wrongdoings. It is inconceivable that the frequency and extent of alleged thievery can go on and on and only small level thieves face the courts.

So, whilst these reports some years after the fact make good political theatre, the underlying problems remain unaddressed. How can it be that the Auditor General's Office can state unequivocally that millions of our funds are misappropriated yet no one is brought to account? This may be because the wrongdoers are civil servants and not politicians and, that remediation is not a priority. According to the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

"Naturally, the vulnerabilities in the company's system revealed after the theft should be addressed first, and any holes in the system should be closed. Job duties should be analysed, and some tasks may need to be re-assigned to prevent any single employee from having too much control over a function. Segregating duties is one of the most basic fraud prevention controls that all companies should implement, and, this is a very cheap method of fraud prevention if it is done correctly."

In the Tribune reporting of January 15, 2018 entitled "Auditors uncover \$450k bonus fraud" we see once more laid out in detail the nature of the fraud. If you read the article through you will see that it was affected by the very same systems failures the remediations recommended by the IFRS was intended to prevent. I believe that if the frauds detected by the Auditor General (AG) over the years, involving virtually all the government's revenue centres were totalled, it would probably be in the millions of dollars.

The question must be asked why? Why, after all the thefts and misappropriations documented is there not a professionally staffed accounting department in every ministry, whose properly prepared accounts can be audited by the AG's staff on a timelier basis? These accountants will also detect in good time, efforts by dishonest staff to commit fraud. This is a problem which has existed across administrations but, has been left to fester and proliferate. It is unconscionable to expect the AG with his minimally staffed and underfunded department to unravel these matters long after the fact. It is also criminally negligent to allow the flagrant theft of our funds to continue year on year without legal consequences. The Bahamas can use the stolen funds to grow the economy and ease the taxpayer's burdens but, I guess I am being altruistic. Okay, we know incontrovertibly that government revenue has been stolen over significant periods of time so, let's explore why nothing is being done to bring the culprits to justice.

Not believing anyone was a big victim.

There are some misguided persons who believe that government funds are endless. So, what if they thief a bit, no one will miss it. That's a spirit of criminality, avarice and covetousness. But they are right about the not missing it part. The lack of consistent oversight and protection of our funds is a disgrace. The idea that no one is a big victim is also selfish and short-sighted. Stolen funds represent a drain on the governments consolidated fund. It funds unfunded pension liabilities estimated to be around \$26 million. Civil servants expect their salaries, gratuities and pensions to come from the fund. With all the fraud being perpetrated on public funds, theft puts the safety of these benefits at

risk. At risk because of rampant dishonesty and theft literally, of your pension funds!

Attorneys advise against legal action.

One of the most effective shields against civil servants being prosecuted in our courts is General Orders (GO). The passage of time before the fraud is discovered and, the intentional absence of a paper trail makes a prosecution problematic.

The wrongdoers know this, and unions use it as a defence. So, employees are either transferred or interdicted in accordance with GO. In some instances, criminal staff are given the option of having the pilfered funds deducted from their salaries; this solution challenges logic. It is doomed to fail as, now the employee must double down on their thievery to replace the funds deducted! If, the fraudster is a kleptomaniac or a degenerate gambler then, heaven help us.

In each of these instances the public loses; the transferred employee is given another venue to continue their fraud; and, the interdicted employee is put on half pay. Eventually interest [or files] is lost forestalling the prosecution of the alleged fraudster. There is more than anecdotal evidence to conclude that neither of these options is in our interest. Indeed, some interdicted employees are being paid long after they have found employment outside the service and in several cases have died.

Emotional ties with the employee.

The Bahamas is a small society and, we all develop close workplace relationships. In some cases, friendships cover the course of many years. It is not unusual to find family members working together in some government departments. So, department heads will find it difficult to deal effectively with fraud in their departments especially as friends will not "rat" on each other. This is where you must rely on effective accounting and management systems which alerts department heads to fraud and other staff wrongdoing. Another serious issue is that deferential department heads will usually pass critical staff dishonesty issues to their Ministers. This creates a whole raft of human resource problems; undermines staff morale and creates "untouchables" within a department. Since Ministers hardly ever make other than politically expedient decisions, especially if it involves a constituent, the culprits remain in place, unpunished and emboldened. Indeed, Bahamian funds and operations are placed at risk when political appointees are sent to head highly technical departments with no training or experience in how they operate. They usually seek to cover their deficiencies with bullying tactics, bluster and arrogance; a deadly combination in any environment.

Not trusting the judicial system.

There is growing public perception that the legal system is not fit for purpose. There are too many instances when clear cases of fraud are brought to the courts and never prosecuted because of the non-appearance of witnesses, police and otherwise. Public servants, especially heads of departments are busy people.

It is unfair to repeatedly ask them to appear to court for a case that is not called. The glacial pace of our legal system, therefore, militates against civil servants being brought to justice for financial wrongdoings in the rare instances that they are charged. So, what do we do? Clearly, the accounting systems and methods must be overhauled and improved. The Bahamas cannot afford the continued "leakages" of public revenue because proper focus and resources are not being provided. What I find incredible is the lack of urgency being given to the prevalence of systemic fraud across multiple government ministries; rampant fraud which endangers the financial health of the country.

Imagine the national development projects we can undertake without seeking expensive bank loans if this criminal activity is remediated. I know that once the most recent auditor general's report is widely disseminated our politicians will propose all manner of fixes for the problem. They might even begin another police investigation with probably no results, just like in the past. For sure, eventually some small fry will be hammered in the courts, but the underlying problem will remain unaddressed; this is unhelpful. The necessary financial means and political will must be exerted if these scandalous episodes in our public life are to be ended. Our elected officials and law enforcement need to step up and solve this vexing problem.

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Quo Vadis, Bahamas?

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E D I T O R I A L

GOVERNMENT BLACKMAILED

There have been foreign investors in the Bahamas over the years who have been good to the Bahamian people. However, there have been others who have taken the people for a ride and fleeced the country. One such investor has been Hutchison Whampoa. In fact they were able to outsmart successive governments.

The Christie government entered into a seven year agreement with Hutchison from 2014 to pay the company \$400-thousand a month to keep the Grand Lucaya hotel open. On top of this, a further \$300-thousand was agreed to be paid to Hutchison to keep Memories hotel in the complex open. So this means that Hutchison was receiving from the Public Treasury of the Bahamas \$8.4 million a year.

When hurricane Matthew severely damaged the property, Hutchison got some \$80-million dollars in insurance money. They took the money and ran and did not refurbish the hotel. Not one penny stayed in the Bahamian economy.

Then the last Progressive Liberal Party government entered into an agreement with the Wynn Group to purchase the Grand Lucayan. That deal fell through. So Hutchison told the government that it will shut down the Hotel on 11th September 2018. According to Minister of Tourism Dionisio D'Aguilar, "they said if you (the government) will not buy, we'll shut it down."

Well, the government hurriedly found a \$10-million dollar down payment on the \$65-million dollar purchase. In addition, the government has to pay all of the severance pay for members of the staff.

Sometime ago, we know that the PLP government was made to understand that Hutchison would spend \$250-million to expand the Container Port. This is why the PLP backed off from pushing Hutchison on the hotel deal. Off course, the expansion never took place and there is reason to believe that it would never happen.

We are told that for this to happen, they would need a written agreement with one or more shipping companies to guarantee a minimum number of containers to be shipped through the container Port.

In our opinion Hutchison is and has been a terrible investor in the Bahamas. They have a long term lease for the Container Port. They own 50 per cent of Freeport Harbour Company. This company owns 100 per cent of the airport. We know that the harbour has made money and the air-

port does not. So the harbour has been subsidising the airport.

We believe that it is in the national interest for the government to take over the harbour company. The harbour is 50 per cent owned by Port Group Limited (the Hayward and Saint George families) and 50 per cent by Hutchison. But Hutchison has management control of the harbour company and the airport. They have failed to develop the area around the airport into a cargo facility. They owned the hotel, but never marketed it properly. They owned the Lucayan and the Reef Golf Courses and they too were never properly marketed for golfing.

Any hotelier will tell you that golfers spend money when they travel. If they had properly marketed the hotel, there would have been full employment on the property and the staff would have worked five day weeks. The owners of the hotel took the money from the government, while Bahamians were working two or three days per week.

All of the decision making for Hutchison is done in Hong Kong. The people in the Bahamas working for the company have little say in important matters.

Hutchison also owns 50 per cent of The Grand Bahama Development Company. Many residents of Freeport complain that there has been no development of any subdivision there since the development of Chesapeake subdivision nearly 20 years ago. Now the company has taken all of Devco's waterfront properties off the market.

Freeport - based lawyer Carey Leonard in a recent speech to The Grand Bahama Chamber of Commerce said, "I want Hutchison Whampoa to be a good corporate citizen. To date, Hutchison Whampoa has fallen miserably short of what it can, and should, deliver to Grand Bahama in terms of their management and in some instances, the quality of their operations. We should query if any management, administrative or similar charges are made by Hong Kong for the services rendered to their local Bahamian companies."

It is our hope that the Minnis administration can bring pressure to bear on Hutchison and tell the principals that the Bahamian people certainly do not appreciate what has transpired. They need to improve their performance if they wish to be well regarded or respected as an investor in the Bahamas.

THE BAHAMAS
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NO BETTER READING

GHS STUDENTS TOLD TO STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE

BY JAMEELHA MISSICK
Journal Staff Writer

The National Security Minister, Marvin Dames told students of his alma mater – The Government High School (GHS) yesterday that they should be about excellence. Mr. Dames was speaking at Awards Day ceremonies where 60 plus students were awarded as top performers.

Pulling from the theme, “Excellence Begins with Me,” Mr. Dames told the students excellence begins in each and every one of them.

“Excellence is not about taking short cuts, excellence is not about skipping

school, excellence is not about being the top boy or girl on the street, excellence is not about being average,” he said.

“Excellence is about digging deep and bringing out the best from within each and every one of you and that’s the only way you can achieve.”

Also addressing the group was Bain and Grants Town Member of Parliament, Travis Robinson, who just a few short years ago stood as a student of C.R. Walker High school.

The youngest Member of Parliament and a tourism consultant, Mr. Robinson reminded the youngsters that winners



► Minister of National Security and 1982 Government High School graduate the Hon. Marvin Dames (right) joins with Guest Speaker and Member of Parliament for the Bains and Grants Town Constituency Travis L. Robinson in encouraging students from his alma mater, at the Students' Recognition Ceremony, held on January 28, 2019, under the theme "Excellence Begins with Me". Also pictured seated is Principal Eloise B. Whymys. (BIS Photos / Eric Rose)

never quit.

“Hard work doesn’t guarantee you anything, but without hard work you do not stand a chance,” he

said.

“So I want you to work hard, I want you to remain committed, I want you to remain focused and deter-

mined that next time around on this honor roll and awards day, “I got next,” why, because excellence begins with [you.]”

GHS has a student population of 690, seven of whom made the principal’s list and 57 of the students were on the honour roll.

21st ANNUAL GB BUSINESS OUTLOOK

The 21st Annual Grand Bahama Business Outlook (GBBO) will take place Thursday, February 21, 2019 at The Grand Lucayan Resort, Freeport. Delivering the keynote this year will be Sen Hon J Kwasi Thompson, Minister for Grand Bahama.

Completing the slate of presenters are Greg Laroda, Sr., president of the Grand Bahama Chamber of Commerce; Derek Newbold, Sr Manager-Business Development, The Grand Bahama Port Authority; Giora Israel Sr Vice

President Global Port and Destination Development, Carnival Corporation & PLC; Zhivargo Laing, Chief Negotiator for the Bahamas Accession to the World Trade Organization; Gravette Brown, Chief Aliv Commercial Officer; Davinia Blair, Exec. Director, Small Business Development Center; David Wallace, General Manager, Pirates Cove Zipline and Water Park; Willie Moss, Partner, Graham Thompson & Co and Ian Strachan, PhD, Vice President, UB

North.

Joan Albury, president of the TCL Group and chief organizer of the seven-island Business Outlook series made the announcement.

“We are delighted to be celebrating the 21st anniversary of Grand Bahama Business Outlook and are pleased to have secured the participation of the Minister for Grand Bahama Senator Kwasi Thompson and the new president of the Grand Bahama Chamber of Commerce Greg Laroda Sr. These gentlemen and the other

speakers are heavily invested in the quality development of this community. All of our presenters have been chosen because of the information they can bring on available national resources and opportunities for quality growth for Grand Bahama and, consequently, the entire Bahamas. We are grateful to all,” said Mrs. Albury.

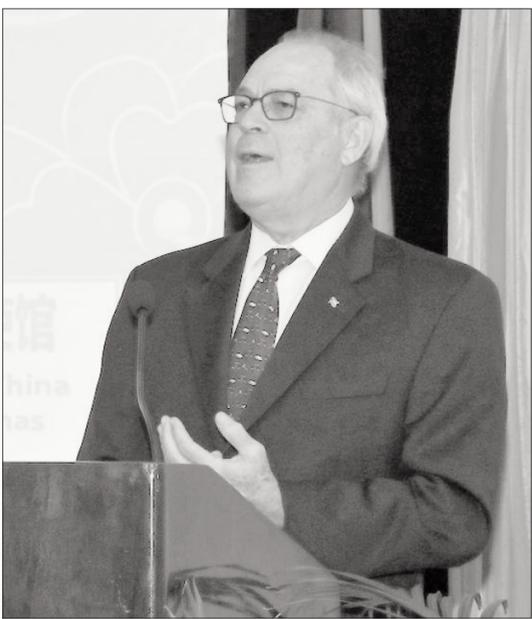
The TCL Group president added: “This year’s theme, “Connecting Resources, Maximizing Opportunities, Transforming Grand Bahama” speaks to the

need for strong partnership among the business leaders and people of this resilient island. Our company believes that Grand Bahama can and will rise again with dedicated collaboration and exchange of ideas. For this reason, we are pleased to be offering the very important Finance and Ease of Doing Business Workshops, with the continued excellent support of the Ministry of Finance. We are also introducing to the Grand Bahama forum our newest innovation called Creative Conversations. This panel will focus on promoting

the creative economy and discussing how creatives can contribute to economic growth. Panelists will include noted visual artist, Chantal E.Y. Bethel; established musician, Kevin G. Tomlinson; chef extraordinaire, Tim Tibbits and accomplished writer, Gea Pierre.”

Interested persons are encouraged to register at www.tclevents.com or contact Mercynth Ferguson of Grand Bahama Chamber of Commerce at 242-352-8329 or Email: info@gbchamber.org.

Bahamas Still Committed to Becoming International Arbitration Centre



► The Hon. Brent Symonette, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs (File photo)

Minister of Financial Services, Trade & Industry and Immigration, the Hon. Brent Symonette reiterated commitment to the country becoming an International Arbitration Centre. He made the remarks while welcoming delegates from across the region during the 7th Annual Arbitration and Investment Summit: Caribbean, Latin America & Other Emerging Markets. The event was held at Baha Mar Convention Centre, January 25, 2019 to the

theme, ‘International and National Arbitration Centers: Cross Border, Cooperation and Partnerships.’

“I would like to extend a warm welcome on behalf of the Government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, to all our international speakers and delegates who may have travelled from abroad to participate in the Summit,” said Minister Symonette. “Gatherings such as this provide a unique opportunity to share information and

provide updates on what policy makers are planning for the sector.”

He said that the conference was especially timely, as it coincided with the country’s timeline and objective of seeking to position itself as a credible centre for international commercial arbitration matters.

“We are presently in the process of enacting legislation which will impact both international and national arbitration matters where The Bahamas serves as the venue,” he said.

He reiterated the government’s commitment to ensuring the success of the financial services industry. “When I addressed participants last year at the 6th Summit, one of the things I noted was the Government’s awareness of The Bahamas’ continued reliance on tourism, financial services and foreign direct investment as drivers of the Bahamian economy and the government’s commitment to job creation, improving the standard of living of Bahamians and diversifying the Bahamian economy. I also noted that these goals have to be achieved in the context of an increasingly globalized

society.”

He said that the government is cognizant of the fact that in order for the country to progress, it must be in a position to take advantage of opportunity taking place internationally.

“In that vein the government remains committed to the establishment of The Bahamas as a modern and sophisticated international commercial arbitration centre,” he said. “The establishment of The Bahamas as an arbitration centre will not only complement the Bahamian legal profession, but also the Bahamian financial and maritime services, foreign direct investment and other international business initiatives. The potential for long term employment opportunities for Bahamian professionals working in such areas is significant.”

He said that it is also worth repeating that The Bahamas possesses all the attributes that makes it possible to be an arbitration hub given the country’s geographical location between North, Central and South America.

“Our accessibility by air transport to several major continents; our infrastructure by way of hotels and

convention centers; our advanced technology; a long standing commitment to the rule of law; stable government; our trained judiciary and let us not forget an experienced and skilled cadre of professional lawyers, accountants, trust officers and insurance specialists to name a few. These attributes should not be taken lightly as they give The Bahamas a competitive advantage over many competitors.”

He said that some progress has been made already as the country prepares itself for this new venture. “In addition to consultations held last year with Law Firms and Industry professionals, last November the Government laid in the House of Assembly the Arbitration (Amendment) Bill, 2018 and the International Commercial Arbitration Bill 2018. Passage of both Bills will bring further certainty and clarity to the Law, particularly for those interested in using The Bahamas as a venue for arbitration matters,” said the Minister.

“The Arbitration (Amendment) Bill, 2018, renames the 2009 Arbitration Act ‘The Bahamas Domestic Arbitration Act’ and will govern domestic arbitration. The International

Commercial Arbitration Bill 2018 incorporates key provisions of the Model Law of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL). The Model Law covers all stages of the arbitration process from the arbitration agreement to the recognition and enforcement of the arbitral award and reflects a worldwide consensus on key aspects of international arbitration practice accepted by states the world over no matter their legal or economic systems. The corresponding provisions of the UNCITRAL Model Law have been included in the Schedule of the International Commercial Arbitration Bill 2018 to indicate which provisions of the Bill align with corresponding provisions of the UNCITRAL Model Law making it easier for persons using the legislation. As you are well aware, the Model Law has become the global benchmark for good arbitration legislation, and by incorporating its provisions within our laws we are demonstrating our desire to be at the forefront in this area.”

Copies of both Bills can be found on The Bahamas Government’s official website at <https://www.bahamas.gov.bs>

Thirty-Six Graduate from Job Readiness Programme



► Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture Acting Permanent Secretary Rhoda Jackson (front row, third right); Deputy Permanent Secretary and Director of Youth K. Darron Turnquest (left of Ms. Jackson) and Programme Co-ordinator Keilli Brathwaite (right of Ms. Jackson) pose with the 36 graduates of the the Ministry's Job Ready programme, during the ceremony, on January 24, 2019, at the British Colonial Hilton. Moderating the event was Assistant Youth Officer and one of the facilitators RasDeNiro Thompson, and Motivational Speaker Mrs. Anastacia Palacios gave an inspirational speech to the class. Darrien Rolle received the award for top graduating class member.

(BIS Photos / Eric Rose)

POLICE SEIZE MARIJUANA SHIPMENT

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workshop aimed at developing a plan of action for the National Drug Strategy of The Bahamas, commended the ongoing work of law enforcement agencies who had intercepted the drugs Sunday night.

"To the Deputy Commissioner and the executive team of the Royal Bahamas Police

Force, let me take this opportunity, Mr. Seymour, and your executive team, to congratulate you on a successful seizure at the Lynden Pindling International Airport, where a team of law enforcement officers, along with police dog Milan, seized approximately 100 pounds of marijuana," Mr. Dames said.

Mr. Dames told reporters following the

opening of the workshop that police were actively investigating the incident.

"While checking some freight on an airline originating out of Jamaica, the police dog's attention was drawn to some pieces.

"After further search it was discovered that a quantity of marijuana was a part of that [cargo].

"So, the police are currently carrying out their investigations so you

should hear more from them very shortly," Mr. Dames said.

According to the police reports, Airport Division Officers made the discovery after 1:00pm Sunday after acting on information, and recovered 19 packages from that cargo flight that arrived from Jamaica.

When asked what will be done to at least clamp down on the influx of

drugs entering the country, particularly at the airport's port of entry, Mr. Dames said the quality of information received assists the police force tremendously.

"You can see it, it speaks to the successes of law enforcement.

"It means now that the quality of the information that they are receiving, their relationship with the public at large, it bodes well and it can only result

in more and more successes.

"So, we understand that our ports of entries will always be a challenge and so we have to look at ways at improving our strategies, increasing resources to ensure that we're able to live up to the challenge," Mr. Dames said.

No arrests were made. Investigations are ongoing.

Minister Hopes For National Drug Plan

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the next 2 years.

This follows the request of the government of The Bahamas, the Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), Secretariat for Multidimensional Security of the Organization of American States (OAS), in collaboration with the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (NADS) of The Bahamas are meeting contribute to the Development of Action Plans for the five pillars of the current National Drug Strategy.

Mr. Dames, during his remarks at the opening ceremony told participants that the planning stages means "no one is left behind".

"The 2017-2022 plan, which is the third in a series

since the establishment of NADS, the previous two covering the years 2007-2012 and 2013-2017, is different in that it now has to take into consideration, the global recommendations emanating from the United Nations General Assembly of Special session 2016.

"The Hemispheric Plan of Action; and the many changes that are going to necessary if we are to make any headway in our attempt to achieve those Sustainable Development Goals that are relevant to The Bahamas.

"So, I challenge you, as you deliberate, think carefully of those underlying conditions that contribute to our social conditions being what they are; our situation with respect to drug treatment; prevention;

the available supply of illicit substances; and chemical control," Mr. Dames said.

Mr. Dames also challenged workshop attendees to direct their efforts to what should be most paramount.

"Based on all the available information, ask yourselves, 'what are the best strategies and activities that we must employ if we wish to have the greatest desired impact on priority problems'.

"In the area of demand reduction, should the strategies include: incentives and penalties, increasing access/lowering barriers; changing policies and or regulations, or changing the environment," Mr. Dames said.

The workshop is being held at Superclubs Breezes Resorts.

Customs Dept.

Continued from / PAGE 1...

driving things that we are looking to do is to make every process that one would encounter or come to the Customs Department to do, an electronic process, where you are able to submit your documentation in the comfort of your home or wherever.

"At the end of the day you would be able to pay for the goods and get them."

Dr. Moss added that the

department has had a challenge getting couriers to be compliant in getting their business licenses updated and to submit the requisite documentation to the department as they are allowed to get their goods and pay the duty within 10 days.

"We need them to make sure that they post the bond to cover the duty in the event that something goes wrong, then we would be able to get the duty back in.

"So we're in the middle of rolling that out with the SI at the airport and hopefully in a few months, we can move that on to the seaside and then the entire department would be in an electronic era like we are intending for it to go," she said.

The Acting Comptrollers came on the sidelines of the Ministry of National Security's Senior Management First Annual Conclave.

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