

HURST REPORTS ON CABINET of Thursday, March 18 2021

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda met for approximately seven hours today, with four members attending virtually and other members attending face-to-face.

1. The Cabinet, following intense discussions among members and in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer, decided to allow restaurants to resume sit-down dining effective immediately. The curfew hours will remain at 8:00 pm to 5:00 am; however, the Cabinet intends to review (next week) the numbers of people being infected and hospitalized daily by Covid-19. If the numbers decline further, the Cabinet will determine whether to extend the curfew to a later hour. **The object is to enable those workers in restaurants to return to their jobs and to begin earning an income once more.** During delivery and pick-up service, many restaurants furloughed staff and others actually closed shut their doors. **Gyms, bars and other places of entertainment will be considered in due course.**

2. The Parliament will convene next Thursday, March 25, 2021, in order to consider whether to end or to continue the State of Emergency which, after 90 days, is scheduled to end on March 31, 2021. Other items to be considered will include the ratification of the vesting order, allowing the Antigua Commercial Bank to purchase the assets and liabilities of the Royal Bank of Canada.

3. It is the practice of the Cabinet to invite experts and officials to its meetings in order to enhance decision-making.

i. **Four of the most experienced lawyers from the Ministry of Legal Affairs/Attorney General's Chambers, including the Solicitor General, provided the Cabinet with a history of on-going events in the life of a contract with P.V. Energy**—the company that has built three solar energy plants on Antigua. There is a disagreement over storage batteries which were to be supplied in order to make the plants more useful. The Cabinet agreed to a bargaining position in order to ensure that Antigua and Barbuda achieves the complete object of the contract.

ii. **REDACTED.**

iii. **There was an intense debate among Cabinet members and the legal team about “capital gains tax”, potentially payable by a registered company on account of its relation to annual profits and an increase in the value of property owned.** The Cabinet maintained that a company, owner of a house or villa in Antigua and Barbuda, and whose house or villa is not essential to either the operation of the business or the profits earned, does not attract capital gains tax because the value of the property increases. Were the house or villa essential to the operation of the firm, then there might exist a nexus that would cause capital gains to become liable. Antigua and Barbuda seeks to attract foreign direct investment and also ownership in properties within the island-state. The Gaston Browne administration would not accept a line of reasoning that would chase away investments by making hidden taxes liable, the Chairman asserted.

iv. **The Chief Executive Officer of Cricket West Indies (CWI) was invited to the Cabinet to share new possibilities that Antigua's hosting of the Sri Lanka tour has created for the destination.** He gave an accounting of the amounts spent in the economy for the on-going tour, at a time when there has been a fall-off in spending

and tax revenues in Antigua and the Caribbean, on account of the Covid-19 global pandemic; hotels, ground transport, food, services exceeded EC\$4.5 million dollars. International cricket has been very good for Antigua, he asserted. The presence of two world-class cricket grounds made Antigua a very attractive venue; only Trinidad, in the Eastern Caribbean, has two world-class grounds, and that country's borders are closed at the moment, he explained. The CWI official thanked the Chief Quarantine Officer (who is the CMO) for her understanding and for devising protective protocols that work for the teams and their officials. He stressed that the new technologies which CWI will be employing are likely to make Antigua an even more attractive venue for international cricket and other sports.

v. Four Managers of the National School Meals Programme were invited to Cabinet in order to prepare for the April 12 opening of schools. There are 220 team members employed who make the program work. They serve 28 Primary Schools, 3 Pre-Schools, the Sir Novelle Richards, the Princess Margaret, 6,000 meals per day, at a cost of \$20.00 per student. The Cabinet agreed to make payments for the purchase of supplies, for the payment to suppliers and other creditors. The payments to enable the functioning of the School Meals Program will take place in tranches, beginning next week.

4. The Cabinet reiterated its policy regarding vaccine usage:

- i. No mandatory use of vaccines (ILO Recommendation)
- ii. No law is to be passed to mandate the vaccines' use.
- iii. If the employee contracts the disease at the workplace, then the liability is the employer's.
- iv. If the employee contracts the disease outside the workplace, it becomes the responsibility of the employee and Social Security.

5. The Cabinet has endorsed a plan to reduce the population of Her Majesty's Prison. Those who have been granted bail and are unable to meet the monetary threshold will be required to report to the Police Station in the mornings and the afternoons. Those on remand will be confined to their homes with tracking bracelets, and will be checked on with frequency.

6. The Cabinet was informed that a new digital identity card will be rolled out later this year. It will eliminate the standing in lines. The stored data will be very secure and will not allow any unauthorized changes to be made to the inputted biographic and other data.

7. The Prime Minister, as Chairman of the 45-member Alliance of Small Island-States (AOSIS) at the United Nations, will address a major multilateral meeting virtually later this month about the impact of the Covid pandemic on populations within small island-states.