

HURST REPORTS ON CABINET of Wednesday June 2 2021

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda met both face-to-face and virtually, all members attending.

1. The Cabinet held a discussion on the Choksi matter, awaiting the decision of the High Court of Dominica. Choksi remains in Dominica and has been charged for entering the Commonwealth illegally. He will return to Court on Thursday, June 3, 2021, to answer to the charge. Local law enforcement officials continue to gather intelligence in investigation of the circumstances of Mr. Choksi's departure from Antigua. Choksi claims he was abducted. Choksi has become Dominica's problem at this time. If he finds himself in Antigua, the problem reverts to Antigua and Barbuda. The preference of the Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda is for Choksi to be repatriated to India from Dominica.

2.i. Cabinet agreed that all those men and women taking the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, commencing Monday, June 7, 2021, until Wednesday, June 30, 2021, will have his/her name entered into a raffle for 8,000 square feet of a parcel of land at Judges Hill. Although nearly 35,000 adults have taken the first dose at this time, at least 5,000 additional first-doses need to be administered by June 30, 2021. The Cabinet agreed that this novel approach towards inducing vaccination is intended to encourage as many adults to quickly vaccinate and to move the country closer towards achieving herd immunity. Parliamentarians and their family-members are disqualified from participating in the raffle.

2.ii. The other incentives that have been relied upon to encourage vaccination against the Covid-19 disease will continue; these include food vouchers from Epicurean, gasoline vouchers from M&M Gas Station; gift vouchers from Medpath Lab (at Villa only).

2.iii. Cabinet agreed that all those who wish to attend the football match at the Sir Vivian Richards on the weekend, as spectators, will be allowed to enter the Stadium by proving that they are fully vaccinated. Those who wish to attend must present both their vaccination card and a government issued photo-identification. A computer check of the authenticity of the certificate will also be made to ensure that the claim is verified. **The match begins at 4:00 pm on Friday, June 4, 2021; gates will open at 2:00 pm. Social distancing, hand washing, and mask-wearing are required.** There will be two entry points at the Stadium and no children below age 18 will be allowed entry. No vendors will be allowed at this time; fully vaccinated vendors will be allowed entry and sale of foods in the near future.

2.iv. The rules governing International Cricket at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium remain the same, since cricket competition takes place within a bubble, permitting entry only to those who are part of the teams and have been kept isolated for the duration of the tour. As more people become vaccinated and herd immunity is achieved, the return to normalcy (pre-Covid-19) will eventually be adopted.

3.i. The new protocols governing entry into Antigua and Barbuda came into effect on Tuesday, June 1, 2021. Those returning nationals who are fully vaccinated and who have been tested within 7 days of arrival at V.C. Bird International Airport, may receive their swabs upon arrival either at the Airport or at home. Results will

be returned within 48 hours following the test, and negative results will cause the new arrivals to be released from quarantine. **Those returning nationals who have only a Covid-19 negative test and who have not had any vaccine or only one vaccine administered**, will be required to spend 14 days in quarantine. A second test will be administered near the end of the 14-day quarantine period; if negative, the returning national will be released.

3.ii. The visitor who arrives at the V.C. Bird International Airport and is staying at a hotel, deemed a bio-secure space, will be dispatched to that hotel; s/he is **not** required to take a swab upon entry, either at the Airport or at the Hotel.

4. The Cabinet encourages all persons 18 years and older who were born outside of Antigua and Barbuda and who now reside within the state to become vaccinated. The immigration status does not and will not be held against those non-nationals who may be out of time. The Cabinet has ordered the Minister of Legal Affairs to enshrine within the Regulations governing Covid-19, that those immigrants who might otherwise be subject to “removal” or “deportation” cannot be prosecuted for seeking the immunization vaccine. Those who are yet to regularize their presence within the State will not be removed or deported from the State, the Cabinet instructed, so that all adults living in Antigua and Barbuda will be vaccinated, no questions asked.

5. The Cabinet considered the issue of corporal punishment administered in primary and secondary school, both public and private, and gave consideration to ending that form of punishment. The Cabinet however concluded that consultations with principals, teachers, parents, guardians and others with an interest in the operation of schools shall also take place, before a final decision is made. Expunging the authority to engage in beatings of those youth under the charge of educators is properly left to parents and guardians; alternative forms of punishment are likely to be adopted and beatings ended.

6.i. The Cabinet applauded the UNDP and the contractors for the work done to hand over additional resilient homes in Codrington, Barbuda, to those who were displaced by the Hurricane Irma which destroyed nearly 95% of the buildings on the sister-isle. The process of building new homes and giving them to Barbudans who are in need will continue until more than 100 new homes are completed under the supervision of the UNDP. Additional homes are to be built under The Prince’s Trust and given to Barbudans in need of housing. The order of priority has been established through consultations.

6.ii. Priority has been given to repairing the Fire Station in Barbuda and to add bathrooms to that infrastructre. The leaky roof has been a challenge for those fire police who work and reside in Codrington. Other government-owned buildings are also to be repaired for return to use in Codrington.

7. The new Procurement Act took effect from Tuesday, June 1, 2021, replacing the Tenders Board Act that stands repealed. The Cabinet reminds that all contracts awarded to those who enter bids must come before the Cabinet for final approval. The Cabinet is of the view that to completely decentralize contracts

is to invite corrupt deal-making. The high level of transparency which has been achieved under the Gaston Browne-led administration is to intensify, not loosened.

8. The Cabinet announced that 100,000 coconut palm seeds from Costa Rica will enter Antigua shortly for propagation of new coconut palms that were destroyed during the lethal yellowing disease which killed off thousands of palms. Many hotels, the Agricultural Development Corporation, homeowners and others suffered a great loss during the height of the disease. The seeds will produce trees resistant to this disease; they will grow about six feet tall, and will begin producing fruit shortly after three years of growth. The Cabinet applauded the Ministry of Agriculture for moving on this project. Other farmers have already begun the process of propagating the resistant strain of palms for their own use.

9. The Cabinet applauds the Airport Authority for taking steps to return Antigua's V.C. Bird International Airport to Category 1 status. The ECCAA (Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority) now has a new Director, and significant effort is being made to restore the recently declared lower status accorded Antigua's lone international airport.