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Sewage issue sets tone for Barbados' coming elections

Unresolved issues relating to sewage on a part of Barbados' south coast vital to tourism, have become intensely political in the run up to the country's next General Election which has to take place by May of this year.

In a scathing attack on Government, Mia Mottley, the Leader of the Opposition Barbados Labour Party (BLP) has accused the ruling Democratic Labour Party (DLP) of neglecting the south coast sewerage system in favour of three major tourism related redevelopments: Sam Lord's Castle, the Pierhead Marina and Grantley Adams International Airport.

Speaking to a large crowd of supporters at the official launch of the BLP's 2018 election campaign, Ms Mottley suggested that that funding for maintenance of the sewerage system, had been denied because of an "internecine war" between the Minister of Finance, Chris Sinckler, and the Minister of Agriculture and Water Resource Management, Dr David Estwick.

However, in a subsequent response, Donville Inniss, the Minister of Industry, International Business, Commerce, and Small Business Development said that there was no way that Government would have been made aware of a major risk and not sought to address it. Mr Inniss said that Government was not turning a blind eye to the sewage leaks, adding that based on his discussions, the relevant agencies have been working around-the-clock to find short-term and long-term

solutions.

According to the Barbados Water Authority (BWA) the short-term fixes they have introduced are holding for the time being. Reports in the Barbados media suggest that by taking some customers offline and introducing new pumps and filters it has been able to remove waste water from the streets. It has also said that consultants from Trinidad are undertaking assessments in order to help resolve the issue.

Despite this, travel advisories issued by the governments of the US, the UK and Canada remain in force about the dangers to health posed by raw sewage in a tourist area of Barbados between Hastings and St Lawrence.

In its warning, the US Embassy has told US visitors to avoid water activities in the affected areas; beware of sewage on the streets. It also warned 'If you come into contact with sewage, wash your hands, shoes, and any clothing that may have come into contact with the effluence If you become seriously ill, seek medical attention'. In a similar health warning the UK government says that certain areas of the South Coast are experiencing breakdowns of sewage pipes. 'Leakages are occurring; you should avoid coming into direct contact with raw sewage and normal hygiene precautions should be followed'. The Public Health Agency of Canada has advised visitors to avoid the affected area.

According to reports in the Barbados media the issue has gone unaddressed for over a year. Some industry sources, say however, the problem is at least three years old. The leaks, which began sporadically, have according to the BWA have reached crisis levels, with growing criticism from residents and businesses which in some cases have been forced to close following inundations.

Speaking at the end of December, Barbados Minister of Tourism, Richard Sealy, said that he had been assured by the BWA and other officials that the problem was being urgently addressed and that long-term solutions will be put in place.

The Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA), earlier this month called on the authorities to act swiftly to end the crisis. Tourism remains the mainstay of the Barbados economy, with its total overall contribution to national income estimated at US\$3.5 billion in 2016, or close to 40% of GDP

Unprecedented CARICOM statement on Trump's remarks

Caribbean Governments and CARICOM have expressed their deep concern about the language used by the US President, Donald Trump, to describe Haiti, El Salvador and the nations of Africa.

In a statement without precedent, CARICOM said on January 13 that its member states were 'deeply disturbed by reports about the use of derogatory and repulsive language by the President of the United States in respect of our Member State, Haiti, and other developing countries'. CARICOM went on to say that it 'condemns in the strongest terms, the unenlightened views reportedly expressed'.

The CARICOM statement, and others from Haiti and Cuba, came shortly after the media quoted US Senators present at a January 11 meeting at the White House on the US's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) migratory programme. There, the US president was said to have wanted to know why he should accept immigrants from such "s***hole countries" and then, in implicitly racist remarks, he asked why the US could not take more immigrants from countries like Norway.

In a strongly worded statement, the Government of Haiti said that it was 'deeply shocked by the unstatesmanlike (remarks) not officially denied (by the White House) attributed by US media to the President of the United States of America who referred to some people, including Haitians, in terms, that to say the least, were disrespectful and insulting'.

In a similar vein, Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a declaration condemning the US President for his 'racist, denigrating and gross statements'. Without criticising Donald Trump by name, a formal declaration noted that the statements were full of hatred and contempt, and produced 'indignation in the Cuban people'.

CARICOM said that it saw the US President's reported remarks as a part of a pattern of denigrating Haiti and its citizens 'in what seems to be a concerted attempt to perpetuate a negative narrative of the country'.

It then went on to say that the regional body expressed its full support for Haiti 'for the dignified statement in reaction to this highly offensive reference', before concluding that CARICOM viewed 'this insult to the character of the countries named and their citizens as totally unacceptable'.

The regional response comes at a time when across the region there is growing concern about the way in which, for many politicians, other aspects of US policy have become dangerously at odds with the Caribbean's existential concerns about climate change. They also express fears that the US is attempting to marginalise the role of the World Trade Organisation, which has increasingly come to be seen in the region as affording a degree of protection to small states though providing equity and arbitration, and that the US administration has embarked on a policy aimed at weakening other multilateral institutions including the United Nations.

Although the US remains an important economic partner for the region, Caribbean officials suggest that the US President's views are significantly changing regional sentiment about US relations, increasing the likelihood in future of relations deepening with nations that have similar values or share the concerns of the region.

Antigua and Barbuda

- **PM promotes work for locals in talks with Chinese officials.** On the heels of the 35th anniversary of diplomatic ties with China, Prime Minister Gaston Browne held high level discussions stressing the importance of local employment with Chinese diplomatic officials and the China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC). January 15 marked the ground-breaking ceremony of a US\$90mn port modernisation project, the largest public-sector investment in the history of Antigua and Barbuda, which received funds from the Antigua government, the China Exim Bank, and the CCECC. Speaking at the ceremony, Browne said that he had asked CCECC, which is the contractor for the project, to strike a 40/60 ratio in terms of employment '...so we can absorb as many people as we can from the domestic market in order to help reduce unemployment in the country.'
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The Bahamas

- **Western Union re-enters market.** Publicly-traded Jamaican conglomerate GraceKennedy Money Services expanded its Western Union partnership into the Bahamas and pledged to open multiple money transfer locations in 2018. Western Union's has been eager to re-enter the market since Fidelity Bank severed ties as its local franchisee in 2015. GraceKennedy/Western Union will now be competing for market share against established players such as Cash N'Go and Omni Money Transfers and Payments, as well as the web shops. The Bahamas

is largely a 'sending' destination, with Haitian, Jamaican and Filipino workers remitting money to families back home.

- **US and Canadian governments issue travel advisory regarding Bahamas crime.** The Canadian government has warned its citizens to exercise a high degree of caution when travelling to The Bahamas due to elevated rates of crime, including a reported increase of sexual assaults against tourists. The government said that violent crime has mainly occurred in New Providence and Grand Bahama, while 'sexual assaults are on the rise in Nassau, including on Paradise Island'. The warning follows a recent US State Department travel advisory that urged US citizens to 'exercise increased caution' when visiting the country due to levels of crime.
 - **Ahead of potential WTO accession, Bahamians debate pace of relaxing exchange controls.** The government has set a 2019 deadline for the Bahamas to accede to full World Trade Organisation (WTO) membership. As a result, the government is undertaking a series of economic reforms, including liberalising exchange controls in an effort to make it easier and less costly for Bahamians – especially businesses – to access foreign capital and invest abroad. However, Central Bank Governor John Rolle has pushed back against the suggestion that the process could be hastened by replacing the Bahamian dollar with the US dollar, suggesting that the government needed to put its 'fiscal house' in order and improve public finances before pursuing further exchange control liberalisation.
 - **Bank of Bahamas will pay out US\$6.4mn to preference shareholders.** Bank of The Bahamas (BOB) will begin a US\$6.4 million pay-out on its D and E preference shares. The redemption of the shares will help the bank to avoid defaulting on the terms of the preference share issue. The bank is in a position to make good on the share redemption after posting a profitable November last year of \$1.29 million, especially compared to losses of \$6.18 million for the same period in 2016.
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Barbados

- **Cabinet approves sustainable recovery plan.** In response to the country's increasingly challenging fiscal position, the Cabinet has given the go ahead to the Barbados Sustainable Recovery Program (BSRP), which includes plans to boost the country's foreign reserves by attracting more foreign direct investment. The BSRP also sets in motion the establishment of a Competitiveness Commission and a Technical Unit to drive the process of policy implementation. The government is also aiming to introduce a new national energy policy and to pursue public financial management reform. The BSRP will now be laid before Parliament for public discussion and debate.
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British Virgin Islands

- **Feed-in tariffs for residents to sell solar energy are formulated.** Residents are being promised the opportunity to sell energy generated from their private Photovoltaic (PV) System to the state-owned BVI Electricity Corporation (BVIEC). Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Communications and Works Anthony McMaster explained that new legislation will allow private citizens and businesses to sell excess energy to BVIEC's grid. McMaster also said the government is emphasising renewable energy to reduce the territory's dependence on fossil fuel and hopes that 30% of the territory will be powered by renewable energy by 2030.

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Cayman Islands

- **Premier reports on infrastructure and economic development projects for 2018.** In his annual speech to the Cayman Islands Chamber of Commerce, Premier Alden McLaughlin anticipated that the current phase of the Owen Roberts International Airport expansion project will be completed by the end of the year. He also reported that government and cruise ship companies are discussing a 'financial model' for the new cruise pier in George Town. In addition, McLaughlin said work would begin on a new landfill and waste management project later in the year.
- **Department of Tourism announces record-breaking year of arrivals.** A total of 418,403 stay-over visitors, an increase of 8.55% over 2016 and 1,728,444 cruisers visited the islands. December increases were fuelled by growth predominantly in North America. Key markets such as the United States and Canada – which saw increases of 27.43% and 22.71% respectively over 2016 – represented the highest standout growth. The increase is well-timed, following an announcement on 17 January that the Cayman Islands and the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have agreed to trial a new fast track immigration system at Miami Airport.
- **Employment hits record high.** According to recently released data from the Economics and Statistics Office, there were 41,764 people working in Cayman at the end of last June. The Office stated the economic performance in Q2 of last year was driven by growth in trade (4.1 percent), electricity and water supply (4.1 percent), construction (4 percent), and hotels and restaurants (2.9 percent). The finance and insurance services sector also grew by 1.4 percent in the first half of 2017. The domestic economy grew at an annualized rate of 2.3 percent in the first half of 2017 over the same period in 2016.

Cuba

- **Size of sugar harvest in doubt.** Heavy and persistent rain in central and eastern Cuba have virtually halted Cuba's current sugar campaign. The 2017-18 crop, set back by drought and Hurricane Irma, was already expected to be less than had been planned, but Cuban reports suggest that many mills remain closed, unable to receive cane as a result of flooded fields and

damaged roads. Cuban state media reported José Ramón Machado Ventura, the Second Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party, as saying that the mills must delay their start-ups until conditions permit efficient processing with clean cane. The same reports said that the managers of the five sugar mills in the province expressed concern about planting for the 2018-19 season if higher levels of production and better yields anticipated in the coming year were to be achieved.

- **Cabrisas says future development depends on 5% annual growth.** Vice president Ricardo Cabrisas, the Minister for Economy and Planning has said that although Cuba's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 1.6% in 2017, and is projected to grow by around 2% in 2018, the rate is still far removed from what is needed ensure development. Quoting Cuban specialists, he said that the country would require a sustained level of growth above 5%. Speaking about the failings (lack of objectivity) in state planning, he said that the issue arose because the process did not always begin with an accurate evaluation of existing economic circumstances. The process, he said, required the attention of all economic actors
- **Cuban and US officials meet in Washington on security issues.** US and Cuban officials have discussed preventing and combatting terrorism, issues relating to the exchange of information on criminal investigations, and taking forward existing counter narcotics co-operation. The meetings held in the week of January 15 form a part of the dialogue on law implementation and enforcement agreed bilaterally in November 2015 with the Obama administration, which continue despite the policy changes towards Cuba announced by the Trump administration. The meetings followed another on January 12, when representatives from the two countries discussed cyber security. Recent reports in the Cuban media suggest that the Cuban government is becoming increasingly concerned about the growing size and incidence of narcotics seizures, and attempts by organised crime to develop a market in Cuba.

A longer and more detailed version of these and other stories on Cuba appears in Cuba Briefing, which is available by subscription or to Premier members of the Caribbean Council free of charge

Dominica

- **PM outlines progress in the recovery and reconstruction following Hurricane Maria.** Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit announced that his government plans to create 1,100 jobs for individuals displaced from the hurricanes. The effort is distinct from the National Employment Programme (NEP). The government will allocate US\$7.5mn to the Ministry of Housing to assist with repairs. Skerrit also thanked Britain for allocating £25mn (US\$34.81 mn) to build greater water supply resilience.

Dominican Republic

- **Oil major TOTAL solidifies corporate presence.** After meeting with Dominican President Danilo Medina, executives from the France-based energy conglomerate announced that TOTAL would establish its marketing and services centre for the Americas and the Caribbean in the country. In January 2016, TOTAL acquired from Putney Capital Management a majority 70%

interest in the leading Dominican downstream retailer; its initial investment was valued at US\$145.3mn.

- **Wind energy project receives approval from the IFC and Canada.** The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the sister organization of the World Bank for the private sector, together with the government of Canada, approved a US\$80mn financing package for the development of a 50-megawatt wind project in the northern part of the country called 'Parques Eolicos del Caribe (PECASA). PECASA is owned by France-based firm Akuo Energy SAS and will be one of the largest renewable energy projects in the country. The project is expected to reduce greenhouse gases by 91,000 tons of CO2 annually. The IFC-Canada Climate Change Program, a partnership that promotes private sector financing for clean energy projects, contributed US\$17mn to the funding.
- **Investment from the BCIE is confirmed for the Monte Grande dam.** The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE) will provide US\$249.8mn at an interest rate of 2.5% over a period of 15 years for the final construction of the dam in the southern part of the country. The termination of construction had been previously announced on three occasions; however, the work has yet to be completed because of the suspension of a loan from the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES). The work on the dam is now expected to be finished in 30 months. The director of the National Institute for Hydraulic Resources (INDRHI) estimates that the dam has the potential to create 12,500 new permanent jobs in the agricultural sector in the region and more than 1,500 indirect non-agricultural jobs.
- **Licensing round for long-term energy generation projects set to launch in Q1.** Executive Vice President of the Dominican Corporation of State Electricity Companies (CDEEE), Ruben Jimenez Bichara, stated on 17 January that a number of tenders will be held to ensure supply for the growing demand for electricity, estimated at 13%, or 120-150mw per year. Bichara said that bidding rules would be made public in less than 60 days and would give preference to natural gas projects.
- **Medical tourism is on the rise.** Between 25,000 and 30,000 international patients came to the Dominican Republic for health or medical tourism in the past year, according to estimates from the Dominican Association for Health Tourism, which says the sector is growing 15-20% annually. The most in-demand services were general, aesthetic, and plastic surgery; dental implants; fertility treatment; and weight loss surgery. The president of the Association for Health Tourism said that the entity is currently signing contracts with hotels to accommodate outpatient care.

Dutch-speaking Antilles

- **Curacao searches for shipwrecked Venezuelan migrants.** Police searching for a group of 30 illegal migrants after their boat sank during a sea crossing from Venezuela on 11 January have recovered four bodies. Curacao's coastguard have reported a growing number of vessels making the dangerous journey from Venezuela as the country's economic crisis continues to worsen. The decision by President Nicolas Maduro to cut transport links to Dutch Caribbean territories to prevent smuggling (see Caribbean Insight Vol.40 Issue 1) looks set to exacerbate the situation, as Venezuelans had routinely travelled to Curacao and Aruba in search of work or staple products that are increasingly scarce back home.

- **Delta Air Lines announces new service to Aruba.** The carrier will launch daily service this summer from Charleston, South Carolina and from Boston's Logan International Airport. The new service complements existing flights between Boston and Aruba on fellow air carrier JetBlue.
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Grenada

- **Grenada will host CDB's 48th annual meeting.** The Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) will take place on 30-31 May 2018 in Grenada. The programme for this year's meeting will focus on resilience, against the backdrop of one of the most devastating hurricane seasons the Caribbean region has experienced in recent history.
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Guyana

- **New telecommunications regulator is established.** The National Telecommunications Agency (NATA) will be responsible for finalising licensing procedures in preparation for the liberalisation of the industry and for issuing new licenses to telecom entities. The new agency is part of the implementation of the Telecommunications 2016 Act, which aims to liberalise the fixed line market and pave the way for the government to end the monopoly of Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company (GTT) on international voice and data transmission. However, full liberalisation still hinges on the settlement of a US\$44mn tax claim against the GTT.
- **Opposition PPP changes position on future of sugar industry.** The opposition People's Progressive Party (PPP) has conceded to the government's position that it is not sustainable to keep several uneconomical Guyana Sugar Corporation (Guysuco) estates open, or prevent the laying off of more than 4,000 workers. Subsequently, the PPP, which is aligned with the leading agricultural unions, stated that it wanted to engage in conversations to 'get decent investment' into the estates and keep up pressure to protect workers' rights in any privatisation deal.
- **United Arab Emirates will provide US\$50mn for renewable energy fund.** Three of Guyana's energy projects have been selected for funding by United Arab Emirates (UAE)-Caribbean Renewable Energy Fund. The UAE-Caribbean Renewable Energy Fund represents one of the largest single investments in the region's clean energy sector, as well as a significant deepening of bilateral relationships between the UAE and Caribbean countries. Guyana was one seven Caribbean countries awarded grant funding for works to be commenced in the fourth quarter of 2018 and in early 2019. The other Caribbean countries eligible to tap into the UAE fund are Belize, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, St Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia.
- **President invites Qatar to invest in its oil industry.** President David Granger extended the invitation to invest in Guyana's 'emergent oil and gas sector' to Sheikh Tamim Al Thani, whose oil-rich country is facing a blockade by its neighbours. Granger made the comments at a ceremony to accredit the new Qatari Non-Resident Ambassador to Qatar.

Haiti

- **Winair commences service to Port-au-Prince.** The regional carrier began its twice-weekly route between St Maarten and Port-au-Prince. The aircraft is operated by Sunrise Airways but seats are sold and marketed solely by Winair.
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Jamaica

- **British tourists warned to 'stay in resorts' in St James security emergency.** The Jamaican government declared a state of emergency in St James parish on 18 January as it launched a military operation in response to a surge in the number of shooting incidents involving gangs. The parish includes the popular tourist area of Montego Bay. In response, the UK Foreign Office said British tourists should stay in their resorts, follow local advice including restrictions in selected areas, and exercise particular care if travelling at night. It is unclear how long the security emergency will remain in place.
 - **Jamaica and Mexico sign MOU to ease travel between destinations.** Multi-destination agreements have now been signed with four major partners in the region: Jamaica, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Mexico. The Mexican Secretary of Tourism said the move was strategic as it will also aid both countries' efforts to get a bigger share of markets, such as Southeast Asia. A joint summit is scheduled to take place in March 2018 with high-level representatives from Jamaica, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Mexico to discuss the marketing arrangement in greater detail.
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Puerto Rico

- **Deployment of additional personnel and equipment accelerates power restoration efforts.** US-based Southern Company announced that line workers and support staff from each of its four electric operating companies will be deployed to Puerto Rico to help restore power to areas impacted by Hurricane Maria. With this new wave of personnel, the total number of restoration workers in Puerto Rico increases to more than 5,500.
 - **Seaborne Airlines to be sold to Silver Airways.** The Puerto Rico-based carrier, which operates flights across the eastern Caribbean, is being sold because of the financial strain caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Seaborne said the airline's day-to-day operations would 'continue as normal' and would not be disrupted by the sale. Although financial stress from the hurricanes encouraged the airline to sell, Seaborne had entered into negotiations with Silver Airways months ago. The sale will result in the two airlines combining fleets.
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St Lucia

- **Following port expansion, St Lucia receives largest cruise ship to date.** The Royal Caribbean Cruises-operated 'Anthem of the Seas' became the largest cruise ship to sail into Port Castries after the completion of a newly-extended Dolphin berth at Point Seraphine. The US\$18.8mn

project was constructed by Dutch company Ballast Nedam. The Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority (SLASPA) said the port expansion was the largest investment it has made in 20 years. St Lucia can now simultaneously accommodate two Quantum-class vessels and is projected to receive 800,000 passengers for the 2017/2018 season.

- **PM travels to the United States for business investment meetings.** Prime Minister Allen Chastanet travelled to the United States to meet with Desert Star Holdings Limited (DSH), the company looking to undertake the US\$2.6bn Pearl of the Caribbean project. The 700-acre project site will comprise a marina, a racecourse, a resort and shopping mall complex, a casino, a Free Trade Zone, entertainment and leisure facilities, eco-tourism activities, as well as villas and apartments. Chastanet said his delegation would also be making presentations to representatives of major cruise lines with regards to the development of a cruise ship facility in Vieux Fort.
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St Vincent and the Grenadines

- **St Vincent threatens to sue Trinidad and Tobago over foreign exchange.** Vincentian traders in agricultural produce have been unable to convert their earnings to Eastern Caribbean dollars for trade conducted in Trinidad and Tobago. The Trinidadian government has said it is constrained by a shortage of foreign exchange in its financial sector. The Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines Ralph Gonsalves has stated that if the ongoing currency issue is not soon resolved, then they will launch a legal case against Trinidad & Tobago's government at the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ).
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Suriname

- **Suriname hopes to benefit from MOU between Indonesia and the Islamic Development Bank.** As a result of the memorandum of understanding – which covers a wide range of cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, health, and transportation – Indonesia plans to enhance the exchange of technology with Suriname. Additionally, a project is being developed between the two countries in the field of artificial insemination of livestock. Guyana also hopes to benefit from a cooperation agreement between the Islamic Development Bank and the Malaysia Agricultural Research Development Institute to update. The US\$863,000 reverse linkage project will introduce innovative rice varieties and increase rice yields per unit.
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Trinidad and Tobago

- **Caribbean Airlines begins flying from Port of Spain to Havana.** The carrier now flies twice-weekly to Havana from its Port of Spain hub, which is linked to the airline's network in Georgetown, Guyana and Paramaribo, Suriname. Speaking at a press conference, the Minister of Finance for Trinidad and Tobago, Colm Imbert, suggested that the new route could open additional tourism opportunities, citing a flight between Beijing and Havana that is already operational and could bring Chinese tourists and businessmen to CARICOM countries. Caribbean Airlines is also the flagship carrier for Jamaica. However, some customers have balked that the price tag – US\$700-US\$1,100 – for a roundtrip from Georgetown to Havana.

- **NCB extends offer period for GHL takeover bid.** In December 2017, Jamaica-based NCB Financial Group (NCBFG) announced its intention to acquire a majority stake (62%) in Guardian Holdings Limited (GHL) at US\$2.35 per share. Shareholders were told that the closing date of NCBFG's offer was extended by three weeks to February 2, 2018 and were informed that NCBFG had paid US\$3.24 per share for its May 2016 acquisition of 29.99% from GHL from Arthur Lok Jack, Imtiaz Ahamad and the International Finance Corporation (the World Bank's private-sector arm).
 - **Businesses welcome PM's speech but want to see action.** Business groups welcomed Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley's speech to the nation as an attempt to keep the country informed about the state of the economy but remained ambivalent about the government's ability to implement the necessary remedies for its improvement. The American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham TT) said it wanted more specific information about how the initiatives proposed by the government would be implemented, especially those that deal with crime.
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Region

- **EU removes three Caribbean territories from tax haven blacklist.** The Council of the European Union removed eight jurisdictions, including Barbados, Grenada and Panama, from its list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes, following high-level political commitments to remedy EU concerns. Nine jurisdictions remain on the blacklist that was drawn up in December 2017, including St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. The EU ministers say the commitment to reform shows that the process is working, but activists and lawmakers are calling for the details of those commitments to be made public.
- **Britain's House of Lords rejects public beneficial ownership register for overseas territories.** The legislative body rejected a proposal calling for the Cayman Islands and five other British Overseas Territories (BOTs) to implement a public register of beneficial owners behind offshore companies registered in the jurisdictions. The amendment would have given the UK government power to demand that the offshore territories provide details of all the owners operating behind companies registered in the regional territories — a step that the Cayman Islands' government and other territory leaders have been battling hard to avoid. In December 2017, the EU listed Cayman on a 'grey list' of tax havens and indicated that Cayman needed to address the lack of 'economic substance' and presence of many large European companies registered there. Representatives from Cayman, the EU and OECD confirmed they will meet to better define the matter of 'economic substance'.
- **China invites Latin American and Caribbean countries to join 'Belt & Road' initiative.** Speaking at a meeting between China and 33 members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the region was a natural fit for the initiative, which China has leveraged to deepen economic and financial cooperation with developing nations. The 'Belt & Road' initiative, proposed in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping, promotes expanding links between Asia, Africa and Europe, with billions of dollars in infrastructure investment. At the China-CELAC conference, representatives signed a broad agreement to expand ties. Though it had few specific details, the agreement is part of an evolving and more aggressive Chinese foreign policy in the region.
- **EU unveils major security programme for the Caribbean.** The European Development Fund (EDF) announced it will fund a Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM) Crime and Security

Programme. The EU is providing US\$14.97mn for the multidisciplinary and multi-national initiative to address crime and security in the region.

- **Trump administration bars low-skilled workers from Belize and Haiti.** Potential workers from the countries will no longer be eligible for US H-2A and H-2B visas given to seasonal workers in agriculture and other industries. A US Department of Homeland Security report stated that Haitians on a variety of non-immigrant visas had a roughly 40% visa overstay rate in the 2016 fiscal year. Belize was also removed from the list for risks stemming from human trafficking.
- **CARIFORUM senior officials meet to discuss Brexit's impact on trade.** Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM) officials met in St Kitts with the objective of forming a negotiation strategy for Brexit trade agreements. The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union leaves the UK-Caribbean trading relations at a crossroads after more than four decades of trade being governed by EU policies.
- **Caribbean Financial Group completes first asset-backed securitisation.** Caribbean Financial Group (CFG), a consumer finance company that offers unsecured personal loans and related credit insurance products in the Caribbean and Panama, has announced the completion of its inaugural securitisation, an issuance of US\$207 million of two-year revolving, asset-backed bonds secured by a pool of its unsecured consumer instalment loans. Since 2006, CFG has originated over US\$2.5 billion in loans and currently provides credit to more than 136,000 active customers through a network of 72 locations. CFG provides credit to individuals who have limited access to consumer credit from banks and other traditional lenders.

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