

Hydrogen plant coming to Harrow

Barbados is to be the regional hub for the first hydrogen plant in the Caribbean, which is intended to reduce imports of oil, benefit consumers via lower electricity prices and make a positive contribution to the global climate change movement.

Energy Minister Senator Lisa Cummins announced the award of a licence to HDF Caribbean, a French hydrogen manufacturing company, on Tuesday evening before the symbolic cutting of a ribbon to mark the opening of its corporate offices at Hastings, Christ Church.

"The licence for this particular project has been granted. That's important news," she declared.

Cost effective

Barbadians have seen investments in solar photovoltaic systems virtually grind to a halt amid an absence of storage at the Barbados Light & Power Company Ltd and a protracted regulatory hearing on new electricity rates.

Hydrogen produced from a solar farm on 183 acres at Harrow Plantation, St Philip, will contribute to storage in a more cost effective way than batteries with a longer storage duration, as well as increase stability of the grid's delivery of electricity.

Senator Cummins said Barbados has become a leader in the global climate change movement as well as renewable energy. The Government has a goal of creating a 100 per cent renewable energy economy by the

year 2030.

But Minister Cummins remarked: "The procurement, the investment, and the approaches towards renewable development in this Caribbean region have to be pooled. They have to be aggregated.

"We have to be able to use those learnings, anchored in people, create financial instruments that support regionalisation of energy production, energy procurement, energy integration. This is a conversation that we in the region must have."

She said that through the collective regional approach the aim would be to scale projects such as the new hydrogen plant at Harrow Plantation "into a large regional project to drive prices down".

HDF Caribbean said the green hydrogen power plant will be designed to provide clean, stable and reliable electricity to 18 680 consumers by integrating solar power with green hydrogen storage.

"We are here to do business. We are here to make things happen," Thibault Ménage, vice president for the United States and the Caribbean with HDF Energy, said.

Included in these goals is providing benefits to the Barbadian economy and its citizens, he added.

"Notably, the project incorporates opportunities for local equity investment, allowing Barbadian institutions, such as credit unions, to actively

participate in and benefit from the energy transition," Ménage said.

Dr Kirt St Bernard, head of Corporate and Public Affairs with HDF Caribbean, also spoke.

"As a leading energy innovator, HDF's presence in Barbados will not only provide opportunities for skilled and unskilled workers but will also expand the local knowledge base. Through targeted knowledge-sharing initiatives and training programmes, HDF will build local capacity, equipping Barbados and the broader Caribbean region to lead in renewable energy innovation," he said.

Licence

The plant at Harrow is a 50 megawatt plant with 128 megawatt hours of storage capacity, 90 megawatts of hydrogen storage and 38 megawatts of battery storage. It is expected to generate 56 gigawatt hours of power annually.

The hydrogen project, whose licence was granted by the Electric Light & Power Advisory Committee, awaits a determination on tariffs by the Fair Trading Commission to start business.

"Now that we are here we would like to invest a bit more," Ménage said.

The hydrogen manufacturing plant is a partnership between Hydrogene de France (HDF Energy) and Rubis Caribbean Holdings Inc.

(HH)



Minister in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs Ryan Straughn. (Picture by Reco Moore)

Construction Gateway grads 'in for boom year'

With 2025 predicted to be a "boom" year for tourism sector projects, people who availed themselves of courses offered via the Barbados Construction Gateway Training Initiative (BCGTI) could benefit when jobs open up.

In response to a question about youth violence being linked in part to youth unemployment, Minister in the Ministry of Finance Ryan Straughn said this was one of the opportunities provided for young people.

"So we have deliberately intervened with respect to the Construction Gateway programme for training. So any young person who is interested in working, it doesn't matter the area, they can go and avail themselves of those opportunities such that the shortages that we're seeing now in relation to construction, that they can fill those," he said.

"If you don't have a skill, you don't have a job, you don't have a chance. So we have been trying to make sure that those opportunities go far and wide so that some of those issues can be addressed."

Skills shortages in construction were highlighted by some of the major companies more than two years ago, and Government put the BCGTI in place in 2022 to build up the bank.

Straughn was speaking after the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Barbados and the United States Export-Import (USEXIM) Bank on Monday morning at **Government Headquarters**, Bay Street, St Michael.

During the signing, Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley said "2025 promises to be a boom year in terms of investment execution in this country" and many of the construction projects which were delayed by COVID-19, particularly those in the tourism sector, should be back on steam.

The Construction Gateway programme started in April 2022. More than 20 courses in the sector were on offer in the 12-week programme.

Last June, principal at Samuel Jackman Prescod Institute of Technology (SJPI), Ian Drakes, gave an update on the programme.

"I'm excited because the construction industry is saying to us, 'Can you please start looking at giving us some of those people who were trained in Construction Gateway, because we have some high-demand projects and some timelines that we need to meet,'" he said at that time.

By his estimate, about 2 000 people underwent training. He said Cabinet gave the nod for the second phase of the programme and they planned to roll out four cohorts and extend the study period from 12 to 16 weeks. (SAT)

BARP puts benefits programme online

The Barbados Association of Retired Persons (BARP) is taking a step closer to modernity with the online launch of its Benefits and Discount Programme.

Officially launched Wednesday for public use, this new online platform is a directory of partners offering products and services in various categories, including construction, vehicular, household, restaurants, and accommodation. It includes information such as company synopsis, a direct link to website and social media pages along with contact information, and opening hours.

Speaking at the launch held at the BARP headquarters in Marine Gardens, Hastings, vice president Eric Smith said the platform was part of the organisation's mandate to embrace modernity and usher their members into the digital future.

"As BARP moves forward, our mandate is increasingly to prepare our members for the longevity phenomenon. It is a known fact that seniors will be making up half the population of Barbados in just over two decades. Not only does this platform help older members to navigate the digital space but helps our younger members to build relationships with our corporate members as well," he said.

Officially launched in 1995, The Benefits and Discounts Programme has been hailed as one of the advantages of BARP membership, facilitating discounts from businesses.

"The aim is to help our members stretch their hard-earned dollars and, in the case of our retirees, their pensions," Smith said.

"We are all aware of the escalating cost of basic food items, health care, medication, vehicle maintenance, utilities, and fuel. The increase in the cost of living is heavy and taking its toll on segments of our society, and some of our members are among the most vulnerable," he added.

Demographic shift

The vice president said businesses will have to adapt their offerings to accommodate an ageing population that will be mostly 65 or older by 2050.

"As the economy shifts, local businesses will have to change focus and move towards deliverables that meet the needs of a senior, diverse demographic. Their target can no longer be primarily a youthful demographic, emphasis will have to be on promoting healthy ageing and improving quality of life. They will be forced to create spaces that are welcoming to senior customers if they want to remain viable," he cautioned.

Smith also stressed that companies will also have to look closely at their hiring practices by being inclusive of a multi-generational workforce, addressing longevity inequalities and evolving jobs by giving workers lifelong skills.

(JRN)