
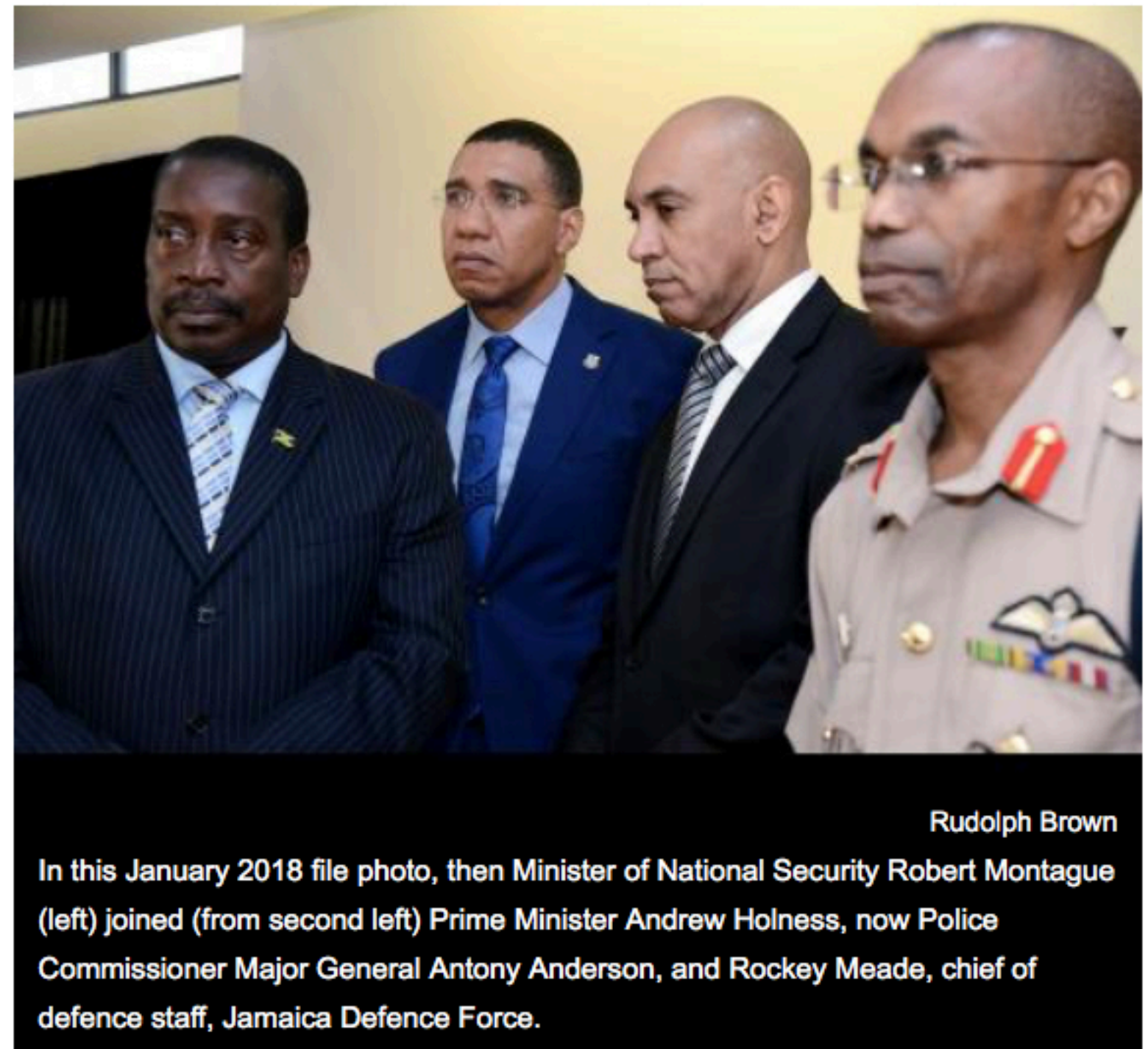
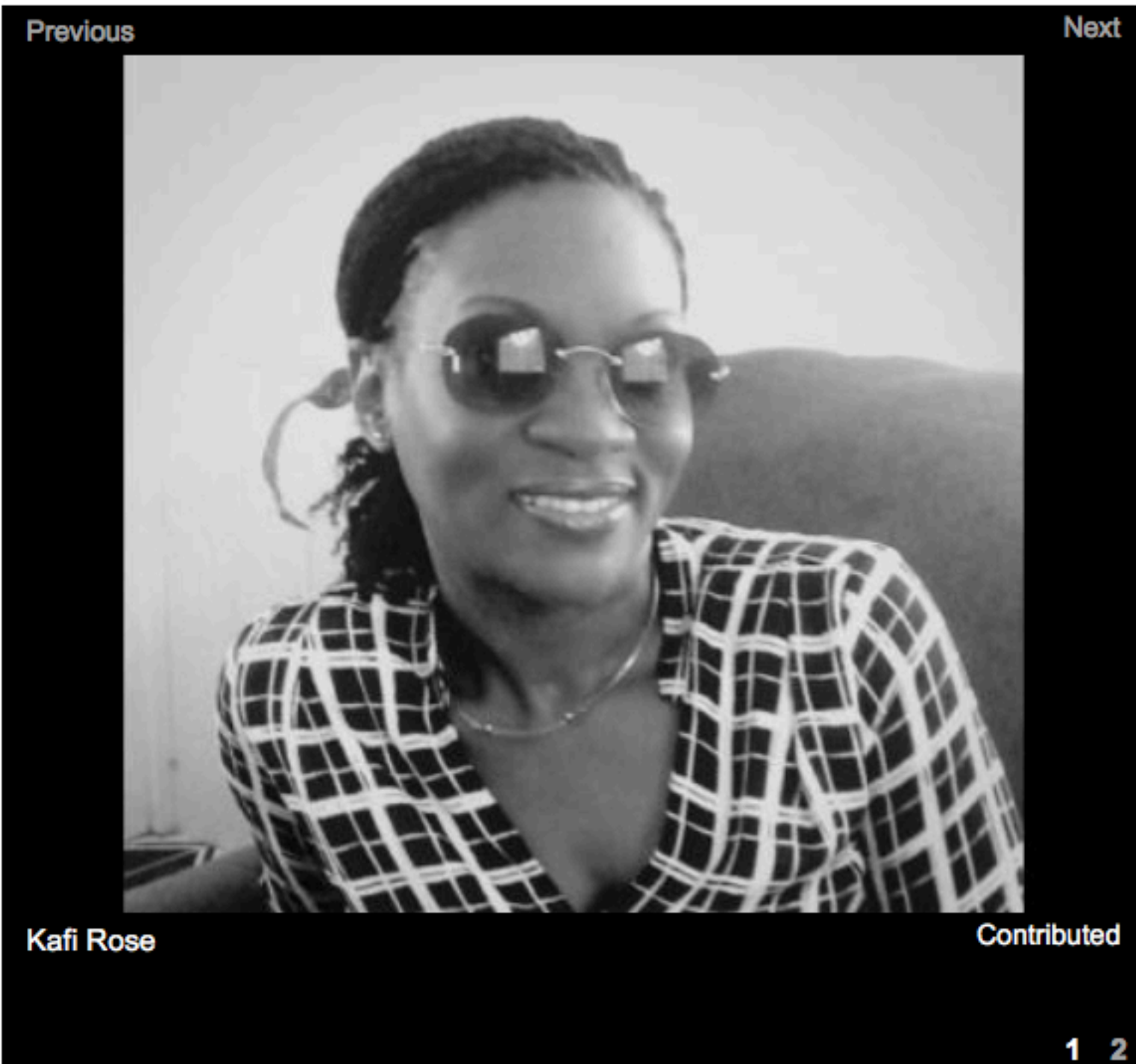


Kafi Rose | Nipping The Crime Bud With All Hands On Deck

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Rudolph Brown

In this January 2018 file photo, then Minister of National Security Robert Montague (left) joined (from second left) Prime Minister Andrew Holness, now Police Commissioner Major General Antony Anderson, and Rockey Meade, chief of defence staff, Jamaica Defence Force.

The Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), in its 2016 manifesto, promised to tackle the crime monster plaguing the country once elected into office.

After the victory, Prime Minister Andrew Holness carefully selected his team to manage the affairs of the country. The National Security Ministry, one under constant scrutiny, was given to the straight-talking Robert Montague.

A huge task indeed, and a challenge to every minister over the past 30 or so years.

When it comes to people's peace of mind, you are expected to deliver, and do so instantly.

Shortly after assuming the heavy portfolio, Montague, in an interview with **The Gleaner**, said crime should be fought on many fronts and an inclusive approach had to be employed.

With the support of his administration, he quickly set out plans to chart the way towards reducing crime and the incidences of crime.

A five-pillar citizen safety and security strategy was announced outlining the focus of the anti-crime programme. The five pillars are: a sure and swift justice process; crime prevention through social development; situational prevention; effective policing; and reducing reoffending.

This all-inclusive approach was new to many, so, to sell the plan to the public, Montague embarked on a series of town hall meetings, listening to the views and concerns of citizens as well as explaining the approach to address the crime situation.

INCREASED MOBILITY

The first to be addressed was the working conditions of those employed to fight crime directly, as well as a number of issues affecting the efficiency of the offices. The mobility of the police force was increased and 162 of the 191 police stations on the island underwent minor repairs, with 47 receiving major repairs.

Realising that the issue of security was not cheap, Montague convinced his Cabinet colleagues to vote in favour of additional funds to implement measures to improve national security during the fiscal year 2017-2018. This was also repeated in the 2018-2019 budget.

In addition, \$700 million was invested in equipment for the police forensic lab; 31 specially trained dogs were purchased, and investment was also made in the Neighbourhood Watch programmes.

One of the deterrents to success in the crime-fighting issue is corruption on the inside. This was detected, and it was also noted that for the five-pillar plan to get off the ground and be effective, corruption within in the force had to be dealt with. Technology was introduced in this process through the acquisition of the EyeDetect Lie Detection System.

It is now mandatory that every recruit entering the force, army or police, undergoes a lie-detector test. Before, only 30 per cent of recruits were given lie detector tests.

The implementation of the pillars seems to be of benefit as the ministry so far has reported successes in each of the pillars, with pillar five bearing the "most fruits".

Fighting crime is no overnight fix. While many may not have agreed with his approach, Montague's focus was to target the root cause of crime.

"It is the only way that crime is going to be dealt with on a long-term basis," said Montague.

He added: "Anybody who believes that solving crime is an overnight, or an instant fix, will have to guess again because a lot of the infestations we see now, these seeds were planted 15 to 20 years ago."

Montague surely did his part in carrying out his administration's plan to reduce crime. As the baton has now passed to Dr Horace Chang, Montague remains confident that the new minister will build on the foundation laid, doing things his own way and in his own style, which must be supported by all.

Reducing crime is after all one of the main concerns of the present government.

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