

Terror talks

The Government of Jamaica has ramped up security at the nation's borders, one week after the deadly terrorist attacks in France and two days after five Syrian nationals were detained in the Central American country of Honduras.

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As part of the increased security measures, National Security Minister Peter Bunting revealed last night that the internal surveillance units of the Jamaica Defence Force and the Jamaica Constabulary Force have "heightened their levels of monitoring of suspicious activities". In addition, Bunting told The Gleaner that the permanent secretary in his ministry, retired Major General Stewart Saunders, has convened a high-level conference for today to discuss "what other appropriate measures need to be put in place". "We are continuing to recognise that while a terrorist attack [in Jamaica] may not be considered a tier-one threat or a clear and immediate danger, the consequences would be very severe," Bunting said. **BOOSTING SURVEILLANCE** "We have been building our surveillance and counterterrorism capabilities significantly over the past couple of years, and we are continuing to fine-tune that," he added. Bunting left no doubt that the increased activities among Jamaican law-enforcement operatives were directly linked to the arrest of the five Syrian men in Honduras on Wednesday and the series of coordinated attacks in the French capital. "Like most of the ministries responsible for public security across the region, we have been monitoring what has taken place. We are aware of the activities in Paris, not just the counterterrorism activities, but that a number of Syrian nationals have been intercepted in this hemisphere and also in the Caribbean and Central America," he pointed out. The disclosure by the security minister comes a day after British counterterrorism expert and Jamaica's former crime chief Mark Shields suggested that steps be taken to raise awareness around the threats posed by the militant group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). "Just because this happened in Paris, in London, and elsewhere, there isn't any reason to say it cannot happen in Kingston or Montego Bay," Shields said on Wednesday, as he warned Jamaicans against thinking that a terrorist attack could not happen on local soil. The national security minister acknowledged that it was not 100 per cent possible to prevent terror attacks, but made it clear that Jamaican authorities are "putting in the groundwork to make it as difficult as possible for us to be considered a soft target". He urged employees at frontline border-management agencies such as the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency and Jamaica Customs to be vigilant.