

New prime minister of Jamaica pledges to cut poverty, joblessness

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KINGSTON, Jamaica --

Jamaica's new prime minister Bruce Golding, who brought his party back to power after 18 years in opposition, takes office Tuesday with pledges to streamline bureaucracy and attract foreign investment.

Golding, who also promises to improve the lives of the Caribbean island's huge underclass, led his Jamaica Labor Party to a narrow victory in Sept. 3 elections that ousted the country's first female prime minister, Portia Simpson Miller.

Golding called for reconciliation and united efforts to address challenges including rising crime in the days following the vote, which gave his party a 33-27 majority in parliament -- the closest margin of victory in decades.

His party is considered slightly more conservative than its rival People's National Party, but there are no major ideological differences between the two sides that have dominated Jamaican politics since independence from Britain in 1962.

Delegations from several Caribbean islands were expected to attend the inauguration, where the governor general was swearing in Golding as the country's eighth prime minister.

Golding, 59, has an economics degree from Jamaica's University of the West Indies. He has pledged to create jobs and make health care free at government hospitals.

His administration will also seek to reduce Jamaica's crushing national debt from its current level of about 134 percent of gross domestic product to 95 percent within five years and eliminate some administrative requirements for opening a business.