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Nomination Day

With several Afro-Guyanese newcomers to the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) facing criticisms, President Dr. Irfaan Ali has called on them to "remain strong." The new supporters were revealed on Nomination Day Monday ahead of Local Government elections. "For us every community, every region, every Guyanese is valuable. We welcome the newcomers to the party on this journey to build better communities and a better country while fostering development for our brothers and sisters." Dr Ali is pictured at left with PPP supporters on Nomination Day



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INDIAN MINISTER VISITS:: India's Minister of External Affairs Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar will be on an official visit to Guyana from April 20-24, 2023. Several events are planned for this period which includes India-Guyana Business Round Table Event and an India Diaspora Reception. According to a press release from the Indian High Commission, keeping in view the significance of this event, important dignitaries including President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Vice President Bharat Jagdeo and other ministers of government.



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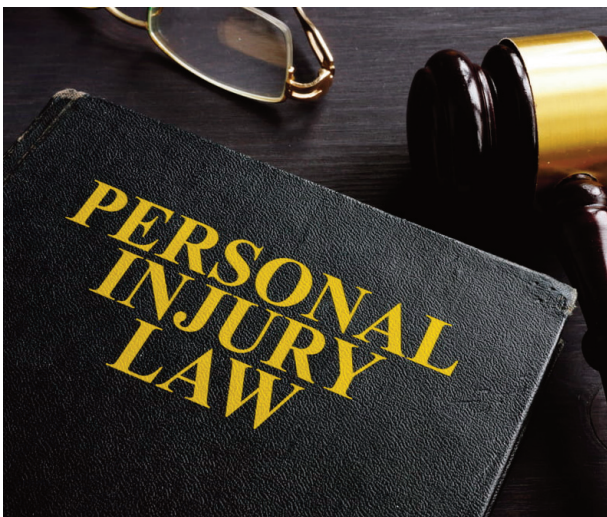
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Ann's Grove farmers get help with drainage

On Tuesday, Agriculture Minister, Honourable Zulfikar Mustapha along with a team of officers from the Ministry of Agriculture returned to Ann's Grove village on the East Coast of Demerara to meet with farmers and community members to discuss issues faced.

The meeting comes days after the minister accompanied Prime Minister, Mark Phillips, and other Cabinet Members met with residents at a community outreach as part of the government's efforts to effectively address issues faced in communities across the country.

Farmers from Ann's Grove, Clonbrook, Bee Hive, and other surrounding villages used the opportunity to raise issues about drainage, access to breeding animals, markets for their produce, and other inputs to advance farming in their communities.

Minister Mustapha, while addressing farmers said that the government has been aggressively working to ensure every village's agriculture potential is realized. He noted that every community has a role to play and that resources will be made available to assist every farmer across the country.

While speaking on issues raised, Minister Mustapha said that the ministry through the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) has expended hundreds of millions of dollars to enhance drainage and irrigation infrastructure in farming communities across the country.

He also said that the works being requested by residents will be done but it has to be undertaken in an organized way.

"All the D&I issues that were raised; we will do a work programme to guide the process. The engineers will visit all the areas to do an assessment. We'll do a work programme so that we can decide which canals are a priority and we'll do those ones first. I can assure you, that shortly, as soon as the work programme is done we start those works," he said.

"I made a commitment last Saturday that we will deal with your drainage issues. I've asked NDIA to look at it and they've already started to do some work to ensure systems are being put in place to address those issues," he noted.

In terms of access to markets for



Guyana Agriculture Minister Zulfikar Mustapha

produce, Minister Mustapha said that there are readily available markets for Guyana's produce in the region.

"GMC has an obligation to help farmers to get markets for their produce. I'm in constant contact with Ministers of Agriculture from across the region; countries like Trinidad and Barbados; and they are requesting fresh produce from Guyana. So, there are ready mar-

kets in the Caribbean for our farmers' produce. We've also been working to remove those non-tariff barriers that affected exports to those countries so we'll work with you to find markets," he explained.

Farmers present also benefited from fertilizers and other inputs to assist with their farming activities.

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NDP, Bloc accuse Poilievre of threatening French, Quebec culture

By Nishad Sharma
LJI REPORTER

Federal Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre’s criticisms of the national broadcaster CBC is an attack on francophone culture in this country, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh is claiming.

Singh addressed the issue, speaking in French, after Twitter added a label to CBC's main account on Sunday indicating the broadcaster was "government-funded media."

That move prompted the corporation to announce Monday it was hitting pause on its use of the social-media platform, which described the BBC the same way before changing its own label to "publicly funded media."

CBC receives roughly \$1 billion in taxpayer money annually, but it contends the label is inaccurate because it maintains editorial independence and receives its funding through a vote in Parliament.

Poilievre regularly promises to slash that funding. And he sent a letter to Twitter last week requesting that the label be applied to accounts associated with CBC News, though the letter did not mention Radio-Canada, the French-language wing of the broadcaster.

The Conservative leader has suggested in media interviews that while he believes in defunding the CBC, he sees the value in its French-language programming and the need to serve francophone communities — but both the NDP and Bloc Québécois are raising specific concerns about that approach.

"This is not just an attack against independent journalists," Singh told reporters Monday, speaking in French. "But it is also an attack against Canadian culture, particularly Quebec culture and francophone culture."

An attack on the broadcaster "will hit the francophone community across the country that depends on Radio-Canada for the news, to share stories, to share culture," he said.

"It shows someone who is willing to attack Quebec culture."

Poilievre's office has not responded to a request for comment.



Federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh

Earlier in the day, Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet said on Twitter that Poilievre is playing a risky ideological game, and that he's openly threatening French and access to information and the arts.

Pierre Paul-Hus, one of two Conservative MPs that Poilievre tapped to serve on his House of Commons leadership team, responded on the platform to say the Bloc leader's assertion of looming cuts was false.

The federal Conservatives currently hold nine out of 78 federal seats in Quebec, while the governing Liberals boast 34 and another 32 belong to the Bloc.

The NDP has one seat and Alain Rayes, a former Conservative who left the party last fall after Poilievre won its leadership contest, sits as an independent.

Poilievre, a fluent French speaker, has visited Quebec several times since becoming Conservative leader.

Making gains in the seat-rich province has proved challenging for the federal party, whose support is heavily concentrated in Western Canada. Since the 2006 federal election that elected Stephen Harper, the Tories' best showing

in the province was to hold a dozen seats.

Alexandre Boulerice, the federal NDP's sole MP in Quebec, told reporters on Monday that Poilievre is "at war with CBC," which he defended as an independent organization.

Asked about Poilievre's pitch to maintain funding for its French-language services, Boulerice suggested that Conservatives were weighing their electoral chances in Quebec, a majority French-speaking province.

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EDITORIAL & OPINIONS

More Talk, No Action

We applaud the Caribbean Community for taking the initiative to host a symposium on crime in the region.

As we all know, the archipelago has been battling rising violent crime in almost every country and region, making a collective response not just important, but much needed.'

But we echo the concerns of Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley -- one of the stars among Caribbean leaders -- who told her colleagues at the Port of Spain conference, which began on Monday, that unless concrete recommendations are adopted at the end of a two-day regional symposium, the leaders will be doing an injustice to themselves and the people they serve.

"We need the Caricom arrest warrant, we need to have the exchange and rotation of judges...we need to have an enlargement of the jurisdiction of magistrates, we need cooperation on forensics and we need to...deconstruct all the rules in our police service and reconstruct them," Motley told a panel discussion of regional leaders.

Mottley, an attorney, also noted that many years ago "people did not get bail for murder.

"Now when I look at the stats, not just out of the Bahamas, Barbados and all through the region, the people who are causing the greatest problems are charged with two, three, four murders. Something is fundamentally wrong," she said.

Indeed.

One of the main issues facing the regional leaders is the abundance of illegal guns that are finding their way to the shores of small states largely unprepared for the onslaught of violence caused by such weapons.

That's something Jamaican prime Minister Andrew Holness addressed when he spoke to the gathering.

He called on Caribbean countries to make the acquisition of national security tools a priority to ease regional reliance on aid from foreign partners.

Holness said while partnership with the United States is crucial in preventing the influx of illegal guns to the Caribbean, regional countries should not be overly dependent on their assistance.

He stressed that Caribbean countries should take the lead in the security and protection of their people and urged stakeholders to strengthen their law enforcement capacities.

"We cannot rely on foreign countries to tell us what is moving in our waters and what is coming in our ports. They are only going to tell us what is in their interest, we must act in our interest."

He added: "There has to be equal energy, effort and attention paid to preventing illegal guns from coming into our country as we pay equal energy, effort and attention in preventing illegal drugs from going to their country."

Trinidad & Tobago Prime Minister

Keith Rowley, who is hosting the Port of Spain conference, spoke to his colleagues about the state of crime in his nation.

With more than 600 murders last year and the country on track to top that number this year, Rowley said T&T had been "blindsided by crime".

"Today, if there's one aspect we may all be guilty of (it) is that the problem of criminality and violence was not dealt with sufficiently in a much earlier timeframe -- in the homes, in the schools, in the prisons, in the courts and I dare say in the Parliaments."

The Regional Symposium on "Violence as a Public Health Issue -- The Crime Challenge" ended with a declaration to ban the use and presence of assault weapons in the civilian population of regional nations.

The leaders also said that Caricom will send a communiqué to the US Government signed by regional Heads of Government pointing out that a main contributor to crime and violence in the Caribbean was the proliferation of firearms from US manufacturers.

"Sellers of those products started using our territory to poison American children. The US is still fighting that -- a drug war it is called. Because the majority was going north to the US we could have just said let it go. We have the authorities to say make it legal. But we said no we will fight the trade," the communiqué stated.

While this is welcome, we wonder if this isn't just more talk without solutions, as banning assault rifles in the region is a moot point, since the guns are mostly banned there already.

Secondly, the decision to call on the US Government to assist them in controlling the entry of guns into the Caribbean is nothing short of rhetoric, and belies the point made by PM Holness at the conference: that dependence on another country to help the problem is foolhardy.

The Caribbean, after all, has no say on what the US Government does, nor can it expect an administration there to help them ban guns in the Caribbean when it (the US) cannot even pass sensible gun laws in its own country.

In the end, therefore, it seems that this crime conference was a political attempt to appease regional populations concerned about the rise in violent crime.

In the end, however, it was nothing more than a meet and greet and an opportunity to enjoy meals, accommodation and other largesse at taxpayers expense -- the T&T taxpayers at that, since that country was the host.

Indeed, the meeting failed to address the critical points brought to the table by PM Mottley, which would have had an immediate impact on crime.

We hate to say it, but it seems a lot like more talk and no action.

What a pity.

Congratulations to Professor Mark Kirton

Dear Editor,

I READ with interest the launch of Professor Kirton's most recent publication, titled, "Building bridges in the Amazon-Guyana Brazil Relations into the 21st Century".

The professor argues that Guyana should consider "negotiating with Brazil for an oil block, as a country, especially in the changing geopolitical and geo-economic landscape in which we find ourselves."

Particularly, the professor contends that "Brazil could serve to counter-balance any aggressive intent

in the immediate regional neighbourhood, and serve as an important player in the stability of the new sector."

Indeed, I concur with Prof. Kirton's argument, and wish to commend him for his academic work, through his latest publication.

That aside, I rather suspect that it is precisely for this reason; the geopolitical risk surrounding the Guyana-Venezuela border controversy, that is, that the Guyana Government has shrewdly adopted a policy stance to reserve a few of the oil blocks to explore country-to-country partnerships.

While I do agree that Brazil should

be the preferred option for such a partnership, and for obvious reasons, if this doesn't work out, I am of the view that India, Nigeria, or the United Kingdom would be the strategic alternative options for Guyana.

This is the kind of discourse that we need to have more of at the national level, which is deeply lacking in our society. There are a few notable persons who contribute to the national policy discussions and debate in a meaningful and scholarly manner, and who are often drowned out in the mainstream media by the noise-makers.

I wish to acknowledge, for in-

stance, Dr. Terrence Blackman, who is an Associate Professor of Mathematics in the Diaspora. Dr. Blackman consistently facilitates a weekly policy discussion forum on topical issues in Guyana, but, unfortunately, the mainstream media does not publish his work.

Nonetheless, let me once again extend my commendations to both Professor Kirton and the likes of Professor Blackman for their scholarly contributions to the public discourse in Guyana.

Yours sincerely,

Joel Bhagwandin

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SIU clears cop in killing of mass shooter at Vaughn condo

By Niraj Sharma
LJI REPORTER

The York Region police officer who shot and killed a mass shooter at a Vaughn condo late last year has been cleared of any wrongdoing.

Ontario’s police watchdog concluded its investigation into the death of a man who shot and killed five people at a Vaughan condominium in December before being fatally shot by a responding officer.

In a Monday press release, the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) said it determined that the York police officer didn’t commit any criminal offense in connection with the shooting.

“On his assessment of the evidence, SIU Director Joseph Martino determined there were no reasonable grounds to believe that the officer committed a criminal offence in connection with the shooting,” the release read.

“There was no basis for proceeding with criminal charges in this case, and the file has been closed.”

On the evening of Dec. 18, York Regional Police were called to a condominium complex at 9325 Jane St., just north of Rutherford Road, for reports of



The condo where the mass shooting occurred

an active shooter in the building.

“One of the first officers on scene located the shooter in the hallway of one of the floors. When the man refused to drop his pistol, and instead raised the hand holding the pistol as if readying to

point it at the officer, the officer discharged his weapon four times,” the release read.

“The man was struck. Despite officers administering first-aid, the man succumbed to his injuries at the scene.”

The man, 73-year-old Francesco Villi, killed three condo board members and two of their spouses before police arrived on scene. Villi had reportedly been in an ongoing dispute with the condo board before the shooting.

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LAW

Guyana is no longer a “Heavily Indebted Poor Country”

By Joel Bhagwandin

Contrary to a news article by a local media entity, Guyana is no longer a heavily indebted poor country as per the IMF and World Bank’s classification. Three decades ago Guyana was considered a heavily indebted country, but it has successfully graduated out of this state before becoming an oil producer. Guyana’s debt sustainability indicators are sound which further corroborates the argument that it is no longer a heavily indebted country. Moreover, there is adequate fiscal space to cushion any adverse impact arising from exogenous factors—and to comfortably advance the country’s aggressive development agenda.

On April 14th, 2023, an article was published in a certain section of the media with the caption “oil-rich Guyana among five countries in the region listed as heavily indebted poor countries”. The article was based on an International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook Report, 2023. The contents of the article and the interpretation of the analytic metric cited from the IMF report implied that the author/journalist does not understand the analytic metric and the classification altogether. As such, Guyana’s classification as illustrated in Table E in the referenced IMF report was completely misunderstood and misinterpreted by the author/media entity. This is despite the IMF report of itself—contained explanations of the analytic metric, the method of classification, and footnotes with explanation just below the table, all of which were completely ignored.

This article, therefore, seeks to explain the IMF’s classification and the analytic metric used in determining “heavily indebted poor countries”.

The IMF report in its statistical appendix explained that “emerging markets and developing economies are classified according to analytic criteria that reflect the composition of export earnings and a distinction between net creditor and net debtor economies”. The analytic criterion source of export earnings distinguishes between the categories fuel (Standard International Trade Classification [SITC] 3) and non-fuel and then focuses on non-fuel primary products (SITCs 0,1,2,3,4, and 68). Economies are classified into one of these groups if their main source of export earnings exceeds 50 percent of total exports on average between 2017 and 2021.

The financial and income criteria

focus on net creditor economies and net debtor economies, heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC), low income developing countries (LICDs), and emerging market middle-income economies (EM-MIEs). Economies are classified as net debtors when their latest net international investment position investment, where available was less than zero or their current account balance accumulations from 1972 (or earliest available data) to 2021 were negative. Net debtors are further differentiated on the basis of experience with debt servicing.

The HIPC group comprises the countries that are or have been considered by the IMF and the World Bank for participation in their debt initiative known as the HIPC initiative, which aims to reduce the external debt burdens of all the eligible HIPCs to a sustainable level in a reasonably short period of time. Many of these countries have already benefited from debt relief and graduated from the initiative.

Guyana was classified as a HIPC country three decades ago but is no longer part of the HIPC programme. Guyana has already benefited from the debt relief programme and has graduated from this initiative. In this respect, the footnote below the table in the report explained that under the “Heavily Indebted Poor Countries” column, a “Dot instead of star indicates that the country has reached the completion point, which allows it to receive the full debt relief committed to it at the decision point”. In other words, the ‘dot’ below this column for Guyana (in the table) indicates that Guyana was once a HIPC country but has now graduated from the HIPC programme. On the other hand, a ‘star’ under this column would indicate that the country is still an eligible HIPC country. This is clearly not the case for Guyana.

Based on the financial and income criteria, Guyana is classified as a net debtor country and an emerging market middle-income country respectively. For simplicity, a net debtor country runs a current account deficit or an external trade balance deficit whereas a net creditor country runs a current account surplus or external trade balance surplus.

Guyana is considered a net debtor country because prior to becoming a crude oil exporting country, it has always recorded a current account or trade balance deficit. During this period, gold exports accounted for the larger share of export earnings. Following oil production in December 2019, Guyana is now



Joel Bhagwandin

a crude oil exporter resulting in a current account surplus balance. However, it is a nominal surplus to a large extent since the nominal value of crude oil exports includes 100% of the crude oil produced offshore Guyana which is reflected as part of the total export value of crude oil. Thus, the real crude oil export value that Guyana actually earns in foreign exchange (FX) is derived from Guyana’s share of profit oil and royalty.

In applying the IMF’s analytic criteria to determine whether Guyana is a net debtor or net creditor country, given that crude oil export accounts for more than 50% of total exports, by excluding this sum from total exports—this adjustment will result in a current account deficit. Hence, it is on this basis that Guyana is classified as a net debtor country though it is an exporter of crude oil with a nominal current account surplus.

In the medium to long-term, however, considering the development trajectory of the economy aimed at achieving greater national competitiveness, viz-à-viz, halving energy cost and ensuring more reliable energy, coupled with all of the investment in building out the physical infrastructure to support the growth across all sectors etc., Guyana is poised to become a net creditor country.

Guyana’s debt sustainability indicators are sound which further corroborates the argument that it is no longer a heavily indebted country. To this end, in FY 2022, the debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 26% and external debt-to-GDP ratio stood at a record low of 11%. In 2023, debt-to-GDP ratio is an estimated 25% and external debt to GDP ratio is an es-

timated 12%. The debt service to revenue ratio in FY 2022 was also low at 12.5%, and external debt service to non-oil export ratio was low at 6%. Altogether, these are sound debt sustainability indicators which indicate that the country can comfortably service its domestic and external debt obligations with sufficient fiscal space available to help the country navigate any adverse impact arising from unforeseen exogenous factors.

In view of the foregoing, the referenced local media report incorrectly interpreted the IMF classification of Guyana as a ‘heavily indebted country’. Guyana has in fact graduated from this state and in so far as its debt sustainability indicators are concerned, these remain sound and stable. Moreover, there is adequate fiscal space to cushion any adverse impact arising from exogenous factors—and to comfortably advance the country’s aggressive development agenda.

These (IMF/World Bank) reports, as illustrated herein, are beyond the simplistic comprehension by journalists who do not possess the relevant technical training and background. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that media houses seek an interpretation and explanation of these often times highly technical and complex reports from the relevant professionals, in this case, a finance professional or an economist. In so doing, this will help to improve the quality of reporting on technical issues and minimize unnecessary errors.

Joel Bhagwandin is a financial professional and entrepreneur with more than fifteen years’ experience in the financial sector; corporate finance; financial management and risk; consulting, and academia. He is actively engaged in providing insights and analyses on a range of public policy, economic and finance issues in Guyana for the past 6+ years. He has authored more than 300 articles covering a variety of thematic areas. Joel has also written extensively on the oil and gas sector including financial and economic analyses of the PSA and detailed forecast analyses, etc. Academically, Joel is the holder of an MSc. in business management with a specialism in banking and finance from Edinburgh Napier University. He is currently pursuing his second and third masters: 1) MBA (Finance) (Top-up) through Edinburgh Napier University, and 2) MSc. in Finance (Economic Policy) through the University of London.

Guyana Gov't extends deadline for oil block auction

GOVERNMENT has extended the submission deadline for 14 offshore oil exploration blocks to July 15, 2023, due to industry feedback and regulatory framework modernisation to support the country's first competitive offshore oil- and-gas licensing round.

On Wednesday, the Ministry of Natural Resources announced the extension of the Guyana 2022 Licensing Round's bid submission deadline.

"Industry feedback and the advanced pace of modernising the oil-and-gas regulatory framework underscore the extended bidding period for the nation's first competitive offshore oil-and-gas licensing round. The round, officially launched on December 9, 2022, continues to receive strong global interest and the government has benefitted from insightful feedback during the consultation periods of the indicative terms and guidelines and the draft model production sharing agreements (PSAs)," the Natural Resources Ministry noted in a press statement.

The government recognises the need for a modern regulatory framework to govern the new oil-and-gas development era. They have been working on finalising the model production sharing agreements and overhauling the 1986 Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act, as promised in their manifesto.

Additionally, agreements have been concluded with PGS Exploration (UK) Limited and CGG Data Services to reprocess 2D seismic data relevant to the blocks for tender. Participants in the licensing round can benefit from this additional seismic data, which can be licensed to inform their bids better.

"The Government of Guyana remains committed to the successful execution of the Guyana 2022 Licensing Round and the strengthening of the nation's fiscal and legal petroleum management frameworks," the release said.

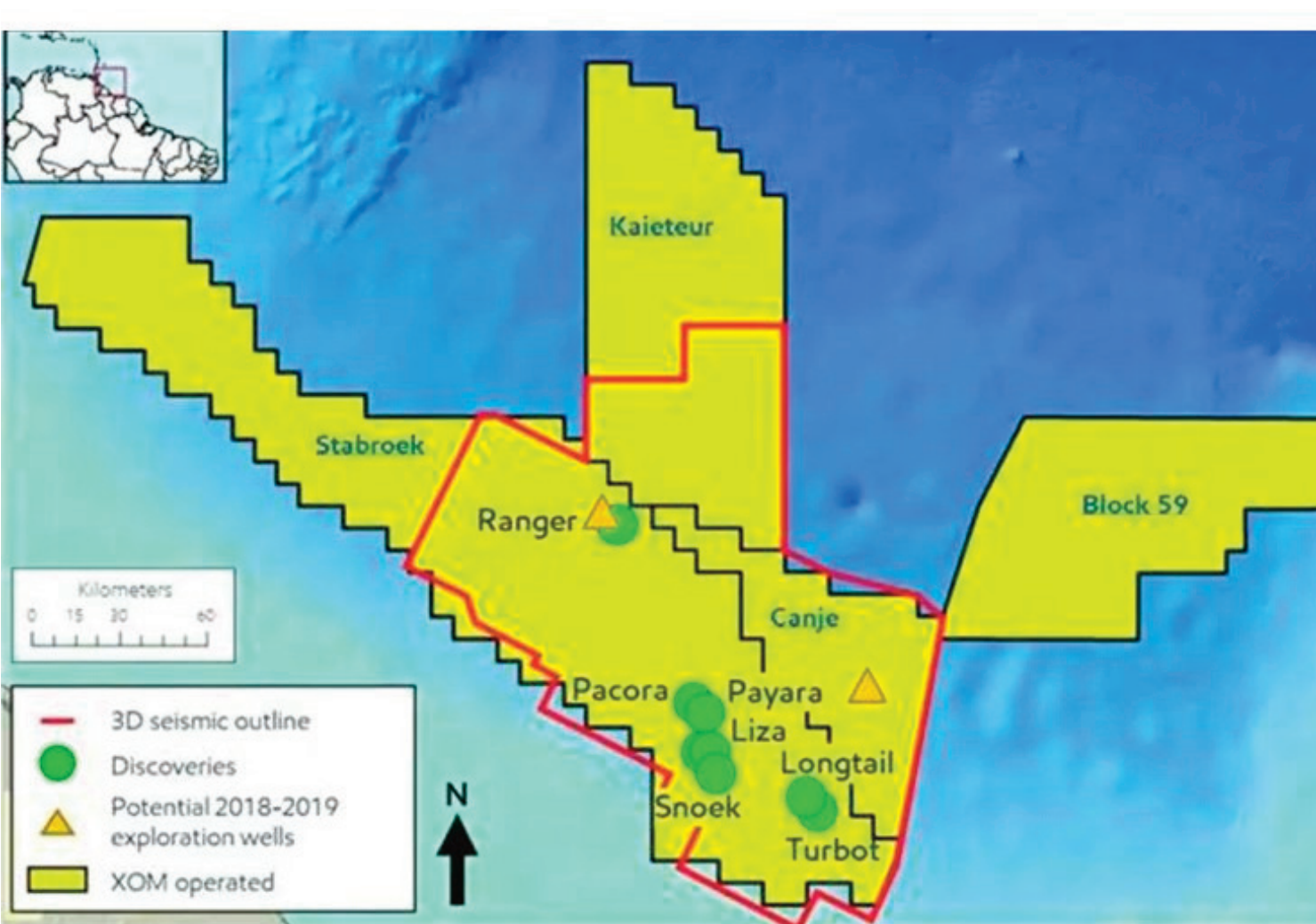
Thus far, Guyana's upcoming auction of oil blocks has lured at least 10 companies, including Shell, Petrobras, and Chevron, to consider the decade's hottest oil region.

The Stabroek Block is 6.6 million acres (26,800 square kilometres), with its gross recoverable resource now estimated to be more than 11 billion oil-equivalent barrels, including Liza and other successful exploration wells.

President, Dr Irfaan Ali last year announced that the government hopes to award the contracts by the end of May. Guyana is among 65 countries that will launch the auction of oil blocks.

The blocks being put up for auction range in acreages from 1,000 sq. km to 3,000 sq. km, with 11 in shallow water, and the other three in deep water.

The bidders' work programmes, financial offers, and local-content com-



Oil blocks offshore Guyana

mitments will be evaluated.

There won't be any restrictions on the number of bids a company can submit, but a successful bidder will be limited to an award of no more than three blocks.

There is a participation fee of US\$20,000 for the bidding process for each block.

The winning bidders of the shallow-water exploration blocks must pay a minimum of US\$10 million signing

bonus and twice that amount for the deep-water blocks.

Bidders will also be required to provide a development plan and financial bids for consideration.

Under the new fiscal terms and other conditions for future Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs), successful companies will be subjected to 50 per cent profit sharing, a royalty rate of 10 per cent, and corporate tax of 10 per cent, among other things.

President Ali had previously said that Guyana's offshore basin had captured the attention of global oil market participants and has been called a gateway to the world's fastest-growing super basin over the last few years.

"Guyana's offshore [fields] are estimated to have potential resources of in excess of 25 billion barrels, and estimated reserves of in excess of 11 billion barrels," President Ali had said.

Small, large businesses reap great benefits at Bartica Regatta

THE much-anticipated 2023 Bartica Easter Regatta did not disappoint as tourists and locals flocked to the "Red Earth" region and participated in the events unveiled by the region's organising committee and stakeholders.

Speaking with this publication, Regional Chairman Kenneth Williams who also chaired the organising committee for the regatta said that it was a huge success for all the businesses and the people of Bartica.

He noted that small or large businesses couldn't complain about not having money in their pockets.

"Any event in tourism is another primary source of income for every single person that is involved. The transportation industry, whether cars or boats; the hotel industry, the entertainment industry, and the small vendors, along with other people, greatly benefited from this regatta weekend in one way or another. We have a number of resorts and entertainment spots that we as Barticians are proud of, and they were all part of the attractions for last weekend," the Regional Chairman noted.

He continued: "As much as we have some way to go

as a country, I am one of those who are very, very happy that the government has started the tourism drive because we recognise how important it is in terms of augmenting or supporting our industries and the benefits it has for our economy."

The Regional Chairman went on to say that it is wonderful that Guyana is not dependent on one sector or industry but noted that he is pleased to see that they are all performing well and Guyanese are benefiting from them.

One of the best attractions and a "proud addition" to the 2023 regatta was the "day tours," which, according to Williams were held on Saturday, and deemed highly successful.

He explained that persons were taken to five resort-like facilities, "the backyard resort, Tiperu Falls, the Golden Beach Boulevard, and Marshalls Falls," which he noted gave them a first-hand experience of the wonders of Bartica and a chance to "hang out" at a very affordable cost of \$3,000.

Guyana secures Latin America, Caribbean's support for UN spot

MINISTER of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, Hugh Hilton Todd, on Wednesday, met with Permanent Representatives of the Group of Latin America and Caribbean States (GRULAC) at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York.

According to a press release, the minister took the opportunity to present to the group Guyana's candidature for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2024-2025 term and to outline Guyana's vision and priorities once successful.

Minister Todd also expressed Guyana's appreciation to the Permanent Representatives for their respective governments' support of Guyana's candidacy. The election is scheduled to be held on June 6, 2023 in New York.

During his presentation, Minister Todd underscored the fact that the Latin America and Caribbean family have made significant contributions to international peace and security, including through the establishment of the region as a zone of peace.

Additionally, countries from the region, big and small, that have served and are currently serving on the council, have proven that the region punches above its weight in this regard.

Minister Todd identified several priority areas that would engage Guyana's attention as a non-permanent



Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, Hugh Hilton Todd, on Wednesday, met with Permanent Representatives of the Group of Latin America and Caribbean States (GRULAC) at the United Nations (UN)

member of the Security Council including climate change, food insecurity and conflict; children in armed conflict; youth, peace and security; women, peace and security and; peace-building and conflict prevention.

Thanking the members of GRULAC that offered to share their experiences on the Council, the minister said that Guyana's term will not be a national flag waving moment but a continuity of GRULAC's contribution to

peace and security.

He emphasised the primacy of the United Nations Charter and the importance of multilateralism in safeguarding the independence and security of states, especially for small states like Guyana.

The GRULAC is allocated two of the 10 non-permanent seats on the Council, currently held by Brazil and Ecuador.

Guyana submitted its candidacy to

GRULAC in 2011 and is the region's sole candidate for the one vacant seat. It has received the confirmed support of all 32 members of GRULAC.

Minister Todd's remarks were well received by the GRULAC Group and Member States concurred that Guyana's successful bid will contribute to the continued success of GRULAC as a whole.

DR airline eyes Guyana-Canada route

SET to commence operations in Guyana from June 1, 2023, Sky Cana Airlines will create opportunities for increased trade and travel to the Dominican Republic, Canada, and later, to Houston.

High-level officials from the airline, including owner Frank Diaz, and a local team of private sector representatives, engaged President, Dr. Irfaan Ali on the company's impending launch.

The intention is to have three routes via Punta Cana (Dominica Republic) starting with Toronto, Canada, and then expanding to Houston.

Local Content Partner, Gerry Gouveia Jnr, who is also the Director of Aviation Services at Roraima Airways, said: "We are very enthusiastic to bring our airline to Guyana. Our engagement with His Excellency was very positive. He is a dynamic leader with a strong vision for Guyana."

Further, Diaz said: "We are excited to enter into a strategic partnership with the Government of Guyana to further develop and stimulate trade and travel for the Guyanese people. We will be offering cargo services to our destinations in North America and Caribbean region. We are ready to invest into Guyana and stand committed as a long-term partner."

According to its website, Sky Cana, which is strategically located in the number one tourist destination in the Caribbean, utilises advanced technology and an innovative brand to fuel continued growth in the region.

"As a hybrid airline that takes best practices from both traditional network airlines and low-cost carriers, for us the sky is the limit. We are in constant negotiations with other airlines to provide greater connectivity on new routes with operations at more airports and destinations.

"Our disruptive new business model is changing the airline industry and with a superior customer experience, we will continue to fly at higher altitudes for the excellence of our service commitment," the company said.

Sky Cana was established by a group of renowned professionals from all areas of the aviation industry, who provide clients with a unique aviation experience.

"We are also pleased to recognise our commitment to achieving climate efficiency in the face of the challenge of climate change, generating more awareness among the other sister airlines as well as in each passenger, both on the ground and in the air," the company related.

It was reported recently that Guyana's aviation sector continues to soar as the country boasts 12 passenger airlines with the addition of British Airways, and as more carriers engage authorities to enter the local market.

In February, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) had reported that there have been significant increases in air travel to Guyana over the past two

years.

Increases in air travel to Guyana reflect the transformational work being undertaken by the government under the visionary leadership of President, Dr. Irfaan Ali. The influx of visitors and investors coming to Guyana is attributed to the massive growth in the housing, tourism, transportation and agricultural sectors.

Minister Edghill said that Guyana is on its way to achieving one million arrivals by 2025, as predicted by President Ali.

According to an airport document, Guyana recorded a 32 per cent increase in passenger arrivals for January 2023 compared to the previous year.

It was also stated that during the month of January, the airport processed 25,005 arriving passengers compared to 18,874 in 2022.

Based on the airport's records, the country's main port of entry continues to experience significant increases in passenger arrivals since the Cricket Carnival in September 2022.

Earlier this year, President Ali via a Facebook livestream, said that the number of people handled at three of Guyana's major ports of entry – the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) in Timehri, Ogle's Eugene F. Correia Airport and Moleson Creek in Corentyne – saw a significant increase in travel with a total of 717,822 passengers in 2022, an increase of 82.6 per cent over 2021.

15 new telemedicine sites for remote communities

MINISTER of Health, Dr. Frank Anthony, said that remote communities, in 2023, will benefit from 15 new telemedicine sites in Region One (Barima-Waini), Region Seven (Cuyuni Mazaruni), Region Eight (Potaro-Siparuni) and Region Nine (Upper Takatu-Upper Essequibo).

The health minister disclosed that during the launch of a biomedical training programme at the National Racquet Centre on Friday.

“This year, we are adding 15 more sites, so we will be putting four in Region One, four in Region Seven, four in Region Eight and four more in Region Nine,” he said.

The telemedicine system allows doctors in the capital city to easily contact community health workers (CHWs) in rural communities.

He noted that they have to start using more technology to do medicine.

Further, he said that they had started four pilot sites where telemedicine was being done. However, the health sector requires persons to maintain computers, connectivity, internet, and devices.

“We need people who understand how to fix these things and maintain them,” the health minister related.

He added that they would need technicians in the area of digital health which will require a training programme.

“So, that is a course that will [be] run and we will have to look for suitable partners who can help us in doing that,” he noted.

The government has set aside some \$1.8 billion to implement the telemedicine programme in isolated Amerindian communities.

The National Telemedicine Programme, a pilot project, was officially launched in December 2022 in Masakenari, ‘Gunns Village’ and is being carried out in other remote communities, including Nappi, Yupukari, and Parikwarinau in Region Nine.



A community health worker communicating with a doctor at the GPHC

\$23M in contracts for Agricola

FIVE persons residing in the community of Agricola, East Bank Demerara, were on Friday awarded some \$23.2 million in contracts to execute drainage works in the community.

This is following a commitment made by President, Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali during a community engagement in February.

During the simple signing ceremony at the St. Anne’s Primary School, Minister within the Ministry of Public Works Deodat Indar urged the contractors to mobilise their teams and execute the projects efficiently.

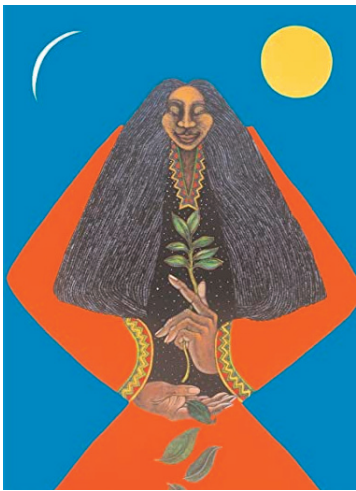
“I told you all that this week we will start the work and I am here. I want each contractor to ensure you do the work properly... Treat the workers fairly, give them fair wages. When you are finished, it is the president’s expectation that you get continuous employment,” Minister Indar stated.

Each of the contractors will be hiring residents of the community to execute the project.

This is part of the administration’s effort to foster community development, as it allows residents to actively participate in infrastructural projects. Their participation will also ensure all parameters of the project are realised in keeping with the scope of work.

Further, Minister Indar highlighted that the involvement of residents is essential as it creates more opportunities for citizens to gain employment through various sectors.

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New agro-processor launches Caribe Snackz, eyes foreign markets

A NEW agro-processing facility was officially opened on Friday at Parika, East Bank Essequibo, to aid the government's ongoing commitment to continuously develop the agricultural sector.

The facility is an essential part of the administration's determination to not only 'slash' the food import bill but also meet the '25 by 2025' goal. Additionally, this new plant offers farmers a chance to promote their local produce, in addition to offering employment opportunities to others.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Caribe Snackz, Chief Samsair, told those gathered at the launch ceremony on Friday that the company is "ready to hit local and regional markets".

The new line will offer five different varieties of plantain and cassava chips with plans to expand in the future. Caribe Snackz will supply both domestic and regional markets, with plans to expand into North America and Europe.

According to Samsair, the government's commitment to the sector inspired him to take action, especially after hearing President, Dr Irfaan Ali encouraging Guyanese living abroad to return home and invest.

The CEO said that the Parika plant can produce 200,000 packs of plantain chips each week with the intention of continuously growing and evolving. He noted that although they are now hiring 25 employees, he intends to increase this number as the business expands.

Meanwhile, Minister of Agriculture, Zulfikar Mustapha, highlighted that farmers in the community who grow "provisions" previously noted that they had trouble locating reliable mar-



Agriculture Minister Zulkifar Mustapha (2nd from right) with Caribe Snackz officials

kets.

But this factory will now allow them to not only earn an income but also display their goods on a local and regional scale.

"We must add value to these products", Minister Mustapha said, adding, "This occasion provides opportunities for us to reduce our food import bill and increase local production and promote exportation of our produce."

He noted that the agro-processing industry in Guyana is rapidly expanding with government support and promotion of investments in the sector.

The debut of this product line, in his view "is a clear indication of the significant strides we have made in promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and value addition in the agricultural sector."

He highlighted that the industry not

only provides agricultural products but also plays a critical role in generating employment opportunities and improving food security.

Paul Cheong, the Chairman of the Private Sector Commission (PSC), praised Caribe Snackz and affirmed that "this is a great opportunity for our farmers to increase their income."

AG warns of unfair, unlawful conduct in hire purchase

THE Attorney General's Chambers and Ministry of Legal Affairs says it has noted with "great regret" the complaints of many as it relates to the alleged unfair and "possibly unlawful conduct" in hire purchase transactions.

A statement from the AG's Chambers said it is principally because of these reasons that the government enacted a modern Hire Purchase Act which came into force in 2022.

The main objective of the Act is to bring greater balance and fairness in the relationship between the hirer and owner which was skewed heavily in favour of the former over the latter, prior to the enactment of the legislation.

"Unfortunately, based upon the complaints received, many of which have been circulating on social media, it appears that provisions of the Hire Purchase Act are not properly implemented or complied with, or are being completely ignored," the statement noted.

A copy of this legislation can be ob-

tained from the Parliament Office, Public Buildings at a most affordable price or can be accessed on the Official Gazette website at <https://official-gazette.gov.gy/index.php/publications/1996-extraordinary-gazettes-12th-december-2022-act-no-23-of-2022-the-hire-purchase-act-2022>.

Members of the public, more specifically, those who intend to enter into hire purchase agreements are being urged to familiarise themselves with the provisions of the Act or to secure legal counsel to do so on their behalf in relation thereto.

A few important sections of the Act are hereby summarised with the view of bringing greater awareness to the protection which they accord to the parties in a hire purchase transaction.

Section 3(1) imposes the obligation on the owner to disclose in writing the cash price before the hire purchase agreement is entered into. Section 3(4) requires all hire purchase agreements to

contain clauses that state the hire purchase price and the cash price of the goods; the amount of instalment required to pay the hire purchase price; and the date each instalment is payable.

Section 5 gives the right to the hirer or buyer to terminate the agreement. Section 6 lists the clauses in agreements which, if included, will be void and therefore unenforceable. These include, among other things, giving an owner or seller the authority to forcibly enter premises to possess goods; denying the hirer or buyer of the right to terminate/determine the agreement; subjecting a hirer or buyer on termination of an agreement to a liability which is greater than the liability provided for under the Act; or clauses which relieve the owner or seller or any person acting on his behalf from liability for any acts or defaults.

Section 10 entitles the hirer or buyer to cancel the agreement within seven days of signing. Section 13 enti-

ties a hirer or buyer who has cancelled under section 10 to recover monies paid under the agreement, subject to a restocking fee charged by an owner or seller to a maximum of 10 per cent.

Section 23 states that where the hirer or buyer has paid 70 per cent or more of the hire-purchase price or total purchase price, the owner is prohibited from enforcing any right to recover possession otherwise than by action in a court of law.

Section 28 provides for rebate on early payment of five percent per annum or such rate as may be prescribed where the balance of the hire purchase price is paid at least one month before the date it is due, calculated on the amount of such balance for the period in respect of which it was prepaid. This section also provides that where a balance remains unpaid for more than one month, it may attract an interest on such balance at a rate of five percent per annum or such rate as may be prescribed.

CARICOM declares war on guns at end of Port of Spain crime conference

CARICOM has declared war on guns, starting with a decision to ban automatic rifles in the entire region.

This was the final development of the two-day symposium on crime as a public health issue at the Hyatt Regency in Port of Spain, which ended on Tuesday.

“Caricom heads have agreed today to take a decision to ban the use and presence of assault weapons in the civilian population of our nations.

“We are undertaking and all of these undertakings would have serious budgetary consequences to provide greater support for those who need it and to do fundamental restructuring of our education system,” the Trinidad Prime Minister said.

Dr Rowley added that Caricom will send a communiqué to the US Government signed by regional Heads of Government pointing out that a main contributor to crime and violence in the Caribbean was the proliferation of firearms from US manufacturers.

Rowley, echoing Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness’ position – on the first day of the symposium – called on the US to assist them in the war on guns, the same way the region assisted the US in the war on drugs.

“Sellers of those products started using our territory to poison American children. The US is still fighting that – a drug war it is called. Because the majority was going north to the US we could have just said let it go. We have the authorities to say make it legal. But we said no we will fight the trade.”

“But our people have a love for gun and the guns started to do to us what the powder was doing to the US. Today we are saying to the US the same way we fought with you to prevent the powder from going up north we want you to fight with us to prevent the guns and ammunition from coming into our territories.”

Speaking with reporters after the close of the symposium on Tuesday, a panel comprising Caricom heads including Rowley, Jamaican PM Andrew Holness, Caricom chairman and Bahamas PM Philip Davis and St Lucia PM Philip J Pierre was asked whether there was a realistic expectation that the US would intervene.

Also present at the symposium on Tuesday was US Ambassador to TT Candace Bond, who later shook hands in a show of diplomatic unity with PMs Rowley and Holness.

Rowley told reporters that, at the moment the US itself is having similar conversations concerning gun manufacturers and the effects of the products that they sell.

“The issue is with gun manufacturers who are selling a product for which there is an appetite increasing and encouraged,” Rowley said.

Holness added that if Caricom does not begin some action, the firearms

would continue to flow into the region and wreak havoc.

“It is by putting the situation to the US whether by legal channels, diplomatic channels, bilateral channels – by joining together as we have done – that we will change the narrative, outlook and perspectives. So at the moment it would seem that it is unrealistic expectation but if we continue to lobby, if we continue through the legal and diplomatic channels, change will come.”

In March the White House issued an

executive order with the goal of reducing gun violence in the US. Included in this executive order were clauses aimed at holding the US gun industry responsible for the high rate of shootings, through mandating that gun manufacturers provide the public and policy-makers with more information on federally licensed firearms dealers violating gun laws.

The executive order also encouraged the Federal Trade Commission to issue a public report analysing how gun manufacturers market firearms to mi-

nors.

On Monday, legal advisor for the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs Miguel Reyes highlighted Mexico’s battle with the influx of US weapons coming across the Mexican border.

In August 2021, Mexico sought to have the companies introduce greater discipline to monitor the chain of commerce and prevent weapons from reaching unauthorised users. The lawsuit was dismissed because of laws which gave US gun manufacturers immunity.





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No firm decision made on local refinery – VP Jagdeo

NO decision has been made by the government as yet to establish a modular oil refinery in Guyana.

On Thursday last, Vice President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, noted that while the government has received a number of offers during a Request for Proposal (RFP) issued last year, nothing definitive has been decided as yet.

“On the oil refinery, we have not made a decision as to whether we will go with the project as yet. We have had a number of offers in. Frankly speaking, I did not pay too much attention to this, but we have not made a decision at the policymaking level as to whether we go with the project and if so with whom and much less on who will manage it. So, no firm decision has been made,” Dr. Jagdeo explained during a press conference held at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC).

It was late last year, after the significant interest being shown, the government had issued the RFP for interested parties to design, finance, and construct a 30,000 barrel per day, (b/d) oil refinery to be built in the vicinity of Crab Island in Berbice.

An oil refinery is an industrial processing plant where crude oil is transformed and refined into useable products, such as gasoline, diesel fuel, kerosene, and other fuel oils and products.

There has been growing support for Guyana to have its own refinery; the private sector has been lobbying for a modular refinery for some time now. A modular refinery is a simplified refinery that is less capital- intensive when compared with the traditional full-scale refineries.

The government’s decision to finally consider the creation of a local refinery was based on the goal of building national energy security. President Dr.

Irfaan Ali had agreed that the refinery would most likely be a modular one.

Dr. Jagdeo had noted that the government will be working along with the one successful bidder with an agreement to provide land and concessions, and the limited amount of crude.

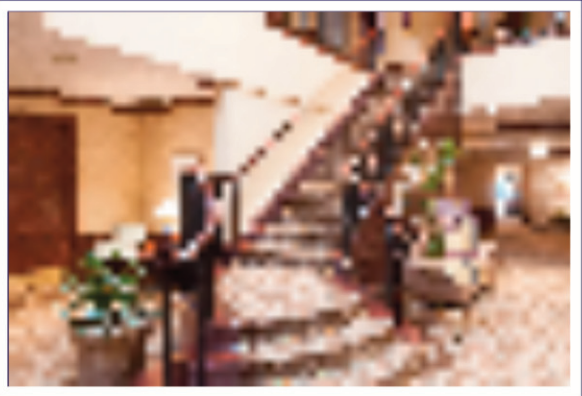
The refinery will not be limited to selling fuel to the government, and will be allowed to sell locally or export, provided the price is competitive. However, having the local refinery will provide the government with options of guaranteeing local provision of refined products, in the case of global supply plights.



Guyana Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo

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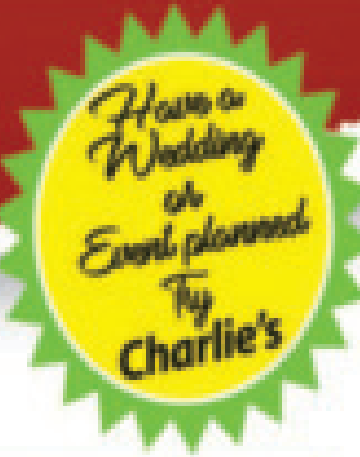
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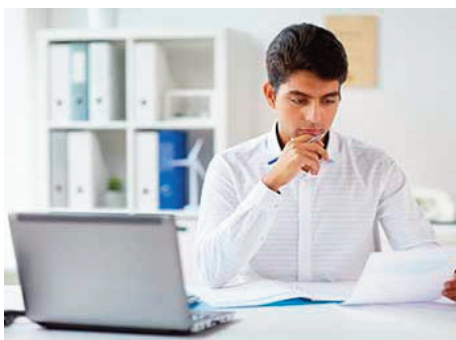
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Tradewinds exercise to include oil spill, flood scenarios

TRADEWINDS 2023, a Caribbean security exercise sponsored by the U.S. Southern Command, will be conducted for the third time in Guyana, from July 14 to 28, 2023.

This time, instead of focusing solely on traditional security type training, this year's exercise will include two humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, according to Major Jaime Castello of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), during a press briefing at the Ramada Princess Hotel, on Monday.

The two operations, he said, will be an oil spill scenario led by the Civil Defence Commission (CDC) and a flood scenario in Kwakwani.

For the oil spill, the focus will be on the Berbice River, where they intend to have practical exercises during those operations.

Military representatives from the United States and 23 partner nations are participating in the final planning conference for the Tradewinds exercise.

Each of the training exercises at the various locations will provide opportunities to conduct joint, inter-agency capacity building opportunities for the partner nations, with a focus on regional co-operation, humanitarian assistance, and disaster response operations.

Major Castello said there is no doubt that the exercise will be fruitful, since Guyana, in 2021, hosted a successful Tradewinds exercise amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Not only did the security forces benefit from training covering the areas in terms of land, sea and air training, Guyana also benefitted economically because part of Tradewinds is using the local economy for the supplies and re-



Military representatives from the United States and several partner nations are gathered in Georgetown

sources required for the exercise," he related.

Major Castello said that for Tradewinds 2023, they anticipate that it will have more than 1,000 troops involving Guyanese and other nations.

"I can say that GDF stands strong to support working with South Command and all nations involved in this exercise to ensure that Tradewinds 2023 is beneficial and successful," Castello said.

Held annually since 1984, the Tradewinds exercise is designed to expand the region's capability to mitigate, plan for, and respond to crises; increase regional training capacity and interoperability; develop new and refine existing

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); enhance the ability to defend Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ); increase readiness; promote human rights and adherence to shared international norms and values; fully integrate women into the force; and increase maritime domain awareness to deter Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities.

The regional organisations scheduled to participate in Tradewinds are Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Regional Security System (RSS), the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS), and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

The Regional Security Cooperation, according to US Army Major, Benjamin Leger, is a foreign military interaction exercise focused on maritime interdiction, ground security, and multinational staff training which supports SOUTHCOM's campaign plan.

"TW23 scenarios include countering Transnational Criminal Organisations (CO) and Violent Extremist Organisations (VEO) to increase interoperability, help finalise the Caribbean Community SOPs, enhance regional collaboration and stability, and increase response effectiveness to security threats common to the region," he said.

EPA in final stages of oil spill guarantee

THE Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is in the final stages of concluding the parent guarantee from the operator of the Stabroek Block to fully cover expenses incurred in any eventuality of an oil spill offshore.

This is according to Vice President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, who, during a press conference on Thursday last, related that the matter is expected to be resolved within a few weeks.

"I spoke with the EPA before I came here and so they said they're in the final stages of concluding the parent guarantee. So, they are working on it and I anticipate it will be a matter of weeks before they conclude but they said to me they're almost finalised," Dr. Jagdeo explained.

"I don't want to put any pressure because, at the technical level, I don't want them to say I'm pushing artificial

deadlines on them and they didn't get that chance at a technical level to go through it carefully. So, I'm not putting any deadline on them but they said to me they are a matter of weeks away from getting the parent guarantee."

A parent company guarantee (PCG) is a contract between a company and its client to ensure a performance requirement is met. These agreements are used when a contractor or subsidiary enter into a contract with clients. The expectations outlined in this guarantee are detailed by the parent company. The document that outlines a parent company guarantee should clearly state that the parent company is only held liable if the contractor or subsidiary company is in breach of the contract and fails to correct the breach in question.

The environmental permit granted to the oil and gas operators provides that holders are liable for the full extent of any environmental damage caused, and cleaning up needed, for any oil spill that may occur.

Dr. Jagdeo noted that concerns by the operators as it pertains to who gets to determine the validity of damages claimed as a result of an oil spill is being worked out.

"That's one of the last issues on this parent guarantee resolution that they are going to resolve shortly," Dr. Jagdeo said.

The Vice President noted that while the oil company is opposed to the government being the final adjudicator of which claims are valid and which are not, vice versa, the government is not comfortable with the oil company having the final say.

"We don't believe that Exxon should decide on the eligibility but they are saying we can't also decide. So, you probably have to find an intermediate step to make sure that it's assessed and with a party that both sides are comfortable with. So that is a critical issue for us," Dr. Jagdeo noted.

Currently, each oil production project being developed offshore by Exxon Mobil affiliate, Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL), has oil spill insurance coverage of up to US\$600 million per event, while the full liability is supposed to be backed by Exxon's parent company guarantee.

The EPA has been working with the operators to secure the parent guarantee. The Stabroek Block is owned by Exxon and its partners Hess and CNOOC.



Bollywood songs have been removed from Spotify

Spotify removes hundreds of Bollywood songs from App

Imagine loading up your favourite playlist, the one you spent hours carefully putting together, only to find half of the songs had gone.

If you're a Bollywood fan with a Spotify account, it's a situation you might not need to picture. That's because hundreds of songs from some of India's biggest blockbusters have vanished from the app.

Spotify says it's not been able to reach an agreement with the owners of the tracks after the old one expired.

Soundtracks with millions of plays, like Mahari from epic romance Bajirao Mastani or Kala Chashma from Baar Baar Dekho, along with other fan favourites were among the deleted hits.

It's left holes in many users' playlists, who only realised the songs had gone after loading them up and hitting play.

For fans, the music in Bollywood is part of a film's soul - enhancing the action on-screen and living on in headphones years after the movie is released.

In cases when the film itself doesn't do well, it can be the music which people remember.

Spotify explains on its website it doesn't provide access to all the music and podcasts in the world.

Like any streaming service, it makes licensing deals with publishers and rights owners so it's allowed to provide their tracks.



ARIES (March 21 - April 20): Make allowances for those who do not share your sense of adventure and don't try to force them into doing the same things as you. Loved ones, especially, should be encouraged to be who they are, not who you would like them to be.

TAURUS (April 21 - May 21): As one of the zodiac's Earth sign you can be a bit cautious at times but now you will go right the other way and act outrageously. You will have a lot of fun annoying your conservative friends but don't take it too far – there is always a limit.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21):
An offer you receive out of the blue over the next 24 hours may be intriguing but is it the right one for you? The planets warn you must think long and hard before making a decision. Chances are it's probably not as good as it sounds.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23): Keep your schemes and dreams to yourself between now and the weekend, because if the wrong people get to hear about them they will go out of their way to scupper your plans. Not everyone wants to see you succeed, so you need to protect yourself.

LEO (July 24 - Aug. 23): According to the planets you owe someone a favor and this would be the perfect time to pay them back in kind. The longer you leave it the harder it will be to come up with a suitable way to thank them for their generosity.

VIRGO (Aug. 24 - Sept. 23): Everyone has limits, even a Virgo, and you may need to remind yourself of that fact today. If you expect too much of yourself you will probably fall short. If you expect too much of other people they are sure to disappoint you.

LIBRA (Sept. 24 - Oct. 23): Mars in the career area of your chart makes you super ambitious but you need to be cautious too. The planets warn if you do something the powers that be disagree with it could have an adverse effect on your reputation. Why take chances?

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22): If you fall into the trap of thinking that nothing can possibly go wrong today then most likely it will. Is the universe having fun at your expense? Maybe. More likely though it is sending you a warning. Too much optimism is rarely a good thing.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 - Dec. 21): What you do between now and the weekend won't only affect your own prospects for success but will also affect loved ones, work colleagues and friends. Make sure your next move is one that both you and they can happily live with.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 - Jan. 20): Mars in your opposite sign makes it hard to agree with what partners are doing, and just as hard for them to agree with what you are doing. You need to find a middle ground where you can work together for mutual benefit. Can't see it? Look harder.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 - Feb. 19): Although what you are working on appears to be going according to plan the planets warn there may be something that you have missed, something that could cause problems later on. Find out what that something is and deal with it at once.

PISCES (Feb. 20 - Mar. 20): You may be tempted to give up on a creative activity that is taking more effort than you expected but don't be hasty. The toughest part, actually starting, is already done and all you have to do now is keep going a little bit more every day.

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Guyana is a ‘credible destination’ for international investors

GUYANA now prides itself as a nation built on the foundation of democratic principles, further highlighting the importance of an efficient anti-corruption legislative framework.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, emphasised this point at the opening ceremony of the Ninth Annual Conference of the Commonwealth Caribbean Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies.

“It took a lot of work, including with the support of our international partners, first of all, to restore democracy, to start to progressively rebuild the institutions of the State, an independent judiciary, other independent watchdogs, including those for the purpose of accountability and such.

“There was a time when no international company would have come to do business with Guyana, and it took hard work to make us able to present ourselves once again as a credible destination for international investors,” he said.

Those efforts did not go in vain as Guyana is a hub for investment activity. Guyana also has a government that places priority on formulating the framework to ensure transparency and accountability.

This work has encompassed every aspect of the governance landscape, seeing constitutional reform having a ripple effect, with the establishment of several constitutional commissions, a public procurement commission, and sectoral committees within the parliament to provide parliamentary oversight in areas of government operations.



Guyana Minister of Finance Dr Ashni Singh

Additionally, the public and media can access annual public reports of constitutional bodies and state boards, as well as the Auditor General’s annual report.

These policies are all part of the administration’s efforts to eradicate corruption in all sectors across Guyana.

This is work that will continue, as

government plans to institute a second wave of constitutional reform, and is on the brink of launching the work of the constitutional reform commission, which will see further revisions.

“We are reinforced in our conviction that what we have achieved thus far represents a work in progress. We continue to be committed to further

strengthening this legal framework. This government is firmly committed to putting in place an institutional architecture for good governance that will be done ultimately to the benefit and wellbeing of all of the Guyanese people,” Minister Singh assured.

GECOM records ‘satisfactory’ Nomination Day

WITH minimal reports of challenges, hiccups or disruptions, on Monday, Chief Elections Officer (CEO), Vishnu Persaud described Nomination Day as “very smooth and satisfactory,” as Guyana moves one step closer to the hosting of its next Local Government Elections (LGE), which is set for June 12.

In a telephone interview on Monday evening, hours after the deadline for submissions, Persaud said that Returning Officers across the country have already began the process of vetting the lists of candidates submitted by the various political parties, groups and individual candidates.

“In a nutshell, all in all, we had a very smooth and satisfactory day into the submission of list of candidates. Going forward, what is required of us is to follow the statutory procedure in terms of determining the acceptability of those lists.

“If there are defects we have to give the stakeholders the opportunity to correct them. When the lists are corrected, then the lists are approved and we can proceed to the preparation of ballots going towards the election,” Persaud related.

Entities wishing to participate in the upcoming LGEs and contest for a seat on any of the councils with the 80 Local Authority Areas (LAA) across Guyana were required to submit their list of candidates on Monday at the respective offices of the Returning Officers under which their LAA fall. Submissions were allowed between 10:00 hours to 14:00 hours.



GECOM Chair Vishnu Persaud

With submissions completed, a preliminary record of the various list of candidates could be made available as soon as Tuesday, Public Relations Officer (PRO) of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), Yolanda Ward said.

She, however, reminded that candidates would only be able to make it on to the ballot for the elections if they satisfy all statutory requirements set out in the legislations governing the elections.

Each list must be reviewed by the respective Returning Officers (RO) over the next few hours to ensure they satisfy necessary criteria, and it would be some time before the approved candidates can be made public.

“It doesn’t mean that because a list was submitted means that it would be approved. It has to go through a vetting process. And as of today immediately after we received the list the ROs commenced that examination process,” Ward said.

Should any defects be discovered on any list, the submitting entity will be notified and given a statutory period of time to correct the defect and resubmit their list.

“They have to meet all the statutory requirements and there is a timeline for that,” Ward said.

Mia urges region to develop concrete measures to deal with crime

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley on Monday called for concrete recommendations to be adopted at the end of a two-day regional symposium on violence that Caribbean Community (Caricom) leaders regard as a public health issue.

“I really believe we would do ourselves an injustice,” she said if the delegates left the gathering without adopting decisions to be implemented across the region.

“We need the Caricom arrest warrant, we need to have the exchange and rotation of judges...we need to have an enlargement of the jurisdiction of magistrates, we need cooperation on forensics and we need to....deconstruct all the rules in our police service and reconstruct them,” Motley told a panel discussion of regional leaders.

Mottley, an attorney, also noted that many years ago “people did not get bail for murder.

“Now when I look at the stats, not just out of the Bahamas, Barbados and all through the region, the people who are causing the greatest problems are charged with two, three, four murders. Something is fundamentally wrong,” she said.

“So I ask myself two basic ques-

tions. How are we going to deconstruct and reconstruct to meet the reality of this jurisprudential development that is undermining the rule of law in our countries and we are going to have to find ways of cooperating from the level of the police to the level of the courts, but in particular, forensics.

“If we can get people to court within nine to 12 months, you have a good chance of a person not being given bail. Beyond 12 months, any number can start to play,” Mottley said, questioning why countries have been establishing forensic labs individually.

She also questioned why the region is not involved in “proactive prosecutions rather than reactive prosecutions.”

Earlier, Prime Minister Andrew Holness said that the region as a collective group must agree that greater resources must be placed on international security in the police services “into our ability to gather intelligence, interdict and prosecute.”

“But we must also consolidate our efforts to lobby, particularly the United States, to assist us as we have assisted them in the war on drugs. They must assist us in the war on guns,” Holness said.



Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley

“There seems to be no interest in stopping the other part of the trade, which are the guns. The guns fuel crime, they are an accelerant, they are needed to protect drugs that are trans-shipped to our borders. They are then turned to deal with other forms of criminal activity.”

Holness said in the case of Jamaica, the weapon of choice is no longer the Russian made AK-47, but the AR-15 and the Glock, which are guns manufactured in North America.

See story on opposite page

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

St Kitts-Nevis diplomat kidnapped in Haiti

Reports are that the deputy-general counsel of St Kitts and Nevis was one of three people kidnapped by armed men in Haiti on Saturday.

It is said that two other businessmen and deputy-general counsel, Harold Marzouka Jr., who is also the CEO of Haiti Plastics, were traveling through the Delmas neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, when their convoy was ambushed.

Reports are that the vehicles belonging to the businessmen were set on fire.

This incident follows the kidnapping of a Haitian American couple last month.

Family members said Abigail Tous-saint, 33, and her husband Jean-Dickens, 33, were kidnapped in the Port-Au-Prince area on March 18 after traveling to visit relatives.

In Haiti, kidnappings for ransom have surged recently as armed gangs have taken over numerous neighborhoods as a result of the nation’s political unrest.

Earthquake shakes Antigua

A magnitude 3.5 earthquake was reported south of Antigua and Barbuda

Monday night.

The UWI Seismic Research Center (UWI SRC) said it occurred around 11:56 pm (local time) at a depth of 16 km.

According to the Automatic Earthquake Location from UWI SRC, the quake struck:

Saint John’s, Antigua and Barbuda, 50 km, S

Point-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, 61 km, NW

Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis, 115 km, SE

There were several earthquakes reported in the Caribbean over the weekend. On Sunday, a magnitude 5.5 earthquake was reported North northeast of Antigua and Barbuda around 5:49 am. Then a magnitude 5.0 earthquake was reported southeast of Guadeloupe around 7:22 am.

On Saturday, a magnitude 4.6 earthquake was felt in some parts of Jamaica.

USA, Cuba resume talks

The United States Department of State says the Biden administration has resumed talks in Washington with Cuban

officials on the implementation of the US-Cuba Migration Accords.

“This bilateral discussion reflects a commitment by both countries to regularly review the implementation of the Accords,” said the State Department in a statement.

It said the Department of Homeland Security’s Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere David Cloe led the US interagency delegation, and Cuba’s Vice Foreign Minister Carlos Fernandez de Cossio led the Cuban delegation.

“These migration talks provide an opportunity for discussions on mutual implementation of the Migration Accords, comprising a series of bilateral agreements between the United States and Cuba completed in 1984, 1994, 1995 and 2017,” the State Department said.

“The US delegation highlighted areas of successful cooperation on migration, while also identifying issues that have been obstacles to fulfilling the goals of the Accords,” it added. “Engaging in these talks underscores our commitment to pursuing constructive discussions with Cuba where appropriate to advance US interests.



“Ensuring safe, orderly, humane and regular migration between Cuba and the United States remains a mutual interest of both countries, and is consistent with US interests in fostering family reunification and promoting greater respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cuba,” the State Department continued.

Jamaican PM: Foreign help alone won't stop gun shipments

Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness is calling on Caribbean countries to make the acquisition of national security tools a priority to ease regional reliance on aid from foreign partners.

Holness made the remarks during his feature address at the first day of the Regional Symposium on Violence as a Public Health Issue at the Hyatt Regency Conference Centre, Port of Spain, on Monday.

His address dealt specifically with transnational organised crime with challenges posed by small arms and light weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean.

He said while partnership with the United States is crucial in preventing the influx of illegal guns to the Caribbean, regional countries should not be overly dependent on their assistance.

Holness stressed that Caribbean countries should take the lead in the security and protection of their people and urged stakeholders to strengthen their law enforcement capacities.

"I also call on our governments to put our money where our threats lie.

"We have to increase our capabilities and capacities.

"We have to scan the goods coming through our ports, to buy the offshore patrol vessels, to have the maritime surveillance.

"We cannot rely on foreign countries to tell us what is moving in our waters and what is coming in our ports.

"They are only going to tell us what is in their interest, we must act in our interest.

"One of the things we must do regionally and individually is to increase our capacity to control our domain."

In addition to strengthening regional capabilities, Holness said the US also had a responsibility in clamping down on the illegal exportation of guns to the region.

Referring to past and present efforts by Caribbean countries to disrupt shipments of drugs to North America, he said similar efforts should be placed by foreign governments in preventing guns from reaching the region.

Holness also warned that failure to do this could render the region's war on drugs ineffective.

"Our children are being killed. Our young men are being killed with drugs exchanged for guns which head to North America.

"Our children are just as valuable as the children in North America.

"There has to be equal energy, effort and attention paid to preventing illegal guns from coming into our country as we pay equal energy, effort and attention in preventing illegal drugs from



Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness

going to their country."

Holness said now more than ever a united front was needed to combat crime and lamented that Caribbean countries

in the past were not able to treat crime with the necessary priority which led to the extent of challenges facing the region.

He said central to addressing violent crime was the need to create laws with local circumstances and complexities in mind.

Rowley: T&T ‘blindsided’ by violent crime

Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Keith Rowley has blamed the crime onslaught on this society's past failure to predict the crisis.

He was addressing a Caricom symposium at the Hyatt Regency, Port of Spain on Monday, titled Violence as a Public Health Issue – the Crime Challenge.

Dr Rowley said, "Violence in the Caribbean is a public health emergency which threatens our lives, our economies, our national security and by extension every aspect of our well-being."

He lamented the prevalence of petty theft, school violence, home invasions, domestic violence, sexual abuse, human trafficking, drive-by shootings, drug-gang warfare and revenge murders.

"When the situation arrives at the door, it is said there was a failure of the society to spot the oncoming crisis.

"Then there may be a later failure to perceive the extent of that arrived situation as a societal problem.

"Today, if there's one aspect we may all be guilty of (it) is that the problem of criminality and violence was not dealt with sufficiently in a much earlier timeframe – in the homes, in the schools, in the prisons, in the courts and I dare say in the Parliaments."

Rowley lamented the evolution of a creeping normalisation of lower standards.

"We allowed slow, moderate, deviant behavioural trends to increase.

"We allowed slips in our age-old standards, ethical and moral norms in our family homes, in our schools, in public institutions, and our roads and in public places – all of which, in hindsight, reminds us that we should have checked very early. Instead, we seem to have been saying, 'These times are different.'"

He mulled this age of American gun culture, amid the internet revolution with its tremendous promises and all its warts. "An age of selfish individualism has been allowed to flourish, at the expense of society itself.

"So morals and values are now considered flexible. Their lines are blurred and they occupy spheres of their own, determined by one's personal whims, the present fashionable trends, and, worse, the political and bureaucratic shortcomings of something malleable called 'the system.'"

Rowley said with a cross-section of Caribbean inputs, the conference would try to address the issue of crime and violence as a public health issue.

"Hopefully, there will be elements of operational consensus, after the planned examination and exchanges, which will form a plan of action that will give the Caribbean people their much-needed assurance that something beyond talk will be done..."

Caricom chairman: Do more to keep young men from crime

CARICOM chairman, Bahamas Prime Minister Philip Davis KC, urged more help for young Caribbean males vulnerable to becoming perpetrators or victims of crime, in his opening remarks at a Caricom crime conference on Monday at the Hyatt Regency in Port of Spain.

"An epidemic of violence grips our region, one that claims lives and generates fear and anger.

"In 2022, Jamaica had a staggering homicide rate of 52.9 per 100,000 inhabitants, Trinidad and Tobago had a rate of 39.4 per 100,000, and The Bahamas, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines all recorded homicide rates above 30 per 100,000. This is over five times the global average."

He said millions of people in the region's crime hotspots could become victims of any day, recalling his comfort families who had their sons and daughters to crime.

Davis said some used epidemiological terms to analysis crime.

"Violence is contagious, and those who map the commission of violent crimes find that their data mirrors the spread of infectious diseases within a community. "Violence can strike in waves and can grow exponentially.

"Those who come in close contact with violence are most likely to spread it and most likely to fall victim to it."

"As we would with any public health crisis, we must define and monitor the problems, identify the risks and protective factors, and develop mitigation and prevention strategies to halt the epidemic."

Davis underlined the urgency of this work by saying on a typical day, 13 young adults aged 16-30 die due to vio-



Caricom chairman and Bahamas Prime Minister Philip Davis

lent crime, leaving families broken by grief and loss, and our communities threatened. "We need to mobilize resources with the same determination we would bring to fighting any other life-

threatening epidemic."

He said the battle was a complex tangle of social, economic, and environmental factors.

"It is not merely a policing or legislative problem. Nor is it solely the domain of the courts.

"While better laws and expanded police capacity are important elements of a successful strategy, we need all hands on deck: parents, social workers, educators, rehabilitation specialists, social scientists, community workers and activists, mental health professionals, religious leaders, and many others."

Davis said Bahamian psychiatrist Dr David Allen has linked the physical and sexual abuse of children to physical, mental, and sociological illnesses later in life.

"Many of these children grow up to be the perpetrators and victims of further violence."

He quoted Allen, "An abused child becomes a dangerous adult."

"We need to interrupt these cycles of violence."

Davis urged zero tolerance for violence against women and children.

"And there must be more outreach to, and support for, our at-risk young men.

"It is critical that we provide more support for our boys in their transition to manhood to keep them on a productive and peaceful path."

He said the recent Carifta games showed what young people can accomplish with positive avenues for self exploration and achievement.

"Recreational, educational, social, and career-related outreach are all needed to appeal to our youth and shield them from the recruitment tactics of neighbourhood gangs and drug dealers."

Davis then lamented in The Bahamas, 98.6 per cent of illegal firearms came from the United States, in Haiti 87.7 per cent, in Jamaica 67 per cent, and in TT 52 per cent.

He said Caricom has asked the US government and US-based gun manufacturers to help Caricom member states to identify weapons purchased in the US, to hold weapons dealers and traffickers accountable for the many lives lost to gun violence each year.

"We must call on our neighbours to the north to better police the trafficking of guns from the US to the Caribbean.

"Last month, The Bahamas, along with Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Mexico, working along with the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Human Security, jointly filed a brief in the United States Court of Appeal in support of a \$10 billion lawsuit to hold US gun manufacturers liable for the destruction American-made guns have caused in our countries.

"It was an action initiated by the Mexican government. We intend to challenge the laws that previously protected gun manufacturers from lawsuits."

He said, "The impact of violence goes beyond personal loss, as terrible as that is.

"High levels of sustained violence undermine investor confidence in the region, scare visitors away from tourism-dependent economies, and place a strain on healthcare, educational, and social support systems."

Davis warned Haitian unrest has implications for the entire region.

Hoping the symposium could generate interventions and solutions regionally, he said, "There are no quick fixes. Yet we must act quickly to save our people from this epidemic."

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Vincey PM: Some crimes done to mind high-maintenance women

There are many root causes to crime, as agreed upon by several Heads of State at the Caricom symposium on crime at the Hyatt Regency in Port of Spain on Monday.

But St Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves said one of the reasons youths are picking up guns to commit crimes, is to keep providing the lifestyle for high-maintenance, pretty women.

He said for most criminals, a life of crime was a choice.

“They chose to be murderers and kill and they do so by and large because they want to make some easy money dealing drugs and running crime,” he said.

“Some of them, in order to maintain rank in the community, they get a fascination with guns. They associate with young women – in some cases beautiful young women who are high-maintenance – and they have to rob and steal and kill and deal in drugs in order to maintain them.

“Everybody here knows what I am talking here is the absolute truth,” he insisted. “What I am talking here, people in the taverns across TT are talking about. Well, it’s time we spoke about it here.”

He dismissed the perceived social effects of crime – poverty, prejudice and



St Vincent Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves

a lack of access to opportunities. He said if people were really that frustrated, they would kill themselves instead of turning to crime and killing others.

“I note that in TT and all the countries in the Caribbean with the possible exception of Guyana, we have among the lowest rates of suicide. So if we are

really frustrated we should be killing ourselves more individually. We don’t...we kill other people,” Gonsalves said.

He described criminals as cowards, adding his wish is to have the death penalty applicable again across the region.

He pointed out that most crimes are committed by young men who come from broken homes and did not take up opportunities presented by governments, education systems and civil society. He added that because of capitalism, these youths see people getting away with criminal activities, and are trying to do the same.

He said contrary to popular belief, most young men are doing their country proud. Those in Boy Scouts, Cadets or who play sports or music, hardly ever find themselves before a magistrate. However their successes are not highlighted as crime is.

He knocked opposition members and the media for sensationalising and politicising crime. He said journalists – who are too cowardly to enter into politics – speak in general terms but have no contribution to solving the issue.

“They have no plan,” he said. “You know that and I know that. And we have to call out this foolishness.”

...wants to see return of the hangman

THERE is no proven data to support that the death penalty leads to a reduction in crime, abolitionist and senior counsel Douglas Mendes told a panel discussion on Monday, in response to political suggestions that the death penalty should be used in the Caribbean to address crime.

At a regional symposium entitled Violence as a Public Health Issue – The Crime Challenge, St Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves called for the return of the death penalty.

The two-day symposium is aimed at looking at crime as a public health issue in order to adequately address it.

On Monday afternoon the Faculty of Law at UWI, along with the Caribbean Centre for Human Rights (CCHR), held a panel discussion on the topic: Advancing Human Rights: Is Strategic Litigation Necessary?

In his contribution Gonsalves said: “I am a Roman Catholic. The Catholic Church preaches that we shouldn’t have the death penalty. My mother, who was also Catholic, taught me that there should not be the death penalty.

“I happen to think that the Pope and my mother were wrong. For crimes, murder other than a crime of passion,

you should get the death penalty.

“I know the Europeans don’t like that. They had it for a long time and they might not want to give aid if we bring it back.

“But I am satisfied that most of the people who do the killing are cowards.”

Asked about Gonsalves’ comment, Mendes said the death penalty proved not to serve any penological purpose, because there is no evidence that it deters crime. He added that this is nothing new, as it is well rehearsed across the globe in various pieces of literature.

“The death penalty has proved not to serve any useful purpose.”

Instead, he said, “(It) seems to me that it is best to focus on the causes of crime, and attempt to remove the causes of crime.”

Mendes said while the rights of the convicted are looked at through human-rights groups, it did not mean the rights of the victims are ignored. Mendes said in society there is polar thinking of either the death penalty or nothing, but with swift justice, both rights are upheld.

“You have to put resources behind detecting crime. You have to put resources behind ensuring that the case comes to trial as soon as is reasonably

possible, so that if there is sufficient evidence to bring in a guilty verdict, that it is brought in as soon as possible. Nothing deters crime better than swift justice. If that justice is deserved, that is how the rights of victims are recognised.”



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Cricket West Indies to recruit new Women’s Head Coach

Cricket West Indies (CWI) will shortly be starting the process to recruit a new West Indies Women’s team Head Coach after taking the decision not to renew the contract of Women’s Head Coach Courtney Walsh and Technical Assistant Coaches Robert Samuels and Corey Collymore. This follows a review of the senior Women’s team performances and programme.

During Walsh’s tenure, which started in October 2020, he oversaw Home and Away Series wins to Pakistan and secured a semi-final spot in the 2022 ICC Women’s 50-over Cricket World Cup.

CWI Director of Cricket Jimmy Adams said

“We are very grateful for the contribution of Courtney and his technical team over the past two and a half years and we wish them all the best going forward. CWI remains committed to our international women’s programme and will now be focusing on recruiting a new Head Coach and technical support team. An interim technical support team will be put in place during the recruitment period.”

Further information on the recruitment process will be provided in the coming weeks with the coaching roles being critical for the development of women’s cricket in the West Indies. In recent years, CWI has significantly increased investment into the women’s game at every level focusing on deepening the talent pool within the Caribbean and producing the next generation of West Indies Women’s players.



CWI Director of Cricket Jimmy Adams

T&T crowned Rising Stars Under 15 Champs

A brilliant half-century from Christian Lall led Trinidad and Tobago to the West Indies Rising Stars Under 15 Championship title, as they defeated the Leeward Islands by six wickets at the Coolidge Cricket

Ground.

The Leewards batting first posted 162 all out in 48 overs, with a half-century for skipper Matthew Miller. He shared in a 63-run partnership with Jaheem Clarke as the pair showed resistance to the spin of Yasir Deen and Alejandro Kassiram. Deen and Kassiram finished with figures of 3/34 and 3/9 respectively.

Lall and Dimitri Ramjattan then posted a 77-run opening partnership before Ramjattan was caught for 19. Trinidad and Tobago lost three more wickets in pursuit of victory, but Yasir Deen nudged the ball for the winning single in the last ball of the 35th over. Kunal Tilokani finished with figures of 2/45.



Yasir Deen

The Windward Islands took home a four-wicket win over Jamaica at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium to close of their championship on a winning note. Batting first, Jamaica posted 146 all out in 42.3 overs, thanks to a top score of 39 from Demarco Scott and 36 from Odane Binns. Theo Edward was the pick of the Windward bowlers with figures of 4/27.

In the third match, Guyana beat last year’s winners Barbados by seven wickets at Liberta Sports Ground. Batting first, Barbados were all out for 69 in 20.5 overs. Oliver Gooding top-scored for the Bajans with 23. Arun Ginda 3/10, skipper Dave Mohabir 3/13 and Jonathan Mentore 3/14 were the leading bowlers for Guyana.

Mentore then returned to top score 17 runs and 14 from Romario Ramdeholl, but it was the 25 runs that came via extras that took Guyana home to a comfortable win. Akobi Crichlow-Byer was the best Barbados bowler with figures of 2/18.

LEADING PERFORMERS

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- Most Dismissals- Christiano Ramanan (9)
- Most Catches -Sycon Charles (6)

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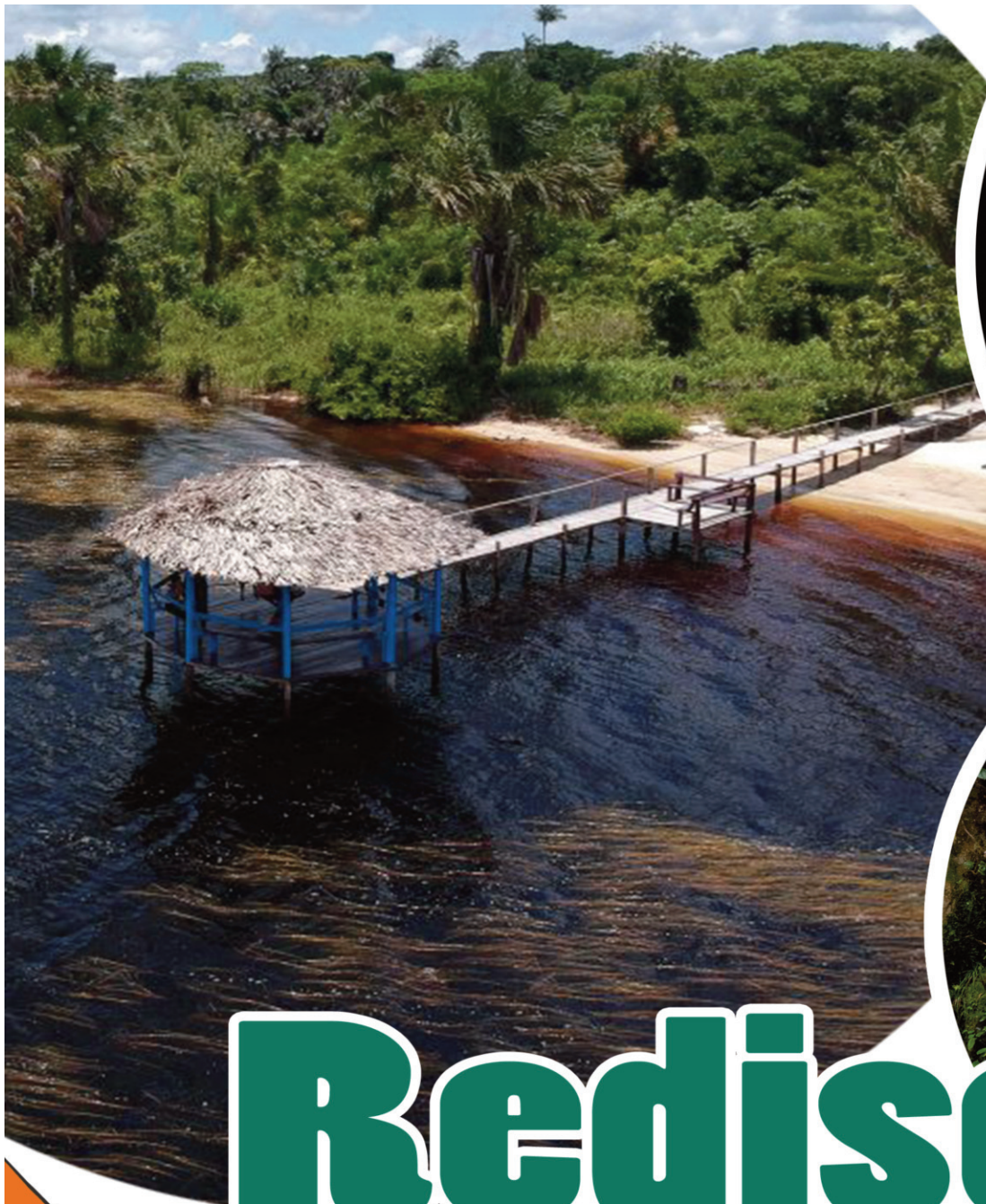
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