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\$781 BILLION BUDGET: Guyana's Finance Minister Ashni Singh (pictured) on Monday delivered the country's largest budget in its history, coming in at a whopping \$781.9 billion. The budget, which includes a number of financial relief incentives for the nation's elderly and poor, is being praised as one for all Guyanese, setting the stage for 2030 and beyond. As well, the fiscal measures contained no new taxes for the people. For more on the historic budget, see stories inside. Also see editorial, Page 6.



NEW GUYANA ENVOY: .Keith George has been named Guyana's new High Commissioner to Canada. Originally from the Essequibo Coast in Region #2, he is a career foreign service officer and prior to his Canadian appointment, he was the country's Ambassador to the Republic of Suriname. Guyana's Foreign Secretary Robert Persaud, pictured here centre with Mr George (2nd from right) and staffers at the High Commission in Ottawa, will host a meet and greet for the new envoy at the Guyana Consulate on Thursday, January 19



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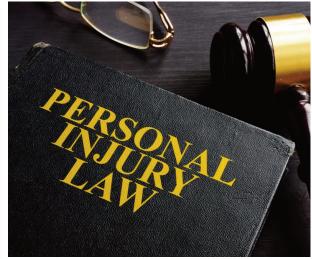
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Participants at the Meet and Greet event held in Markham

Canadians of Indian Origin start the New Year with "Fill A Box" Food Drive

By Vasant Phillip LJI REPORTER

Canadians of Indian Origin came together to welcome 2023 and celebrate Pongal, Lohri and Makar Sankranti on January 14, 2023, at Markham's Milliken Mills Library. This free community event for all ages not only reflected a joyous and festive community gathering but also presented a unique opportunity for the community members to contribute and give back to their community.

An integral part of the Meet and Greet event was a food drive organized in collaboration with Markham Food Bank, whereby community members donated and prepared non-perishable food boxes for the "Fill-A-Box" Food Drive. Special invited guest Markham Food Bank President Stephen Lough attended and thanked the attendees.

The community activities reflected the remarkable multicultural diaspora of the Markham community. The attendees participated in a host of diverse community activities that embodied the spirit of goodwill and generosity such as decorating food drive boxes, preparing red packets for the Lunar New Year celebrations on January 22, and preparing Canadian and Indian flags for the January 26 Indian Republic Day celebrations. Vikrant Thakur entertained the attendees with his melodious singing.

Thank you to food drive committee members Sudhakar Sah, Anshul & Jyoti Johari, Rajan Gossain, Shraddha, Shubash & Shobha Mathur, Sandeep Kumar & Renu Srivastava for their hard work and dedication. Special thank you to committee members Surinder Razdan and Arun Prasad for their continued support and assistance and Neera Chakravorty for spearheading this community initiative. Heartfelt thank you to the Markham Public Library & its wonderful staff for their assistance, contributions, and generous support.

The event was a major success as it signified the unity of community members to celebrate the various festivities that signal the start of the new year. Moreover, the benevolence of the Markham community members came to the fore, as attendees were elated to be presented with the opportunity to do good and give back to their community by way of the food drive.



ISHWAR PASSES: Prominent Toronto Attorney at Law Ishwar Sharma, 55, has died. The lawyer, part of the Sharma Law dynasty, was the son of Roop Sharma, who predeceased him last year, The father and son ran their law office, Sharma and Sharma, for decades in downtown Toronto. A viewing for Ishwar, pictured here with one of his children, will take place on Friday from 6 p.m., while his funeral will be on Saturday at 7 a.m. Both will take place at Lotus Funeral Home, 121 City View Drive in Etobicoke.

Ontario expanding private delivery of public health-care

By Nishad Sharma

LJI REPORTER

There are signs that health care in Ontario is being privatized, say critics of a new plan to expand the delivery of some surgeries to private hospitals.

The plan was announced by Premier Doug Ford on Monday, who said that the province will fund clinics to perform more cataract surgeries, MRI and CT scans, colonoscopies, hip and knee replacements and other procedures in an attempt to ease pressures on the hospital system.

But critics warn the moves will increase wait times, drain staff from the beleaguered public hospital system and leave patients vulnerable to paying out of pocket.

Making the announcement Monday, Premier Doug Ford lamented "endless debates" about who should deliver health care and said all he cares about is getting people the care they need quickly and safely.

"The way I can describe it, you have a dam, you have a log jam, are you going to just keep pouring the water up against the logs?" Ford said.

"Or are you going to reroute some of the water and take the pressure off the dam? You see what happens when the dam has too much water, it breaks."

Ford and Health Minister Sylvia Jones unveiled a three-step plan Monday to deliver more procedures at private clinics. Both stressed that the surgeries and tests will continue to be paid for by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

There are about 206,000 patients waiting for surgical procedures, the province said.

Ford said it's time to start thinking differently about the health system.

"One CEO, and I won't name him, said...'There's only two places in the world that have the health care that we have, the same system, is Cuba and North Korea," Ford said.

"Like, really? We need to improve. So we're making the changes with the support of the CEOs and with the associations."

The Ontario Hospital Association

said it welcomes the opportunity to work with the province to integrate the new surgical centres into the healthcare system.

The Ontario Medical Association said outpatient surgeries in other jurisdictions shows surgeries occur quicker and have lower rates of infection.

The first stage of the plan involves adding 14,000 cataract surgeries through new centres in Windsor, Kitchener-Waterloo and Ottawa. The province said these surgeries will be performed with existing staff and will not take any from the hospital system.

As well, the province is putting \$18 million in existing centres across the province for MRI and CT scans, cataract surgeries, other ophthalmic surgeries, certain gynecological surgeries and plastic surgeries. Jones said that will help the wait lists for those procedures return to pre-pandemic levels by March.

Subsequent steps in the plan are set to include expanding the scope and capacity of private surgical and diagnostic centres, including more colonoscopy and endoscopy procedures. The third step will involve issuing more licences, opening more centres and seeing hip and knee replacements performed at those clinics.

Ford said the changes are permanent.

Jones said the companies will have to provide "detailed staffing plans" as part of their applications. A "number of physicians" at the new centres will have to be affiliated with local hospitals, the province said.

The regulatory organization of doctors, The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, said it told Jones' office that complex procedures such as hip and knee replacement surgeries should remain connected to the hospital system "to ensure continuity of care and patient safety."

"CPSO is supportive of expanding access to diagnostic procedures and less complex surgical procedures in community settings," said Dr. Nancy Whitmore, the registrar of the college, in a statement.

"However, we emphasized our on-



Doug Ford

going concern about creating further strain on the present health-care provider crisis particularly in skilled operating room nurses and anesthesiologists."

Five health-care unions called on the province to abandon the plan, saying it will "siphon provincial funding from public hospital care and hand it to private, for-profit surgical clinics."

The Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Ontario Nurses' Association, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, Service Employees International Union Healthcare and Unifor said province should invest in the public health-care system and implement a staffing retention program.

The head of the Ontario Nurses' Association called the changes a "terrible plan for providing health care" and said it was unconvinced that staffing at hospitals won't be affected.

The current health-care system is 25,000 nurses short, said Bernie Robinson, the interim president of the association.

"I fail to understand where the government thinks it's going to get the human resources to staff these private clinics other than by draining our already-taxed public system," Robinson said

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario said the province should invest in existing operating rooms across the province that sit quiet on evenings and weekends.

"The premier needs to open the operating rooms, the operating theatres, the recovery rooms in our public hospitals 24/7 like many other countries do," said Doris Grinspun, the association's CEO.

Liberal health critic and MPP Adil Shamji, who worked as an ER doctor prior to last year's provincial election, said it's "enticing" for doctors and nurses to work at a 9-5 clinic instead of taking on a mix of overnight and weekend work at hospitals.

Shamji said the Liberals have called for greater investment in private health clinics to ease hospital pressures, but only not-for-profit ones.

When there is a profit motive, there is a danger of patients being pressured to pay out of pocket for tests or treatments above what OHIP covers, he said.

"Physicians, I must emphasize being one myself - are well intentioned," Shamji said. "We also want what is best for our patients. But in the setting of corporatized, for-profit practice where there are shareholder and corporate bottom lines that are that are pushing to deliver results, it's difficult...not to go down that pathway."

Ontario's auditor general said in a 2021 report that there isn't enough provincial oversight of such add-on fees. Patients might not be aware of their right to only select what's funded through OHIP or where they can complain, the auditor wrote.

"This means that the issue of inappropriate and unusual patient charges could be much more widespread than the complaints being made to the Ontario Patient Ombudsman and the ministry," the report said.

The audit found instances of cataract clinics suggesting the OHIP-covered services are inferior or that purchasing specialty lenses was mandatory.



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EDITORIAL & OPINIONS

Good news budget

In a world filled with negative news, even as we are barely into the New Year, it is nice to see a glimmer of bright light. And the fact that it is coming from a small corner of the world is even more remarkable.

We speak, of course, of Guyana, which just delivered its biggest budget in history: \$781.9 billion dollars worth of it.

The size of the budget is not as important as the plan for it, and this is where the good news comes in.

As our readers already know, Guyana is experiencing exponential growth of its economy due to oil exploration and discovery. All eyes -- globally -- have been on what the country's government will do with the newfound wealth brought by the fossil industry. The key question has been, will it succumb to Dutch Disease, a concept that describes an economic phenomenon where the rapid development of one sector of the economy (particularly natural resources) precipitates a decline in other sectors?

That question seems to have been clearly answered in the 2023 budget, in which the oil and gas industry seems to have played second fiddle to development - both infrastructure and social -- issues.

Under the theme: "Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow", Finance Minister Dr Ashni Singh said that Budget 2023 strikes a balance between addressing the pressing needs of today and the critical investments needed for tomorrow thus ensuring that both are attended to.

He went on to say, "...this is a Budget for all Guyanese and it is a Budget for now and for the future."

Among the many initiatives taken by Singh and the Irfaan Ali government were measures to ease financial pressure on ordinary Guyanese, including an increase in the income tax threshold; an increase of old age pensions and social security payments; more support for students and the a removal of Value Added Tax on the sale of residential properties.

The government said the 2023 budget is one that seeks to stabilize all the productive sectors of Guyana's economy and continues to give incentives and balance to the productive capacity of the country, to further enhance growth.

Further, the budget also sees the addition of some \$208.9 billion to be transferred from the country's Natural Resource Fund (NRF). This means that the government is signaling its plan uti-

lize the oil and gas revenue stream to develop other revenue generating areas of the economy, including agriculture and tourism.

The Ali administration has been lauded globally for its initiatives in agriculture, especially for its move to help secure food security in the wider Caribbean region of which it is a part.

The neglected sugar industry, for one, is getting a major boost in this budget as the administration tries to bring factories shuttered under the previous government back online, understanding the importance of that industry to a large sector of the population which has been dependent on it for their livelihood for decades.

The Agriculture Ministry has also been engaged with the farmers, with the Minister, Zulkifar Mustapha, taking a personal interest in their issues, often traveling the country, including into remote interior areas to hear and address their concerns.

Part of the strategy seems to include building road infrastructure to allow for easy transport of produce from farm to city and ports, which will only enhance Guyana's ability to export food and boost the income of farmers, long seen as poor manual labourers.

This focus on agriculture also gives young people in the country reasons to give the industry a second look as a career choice, and ensures the sustainability of the industry and the country's food security in the long term.

Another area getting a boost is tourism, with Guyana now having more hotel rooms being built than any of its Caribbean neighbours. Tourism has never been a traditional industry in Guyana, but recent plugs from major travel industry publications has resulted in a surge of visitors, with the country now being one of the only ones in the region to report visitor arrivals being back to pre-pandemic levels.

All in all, the signals in this budget are strong, and sends the right message to the international community that the Ali government is focused, and on the right track.

If it continues, Guyana may well buck the Dutch Disease trend and become a model globally for diversifying the economy at a time of resource riches. We commend Ali and his team for their skillful steering of the ship of state. It is wonderful to get some good news for a change in a world that seems mired in bad.

Let's hope 2023 continues to bring smiles to the faces of all Guyanese.

Test all visitors to T&T for Carnival for Covid

THE EDITOR: Open letter to Prime Minister Rowley.

I was glad when you held a national press conference on January 12 to discuss updates on covid19. It is noted that covid19 cases are rising again and we now have the XBB variant that can cause some trouble. Carnival is fast approaching and a lot of tourists would be visiting our country. Could you kindly and urgently put measures in place to protect our citizens, please?

I kindly suggest that every single visitor coming into the country be tested for covid19 as soon as possible.

It is understood that to postpone Carnival now would be a mammoth

task and would result in losses in the millions. However, please take note that no one in this country wants another lockdown.

While we can be a forgiving people, perhaps too forgiving, we are not going to accept any sad stories after Carnival from your administration and for our rights to be taken away again.

During the lockdowns, we the citizens saw clear disparities between the haves and have-nots. We saw unfairness when it came to who was able to sell packaged food as well as noting that bars remained open while places of worship were closed or limited to an hour's service, which made no sense whatsoever. We the people do not want

to hear any "chupidness," we really don't.

Please test the visitors. It is noted that Guyana has imposed travel restrictions on passengers from China and the same should be done here. Everyone who went to China recently should be tested or must provide a negative covid19 test upon entry.

J ALI Port of Spain

Send us your letters

Equality welcomes letters to the editor from all of our readers. If you have an issue you would like to air in public, or an opinion to offer, please submit your letter to the editor to Equalitygroup@rogers.com.

Please note that all letters are subjected to be edited for space and to ensure they meet our legal requirements. Letter writers must include contact information, which will be withheld from publication, so we can contact the writer to ensure the authenticity of the contribution.



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Black Toronto student sues police in claim he was violently assaulted

By Niraj SharmaLJI REPORTER

A black Toronto student is suing the cuty's police force after what he claims was a violent assault on him two years ago.

The alleged assault highlights the disproportionate use of force and ongoing racial profiling levelled by the city's police force, his family and lawyer said Monday, calling for increased accountability and denouncing a proposal to increase their budget.

In a statement of claim filed in the Superior Court of Justice, Hasani O'Gilvie alleges three officers tackled him, pressed a knee to his neck and repeatedly shot him with a stun gun in August 2021 while he pleaded he had done nothing wrong.

At a news conference Monday, O'Gilvie's family and lawyer said it's a case of police unnecessarily and violently escalating an incident with a Black man only for officers to later claim he looked like a person they were searching for.

"Whether we like it or not, he is symbolic of the experiences endured by many young Black males in North America," his mother Christine O'Gilvie said at a news conference.

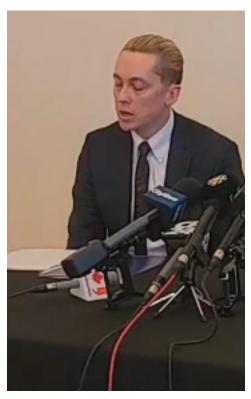
The statement of claim alleges the 27-year-old University of Toronto student was assaulted by three Toronto police officers near a North York grocery store on his way to school.

"This is a case of someone being assaulted for walking while Black," his lawyer David Shellnutt said. "He looked like somebody who police allege they were looking for."

O'Gilvie and his mother are seeking \$2.4 million in damages as well as \$250,000 under the Family Law Act, according to the statement of claim.

Toronto police said they would not comment as the matter is before the courts, and the Toronto Police Association – which represents civilian and uniform members – says the officers are not commenting as the case is also before a review tribunal.

"In many cases, enforcement actions are met with resistance; not everyone wants to be arrested," said Toronto Police Association president Jon Reid in a statement. "As these members face charges under the Police Services Act,



Lawyer David Shellnutt

the Association will ensure they are treated fairly throughout this process."

According to the claim against the three officers, which was filed in June and has yet to be tested in court, O'Gilvie gave his name to an officer who stopped him for questioning after following him

down a walkway near the grocery store. The claim alleges the officer did not believe him and drew a stun gun shortly before two other officers arrived.

O'Gilvie put his hands up and complied but the officers allegedly tackled him to the ground, the claim says. One officer then allegedly put his knee on his neck and repeatedly shot him with a stun gun while O'Gilvie "was subdued, not resisting, on the ground, and restraints being applied," the claim alleges.

The claim alleges O'Gilvie was only released after the officers searched his bag and found identification proving what he told police.

"Regardless of mistaken identity of who they were looking for, that this matter ended up with a young U of T student with a knee on his neck, the same manoeuvre that killed George Floyd just a year prior, and being repeatedly stunned by the same officer who was doing that is unacceptable," Shellnutt said.

The Special Investigations Unit, which launches a probe whenever police conduct may have resulted in death, serious injury, sexual assault or the discharge of a firearm, said it is not investigating O'Gilvie's case.

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Trudeau promises good news 'soon' on health care as fears grow

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Monday he hopes to announce "positive steps forward in the very near future" on health care - suggesting the years-long standoff between Ottawa and the provinces over health-care funding may be resolved soon.

Speaking to reporters in Saskatoon after touring a rare earth elements processing plant, Trudeau said the federal government and the premiers are "all very much on the same page" about what's needed to repair a system on the

"There's a need for more money," Trudeau said. "There is a need for more to deliver results for families."

Throughout Ottawa's health-care funding talks with the provinces, Trudeau has said he would not offer up any more cash until the provinces agreed to meet certain conditions.

Some premiers, notably Quebec Premier Francois Legault, have been cool to the idea of conditions. Some provinces, such as Ontario, have said the sticking point isn't the attachment of conditions but rather the dollar amount Ottawa is willing to spend.

Echoing federal Health Minister Jean-Yves Duclos' demand that any new federal money be targeted at five priority areas, Trudeau said Monday he wants Ottawa's money to be used by the provinces to expand access to primary care, improve mental health supports and reduce surgery backlogs.

Asked about Ontario Premier Doug Ford's plan to send more publicly funded surgeries — such as knee and hip replacements — to private hospitals to reduce wait times, Trudeau said it's the federal government's job to ensure "the Canada Health Act is always respected." He signalled, however, that he's open to ideas that "deliver better services to Canadians in health care."

The Canada Health Act requires universal access to publicly funded health services covered by provincial and territorial plans, and bans user charges and extra-billing.

"We know how important it is to continue to invest in our health-care systems," Trudeau said.

Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe, who told reporters Monday he had no advance notice of Trudeau's visit to the province, said he wants the prime minister to cut a deal.



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

"Now is the time for the federal government, the prime minister, to sit down with the sub-national leaders and provide a funding level to make sure that those investments are sustainable into the future," Moe said.

Asked whether he'd accept a deal with federal "strings attached," Moe said federal and provincial priorities on the file "very much line up."

"'Strings attached' is not the term I would use. Our priorities are most certainly aligned," he said.

Moe said Saskatchewan already has invested in Ottawa's five areas of interest, including long-term care tize records.

He said federal dollars would help the province address labour gaps.

"We need more people on the front lines of our health-care system," he said, while touting his province's program to hire health-care workers directly from the Philippines.

During a stop in Quebec, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre blasted the Liberal government over its handling of the health file. He said it's "incredible" that Trudeau has "doubled our national debt without any improvement to our health care system." (The national debt increased from \$628.9 billion in 2015 to \$1.1 trillion in 2022).

"Health care, after seven years of Trudeau, is worse than ever," Poilievre said. "I understand why premiers are frustrated with the damage he's

Poilievre said a government led by him would pursue three health-care priorities: shorter wait times, more doctors and nurses and "faster approvals for new cutting-edge treatments and medication."

He also vowed to work with the provinces to fast-track foreign-trained health professionals.

Canada's population is booming, thanks in part to record levels of immigration. The country is also getting older. Those twin challenges, combined with COVID-related labour shortages, have strained the country's publicly funded health-care system.

To help stabilize the system, the premiers have been asking Ottawa to dramatically increase how much it spends each year on the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) — the block of money sent to the provinces and territories to fund health services.

The premiers have made a bold request: they want Ottawa to increase its share of health-care costs from the current 22 per cent to 35 per cent — a multi-billion dollar annual cash injection. If enacted, that would increase the value of the CHT from \$28 billion a year to \$45.2 billion.

The federal Liberal government has said the 22 per cent figure doesn't reflect the whole funding picture.

Sources have told CBC News that a deal to increase the CHT is now taking shape — although it might not be the \$28 billion increase for which the premiers have been asking.

In 1977, some tax points were transferred from Ottawa to the provinces, which allowed them to collect a larger share of all tax revenues to fund social programs like health care. Those tax points, Ottawa argues, should count for something.

The federal government also made a series of one-time top-ups to the CHT during the pandemic to help provinces deal with the health crisis.

At a December meeting of the Council of the Federation, the group that represents Canada's premiers, Manitoba Premier Heather Stefanson said the prime minister must meet with premiers immediately for "serious discussions" on health care because it's a fundamental priority for Canadians.

Trudeau has, to this point, largely left the health-care negotiations to his ministers. Sources told CBC that the prime minister likely won't sit down with the premiers until a deal is almost finalized.

The premiers are looking at holding meetings in Ottawa in mid-February, sources said. They hope enough progress can be made on a deal to convince Trudeau to join the meetings.

homes and e-health, a program to digi-

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Barbados has top regional passport for 8th year in a row

Barbados has ranked top of the leaderboard for having one of the most powerful passports in the Caribbean – for the eighth year running.

Henley Passport Index placed the east-tropical island in its coveted spot due to it boasting the most visa-free access across 163 destinations around the world.

Barbados, which has been thrust onto the world stage for its strides in becoming a republic and efforts in fighting the climate crisis, still managed to hold its ranking for having the most-sought after passport in the idyllic coastal region despite Covid-travel restrictions and being heavily reliant on international tourism.

It was the first country in the world to announce the first steps into entering into the metaverse, which would allow travellers to the Caribbean nation to be issued "e-visas" through a digital embassy.

After Barbados came St Kitts and Nevis (157 destinations) who ranked 26th and The Bahamas (155 destinations) in the 27th spot.



The Barbados passport is the Caribbean region's most coveted for the 8th year running

In 30th position was St Vincent and the Grenadines (52 destinations), followed by twin-islands Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago (151 destinations) who both tied in 31st place.

Grenada claimed the 34th position on the list, Dominica in the 35th spot and Belize in 54th place.

The lowest ranking passport in the tropical region was Haiti which also

ranked 94th globally for the world's most powerful passports.

It comes after Barbados surged to the top spot in the Caribbean, but fell to 25th place in the world ranking after being selected as 23rd last year out of 199 different passports and 227 travel destinations.

The annual reports suggest that a passport's strength is linked to economic

power and the "percentage of global GDP each passport provides to its holders' visa-free".

Dr. Juerg Steffen, CEO of Henley & Partners, said that "in a highly unpredictable and volatile world, economic mobility and cross-country visa-free access to more stable economies helps investors mitigate risk and secure additional income streams."

Pakistan PM opens dialogue with India

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has made a conditional offer to his Indian counterpart to open talks on all outstanding issues between them, including disputed Kashmir, which he believes could be facilitated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"My message to the Indian leadership and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is let's sit down at the table and have serious and sincere talks to resolve our burning issues, like Kashmir," Sharif said in an interview with Al Arabiya news channel, telecast by Pakistan's state run TV on Tuesday.

However, a statement issued by Sharif's office after the interview aired added that such talks would only be possible if India restored the autonomous status in the part of Kashmir it rules that was revoked in 2019.

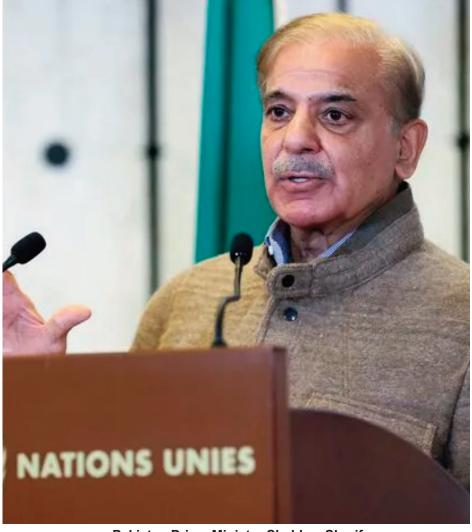
"Without India's revocation of this step, negotiations are not possible," it said.

The Indian foreign affairs ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. New Delhi has ignored such calls from Pakistan on Kashmir's status in the past.

In the interview, Sharif said he had taken up the issue with UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed on his recent visit to the Emirates.

"He's a brother of Pakistan. He also has good relations with India. He can play a very important role to bring the two countries on the talking table," Sharif said.

The two arch-rival nuclear powers



Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif

have fought three wars since independence from British rule in 1947. Two of the wars were over Kashmir, a disputed Himalayan region, which both the nations claim. Each controls half of the region.

The two neighbours came close to

war again in 2019, when India launched an air strike inside Pakistan to target what New Delhi said was a militant training facility.

Tensions were again inflamed when India unilaterally revoked the autonomous status of its part of Kashmir later in 2019, which Sharif said resulted in "flagrant" human rights violations.

India has faced a decades-long insurgency in its part of Kashmir which is accuses Pakistan of stoking - an accusation Islamabad denies.

Official talks between the two countries have been suspended since then, although there have been some backdoor diplomacy attempts to resume negotiations - one brokered by the UAE in 2021.

Sharif said the wars between the two countries brought nothing except misery, poverty and unemployment.

"We want to alleviate poverty, achieve prosperity and provide education, health facilities and employment to our people, and not waste our resources on bombs and ammunition, that's the message I want to give to PM Modi," he said.

ADVERTISE



Tourism nears full rebound in post-pandemic period: GTA

TOURISM continues to be one of the sectors hardest hit by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic; however, the outlook for Guyana is bright, with the country recording massive increases in both domestic and international travel.

Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA), Director Kamrul Baksh, during an exclusive interview with the Guyana Chronicle, said that the sector is expected to make a full recovery and has already exceeded global expectations.

"We have attracted a lot of attention because we have a world-class product; our recovery is strong at 83 per cent, far exceeding the global average of 65 per cent," Baksh said.

To further advance the sector, much focus will be placed on upgrading standards in the industry, improving digital marketing, increasing influencer marketing, as well as raising the service levels, he related.



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recorded a massive increase in travel at three of the country's main ports of entry, where an overall total of 717,822 passengers were processed, representing an 82.6 per cent increase in arrivals over 2021.

The number represents passengers processed at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) at Timehri, the Eugene F. Correia Airport at Ogle, and at Moleson Creek, Corentyne.

Additionally, the pandemic saw a renewed interest in domestic travel.

President of Visit Rupununi, a local tourism franchise, Melanie McTur, shared with this publication, that tourism has had ripple effects across the hinterland communities, where tourism is prevalent.

"We have discovered that tourism is not only an economic earner, but it has ripple effects across the society. If you look at the North Rupununi (Region Nine), in the last 20 to 30 years we've had tourism, we've seen now a re-emergence of culture."

McTurk said now that domestic tourism has restarted, there is a positive impact on jobs and businesses at some destinations.

"In addition to just the revenue, there has been much more... tourism has also brought tremendous opportunities for young women and girls in the Rupununi.

"Once, there was a time when only men had work, and now many of the lodges, you'll find as many women, if not more women working than men, and you'll find many of the administrative roles are also being fulfilled by young women, young Indigenous women, which is really wonderful," she added.









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Indian, European oil firms evaluating bids for Guyana blocks

GUYANA'S upcoming bidding round for offshore areas has caught the interest of top energy companies from Asia to Europe, according to people familiar with the matter, even as the government continues to work out terms for the auction.

The South American country wants to quickly expand its oil industry and recruit developers to counterbalance an ExxonMobil Corp (XOM.N)-led consortium that now controls all production. The Exxon group has outlined plans to install at least seven vessels to tap more than 11 billion barrels discovered to date.

India's ONGC Videsh (ONVI.NS), the overseas investment arm of state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC.NS), is considering a bid for some of the 14 exploration blocks the country has put on offer. Refiner Indian Oil Corp (IOC.NS) also is looking to work in Guyana in collaboration with ONGC Videsh,, two people close to the talks told Reuters.

Guyana's President, Dr Irfaan Ali, this month travelled to India and encouraged energy companies to participate in the auction, extending the same invitation to Chinese firms days later.

Guyana might consider allocating areas directly to strategic partners through government to government negotiations, officials have said.

"ONGC Videsh continues to consider, evaluate and process several global business opportunities," a spokesperson said in a statement, adding: "For reasons of confidentiality and as a policy, we do not comment on specific opportunities until there are definitive agreements in place."

IOC did not respond a request to comment.

Guyana is offering three deepwater and 11 shallow-water blocks, each averaging 2,000 square kilometers (722 sq miles). Bids are expected to be opened in April in Georgetown.

Several European companies in recent months also have researched on the auction's terms to consider bidding, two other people familiar the matter said.

Exxon is considering bids on the blocks, said the company's Guyana country chief, Alistair Routledge. "Of course, we will look at it," Routledge told Reuters in an interview.

Many bidding decisions are contingent on Guyana clarifying terms of a new production-sharing agreement (PSA) that differs from that signed with the Exxon consortium for its 26,800 sq km Stabroek Block.

Oil analysts and experts say they are not expecting the new PSA model



Guyana offshore oil blocks a hot commodity, reports the international media

to meet a Jan. 31 deadline amid unfinished contract language, legislative changes needed to reflect the new framework, and work pending to organize the auction.

Guyana's finance minister, Ashni Singh, said on Monday the licensing round will be open through April 14, with successful bids to be awarded by the end of the first half of the year.

U.S. firm IHSMarkit was selected last year as lead consultant for the auction

To bring more companies into the auction, Guyana did not restrict the amount of blocks companies can bid for, but will limit the awards to three per company.

Winners will be required to submit work programmes as part of their bids and present guarantees on those programmes. If winners have not fulfilled the investment programmes as required, the government could impose penalties or claw back acreage for future auctions.

"We want a greater turnover,"
Guyanese Vice President Bharrat
Jagdeo said in November. "This is trying to solve a lot of the problems we have had with other areas, where people just sat on these and then they relinquished them after a long period."

Last year, Exxon, Hess Corp (HES.N) and China's CNOOC

(0883.HK) ramped up oil output and exports with their second production vessel. The increased output began just before the acceleration of global de-

mand in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and sanctions derived from it.

\$50B in people's pockets

SOME \$50 billion will be placed in the pockets of citizens through the proposed increases in old-age pension, public assistance and income tax threshold, along with other cost of living measures that form part of the government's \$781.9 billion budget for 2023 that was tabled in the National Assembly, on Monday.

Finance Minister Ashni Singh, who delivered the budget, noted: "Budget 2023 reflects a number of measures that are geared towards providing further stimulus to economic activity and the productive sectors, as well as to bring relief to households and individuals.

"These interventions are targeted towards continuing to increase the disposable income of our citizens, while facilitating and promoting job creation and income generation, coupled with an institutional framework that will reduce the cost of doing business all with the aim of improving the lives of all Guyanese."

The income tax threshold was increased by another \$10,000, moving from \$75,000 to \$85,000. As a result of

the adjustment in the tax threshold, over 12,000 persons will be removed from paying income taxes, while every single taxpayer will benefit.

This will result in a \$3.3 billion increase in disposable income. At an individual taxpayer level, for illustrative purposes, this translates to additional disposal income of \$33,600 annually for every single taxpayer who is currently earning \$100,000 per month.

Aside from the increased income tax threshold, the first phase of salary adjustments announced last year by President, Dr. Irfaan Ali will take effect from this month, benefitting over 5,000 healthcare workers and almost 9,000 members of the Disciplined Services, resulting in an additional \$3 billion in disposable income in the hands of these workers. Provision for these are all made out in Budget 2023.

Another \$10 billion has also been allocated to the part time job programme which was started in 2022.

Meanwhile, with effect from January 1, 2023, old-age pension will be increased to from \$28,000 to \$33,000.

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Budget 2023 to improve the lives of every Guyanese, President Ali says

PRESIDENT, Dr. Irfaan Ali has said that the direct relationship between the policy measures announced in the 2023 National Budget and the improvement in the lives of Guyanese will be seen.

The 2023 national budget was presented to the National Assembly under the theme, "Improving Lives today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow."

The \$781.9 billion budget, Guyana's largest ever, is one with a difference that points to the future aspirations of the country, laying the bedrock and framework for an economy that must be built to be sustainable in a world 2023 and beyond, Dr. Ali said in a broadcast on Monday evening.

This budget, he said, is one that seeks to stabilise all the productive sectors of Guyana's economy and continues to give incentives and balance to the productive capacity of the country, to further enhance growth.

This year's budget is approximately 41.4 per cent larger than Budget 2022 and brings in revenues from Guyana's first carbon sale which amounts to some \$1.3 billion. The use of these funds, Dr. Ali said, serves as part of the transformative agenda of the government.

Further, the budget also sees the addition of some \$208.9 billion to be transferred from the country's Natural Resource Fund (NRF).

"So, Budget 2023 is that transitional budget as we start to work on a framework that utilises new forms of income, that utilise the new revenue stream that our country will be pursuing," he said,

In addition to this, President Ali said that this budget is about achieving a middle ground in stabilising the economy, strengthening systems and focusing on people's priorities.

As promised in the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) manifesto, the first five years in office would be focused on ensuring that citizens get the best access to healthcare, education, water, social services, infrastructure and more, and budget 2023 brings all of those things together.

Since entering office, the Head of State remarked that his government has been continuously addressing issues like salaries to increase the disposable income in homes across the country.

Against this backdrop, he spoke of the announcement of the adjustments in salary scales for nurses, healthcare workers and members of the Joint Services. These adjustments, Dr. Ali said, will see \$3 billion back into the pockets of these categories of workers.

However, as it relates to the general population, he noted that the government has come up with certain incentives such



Guyana President Irfaan Ali: budget designed to build a sustainable country

as the increase in the income-tax threshold to ensure that more disposable income is in the pockets of the people.

In budget 2023, Dr. Ali said the income-tax threshold has been increased from \$75,0010 to \$85,000, which will release an additional \$3.3 billion of disposable income for workers.

This adjustment, he said, will remove some 12,000 persons from the taxpayer's basket as these are the persons who will now fall below that threshold.

Meanwhile, he happily announced that the reinstituted 'Because we Care' cash grant for school children which stood at \$25,000 in 2022 will see an increase to \$35,000 thus releasing an additional \$2.1 billion into the hands of parents for their children.

While he noted that this budget has been cast in very difficult circumstances, Dr. Ali noted that the budget takes into consideration several specific cost-ofliving measures to address the needs of the people of the country.

He highlighted that as was done in 2022, this budget will see zero excise taxes on fuel maintained to absorb the impact of the volatile fuel prices.

President Ali said: "This will cost the government \$17 billion of revenue that you would have otherwise had to pay in the taxes in that fuel that the government is removing from you."

Additionally, during the course of the year, he said that based on what is happening globally, the government has planned to further cushion the cost-ofliving situation and has accordingly, budgeted an additional \$5 billion to cushion any foreseen issues surrounding cost-of-living.

However, in keeping with the government's philosophy of reaching vulnerable groups, he said that government has announced the increase in the old age pension from \$28,000 to \$33,000, thus placing an additional \$4.4 billion into the hands of over 73,000 persons.

Further, as part of the government's

drive to advance and promote homeownership, the Head of State remarked that the 2023 budget continues to give more to prospective homeowners making it easier for them to own homes.

Against this backdrop, he stated: "Budget 2023 will see the low-income ceiling for loans for the housing sector, increasing from \$15 million to \$20 million, so a young professional now would have that ability to borrow within that low-income ceiling moving from \$15 million to \$20 million at low-interest costs."

These are among many measures addressed in this year's budget to further improve on various sectors that have seen a tremendous transformation over the past two years.

President Ali said during his live address that throughout the week, he will continue to highlight areas in which Budget 2023 will deliver a higher quality, more productive and sustainable life for all Guyanese.

\$54.5 billion budgeted for housing development in new areas

IN 2023, the sum of \$54.5 billion is budgeted for housing development in new and existing areas, including constructing roads, drains and bridges and installing utilities to meet housing demands.

This is according to Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, who unveiled the annual fiscal plan in the National Assembly on Monday.

Areas will include Mabaruma, Oronoque, Buxton/St Joseph, Stewartville, Wakenaam, Block A and B Hope, Success, Balthyock and No. 75 Village.

Government, the Finance Minister said, will also undertake infrastructural works in regularised areas, such as Charity, Tuschen, Chateau Margot, Block SS Sophia, Belvedere and Amelia's Ward. Additionally, more lands will be acquired for new housing areas across the country.

Further, he told the National Assembly that government in 2023 will continue to promote accelerated investment in the sector and ensure that concessions are brought to production in the shortest possible time to boost productivity.

Notably, he said an additional six quarries were recently licensed and are expected to contribute a further 400,000 tonnes in 2023.

"These additions reflect the government's efforts to ensure construction materials rise to match demand from housing and the other infrastructure works across the country. Mr Speaker, government continues to deliver on its promise to the population by improving and expanding the water-supply systems across the country. Improved access and enhanced quality of water has positively impacted the quality of life and overall public health. In support of these investments, Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) has undertaken several interventions in the water sector. In this regard, the government expended \$9.9 billion in 2022 and has allocated \$17.7 billion in Budget 2023 to improve the water sector further," Dr. Singh underscored.

Government, he said, continues its effort to ensure that all communities across the country will have access to potable water by 2025.

"Mr Speaker, upgrading works are currently progressing with the distribution networks along Church Street to improve service-delivery levels and water quality for over 35 per cent of the residents in Georgetown. Works have advanced on replacing old cast iron mains with new polyethylene pipes from the Shelterbelt to East Street. The replacement works are now 90 per cent completed," he noted.

In 2023, he said \$1.4 billion will be spent on further upgrading and ex-

tension of water supply systems and constructing wells in several hinterland communities of Regions One, Two, Seven, Eight and Nine.

"Government targets an increase in treated water coverage for the coast-land from 52 percent currently, to 90 per cent by 2025," Dr Singh noted. "In 2023, we will advance works on the construction of seven new water-treatment plants at Onderneeming, Parika, Wales, La Parfaite Harmonie, Caledonia, Cummings Lodge and Bachelor's Adventure."

Further, he said 12 existing water-treatment plants will be rehabilitated at a total cost of \$13 billion.



Money allocated for new housing development in 2023 budget

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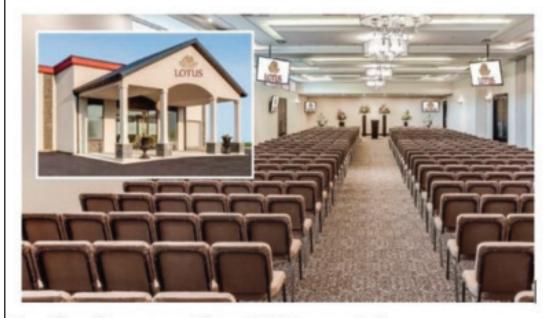


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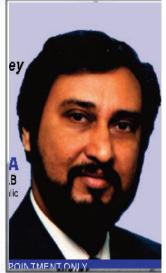
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Guyana's \$781 billion budget praised as being for all Guyanese

The National Budget 2023 has been praised as one for all Guyanese, setting the foundation for vision 2030 and beyond.

It is regarded as the largest fiscal plan ever presented in the country's history at 781.9 billion, with a significantly higher increase than the \$552.9 billion budget that was produced in 2022 by 41 per cent.

This is the People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C) fourth National Budget and covers fiscal plans for 2023, presented by Senior Minister within the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance, Dr Ashni Singh. Under the theme "Improving Lives for Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow", a series of measures and allocations were announced in realising the transformation of Guyana.

Public Works Minister Juan Edghill regarded the financial framework as people-oriented and strategic, fulfilling promises made to Guyanese when the PPP/C walked the campaign trail in 2020.

"It sets the tone for Guyana's development, modernisation and transformation, taking into account the immediate things that needs to be done, but also laying the foundation for the future, 2030 and beyond. This is an excellent document, a framework that is outlined that will lead us towards fulfilling the commitments that we made and the mandate which we received from the people when they elected us in March 2, 2020," Edghill recognised.

NO NEW TAXES

Expressing her satisfaction with the allocation of resources was Minister within the Housing and Water Ministry, Susan Rodrigues, who emphasised that despite being the largest budget ever presented, no new taxes were imposed to burden Guyanese.

"I think Guyanese across all walks of life can be very relieved, very happy with this budget. This budget is in keeping in line with our manifesto commitments, and therefore Guyanese do not have to be worried or surprised by any new taxes. It is the largest budget ever is fully financed with no new taxes and increases in taxes. As a matter of fact, we saw significant reduction in taxes in several areas," she highlighted.

In her remit, the housing sector's budgetary allocation increased by over 40 per cent from 2022, which according to her, means more transformation to the lives of ordinary citizens and fulfilling dreams.

"We have a lot of work that we will continue to do in the housing sector and I know a lot of Guyanese will be very happy this year as they see our



The 2023 budget will fast track and expand the country's development programmes

infrastructure programme continue to roll out and as we make more households available for people, as we do upgrading works within our existing housing schemes, and as we continue to provide safe water for our people... This budget clearly sets us on the path to achieving all of our manifesto commitments and all of our targets that we have set ourselves for five years in Government," the Minister cited.

MONUMENTAL

Meanwhile, President of the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA), Rafeek Khan expressed that this monumental budget increase was "needed", as it paves the way for a bright future in manufacturing for Guyana. The 17 per cent allocation for infrastructural works is "commendable", he noted, since it addresses some of the hindrances facing the sector as it relates to energy and logistics.

"This is the only way we're going to become a manufacturing sector that is going to be vibrant, in order for us to grow industries, develop new industries. We have got to see the increase in the national budget to help in major areas, especially infrastructure and energy. These two areas have been hindering the growth of manufacturing overall for competitiveness. You bring down the infrastructure costs, logistics, energy costs and you're going to see manufacturing grow," Khan expressed.

He added, "At least six per cent of the national budget is energy, which speaks to what is expected to happen in 2023. This is where I am seeing the difference that will be made for manufacturers"

In the energy sector, the Gas-to-Shore Project has received a whopping \$43.3 billion from Budget 2023.

He was optimistic that manufacturing will grow even more within the coming year with these changes and as the sector rebounds from COVID.

"Every single sector grew by almost double digits. The manufacturing sector grew by four per cent and while this may seem a little discouraging, coming out of COVID and trying to rebound and trying to resuscitate our manufacturing sector, I foresee within the next year, you're going to see projections way above 10 per cent."

Low energy costs for producers

Additionally, the Region Three (Essequibo Islands-West Demerara) Private Sector Chairman, Halim Khan praised the gas-to-energy project, as it would mean lowered energy costs for producers.

"This project is the single largest investment made in Guyana's electricity sector and promises to slash local energy costs in half once the project is on-stream. Overall, the project is pegged at more than US\$1 billion... Cheaper power will be an important pillar of development in Guyana as is the transformation of communities and roadways with \$136.1 billion being allocated in the 2023 budget to enhance roads and bridge networks across the country," Khan penned.

Meanwhile, bringing significant relief to the region is the construction of the New Demerara River Bridge – the first high span, four-lane permanent hybrid concrete and cable-stayed structure. With an injection of a further \$5.2 billion in this project, the private sector official labelled this investment as "commendable".





Shah Rukh Khan with his son Aryan and daughter Suhana

Controversy dogs new Shah Rukh Khan movie Pathaan

All eyes are on Shah Rukh Khan's Pathaan. The movie is supposed to take a huge opening in the overseas and domestic markets. Drishyam 2 was the last big hit for Bollywood.

Shah Rukh Khan is making a comeback after four long years. The film has been embroiled in two major controversies. Fringe groups objected to the name Pathaan. But the biggest row has been about the song Besharam Rang. Some people took stern objection to the fact that Deepika Padukone has worn a tangerine coloured bikini in the movie.

They felt it insults the Hindu saffron sentiments. The colour is in the same palette as Bhagwa. The CBFC has asked makers to review the movie.

Now, Aaj Tak has reported that the owners of multiplexes have asked the government to intervene.

It seems they have complained of many writ-

ten and verbal threats from such groups that have warned them not to show the movie. Bajrang Dal workers tore down the posters at a mall in Vastrapur some days back.

Many people condemned the incident. Something similar happened even during the release of Padmavaat.

The movie did not get a release in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The Boycott Bollywood gang have been targeting Pathaan since day one.

Meanwhile, at a private screening was held for the family members, Gauri Khan and kids Suhana Khan and Aryan Khan were dressed in casuals to watch the movie.

Pictures of Aryan at the screening have gone viral, leaving many fans wondering when the Junior Khan will enter Bollywood officially.

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TAURUS (April 21 - May 21): Usually your hunches can be relied on but today's Mars-Mercury link warns you are unlikely to be thinking straight on either a conscious or subconscious level, so hold off from acting on what you think is the truth – because it may not be.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21): The more other people try to dictate to you today the more you must dig in your heels and refuse to play by their rules. The simple fact is they don't have the power to coerce you either at home or at work, so say "No" and mean it.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23): Your patience could wear thin over the next 24 hours, especially when dealing with people who seem determined to act in ways you know from experience will end in disaster. The only way they will learn is if it hurts, so let them get on with it.

LEO (July 24 - Aug. 23): You need to accept that not everyone you live, work or do business with sees the world the same way as you. Try not to get too pushy today when dealing with people who clearly don't want to follow your lead. There's no law that says they must.

VIRGO (Aug. 24 - Sept. 23): It is important that you spell out precisely what it is you expect of other people today, because misunderstandings will occur if your instructions are vague. What seems so obvious to you may seem confusing to those whose minds move at a slower pace.

LIBRA (Sept. 24 - Oct. 23): The next few days will see you having to deal with people you may not much like on a personal level but whose support you are going to need on a professional level. Be careful what you say and do – their fragile egos are easily damaged.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22): You must think before you act today, especially in situations that may not look threatening on the surface but which you know from past experience could get out of hand if you approach them the wrong way. You really don't need another confrontation.

SAĞİTTARIUS (Nov. 23 - Dec. 21): Resist the urge to splash out on things you don't need to buy. Once you start spending your cash you may find it hard to stop and before you know it you'll be in debt again. Yes, it's only money, but it's smart to keep some in reserve.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 - Jan. 20): You are in the mood to make some bold decisions, but will they be good decisions? Today's Mars-Mercury link warns if you get carried away and start believing you cannot possibly lose you could be setting yourself up for a fall, so be careful.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 - Feb. 19): Everyone takes a wrong turning now and again, even an Aquarius, so don't be too hard on yourself if you find you have no option but to retrace your footsteps and choose a different route. Time is not a factor though, so don't rush it.

PISCES (Feb. 20 - Mar. 20): You are well aware that if your next big move on the work front goes wrong it will reflect badly on your judgement and damage your reputation, so make sure you have taken every possible outcome into consideration. You can never plan in too much detail.



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Guyana invites China to bid for available oil blocks

Guyana President Dr. Irfaan Ali has invited investors from China to capitalize on the country's oil industry with 14 oil blocks being auctioned this year.

The president, during an interview with China's state-run CGTN, pointed to the deep ties between the two countries, noting that China has been a key developmental partner for years.

Ali also stated that Guyana seeks to ramp up activity in its nascent oil and gas sector while supporting other sectors of the economy.

Part of those efforts include the auction of oil blocks offshore this year.

"We encourage China to participate in the public process... the bidding process," President Ali said.

"We will be auctioning off a number of new blocks and we hope that many firms around the world will participate in that process."

The bid round for 14 new oil blocks was launched last December and is expected to close by April 2023.

Guyana's government hopes to award contracts by the end of May 2023.

The oil blocks on auction are for shallow and deep-water areas.

Outside of the auction, President Ali said Guyana is developing its natural



The oil blocks in Guyana: 14 remain available

gas resources and it hopes Chinese investors will be part of that process.

The president also noted that the government does not believe development of Guyana's oil and gas resources conflict with the country's low carbon ambitions.

He also said Guyana is keen on avoiding the resource curse- though it doesn't really believe the problem to be concerned about is having abundant resources. Instead, he said it is the mismanagement of those resources that is a problem. Guyana, he said, is keen on

managing these resources well.

"You must go on a wild spending spree. You have to exercise good judgement (and) good fiscal responsibility.

"It is not a resource curse, it is a blessing," he said.

India's support to strengthen military

The Government of Guyana has announced plans to take significant steps to modernize the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and is exploring all options for acquiring new equipment and supplies.

One option under consideration is purchasing hardware and military equipment from India, President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali said Friday.

Ali was speaking with reporters at an Indian multinational news channel headquartered in New Delhi. Guyana has already begun to increase its level of military cooperation with India, including working more closely on a wide range of activities.

The cooperation also includes developing an integrated relationship in terms of technology, equipment, and human resources.

Furthermore, the collaboration with India is aimed at supporting Guyana's efforts to modernize and retool its military.

Several ranks of the GDF are currently benefitting from or have completed courses in the South Asian nation, through the country's Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) training program for friendly foreign countries.

Ali also stated that his government has communicated to Indian authorities it has no objections to and supports India's involvement in the drive.

The Ali-led administration has been strategic in making the necessary investments in army bases countrywide to improve their technological capability to advance ranks' educational development.



Guyana is increasing its level of military cooperation

Additionally, the president has been pushing tertiary-level educational development among the nation's defence force members. The head of state said these academic upgrades are essential and align with the administration's mandate to improve the lives of every Guyanese.

Jamaica sending large trade delegation to Guyana

Jamaica is sending a 60-member trade delegation to Guyana later this month focusing on strengthening previously established partnerships with Guyanese businesses as well as increasing trade and investment opportunities between the two countries

Industry, Investment and Commerce Minister, Aubyn Hill, will head the delegation from January 23 to 28, hoping "Jamaica and Guyana building formidable business, commercial and even broader political arrangement.

"Jamaica is very optimistic about this trade mission, and I believe that it will help us to cement those original arrangements we made," he said, adding "I see the relationship that we are seeking to build with Guyana as a vital one [especially] for Jamaican construction companies".

Jamaica is hoping the week-long mission will result in approximately 100 business-to-business meetings that will drive cross-border transactions in both investments and trade, which will be mutually beneficial to both countries.

Acting President of Jamaica Promotions Corporation (JAMPRO), Shullette Cox, said "with the economic boom that is coming to Guyana, there is going to be heavy demand for construction, not only for services but also supplies, and so we have a couple of companies from the sector that will be making the trip

"Very related to development and infrastructure will be the need to capitalize on those types of projects, and Jamaican financial institutions are going to be positioned at the forefront of those engagements," Cox told JIS News.

Companies within the banking and finance sectors will be a part of the local delegation and Cox noted that of the various sectors that will be participating in the mission, "the greatest interest that we have seen is in our technology sector or what we call our global digital services sector.

"With export being a primary focus for JAMPRO, one of the important inroads that we want to make in Guyana is to expose our exporters, both on the manufacturing and agricultural side, to new buyers and new distributors in the Guyanese market," Cox said.

She said the role of JAMPRO on this mission is to "establish business relationships and to secure export contracts in both goods and services.

"As a government entity, we also reinforce the relationship between the Governments of Jamaica and Guyana, and we are looking forward to achieving and coming back to report on all of the successes coming out of those discussions".

The chief executive officer at Kon-



Jamaican Industry Minister Aubyn St Hill (left) will lead the mission to Guyana

said since participating in the first mis- pany, which is involved in the field of begun operations in Guyana.

nexx Services Limited, Dean Nevers, sion to Guyana last October, his com-telecommunications engineering, has



Jamaica's Justice system gets Cdn\$12M boost from Canada

Jamaica has received a boost of CAN\$12 million (US\$8.9 million) from its longstanding international partner, Canada, through the newly launched Social Justice (So-JUST) Project.

The seven-year initiative, which runs from 2021 to 2028, aims to facilitate a more rights-based and gender-sensitive justice system that yields equitable outcomes for all Jamaicans.

It comes in the wake of the recently concluded Justice Undertakings for Social Transformation (JUST) program, which ran from 2011 to 2021.

So-JUST is intended to integrate the four pillars of social justice – equity, access, participation, and rights.

It will focus specifically on enhancing the rights of and access to justice for women, girls, people with disabilities, and residents of rural and vulnerable communities.

The project is designed to directly benefit the poorest and most disadvantaged users of justice services, in particular survivors of gender-based violence.

Justice Minister, Delroy Chuck, and Canada's High Commissioner to Jamaica, Emina Tudakovic, were among the speakers at the project's recent launch.

In his remarks, Chuck thanked the Canadian government for supporting the project, emphasizing that, "Jamaica



Delroy Chuck right shakes hands with Harjit Sajjan

must respond by becoming a peaceful, safe and secure society".

"So, this program has now been launched. It's really one where we expect strong communication, so that every single citizen is made aware that you will have help [and] you can get help."

The justice minister urged persons to "use the services being provided by the Ministry of Justice and other State agencies... and in doing so, we, hopefully, can create a kinder and gentler society; we certainly can reduce, deter, and prevent many violent confrontations".

High Commissioner Tudakovic, in her remarks, said Canada is "honored to be associated with the justice reform process in the Caribbean", and assured that the country "remains committed to supporting stakeholders as they seek a more equitable, efficient and responsive justice system for all".

For his part, Canada's Minister of International Development, Harjit Sajjan, outlined that, for many years, his country has been a primary international development partner of the Government of Jamaica.

He also highlighted the importance of the So-JUST Project, which supports mediation, restorative justice, child diversion programs, and child justice coordination systems.

"This directly improves justice outcomes by reducing the backlog in the courts. For women and girls in rural areas, the extension of access to legalaid systems has a direct impact," Sajjan said.

The So-JUST Project is being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the Justice Ministry and the Office of the Chief Justice, with funding from Global Affairs Canada.

Barbadian media under fire for crime news

A junior government minister is pointing an accusing finger at the media in Barbados noting that its coverage of the crime situation in the country is giving a false impression.

"We have a relatively safe place but the conundrum is this, there is a massive disconnect between crime in Barbados and the perception of crime in Barbados. And you know what dictates our perception? What pushes us to have a perception that crime in Barbados is a lot? The media," said the minister of state in the Office of the Attorney General with responsibility for Crime Prevention, Corey Lane

Lane said, "crime has been relatively stable over the years" and the perception crime is high is largely due to media reports, even as he acknowledged he was not asking the media to "hide anything."

"Crime against tourists down 142 percent," he said, telling the audience at a joint meeting of the St. James branches of the ruling Barbados Labour Party (BLP) that at least one radio station will "come and tell you two tourists get shoot today, tomorrow and the next day and you would swear that crime is the biggest thing against tourists".

Lane, who compared the island 's crime statistics to those in neighboring islands, said Barbados was among the safest but suggested that media reports had inflated the issue, citing reports of violent incidents involving students.

"Things does happen in schools all the time, if you report incidents back-toback your perception is that the schools in chaos but things happen at schools all the time, it's just how and when and how regularly them report it."

Last Friday, two 15-year-old secondary school students were involved in an altercation, resulting in one of them nursing multiple stab wounds.

Lane, who is also the chairman of the National Crime Prevention Plan maintained that he was not prompting journalists to "hide anything" on behalf of his party or the country but urged them to be responsible in their reporting.

He pointed to another island, with a lower population that recorded a higher murder rate than Barbados in 2022 and suggested that the media there were more responsible in its reporting.

"Their media down there tend to understand tourism is important so they got lead stories like 'Big regatta next week' in the front of them thing [news]."



Usain Bolt loses millions of dollars in investment fraud

An investigation has been launched after millions of dollars reportedly went missing from an account belonging to eight-time Olympic champion Usain Bolt

Bolt's manager, Nugent Walker, told the Gleaner that Jamaica's Financial Investigations Division and Financial Services Commission are looking into the case at investment firm Stocks and Securities Limited (SSL). SSL is also understood to have called the police.

Walker said that Bolt first noticed what appeared to be discrepancies with his accounts at SSL on Wednesday. "All the relevant steps have been taken to come to the bottom of this," Walker told the Gleaner, adding that due to the ongoing investigation he could not disclose the sums involved.

"He's been with this entity over 10 years ... His entire portfolio is being reviewed," Walker said.

According to the Gleaner an SSL employee has been implicated in wide-spread fraud at the company, and may have been involved in the the developments surrounding Bolt.

A lawyer representing the unnamed employee told the Gleaner that her client had been talking with legal representatives of SSL for two weeks.

"My client is in discussion with SSL and the lawyers representing SSL," she said.

Bolt is considered one of the great-



Usain Bolt: noticed money missing from his investment account

est track athletes of all time and holds world records in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay. The 36-year-old retired in

2017, and has a number of lucrative sponsorship deals. In 2016 alone he earned \$33m from sponsorship, prize

money and appearances fees, making him easily the highest-earning track athlete in the world.

Holness: Time for JA to ditch the King

The Jamaican government says it will be moving with haste and alacrity towards transforming the island into a republic.

"It is time that Jamaica become a republic. For us, the process is not simple, and we have known this from we started on this journey, and we are making sure that we check every box as we move deliberately in that regard," Prime Minister Andrew Holness said, noting that while the process is something he inherited, he never expected it "to be a straight line".

Addressing Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett's 25th Anniversary Scholarship Program, in St. James, last weekend, Prime Minister Holness said he was urging Legal Affairs and Constitutional Affairs Minister Marlene Malahoo Forte, to "please move ahead with speed on this matter".

"Jamaica must become a republic," Holness said, adding that whatever obstacles the process might encounter, his administration will be in for the long haul and will do whatever it takes.

Last week, Malahoo Forte expressed the government's "disappointment" at the failure to name the high-level committee on constitutional reform, blaming the main opposition People's National Party (PNP) for holding up the start of the process of Jamaica's move towards becoming a republican state.

Malahoo Forte told Parliament that while a referendum is necessary for Jamaica to move away from having the British monarch as its head of state, the process must involve cross aisle collaboration as well as consultation and collaboration with ordinary Jamaicans.

She said it was the intention of the government to name the members of the high-level committee last Tuesday, "but I regret to advise the people of Jamaica that we are not able to do \$0....

Opposition Leader Mark Golding defended the opposition's position on the situation, noting that the circumstances were not that simple as Malahoo Forte had only recently replied to



Jamaica Prime Minister Andrew Holness

a letter which he wrote to her in June 2022 requesting information on the intended amendments to the Jamaica Constitution and concerns regarding the Privy Council remaining as Ja-

maica's final appellate court.

Jamaica gained independence from the United Kingdom August 6, 1962.

Trinidad food prices jump 13.8% in **November: Statistics Office**

PRICES of food and non-alcoholic beverages in Trinidad and Tobago jumped by 13.80 per cent on average between November 2021 and November 2022, data released by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) has revealed.

And, according to the CSO data, prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages were 20.77 per cent higher on average in November 2022 than in November 2020.

The methodology used by the CSO gives food and non-alcoholic beverages a 17.3 per cent weight in its All Items

The All Items Index—which measures all of the items used by the CSO in coming up with the monthly inflation number—was 8.01 per cent higher in November 2022 than in November 2021.

Prices last November were 11.95 per cent higher than in November 2020.

Apart from the double-digit rise in food prices, the two main contributors to the 8.01 per cent increase in the All Items Index for the period November 2021 to November 2022 were transport and homeownership.

According to the CSO data, the cost of transportation in November 2022 was 14.62 per cent higher than in November 2021. Between November 2020 and November 2021, the cost of transport increased by 3.08 per cent. Transport costs contribute 14.71 per cent of the All-Items Index.

The category of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels was 4.98 per cent higher in November 2022 than in November 2021. That category contributes 27.5 per cent of the All-Items Index. Home ownership prices were 4.98 per cent higher in November 2022 than in November 2021. The category of housing, water, electricity, gas and other



Customers purchase items from a vendor on Charlotte Street, Port of Spain in December

fuels contributes a total of 27.5 per cent to the All-Items Index and is the largest single category.

In a news release, the CSO said the inflation rate for November 2022—measured as the percentage change in the average All Items Index for the period January to November 2022/January to November 2021) was 5.6 per cent.

This represents an increase from 5.3 per cent which was recorded in the previous period (January to October 2022/January to October 2021). The Inflation Rate for the comparative period (January to November 2021/January to November 2020) was 1.9 per cent, accent. cording to the CSO.

The national statistical agency also indicated that prices did not change very much between October and November 2022. The All Items Index of Retail Prices calculated from the prices collected for the month of November 2022 was 122.7, representing an increase of 0.2 points or 0.2 per cent above the Index (All Items) for October 2022.

The Index for Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages increased from 144.5 in October 2022 to 145.9 in November 2022, reflecting an increase of 1.0 per

"Contributing significantly to this increase was the general upward movement in the prices of chilled or frozen beef; fresh beef; chilled or frozen pork; melongene; carrots; cucumber; pumpkin; onions; green (sweet) pepper and cabbage. However, the full impact of these price increases was offset by the general decreases in the prices of tomatoes; ochroes; powdered milk-full cream; garlic; oranges; steak—fresh; shrimp—fresh; salted pig tail; Irish potatoes and crab- fresh," according to the CSO.

No ease anytime soon, says Supermarkets boss

Food prices are not likely to fall anytime soon although the cost of freight shipments is dropping, according to T&T Supermarkets Association president Rajiv

Supermarket operators say they are not yet able to cut prices because of several factors not connected to freight deliv-

During an interview on i95.5fm, Diptee said the reduced price of freight is between China and several countries, but not in this region.

According to the supermarket head, there are not many exports between China and Trinidad and Tobago.

"We have conflict, which is still happening in Ukraine and that is affecting everything, along with Covid-19 and we are still seeing effects of this through the supply chain affecting operations globally. We also have climate change to grapple with and flood issues, which has



Rajiv Diptee

caused produce to skyrocket at the supermarkets," Diptee outlined.

He pointed out that transshipment is also a major problem within the Caribbean.

But there are still concerns and complaints about the cost of local food items and

Diptee admitted that the recent floods can be blamed.

"The flooding that took place late last year, has caused the prices to increase drastically. When I looked at pumpkins it was \$9 a pound at the market and \$12 at the supermar-

"I think that some of the prices coming forth in the market, from some of the farm-

ers, and in particular some of the agri producers are a lot for consumers to fork out. I am not sure that we have any control over such a situation. That's for the Ministry of Agriculture to deal with," Diptee stressed.

He added that lower prices are likely later in the year,

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Billions set aside for sport development in Guyana budget

Guyana's Finance Minister, Ashni Singh, on Monday evening announced a mammoth \$4.3B budget for Sport in 2023; during the presentation of the National budget at the Arthur Chung Conference Center (ACCC), Liliendaal.

This year's massive budget allocation for Sport signals a vast improvement on allocations for previous years. In 2022, the sector received a whopping \$2.2B allocation, which was at the time the highest that Sport had ever seen. That was also an improvement on the \$1.5B allocation from 2021.

"The sum of \$4.3 billion has been allocated in budget 2023 for the for the development of sport," Singh told the National Assembly on Monday evening.

This year's sport budget will cover major infrastructural work, for instance, a state-of-the-art Stadium at Palmyra, new facilities in the hinterland regions and the rehabilitation of the Cliff Anderson's Sports Hall (CASH).

Singh explained, "Provision has been set aside for the establishment of a National cricket Academy, with the construction of the state-of-the-art stadium a Palmyra also slated for this year."

"Additionally, provision is made for other sports infrastructure and development, including construction of multipurpose sporting facilities in the hinterland, rehabilitation works at the Cliff Anderson's Sports Hall, construction of stands and grass mounds in Regions 2 and 6, extension of the Squash court at the National Racquet Center and procurement of sports gear," he further revealed.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport will also be able to continue their work on community grounds across the country, with a third consecutive budget allocation going towards that ongoing project.

"In addition, sir, the sum of \$250 million is budgeted for the continued improvement of community grounds across the country," Singh disclosed.

The \$2.2B allocated to sport in 2022 encompassed \$1.4B for infrastructural works. Work for the Synthetic Tracks in Regions 6 (East Berbice- Corentyne) and Region 10 (Upper Demerara- Upper Berbice), the construction of multipurpose sport facilities in Regions 2, 6, and 10, erection of stands at the National Track and Field Center (NTFC), West Coast Demerara, rehabilitation works at the National Stadium, Providence and

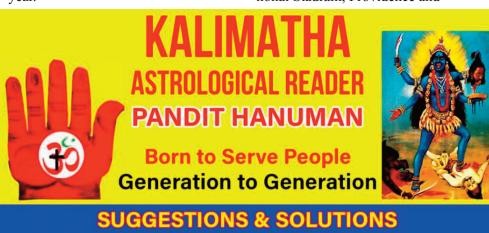


Guyana Finance Minister Ashni Singh

improvement of community grounds all fell under the infrastructural umbrella.

Meanwhile, in 2021 \$1.5B was allocated to sport, with \$320M of that

sum going towards the development of professional athletes and coaches. Work to improve community grounds was also another major component in that budget.



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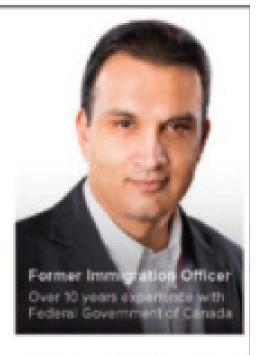
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