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2024 budget promises better lives for all Guyanese as country 'transforms' \$1.14 trillion

for Guyana

Guyana President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali provided a comprehensive overview of the transformative measures outlined in Budget 2024 during a televised address to the nation on Monday.

Senior Minister within the Office of the President, with responsibility for Finance, Dr Ashni Singh announced a whopping \$1.146 trillion budget for 2024, under the theme 'Staying the course: building prosperity for all.'

President Ali emphasised that Budget 2024 provides a holistic perspective on the country's development trajectory, showcasing key projects aimed at continuing the nation's transformative agenda.

"We had another opportunity to showcase our model of development and outline a clear strategy through which we are building national prosperity and through which we are creating opportunities for every single Guyanese regardless of which region you live in, regardless of which sector you are in," he said.

The president underscored that the measures specifically focusing on women, children, the elderly, and the youth with an estimated injection of over \$100 billion.

He said, "All of these measures are aimed at increasing disposable income, putting more money in the pockets of people, bolstering income for vulnerable groups, and of course, improving the system of governance and the provision of services for our country."

Notably, the President emphasised the government's commitment to containing the cost of fuel, a move projected to save approximately \$40 billion annually at current prices.

He elaborated on the impact of fuel costs and how it influences the overall cost of energy and essentially dictate the pricing structure across various sectors.

The ripple effect extends to the cost of production for farmers, manu-



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Guyana Finance Minister Dr Ashni Singh: prosperity for all

facturing, and industries, ultimately determining the pricing of goods and services and transportaytion.

"And so, it is imperative that we address this issue that is so uncertain globally," the president noted.

Additionally, the government's adjustment of freight charges will continue this year, at a cost of over \$6 billion.

President Ali also highlighted government's part time job programme which was allocated the sum of \$10 billion this programme and get \$40,000 every month, can repay the low-income loan and still have \$12,000 in their pocket every month," he explained.

The sum f \$7 billion is also set aside to directly address and cushion the impact of cost of living.

Among the key provisions of Budget 2024 are increases in various pension categories. The old-age pension will see a rise to \$36,000, benefiting 76,000 individuals, while public assistance will be increased from

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billion.

"What this means is that \$10 billion that was not the year before is now available in communities across the country to be spent in the markets, in the local shop, and a person who has a low-income house, who now goes on \$16,000 per month to \$19,000 per month.

The minimum National Insurance Scheme (NIS) pension has been increased to \$43,075, benefiting over 27,000 people.

More budget highlights inside



MASH 2024 Souvenir Magazine

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Coroner's Inquest into shooting death of Sammy Yatim starts

Stories By Nishad Sharma

The coroner's inquest probing the death of Sammy Yatim, a Toronto teenager shot by a police officer on an empty streetcar, resumes its proceedings today. The inquest, initiated last Friday, included statements from Yatim's parents and sister, who implored jurors to recommend increased support for families facing similar situations.

Testimony in the inquest also featured the streetcar driver who operated the vehicle Yatim was on, and jurors were shown a video depicting the teen's encounter with police on July 27, 2013. At the time of the incident, Yatim, an 18year-old, was alone on the streetcar, holding a small knife when then-Const. James Forcillo shot him shortly after midnight. Yatim suffered two rounds of gunfire, with jurors in Forcillo's subsequent criminal trial acquitting him of seconddegree murder pertaining to the first round, which resulted in the teen's death. However, Forcillo was found guilty of attempted murder in connection to the second set of shots. He received a sixand-a-half-year prison sentence and obtained full parole in 2020.



Sammy Yatim

New \$135M sugar production plant planned for Hamilton, ON

A major North American producer, SucroCan Sourcing, has unveiled an ambitious plan to build Canada's largest sugar processing plant in Hamilton, Ontario. The company is set to invest \$135 million in a new refinery located at Pier 15, anticipating an annual sugar production of one million metric tonnes.

Jonathan Taylor, the Founder and CEO of SucroCan, cites the growing demand for sugar in Ontario, driven by an expanding food processing sector and limited refining capacity in both Canada and the United States. This move comes at a crucial time, with intermittent sugar shortages across Canada since September, partly influenced by a strike at Rogers Sugar Inc. in B.C., triggered by proposed roundthe-clock, year-round refinery operations.

Several sugar producers, including Rogers, have announced expansion plans in response to the increasing demand. Rogers is investing \$200 million to boost capacity at its Montreal operation by 100,000 tonnes annually, in addition to expanding logistics and storage capacity in the Greater Toronto Area. Redpath also increased production at its cane sugar refinery in Toronto in mid-December, raising yearly capacity by 65,000 metric tonnes.

SucroCan's new plant, expected to open in 2025, aims to address the sugar supply challenges and contribute significantly to Canada's refined sugar production. With a strategic location at the Port of Hamilton, the facility will leverage multiple transportation modes, including marine, rail, and highway, ensuring efficient exports.

Provincial agriculture minister Lisa Thompson emphasizes the importance of Hamilton port's access to diverse transportation options, particularly the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway. Ian Hamilton, president and CEO of HOPA Ports, confirms the plant's connectivity to marine, rail, and highway transportation, highlighting its significance for regional economic growth.

In 2022, the Ontario government estimates that the agriculture and food industry contributed over \$48 billion to the province's GDP and supported approximately one in 10 jobs. Sucro-Can Sourcing, which opened a granular sugar refinery in Hamilton in 2019, has undergone three expansions in five years and currently produces around



Sucro Ltd. plans new refinery in Hamilton

200,000 metric tonnes annually. The new, larger plant is poised to further enhance SucroCan's production capabilities, meeting the rising demand for sugar in the region.

Rent in Toronto declines for third straight month

For the third consecutive month, the average apartment rent in Toronto has experienced a decline, as per the latest monthly report from Rentals.ca. According to the January report, the overall average asking price for an apartment in Toronto witnessed a modest 2.1% increase compared to a year ago, reaching an average rent of \$2,832.

In November, there was a 2.4% year-over-year decrease in rent, bring-

ing it to \$2,913. The October report from the organization marked the first instance of a slowdown in rental costs since August 2021. Toronto remains in the second position on the list of the most expensive Canadian cities for renters, with Vancouver taking the lead.

Nationwide, asking rents have seen a cumulative 22% increase over the last two years, equating to an average rise of \$390 per month.



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EDITORIAL & OPINIONS

The homeless problem

According to Fred Victor, a social service charitable organization that fosters change in the lives of homeless people in Toronto, there are more than 9,000 people living on the streets of this city.

6

This means while the rest of us are warm and cozy when the temperature is below freezing outside, these people are left o stay warm on the streets by whatever means they can.

According to the organization, homelessness is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing.

The city has been doing what it could to help the homeless. It has opened 5 shelters this year, all of which are over capacity.

One of the problems is that the Federal government continues to accept refugees from other countries, who end up in the city without any accommodations being planned for them. They then become the city's -- and taxpayers' -problem. This is one of the reasons why Toronto homeowners could see a property tax increase of up to 16 percent this year.

Toronto has no money to house both the homeless and the refugees who

By Donald Ramotar

Since late last year the Houthis of Yemen have taken actions in solidarity with the besieged Palestinian people. At a time when the whole world looked on at the carpet bombing of Gaza, the blowing to smithereens of human beings and people stood helplessly looking at their T.V screens.

The UN Security Council and General Assembly were paralyzed by the US use of their veto power to derail all the resolutions that called for a cease fire. Indeed, so distressing the situation had become that one wondered where were decisions of the US administration taken where it hurts most, that is at Israel's in regard to the Middle East, in West Jerusalem or in Washington? The US ad-

flock to the city by the thousands each year, which has put a strain on the already overwhelmed housing market, with on average, a 10 year wait for an apartment.

Even people with regular jobs can barely afford rent today.

Being homeless is a tragedy. Being caught in the cycle of homelessness is an even bigger one. For many on the streets, there is no way out. They are at the mercy of the authorities to find suitable (by that, we mean clean and warm) shelter on a daily basis.

This puts a strain on other areas -homeless people often seek warmth and shelter in subway stations and hospitals. As some 75% of the homeless are struggling with mental issues, this causes other problems, many of which we've seen manifest on public transit in recent months, with attacks on transit users rising weekly.

We've seen efforts by the City to deal with homelessness in the most humane way possible, by offering what it could. And we believe this is a burden the city of Toronto should not have to bear alone.

Surely the Federal government, under whose purvey is the refugee system, should -- and must -- step up here.

We cannot keep accepting refugees if we have no place to put them. Those fleeing distress in their original homelands do not expect to come here and end up on the streets in one of the coldest countries in the world. More has to be done.

If refugees are properly housed, then the homeless situation becomes manageable. And this means many of the city's most vulnerable people will literally not have to knock on doors every day to save themselves from freezing to death.

We suggest the Feds take a different approach to the refugee system. By all means, we must continue to offer a safe haven to people who can no longer live in their own countries due to war or violence, but surely we can manage the intake of refugees differently.

One way is to ease the strain on big cities by placing refugee claimants in other areas. There are small towns across this country that need newcomers. Why not place the refugees there on the condition that they remain where they are placed until their claims are settled?

Yes, we know, civil libertarians will say we cannot restrict the freedom of movement of people, but we think in this case, we can.

Refugees are looking for a safe place to live. We can offer them that conditionally. We as a country are under no obligation to any refugee claimant who demands they must stay in a particular city.

Putting conditions on acceptance will ease the burdens on big cities like Toronto, and will also give smaller towns across the country a chance to grow their own populations.

Many of these refugees are capable of becoming farmers or business owners who will contribute to municipal coffers by way of taxes and employment.

We think this is an idea whose time has come.

Leaving people out in the cold -- literally -- is heartless and inhumane.

The Feds must step up and act, not only by throwing money at the problem but by designing a better system.

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.

Houthis: Solidarity Not Terrorism

ministration at times appeared to be the Israelis. junior partner in its relationship with Israel.

In these conditions the Houthis began to take measures to halt the indiscriminate killings and massive destruction of property. They began firing missiles into Israel. This had little effect on Israel's aggression since many of their rockets were shot down by US warships in the Red Sea and by Israeli's Iron Dome anti-missile defense system.

Instead of halting the attacks the Israeli Defense Force became even more aggressive in their acts of destruction.

This caught the attention of the world as now more than one country would be affected because it began to affect International Trade. The hope here was that this pressure would have resulted in Israel rethinking its murderous policies and relent on the killings of innocent civilians. It appears that they thought that other countries would join to pressure Israel to halt the genocide and push Israel to the negotiating table.

Unfortunately, it did not, instead led to the US and UK bombing Yemen. They chose to use their power, not to get That forced the Houthis to hit negotiations going but to prevent solidarity to the Palestinians in Gaza from succeeding.

Houthis on the ground that their action in attacking ships would carry up the cost of goods imported in various countries. The narrowness of this view is unbelievable. This, in a sense, is putting a "little inconvenience" by consumers above human lives. I am sure that some who too that view did not see it that way, however that is precisely where the logic would lead to.

What the Houthis are doing is paying with their blood for the support they are giving to stop the massacre in Gaza. This is genuine solidarity and should be commended not condemned!

economy. It began to target ships going to and from Israel and ships owned by

There are those who criticize the

Donald Ramotar is a former President of Guyana



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Grocery chain stops 50 percent markdowns on near-expired items

By Niraj Sharma Lji reporter

Prepare yourself for a surprising twist during your next trip to a Loblawowned grocery store if you've been accustomed to cutting costs by purchasing perishable items at a 50% discount as they approach their expiration date. According to an email from Loblaw Companies Ltd. examined by CBC News, such markdowns on items like meat, fruits, and vegetables will no longer be available.

This alteration is distressing for individuals such as Edmund Duarte, a 66-year-old senior citizen on a fixed income residing near Yarmouth, N.S., who heavily relies on these discounts for his weekly grocery shopping. Duarte, who noticed the shift at his local Atlantic Superstore branch last week, expressed his frustration, emphasizing the impact on seniors. Items that were previously marked down by 50% were now listed at 30% off, leading him to reassess his grocery budget.

Bill VanGorder, the national advocacy chair for the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, reported receiving numerous concerned calls from seniors across the country who had observed the change. He highlighted the financial strain seniors face due to the rising cost of living, with many depending on discounted perishable foods to make ends meet.

However, the repercussions extend beyond seniors, according to Charles Levkoe, the Canada Research Chair in Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ont. Levkoe emphasized that vulnerable populations, including Black and Indigenous communities, who are already more likely to experience food insecurity, will be disproportionately affected. He criticized Loblaw's decision to withdraw the discount, considering the company's public commitment to collaborating with the government to stabilize grocery prices.

The move by Loblaw is seen by

some as disingenuous, especially in light of CEO Galen Weston's statements in December about reducing prices on staple items, which account for about 10% of the chain-wide sales. The shift in discount policy is raising concerns about the challenges faced by those who relied on these discounts to afford their groceries.'More predictable' discounts

Sylvain Charlebois, who studies food policy and is the director of Dalhousie University's Agri-food Analytics Lab, said Monday that he reached out to the company directly after receiving reports from concerned consumers about the change.

NDP restructures leadership team ahead of upcoming election

By Nishad Sharma LJI REPORTER

The federal NDP is undergoing a restructuring of its leadership team in anticipation of the upcoming election.

Anne McGrath, a longstanding national director of the New Democratic Party, is stepping down from her role as the party's top executive. In her new capacity, McGrath will assume the position of principal secretary to the party's leader in the House of Commons, Jagmeet Singh.

As outlined in a party news release, McGrath is expected to take on an expanded role in supervising the progress of the NDP's supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberals. The agreement, established in March 2022, bound the Liberals to fulfill key demands from the New Democrats in exchange for their support on crucial pieces of Liberal legislation.

Scheduled to expire in 2025, the NDP-Liberal deal still has outstanding commitments, including the passage of legislation that could pave the way for expanding drug coverage to a broader segment of the Canadian population, commonly referred to as pharmacare. This leadership transition positions Mc-Grath to contribute more actively to the ongoing collaboration between the NDP and the Liberals as they work towards achieving their shared goals. The NDP national director is the CEO of the party and its operations at the party's headquarters — the Jack Layton Building in downtown Ottawa. They also oversee the NDP's fundraising, staff hiring and strategic planning. The role is also about building and maintaining relationships inside and outside the party with the party's federal executive and council, provincial parties, labour and the youth wing.



The national director also works

Lucy Watson: taking over as national director of the NDP

closely with NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh and his 24 MPs, often attending weekly caucus meetings on Parliament Hill.

Taking over McGrath's national director role will be party stalwart Lucy Watson.

Watson rose through the ranks of the largest student organization, the Canadian Federation of Students. She has also served in various senior roles with the British Columbia, Ontario and the federal NDP.

A statement from the NDP framed staffing changes as necessary for "building momentum for the next election." It also suggested the next election as a two-way race between the NDP and the Conservatives.

"Anne McGrath and Lucy Watson have the experience and commitment we need to take on the Poilievre gutand-cut Conservatives and an out-oftouch Liberal government," Singh said. "[Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre] isn't the answer to the frustration and disappointment people are feeling toward [Prime Minister] Justin Trudeau, and clearly, he's not interested in helping families in these difficult times."

THURSDAY JANUARY 18 2024

The Economy & Finance | JB's Insight The AFC have vindicated my contentions

My attention was drawn to the Alliance for Change's (AFC) press statement dated January 13th, 2024, on their Facebook page (Guyana Standard on January 14th, 2024) with the caption... "AFC response to PPC Commissioner Bhagwandin". The AFC was referring to my letter that was published in the Stabroek News edition of January 11th, 2024, in relation to the Akamai matter.

Once again, the AFC's statement is fraught with inaccuracies. First and foremost, let me clarify that I did not attack my colleague, whom the AFC identifies as an AFC nominated commissioner. I merely pointed out the fact.

It would appear that the AFC has great difficulty accepting, comprehending, and appreciating the fact that the commissioner whom they (AFC) refer to as an AFC-nominated commissioner, is no longer an AFC nominated commissioner. Matter-of-factly, the said commissioner is a duly appointed constitutional officer (commissioner) of the Public Procurement Commission (the Commission) in accordance with the Constitution of Guyana.

Readers would recall that I had intimated that the AFC aligned commissioner may have been subjecting herself to political influence by the AFC, inter alia, executing the AFC's political instructions at the Commission. As such, I drew reference to Article 212W (2) which states that..." the Commission shall be independent, impartial, and shall discharge its functions fairly". Therefore, the commissioners ought to discharge their duties independently and free from political influence. Towards this end, the AFC has now vindicated my contentions and observations, by way of implicating my colleague, whom they consistently refer to as an AFC commissioner. Let me demonstrate hereunder.

In the penultimate paragraph of the AFC's statement, the AFC contends..." [a]s asserted by Commissioner Bhagwandin that the AFC has a special interest in Akamai and not in Motiram's case, this is proven by the email excerpts to be a grand lie, since Commissioner Rajcumar did object to the PPC's summary of findings for both Motiram and Akamai case on similar grounds".

Whose position is the AFC referring to? Are they (the AFC) adopting a commissioner's position as their own, who ought to be independent? Visibly, there is no separation between the AFC, a political entity, and commissioner Rajcumar, an independent constitutional officer. For absolute clarity, the AFC never publicly expressed a problem with the case of Motiram, nor did they represent the case of Motiram, as they did in the case of Akamai within the public domain. The public records would corroborate this fact. Henceforth, I shall leave this up to the general public to form their own conclusion.

jcumar, however, I should mention that at least for the first year since we were sworn in as commissioners of the PPC, she functioned independently, impartially, and fairly. She had always taken principled positions on matters. It was only in recent months that my colleague's disposition observably departed from her usually principled and cogent articulations.

With that in mind, let me now address the inaccuracies in the AFC's statement by outlining the sequence of events. The AFC cited commissioner Rajcumar's statement via email to the other commissioners on December 14th and 29th respectively as follows:

"I have perused the report prepared. Unfortunately, I do not know what was the methodology used to compile the report. Internally, an investigation policy and procedure was developed by the Legal Department which has not been adopted as yet. I have stated my support for the said procedure which thoroughly outlines the steps to follow to conduct an investigation including a step for interviews with parties involved. Firstly, all contracts over G\$15M are awarded by NPTAB, and as such they are required to provide the commission with all the requested information. Secondly, the copy of an evaluation report without all the supporting documents is not sufficient to make a determination as to the validity of this award - if there was an error in the preparation of the evaluation report as questioned by Mr. Motiram. This can only be discovered by a full examination of the supporting documents as to confirm the findings in the evaluation report. Complainants come to the Commission expecting that we would impartially examine their claims. Therefore, reporting what is contained in the NPTAB report without fully verifying the details is, in my opinion, doing a disservice to the complainant. As such, I cannot agree with the report findings. I suggest that we contact the complainant through written / oral interview to ascertain that what we received from NPTAB is what he submitted. In light of the foregoing, I am unable to support and append my signature to this report".

"I have stated my opinion via emails and in the last Statutory meeting re Motiram summary of findings that the complainant, as a party, be engaged to corroborate on the findings in an investigation, hence to go beyond relying on NPTAB's report, since PPC has an oversight function in the procurement process. I maintain this position with regards to Akamai's summary of findings as I have stated before via email, hereunder that Akamai be engaged to collaborate on documents re NPTAB submission. For that reason, I do not agree with the Summary of Findings". It is imperative to note what were the sequence of events that preceded the emails cited above. In this regard, after receiving all of the documentations for review from the relevant

agencies on November 1, 2023, the technical staff of the secretariat proceeded to conduct the Administrative Review, following which the reports were submitted to the Commission for consideration. Subsequently, all of the commissioners had the opportunity to review same prior to determining the matter.

At the Commission's 56th meeting held on December 1, 2023; three of the five commissioners had completed their reviews. Thus, the reports of the secretariat was adopted by the said commissioners, save and except for myself and commissioner Rajcumar, as we had not yet completed reviewing the reports therefor. Consequently, the Commission requested that both commissioners Rajcumar and myself complete our reviews and submit our comments or objections by December 5th, 2023, via email. It was via email that I submitted that I concurred with the report.

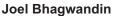
On December 5th, 2023, commissioner Rajcumar indicated via email that..." I have reviewed the evaluation criteria # 10 re reason for non responsive bidder and while a previous contract was not provided there was a detailed spreadsheet which listed several contracts which were completed.In this context, I cannot determine what is "documentary evidence" and would rely on the legal department to interpret same".

In response to the above from commissioner Rajcumar, she was reminded that the bid nonetheless failed on two grounds, hence she was asked to state her position on the second ground. In response, on December 6th, 2023, commissioner Rajcumar indicated via email that ... " reference to criteria #17, there was no letter in the files which came from NPTAB, so that indicates that the bidder failed criteria # 17". At this point, the Akamai and Motiram matter was considered closed having been fully considered by all of the commissioners. The next step that followed was to inform the complainants of the Commission's findings and recommendations, to which draft letters were circulated and all five commissioners, including commissioner Rajcumar indicated their no objection to the letters.

In keeping with the decision of the Commission, two summary reports on the findings were drafted to be uploaded onto the Commission's website. It was the draft reports on the findings, which came after the matters were fully considered and closed, that commissioner Rajcumar sought to virtually reopen the cases, viz-á-viz, her emails on December 14th, 2023, which preceded the Commission's meeting on December 15th, 2023, followed by a reiteration via email on December 29th, 2023, as noted above. The contents expressed in these emails were completely new objections and effectively a new position by my colleague that was never brought up for deliberation prior to the



closure of both cases (Akamai and Motiram) on December 6th, 2023. This was astounding.



In relation to my colleague's contention via email on December 14th, 2023 (cited above), there are two points of correction that should be noted.

Firstly, NPTAB does not award contracts above \$15 million, it is the procuring entities that award all contracts. NPTAB conducts the evaluation and make recommendations, which the procuring entities can object to, if it does not agree with the evaluation committee's recommendations. In this case, pursuant to Section 39 (3) of the Procurement Act (Cap. 73:05) the procuring entities: "...shall issue an advisory recommendation to the Evaluation Committee regarding which bidder should be the lowest evaluated bidder, which recommendation the evaluation committee shall observe".

Secondly, the commissioner contends that she was unaware of the methodology in the preparation of the reports. I am not sure how this could be possible. Paragraphs [15] to [17] of the report on the "summary of findings" outlined the methodology. Separately, the commissioner's point of view on the draft document prepared by the legal department is noted, but that has not yet been adopted because other commissioners provided their inputs which have to be incorporated into the document by the legal department.

Additionally, I have noted an article in the Stabroek News edition of January 14th, 2024, in respect of the Akamai matter, whereby reportedly the Chief Executive Officer of the Hinterland Electrification Company, Mr. Horace Williams, sought to implicate the Prime Minister, Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Phillips, by referring Stabroek News to the Prime Minister. To this end, the "excuse" provided by the CEO is unacceptable given that the procuring entity is duly and equally accountable together with NPTAB, pursuant to Section 39 (3) of the Procurement Act as previously referenced.

In view of the foregoing, I would like to urge the AFC to desist from seeking to influence the work of the Commission by allowing their nominated commissioner to function independently. Moreover, the AFC is reminded that the Commission is ultimately required to report to the National Assembly, wherein the Executives of the AFC are Members of Parliament. The National Assembly is the appropriate forum for the scrutinization of the Commission's work by the politicians on both sides of the house. And, wherever legislative deficiencies are identified, then that becomes a matter for the legislature to remedy.

To the credit of commissioner Ra-



Toronto man finds stolen SUV 11,000 km away in Middle East

By Akim Shazad LJI REPORTER

On a holiday Monday last August, a resident of Toronto faced a disheartening sight as he gazed out at his driveway – his SUV, the second to be stolen that year, was nowhere to be found. The exasperation of a recurring incident echoed in his mind: "Not again."

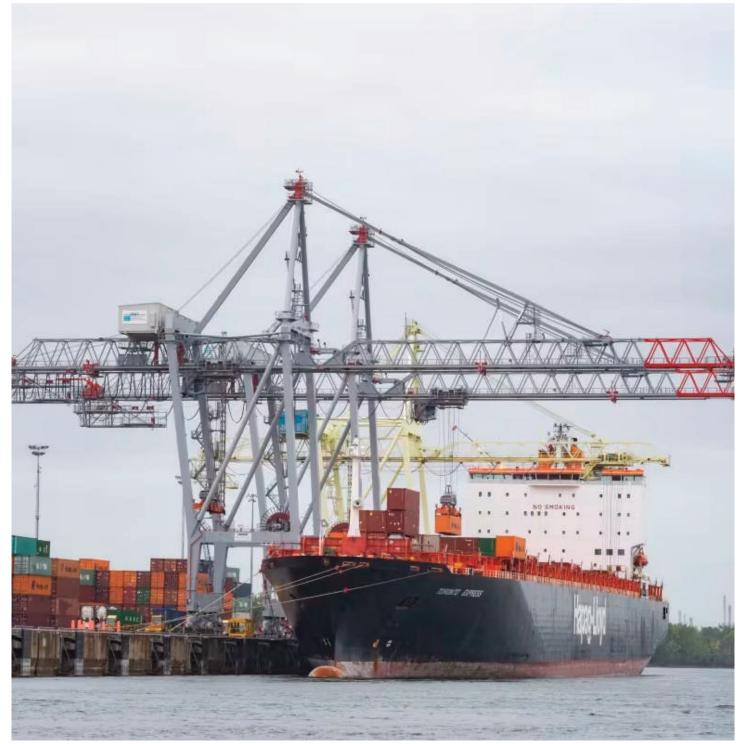
Determined to recover his vehicle, Andrew utilized Apple AirTags discreetly placed in his 2022 GMC Yukon XL. The tracking journey led him from a nearby rail yard to the Port of Montreal and finally to a used car lot in the United Arab Emirates, unraveling a criminal trail that spanned continents.

Frustrated by the lack of assistance from law enforcement, Andrew turned to a private investigator and even contacted Interpol, all to no avail. Due to fears of reprisals, CBC News has chosen to conceal Andrew's full identity as his family contends against the thieves.

This extraordinary saga offers a rare glimpse into the criminal exploitation of an overseas shipping route amidst Canada's auto theft crisis. Andrew's relentless efforts speak of a desperate desire to retrieve what was rightfully his: "We've done everything we possibly can, save going over there and trying to take it back ourselves."

Returning from a summer vacation, Andrew and his wife were greeted by an unsettling scene on August 7. Their SUV, parked in the driveway, bore signs of tampering – a bent steering wheel with the anti-theft lock still intact, and a driver's seat pushed farther back than usual. Recognizing the familiar patterns of a previous theft in May, they planned to secure the vehicle after a quick meal. However, by the time they finished eating at 9:15 p.m., the SUV had vanished.

Having experienced a similar ordeal earlier that year, Andrew had equipped his second Yukon with discreet Apple AirTags for tracking. As the SUV disappeared, he monitored the AirTags' signals on his smartphone, which pinged across the Greater



The stolen vehicle was first tracked to the Port of Montreal before ending up in the UAE

Toronto Area for hours.

Alerting Toronto police and neighboring forces, Andrew's persistence paid off two days after the theft. One AirTag pinged from the Canadian Pacific Kansas City railway's terminal in Vaughan. Contacting York Regional Police, Andrew provided a screenshot of the AirTag's precise location. The police officer, equipped with the information, approached the rail yard, and the second AirTag corroborated the location.

In a series of text messages, the officer conveyed the situation, confirming the likelihood that the stolen SUV was within containers on a railcar. However, lacking the authority to open the containers, the officer directed Andrew to the railway's private police service. the train carrying his truck departed soon after. Describing this as the height of frustration, Andrew lamented, "Knowing that it's still here, but it's about to disappear." Despite his ordeal, CPKC spokesperson Terry Cunha declined to discuss the incident, mentioning only that the railway collaborates with law enforcement to recover stolen vehicles.

To Andrew's dismay, the CPKC ve police failed to respond that night, and

—with files from CBC



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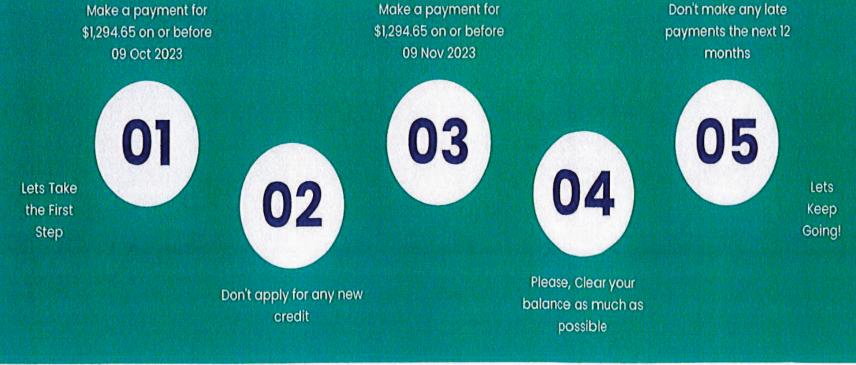


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Guyana gov't seeks proposals for natural gas development

AIMED at discovering new avenues to develop and monetise its natural gas, the government has launched the Request For Proposals (RFPs) for the designing, financing, construction and operation of the required gas infrastructure.

This was disclosed by President Dr Irfaan Ali on Saturday during the commissioning of US\$30 million marine facility.

He said: "We're going out with an RFP tomorrow [Sunday] to have proposals coming into our country to look at how we're going to utilise our gas to stimulate wealth and create opportunities in positioning Guyana as an important capital in the energy-security matrix of the region."

According to the RFP, the requirements include: the developer's capability and credibility to execute such a project, clear written agreements among the parties, and if a consortium, evidence of consortium agreement for this project, the site plan for the project, a summarised and detailed project schedule, the project costs, the project structure diagram, business plan, list of legal agreements and the proposed capital structure.

It was also stated that this project will be strictly financed and owned 100 per cent by the private sector.

Moreover, Vice-President, Dr

Bharrat Jagdeo, has made it crystal clear that the government has a clear strategy for advancing investment in gas development.

During a recent press conference, Dr Jagdeo related: "We will take into account the Exxon gas-utilisation strategy, but we're not going to be bound by that strategy. We could have differing interests and I've outlined that from the beginning and what those differences could be. Even conflicting interests.

"Our strategy, our goal is clear. We want to advance investment in gas development as early as possible. And so, clearly that has to be. We're going to put out the final government gas strategy."

The natural gas strategy will be one of several areas where the government is collaborating with the Government of India. Bilateral agreements on the development of Guyana's remaining offshore resources continue to be considered.

According to a press statement from the Ministry of Natural Resources, this strategy is part of a pivotal roadmap for managing the nation's significant gas resources. It also serves as a vital tool for Guyana to make informed decisions regarding the utilisation of its gas resources.

The Stabroek Block, along with the Corentyne Block, holds substantial gas resources. Ongoing exploration and ap-



Bharrat Jagdeo

praisal activities are underway to determine the full extent of Guyana's gas resources. To date, the sanctioned projects in the Stabroek Block are exclusively oil-focused, including the Whiptail project currently under review.

At Pluma, Haimara, and other discoveries with condensate, reviews are ongoing. Along with the discovery of over 11 billion barrels of oil offshore, Guyana has a substantial amount of associated natural gas. Though some amount of the gas is being reinjected into the wells, there is a considerable amount that could be utilised for other purposes.

Moreover, the gas-to-energy (GTE) project currently being developed by the government is one area in which it has already devised use for some of the natural gas that is offshore.

Under this project, a minimum of 50 million standard cubic feet of gas per day (mmscfd) will be transported from the Liza Phase One and Liza Phase Two Floating, Production, Storage, and Offloading (FPSO) vessels, to a power plant and Natural Gas Liquids (NGL) facility that will be built in Wales, on the West Bank of Demerara.

The conversion of natural gas from ExxonMobil's offshore operations to electricity, is a key component of the government's objective to lower energy costs by at least 50 per cent through an energy mix which incorporates gas, solar, wind, and hydro power.

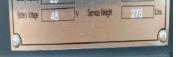
Aside from the natural gas being used to fuel the power plant, Guyana could generate between 70 - 100 million from the sale of cooking gas produced by the NGL facility.

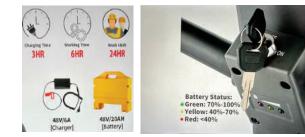


















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THURSDAY JANUARY 18 2024



Among the transformational projects in Guyana is the building of the new iconic Demerara River Bridge, the largest transportation project in the country

Singh on 2024 budget: 'We are building a new Guyana here'

AS Guyanese itch in anticipation for Budget 2024, which will be revealed today, Senior Finance Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, has given all the assurance that it will serve as the vehicle in bettering the lives of Guyanese.

As the face of the country changes for the better, the well-being of the citizens is at the focal point for the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government.

During the Pre-Budget 2024 interview on Friday, the minister, though teasing at the massive fiscal plans in store for 2024, stated that the government is not a stranger to ensuring that development reaches every inch of Guyana. Therefore, this budget will be a continuation of that work.

"It has to be understood that we are building a new Guyana here. The face of the country is changing as we speak. Whether it's the physical infrastructure, whether it is public infrastructure, or privately financed ment that is conducive to investments, according to him.

Peeling off the shallow layer of how people only analyse the short term benefits, the senior government official used the gas-to-energy project to put things into perspective.

As Guyana's energy infrastructure continues to expand, this project stands on the pedestal of revolutionising the lives of all.

The project will help households and businesses enormously by cutting the present high costs of electricity and it will play an integral role in reducing the plague of blackouts in the country.

Aside from this, the minister shifted his attention to how the 12 regional hospitals that are currently under construction will serve as a great aid to citizens.

As the PPP/C administration remains steadfast on fostering quality healthcare, the government is also ensuring that these services reach all ment that Guyana has undergone since the PPP/C took office in August 2020, the minister stated that unlike the previous coalition administration, this government always stays committed to having a consultative approach to policy-making.

"Our tune is not different in government from when we were in opposition. The things that we said we will do in opposition are the things we said we will do when we get into government and when we got into government are the things that we implemented," Dr Singh asserted.

He added, "Unlike the APNU+AFC, we don't formulate policies in our conference rooms, or in our offices. We listen to people. We have a President who is constantly on the ground listening to people. We have a cabinet that is constantly on the ground listening to people."

Deeming it a "hallmark" for this government, the Finance Minister said that policy continuity is something that they are proud of since they do not "hop and skip" from policy to policy or abandon them. "The things that we implement in our budget, our successive budgets are things we promised in our manifesto and are the things that people voted [for]... and expected [us] to deliver." He also stated that the government is methodical in its approach to policy formation and always takes the time to analyse the global economy to frame the policy response accordingly. "If you were to dissect everything we have said and everything we have done and every major policy document that we have issued, you will see that the consistent objective underline all that we have done is improving the

well-being of all of the Guyanese," he related.

Diversified growth and bettering citizens' lives are at the top of the list of objectives that the PPP/C aims to produce.

Moreover, he stressed on the efforts being rolled out to not only ensure that the environment is one that can provide jobs for the people but also put money back into their pockets.

"In every sector of government operations, there's a consistent approach and that consistent approach is always aimed at improving people's lives," Dr. Singh remarked.

He then went on to say: "So maintaining strong economic growth is an important policy objective for us, not because economic growth is an end by itself... but because economic growth can and does translate into economic well-being and the well-being of communities and households, etc..."

Pointing out the false hopes and the effort to attract votes, Dr Singh expounded on how the APNU+AFC administration did not deliver on any of their promises in their 2015 manifesto. For instance, instead of creating more opportunities for Guyanese, in 2017, the former APNU+AFC Coalition Government announced the closure of several sugar estates across the country, leaving thousands of persons without jobs or a source of income. The move saw four sugar estates being closed and over 7,000 sugar workers losing their jobs. The Rose Hall Estate, prior to its closure, was "home" to some 2,500 sugar workers, but 1,181 of those were retrenched. The remaining workers from the Rose Hall Estate were transferred to Blairmont Estate.

infrastructure...the face of our country is changing," Minister Singh said.

He then went on to say: "Budget 2024 will continue that work and in building a new and more prosperous Guyana. We are building a Guyana in which every single Guyanese and their family will be better off, that in which their well-being will be improved."

While there are some naysayers who use the narrow perspective of criticising the government for executing the construction of numerous infrastructural projects, the minister elaborated on how these projects from roads and bridges to hospitals will benefit everyone.

In the short term, these projects can aid in improving convenience, but in the long term, it creates an environGuyanese, in the various regions.

According to Minister Singh, even though one can sit and say these hospitals serve no use to them, if that citizen or one of their relatives gets sick, the hospitals will be there to treat them and ensure that their well-being is in good shape.

He also briefly underscored that the government will continue to invest in social services, health and education to produce a better tomorrow for all Guyanese.

He said, "It may look like an investment in a road but it goes to the core of a well-being of the people. It may look like hospital and [you can say] it has nothing to do with you but it has everything to do with you."

Reflecting on the drastic develop-

THURSDAY JANUARY 18 2024

Massive 28 per cent increase in sugar production in 2023

Senior Minister within the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance and Public Service, on Monday, announced that the sum of \$135.2 billion has been allocated to realize the government's vision of having a worldclass education system here.

The Minister made this disclosure during his presentation of the 2024 National Budget where he noted that in 2023 some \$105 billion was spent by the sector in various areas.

This year, he said that the construction will commence on several primary schools in various areas across the country and as such the sum of \$3.1 billion has been set aside to advance those works.

Added to that, some \$16 billion has been allocated for the construction and works on secondary schools across the country while some \$3 billion has been allocated for nursery school buildings.

As the government intends to improve education infrastructure this year, Dr Singh stated that \$28.7 billion has been set aside for schools, buildings and education facilities.

Meanwhile, he indicated that the distribution of the Because We Care and Uniform cash grants will continue this year along with the rollout of the classroom grants which began in 2023.

As such, the finance minister said that \$3.1 billion has been budgeted to continue these initiatives.

Added to this, the sum of \$4.9 billion has been set aside for the continued rollout and expansion of the school feeding programme set to benefit some 126,000 children across the country.

Among other major investments in the education sector, \$4.1 billion has been budgeted to support the operations of the University of Guyana with another \$4 billion set aside to support the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme.



Sugar production has increased significantly



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Guyana economy continues to boom as non-oil sector grows 11.7 percent

DRIVEN by critical investments and prudent management by the Government of Guyana, the country recorded significant economic growth of 33 per cent last year, with "stronger-than-expected" expansion in non-oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 11.7 per cent, according to Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh.

Dr. Singh, during his presentation of the massive \$1.146 trillion 2024 budget to the National Assembly on Monday, said that the growth recorded last year significantly outstripped the 25.1 per cent growth and 7.9 per cent non-oil growth that was initially projected for 2023.

"The expansion of the overall real economy in 2023 can be largely attributed to continued growth in oil and gas activity, with the notable achievement of first oil at the new floating, production, storage, and offloading (FPSO) vessel, Prosperity, in November," he said.

Additionally, while growth in the non-oil economy was mainly driven by expansions in the construction and services sectors, notable increases were also observed in all subsectors within agriculture, forestry, and fishing and manufacturing, as well as in the other mining and quarrying sub-sector.

"...Our government's policies con-



tinue to be focused on supporting growth in the traditional pillars of the economy while managing the oil and gas sector effectively," Dr. Singh said.

Owing to continued focus in traditional and non-oil sectors, growth in this area is expected to reach 11.9 per cent next year.

This, according to Dr. Singh, will be driven by consistent expansion in all sub-sectors in the agricultural, forestry and fishing sectors, continued expansion in construction and services, as well as a recovery in bauxite and gold mining. "Once realised, the non-oil economy will have recorded four years of consecutive growth, and an average growth rate of 9.9 per cent annually since its 7.3 per cent contraction in 2020," he said.

Just last year, the agricultural, forestry and fishing sectors is estimated to have expanded by seven per cent in 2023. This performance is attributed to increases across all sub-sectors, namely other crops, rice-growing, livestock, fishing, sugar-growing, and forestry. This was despite the impact of El Niño on the production of a number of crops. And this sector is projected to grow 10.4 per cent this year, supported by increased production across all sub-sectors.

The mining and quarrying sector is estimated to have expanded by 42.6 per cent in 2023. As with recent years, the estimated growth is driven largely by an expansion in the oil and gas and support services industry which, when combined with growth observed in the other mining industry, outweighs the declines observed in gold and bauxite-mining activities. This sector is projected to expand by 43.6 per cent this year amidst further growth in oil and gas and other mining and quarrying, as well as an expected recovery in the gold and bauxitemining sub-sectors.

Further, the manufacturing sector is estimated to have expanded by 25 per cent in 2023, with growth recorded in all three sub-categories. Sugar and rice production are estimated to have expanded by 28 per cent and 8.3 per cent, respectively, and other manufacturing by 31.8 per cent. Within other manufacturing, growth was driven mainly by the manufacturing of fabricated metal products and non-metallic products.

This year, the manufacturing sector is projected to continue its growth trajectory to expand by 16 per cent.



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EQUALITY NEWS THURSDAY JANUARY 18 2024

Guyana government seeking to build oil refinery on Crab Island

WITH the aim of promoting valueadded production, the government's vision of having an oil refinery could soon become a reality.

This was according to Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, during his presentation of Budget 2024, on Monday.

"Mr. Speaker, the government received nine proposals from interested parties vying to construct a refinery in the Berbice region and five were shortlisted. These proposals are currently being evaluated and the final ranking is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2024," he said.

He remarked that the top-ranked contender will undertake an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment at-Crab Island for a facility designed to process at least 30,000 bpd. The investment commitment from these shortlisted firms is expected to exceed US\$1 billion.

A Request for Proposals was issued in 2022 for the design, financing and construction of the refinery at Crab Island, Region Six (East Berbice-Corentyne).

An oil refinery is an industrial processing plant where crude oil is refined into marketable petroleum products such as gasoline, asphalt, and kerosene.

With the operationalisation of a local oil refinery, Guyana would be able to supply crude-oil components to various industries for a broad range of purposes, including fuels for transportation, paving roads, and generating electricity and raw materials for chemical manufacturing.

Last year, during a state visit to The Dominican Republic (DR), President Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali and Dominican Republic President Luis Abinader signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) Dr Jagdeo also stated that the government is simultaneously exploring the possibility of strategic reserves, which may negate the economic viability of an oil refinery.

According to him, the government is exploring all options to ensure that the investment is one that is economically viable, sustainable, and will bring added benefits to the country.

"This is not something that we are just going to do on a whim. We are looking at every option, and all the studies, and numbers, because often it's the numbers that will ultimately influence the decision."



An oil refinery for Crab Island is being evaluated

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to address consideration of The Dominican Republic setting up a refinery in Guyana.

Two weeks ago, Vice-President, Dr Bharrat Jagdeo explained that the five groups include the DR group that signed this memorandum.

However, he said that the discussions have seen some divergence from the parameters originally established by the government.

"The parameters we established at the beginning, people want to change those parameters. So, if you change the parameters, you often change the nature of the project and you're wondering whether it would be fair to the other people. So, clearly, the need for energy security is vital," he explained.





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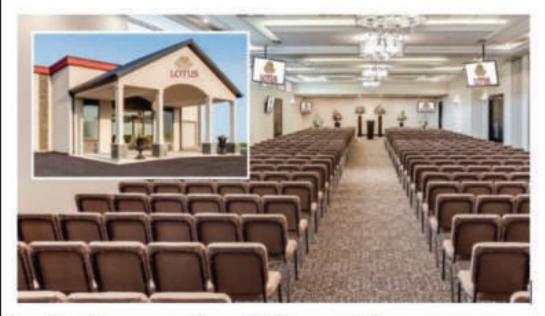


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EQUALITY NEWS **THURSDAY JANUARY 18 2024** 20 **Trial into Guyana's elections fraud case** to commence March 4

AFTER a three-year delay, the trial into the long-awaited electoral fraud case involving former District Four (Demerara-Mahaica) Returning Officer Clairmont Mingo; former People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) Chairperson Volda Lawrence; PNC/R activist Carol Smith-Joseph and four others, is set to commence on March 4.

On Monday, during a case management conference (CMC), additional statements were handed over to the court. Subsequently, Magistrate Leron Daly set timelines for the trial.

The trial will commence from March 4-8. Additionally, the first weeks of April and May have been set aside for the case to be heard.

Special Prosecutor Darshan Ramdhani, KC, will lead the evidence in the case.

The trio, along with Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) employees Sheffern February, Enrique Livan, Denise Bobb-Cummings and Michelle Miller, are before the court for allegedly defrauding the electors of Guyana by declaring a false account of votes for the 2020 General and Regional Elections.

At the last court hearing in December, the state handed over, again, flash drives containing certified copies of Statements of Polls (SoPs) and Statements of Recount (SoRs), along with video interviews. Several bundles of documents were also submitted.



Some of the people facing trial on March 4 on election fraud charges

It is alleged that the defendants inflated or facilitated the inflation of results for Region Four, the country's largest voting district, to give the APNU+AFC coalition a majority win at the polls when, in fact, the People's Pro-

gressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) had won court. by 15,000 votes.

Those who rejected the results filed several legal challenges which ended up before the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), Guyana's highest appeal

A lengthy recount of the votes eventually declared victory in favour of the PPP/C, and Dr. Irfaan Ali was sworn in as the President of Guyana on August 2, 2020.

Over 4600 jobs restored in sugar industry: Singh

MAKING good on its commitment to restore life to Guyana's sugar industry which was battered by the former APNU+AFC government, the PPP/C administration, since its election to office in 2020, has restored over 4,600 jobs within the industry.

"Since September 2020 we invested in the rehabilitation and modernisation of sugar factories and canefields, and over 4,600 workers were rehired, bringing total employment to over 8,100 employees across the industry," Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh said during his presentation of the milestone 2024 budget to the National Assembly, on Monday. Prior to its election to office, the government promised to revive the sugar industry and re-energise local communities devastated by the unconscionable decision by the APNU+AFC to decommission and close several grinding estates. In 2017, the coalition government had announced the closure of several sugar estates across the country, leaving thousands of persons without jobs or sources of income. The move saw four sugar estates being closed and over 7,000 sugar workers losing their jobs.



of last year.

This year, the industry is projected to accelerate its recovery with strong growth of 66.1 per cent aided by Guy-SuCo's continued focus on mechanisation and conversion efforts, as well as promoting value-added production.

"Looking forward, it is expected that the conversion of lands for mechanised harvesting will continue in 2024, targeting an additional 7,100 hectares.

"Additionally, works will be completed on the Albion and Blairmont Packaging Plants, the installation of a sugar dryer at the Blairmont Estate, and the rehabilitation of heavy- and lightduty revetments across the industry to strengthen the drainage system to allow the timely delivery of harvested canes to the factories. These investments are expected to improve production and productivity," Dr. Singh said. The government has set aside \$6 billion in Budget 2024 for GuySuCo to improve further production and operational efficiency of the sugar industry. "Over 2024 and 2025, the sector is expected to benefit from the conversion of over 5,000 hectares of land for mechanical harvesting and loading. Given these interventions, the sector is expected to produce 100,000 metric tonnes of sugar in 2024," Dr. Singh said.

"In keeping with our manifesto commitments, in just under three years Guyana Finance Minister Dr Ashni Singh

the government reopened the Rose Hall Estate which recommenced operations in September 2023.

"In an effort to further boost the industry through retooling and mechanisation, we achieved the conversion of 2,740 hectares of land for mechanised harvesting at Rose Hall, Albion and Blairmont estates," Dr. Singh said.

He said, in 2023, the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) expanded its storage capacity to 3,500 tonnes at the ISO-certified Blairmont Packaging Plant in anticipation of the commencement of production of new lines of packaged sugar, including sugar sticks, which are slated to target premium markets.

Also, works commenced on the construction of the new Albion Packaging Plant. Further, to support accelerated mechanisation of cultivation and harvesting, \$997 million has been invested in the procurement of equipment which augments the growing share of private sector involvement in this activity.

Owing to critical investments, the sugar industry is estimated to have grown by 28 per cent in 2023. Guy-SuCo produced 60,204 tonnes in 2023, compared with 47,049 tonnes in 2022.

In addition to the reopening of the Rose Hall Estate, this expansion is the result of improved yields and weather conditions, particularly in the first half

Jamaica sees lowest crime level in over 20 years

Jamaica recorded its lowest level of crime in more than 22 years last year, and the island's Prime Minister Andrew Holness has promised harsher punishments for criminals to ensure the trend continues.

In 2023, crime was down by 10.7 percent when compared to 2022, with murders down 7.8 percent; shootings down approximately six percent; and rape, robbery, and break-ins down between 12 and 17 percent.

The prime minister said for 2024, his administration is working on shifting Jamaica's culture of crime and violence to one of peace and proper conflict resolution. Among his top priorities is to have legislation that imposes harsher penalties for crimes committed.

"In 2024, the government will continue to review our legislative framework to ensure that the system of penalties matches the severity and prevalence of the crimes, as well as increase the deterrent effect. No doubt a significant portion of our crime is spontaneous, however by the nature of major crimes there would be some deliberate and premeditated intention for which the criminal mind must consider the consequences of their action beforehand.

"Stronger laws and penalties, coupled with improved policing through intelligence, investigations, and prosecution, will change the risk/reward environment for criminals in Jamaica," stated Holness.

The prime minister also noted that although crime is on a decline, more Jamaicans are becoming exposed to gruesome crimes through social media, which is also another concern of the government.

"Murders are down 7.5 percent ... Serious crimes are the lowest they have been in 22 years. Though our economy is doing well, though we are building the infrastructure, though the statistics show murders are going down, violent and serious crimes are going down, how people feel, what they are being exposed to, what comes across on their social media, it is having an impact on their mental health and well-being, and that is dangerous," he said.

Holness previously hinted at the creation of a separate ministry to treat the "human element" of crime and violence, which involves issues regarding mental health and trauma, parenting, and more.



Jamaica PM Andrew Holness: harsher punishment for criminals

The prime minister said he has received preliminary data from the National Violence Prevention Commission, and the government will soon take steps to implement the necessary interventions.

need this national commission to look at

what assets we have already deployed in treating violence, see where the gaps are, and then the government will have to dedicate a budget and probably create an entire ministry to coordinate all the state and civil activities to treat with this

"The strategic thinking is that we

issue," he said.

15 murders mark start of New Year in T&T

Trinidad and Tobago has witnessed a distressing start to the new year with 15 killed in just the first week.

This grim statistic is more than double the country's murder toll for the corresponding period in 2023.

Reports are that at the same time last year, the murder toll stood at seven.

Reports are that between Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon, six murders occurred within Port of Spain and several other areas in Trinidad.

Amid this unsettling surge in homicides, Po-

Despite the grim statistics, Commissioner Christopher remains resolute in restoring peace and order in the country.

Commissioner Christopher has



also drawn attention to her faith as a source of strength in these trying times, publicly declaring her belief that divine intervention can help stem the tide of violence.

She emphasized the police force's willingness to collaborate with faithbased organizations, underscoring the importance of a united front against the escalating crime wave.



lice Commissioner Earla Christopher has emerged as a voice of authority, expressing confidence in the ability of law enforcement to combat crime.

Earla Christopher



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THURSDAY JANUARY 18 2024

EQUALITY NEWS



After Hollywood, Bollywood fights 'unfair' contracts

Writing is a lonely business, and for many in India's Bollywood, not a profitable one.

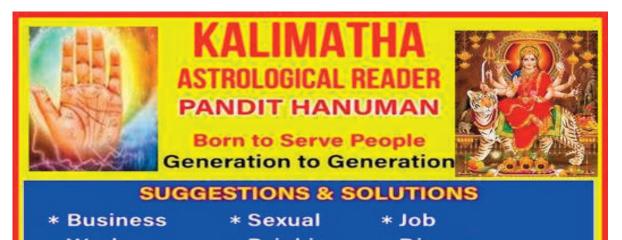
Unless a screenwriter lands a big break - a successful film where they also get credit. But until then, money and opportunity are often in short supply.

A major reason, writers say, is the "harsh contracts" they have to sign, which they allege are designed to protect the interests of the producer.

"Most contracts have arbitrary termination clauses and offer paltry fees, especially to newcomers," says Anjum Rajabali, a senior member of the Screenwriters Association (SWA) - the Indian equivalent of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) - which has more than 55,000 members across the country. "They also don't pay writers for reworking drafts and give producers the right to decide whether a writer should be credited for their work or not," Mr Rajabali says, adding that some contracts even ban writers from approaching the union if there's a dispute with the producer.

The SWA has advocated for members' rights for decades, but recently, it has been exploring more assertive ways to reduce the alleged power imbalance between producers and writers.

In December, it held a meeting to discuss changes writers would like to see in their contracts. More than 100 writers, including some big Bollywood names such as Abbas Tyrewala and Sriram Raghavan, attended.





ARIES (March 21 - April 20): Don't lower your standards to accommodate people who are not capable of doing a task to a high enough level. You may want to help them, you may even feel sorry for them, but if they can't make the grade they will only hold back those who can.

TAURUS (April 21 - May 21): You will either be incredibly brave or incredibly foolish today, and maybe both at the same time. Having said that, life is too short to worry about making the wrong choices, so follow your instincts and accept that you will have to live with the consequences.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21): You may be desperate to get ahead in your career but you must not use underhand methods to do so. The planets indicate if you play by the rules over the next few days you will make significant progress, but don't expect too much of yourself.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23): The answer to a question that has been worrying you for ages will just pop into your head today and most likely you will be amazed by how obvious it is. That's one of your problems Cancer, you tend to overthink things that are really quite simple.

LEO (July 24 - Aug. 23): It is a complete waste of time indulging in regrets and remorse. You don't have the power to go back and change the past but you do have the power to make the future a better place, so stop feeling sorry for yourself and find ways to be happy.

VIRGO (Aug. 24 - Sept. 23): It's okay to have negative feelings about someone but you must not allow those feelings to color how you deal with them. They are who they are for a reason and if you can accept that fact their words and actions won't bother you so much.

LIBRA (Sept. 24 - Oct. 23): Everyone makes mistakes, so try not to get annoyed if a friend or loved one makes a wrong move today, even if it affects you personally. Give them as many opportunities as they need to try again and get it right, which they will do eventually.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22): You may think you have your finger on the pulse and know what is going to happen next but what occurs between now and the Sun's change of signs at the weekend will surprise you. It seems you have overlooked something that makes a world of difference.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 - Dec. 21): Don't be too eager to finish a project in double quick time, because what you do in haste today may have to be done again later on. No matter how much pressure you may be under to get it completed you can and you must do it right.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 - Jan. 20): You can, if you wish, find fault with other people's efforts today but why bother? It is highly unlikely that they will change their ways just because you want them to, so keep some distance between you and maybe do the most important stuff yourself.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 - Feb. 19): Watch what you say and the way in which you say it today. You may be consumed with zeal for your latest project but not everyone shares your passion and some people may even oppose it. Work quietly and, if possible, on your own.

- * Work
- * Money
- * Love
- * Court Case
- * Depression
- * Enemy
- * Drinking
 - * Visa
 - * Jealousy
 - * Children
- * Health
- * Marriage
- * Divorce * Lucky Number
- * Husband-wife



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PISCES (Feb. 20 - Mar. 20): An offer that arrives out of the blue will take you by surprise to such an extent that you may agree to it immediately. That could be a big mistake. If it's a genuine offer then those making it won't mind if you think about it for a bit.

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EQUALITY NEWS THURSDAY JANUARY 18 2024 23 Jamaicans account for 90% of Canadian farmworkers who 'run off'

The Jamaican government is raising concerns about the high number of Jamaican farmworkers who have been absconding or "running off" on the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Programme (SAWP).

Data provided by the ministry has revealed that Jamaican farmworkers accounted for 90.8 percent, or 2,597, of participants in the Canadian SAWP who have run off between 2018 and 2022.

Mexico followed Jamaica with 104 persons while 63 farmworkers who absconded during that period were from Trinidad and Tobago. Eastern Caribbean countries accounted for 66 farmworkers and five were from Barbados.

Annually, approximately 10,000 Jamaicans participate in the employment program that was established 58 years ago.

Minister of Labour and Social Security, Pearnel Charles Jr., says when Jamaicans go abroad and "run off" on these programs, "it closes the door for hundreds."

"One disgruntled employer can be in charge of 800 spaces for Jamaican workers and if a disgruntled employer is facing the consistent challenge of persons coming up and running off... then they would look towards alternatives," he said.

Charles Jr. noted that while the SWAP started with Jamaica and Canada only, it is now a competitive process involving other countries, such as Mexico, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago.

"We want Jamaicans to fill those positions, to have that opportunity. It is our responsibility to make sure that as we recruit, as we guide, we ensure that it resonates that you [the potential workers] are going to impact your cousin, friend, and others to come," the Minister stressed.



Jamaican farm workers in Canada protesting for status

"In my discussions with Canadian officials, if we want this program to continue, we are going to have to collaborate across the aisle and we are going to have to make sure that we are firm in facing the facts. It is my intention that in being transparent it will stimulate us to take the action to recruit in a more deliberate way," he added.

Minister Charles Jr. also informed that most of the complaints received outside of absconding from employers surround newer workers and their attitude and work ethic.

Several employers also spoke to

the situation where workers are manipulating the open work permit system, which triggers an integrity audit by the Canadian authorities, and delays the approval for them to receive foreign workers.

Charles Jr. explained that this also damages their businesses and their reputation, as they are now stigmatized and labeled as "bad employers."

He said his ministry hs committed to partners that they will have a more robust orientation so that the workers know what they are going to confront when going on the SAWP. "That way when you go there you won't have that distance between your expectations and reality, which is the main problem that we have been having. This process is for us to make sure that they understand the reality," Charles Jr. said.

He also stated that the Ministry will be working with stakeholders to create training videos that will assist the persons who are selected to become more sufficiently oriented for the particular job type they are going on in the program.

A&B PM takes legal action against critics

In a decisive move to defend his character, Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Gaston Browne has taken legal action against individuals who have made defamatory allegations against him.

His attorney, Dr. David Dorsett, recently issued a pre-action protocol letter, marking the beginning of a legal battle against those who have tarnished Browne's reputation.

Dr. Dorsett directed the pre-action protocol letter at former United Progressive Party (UPP) St John's Rural North candidate Pearl Quinn-Williams.

This action comes in response to Quinn-Williams displaying a placard at a recent protest that contained multiple allegations against Prime Minister

Browne.

During an appearance on the Antigua and Barbuda Broadcasting Services' Evening Newscast, Dr. Dorsett made it clear that the legal action does not stop with Quinn-Williams.

He announced his intention to send similar letters to St. Mary South Member of Parliament Kelvin "Shugy" Simon and the Antigua Observer.

Dr. Dorsett expressed astonishment at Simon's decision to challenge Browne by reposting an image of the placard on his Facebook page.

Additionally, he raised questions about the Antigua Observer's role in republishing the offensive material in an online edition of the newspaper. As per Dr. Dorsett, the pre-action



Gaston Browne

protocol letters for Kelvin "Shugy" Simon and the Antigua Observer were sent, signaling the start of legal proceedings against these parties.

Prime Minister Browne, during a recent radio program on Pointe FM 99.1, reaffirmed his commitment to vigorously protect his reputation.

He denied all allegations of corruption made against him.

Browne emphasized that he is not interested in engaging in arguments but instead intends to take legal action against those who "cross the line."

He challenges anyone who accuses him of corruption to prove their claims in court.

Holness declares readiness for local gov't elections in Jamaica

Jamaica's Prime Minister Andrew Holness has declared that his party, the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) is ready for the country's next local government elections, which are due next month.

Holness held a meeting with the party's senior officers on Sunday, where he received reports on the party's readiness for an election.

Reports were submitted by Chairman Robert Montague, General Secretary Dr Horace Chang, Deputy Chairman Dr. Aundre Franklyn, Chairman of Area Council One Desmond McKenzie, and Party Treasurer Aubyn Hill.

In a statement, Holness said that based on the reports he received, he was "confident in the prospects of the Jamaica Labour Party for the upcoming elections, as the internal polling numbers showed the Jamaica Labour Party maintaining a strong lead in a majority of parish council seats."

The local Government elections, which are constitutionally due every four years, were last held in November



Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness

2016. They were due to be held in November 2020 but were postponed as the world was still grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic — even though general elections were held in September of that year.

They were postponed again in January 2022 for the same reason — COVID-19. In 2022, for a third time, the local government elections were postponed until no later than February 28, 2024.

Holness also used the meeting to outline some "important perspectives" on issues on the national agenda.

He made it clear that making Portmore a parish was never intended as an election gimmick or a strategy to win Portmore. He noted that the country is evolving economically, culturally, and socially. This evolution requires the government to make strategic changes to enhance the development of areas like Portmore, which requires changes in definition and management to further its development.

Holness said his government would never seek to use the people of Portmore for narrow political objectives.

In the area of roads, Holness noted that roads have become a political flashpoint where some persons feel that in order to get their roads repaired, they must protest.

He advised that roads continue to be a critical priority for the government. Holness revealed that at the next sitting of Parliament, the government would outline a consultative process for communities to contribute to the decisionmaking on which roads should be repaired in their communities but emphasized that priority ought to be given to those roads considered to be pain points in communities.

CARIBBEAN ROUNDUP US pilot faces gun charges in Grenada

The Royal Grenada Police Force (RGPF) has reported that a retired airline pilot from the United States has been arrested and charged for illegal possession of a firearm and ammunition.

Reports are that Richard Cyrus Lockman, a 66year-old citizen of Minnesota, faced charges after a check at Maurice Bishop International Airport led to the discovery of a Smith & Wesson 9mm Pistol and four rounds of ammunition in his luggage.

Following the airport discovery, RGPF officers accompanied Lockman to his yacht at La Phare Bleu, St George.

A thorough search revealed 23 rounds of ammunition and six warheads.

Lockman appeared before the St George's Magistrate's Court on January 15. He pleaded guilty to the charges leveled against him. He was fined EC\$4,000, which was paid. **Uptick in leprosy cases** in St Lucia The Ministry of Health in St. Lucia said there was an uptick in leprosy cases on the island last year, which has led to the formulation of an action plan to eliminate the disease among its population. According to the government of St. Lucia's official Facebook page, the General Health Summary for 2023 published last week by the country's Ministry of Health showed that the country recorded 11 new cases of leprosy which represents a 120% increase from 2020 to 2023.

The ministry did not detail information as it relates to the severity of the disease among those infected.

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by a type of bacteria, Mycobacterium leprae, according to the World Health Organization. The disease predominantly affects the skin and peripheral nerves. Left untreated, the disease may cause progressive and permanent disabilities.

A national action plan has now been drafted to-

nosis, increased in-country testing and more aggressive and consistent treatment," St. Lucia's government said.

Over the weekend, Barbados health officials confirmed one leprosy case on the island.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr. Arthur Phillips, in an update with Barbados Today, informed that the affected individual is currently undergoing treatment, with just a month or two left in their regimen.

Dr. Phillips highlighted that this is an isolated case, and the situation is under control. He assured residents that there is no need to panic.

Health authorities in Barbados have also devised a national plan aimed at eliminating leprosy from the island.

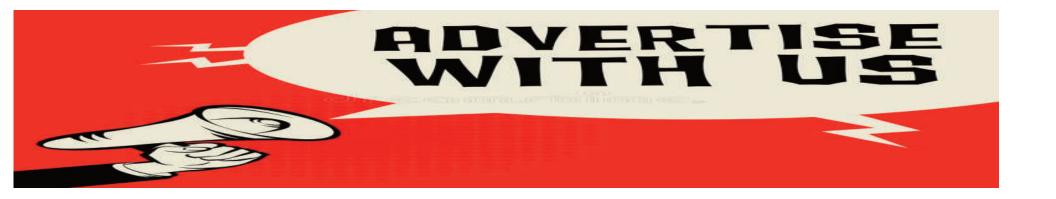
The last time there was a significant uptick in leprosy cases in the Caribbean was in 2021, when Cuba, Guyana, Dominican Republic, and Haiti reported spike in cases.

wards the elimination of leprosy on island.

This includes an educational public health campaign, and intensive contact tracing in the affected communities.

"A national action plan has been drafted for the elimination of Leprosy on island. This includes an educational public health campaign, intensive contact tracing in the affected communities, re-training of health care workers towards early detection and diag-

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Usain Bolt still in limbo one year after fraud cost him his fortune

Jamaican sprinting legend Usain Bolt has marked the one-year milestone since the financial controversy involving investment firm Stocks and Securities Limited (SSL).

EQUALITY NEWS

In a 22-second video shared across his social media platforms on Thursday, the retired world record holder cryptically stated, "One year ago today, but just know still a hold firm."

The reference is believed to tie into the anniversary of the multi-billion-dollar fraud at SSL, where millions reportedly vanished from Bolt's account, prompting a comprehensive fraud investigation.

While Bolt didn't explicitly address the SSL fraud in his social media post, he expressed gratitude to his supporters."Just want to let you know I'm still here, still fighting the fight, holding on, always going to stay strong. You know how the country youths do it," he said.

Acknowledging the backing from his fans, Bolt concluded his message with a peace sign gesture, "To all the people supporting me, continue to support. It's nothing but love, alright."

Notably, Usain Bolt has taken legal action against SSL through his company Welljen Limited, with the case currently residing in the Civil Division of the Supreme Court in downtown Kingston.

Jean-Ann Panton, a former wealth advisor at SSL, is the only person charged so far in connection to the incident, which made headlines on January 12, 2023.

On December 6, 2023, Jean-Ann Panton made her latest court appearance via video link at the Home Circuit Court in downtown Kingston. Coincidentally, that same morning, the Financial Investigations Division (FID) issued a statement revealing that over 200 affected accounts and a staggering US\$30 million were linked to fraudulent activities within SSL clients' funds.

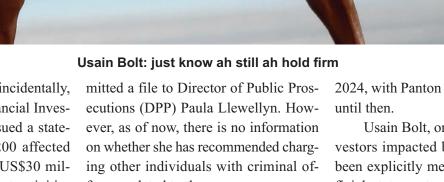
The FID's ongoing probe has unearthed "potential criminal and regulatory breaches" involving both SSL and individuals associated with it, distinct from the existing court case involving Panton. In the same month, the FID subfenses related to the case.

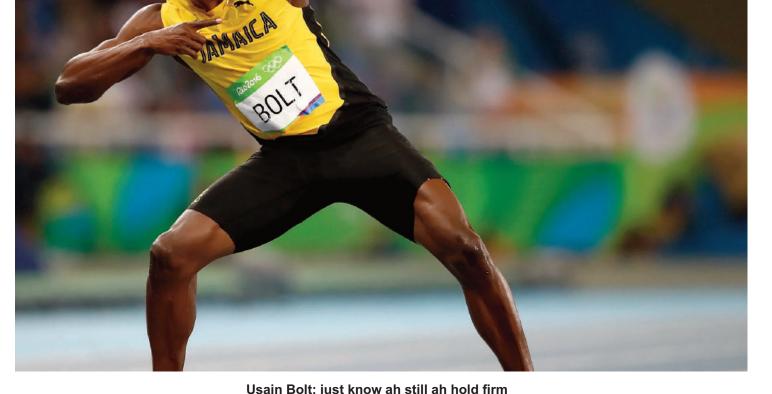
Panton, facing charges for her alleged involvement in the SSL fraud, is accused of multiple violations of the Larceny Act, the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA), the Forgery Act, and the Cyber Crimes Act. A case management hearing is scheduled to continue on May 27, 2024, with Panton remaining in custody

Usain Bolt, one of the over 200 investors impacted by the fraud, has not been explicitly mentioned in the 23 official statements received by the FID from affected individuals and entities. Despite the substantial scale of the alleged fraud and numerous appeals, it remains uncertain whether the retired sprinter is among those who have provided statements to investigators regarding the case.

No new restrictions as Covid escalates in Bahamas

Bahamas' Prime Minister Philip Davis says that there is no need to implement COVID-19 protocols in the country, despite a recent surge in cases since De-







cember 2023.

This decision comes in the face of warnings from health officials regarding the escalating COVID-19 situation.

Prime Minister Davis has announced that while masks are recommended, they will not be made mandatory.

The Ministry of Health in the Bahamas has reported a concerning increase in COVID-19 cases. Over the past six weeks, a total of 36 cases have been documented, with 26 cases occurring in December alone.

Additionally, the country has sadly recorded one COVID-19-related death during this period.

Former Health Minister, Dr. Duane Sands, has voiced his concerns about the government's lack of transparency in addressing the COVID-19 situation.

He believes that the authorities should be more forthcoming with residents about the reality of the pandemic within the country.

Restrictions left Bahamanian beaches empty during Covid, but no new ones are coming

Barbados passport still the most powerful in the Caribbean

For the ninth straight year, Barbados again holds the title of the most powerful passport in the Caribbean region, according to a recent report.

According to the 2024 Henley Passport Index ranking, released by London-based global citizenship and residence advisory firm Henley & Partners, Barbados is number one in the Caribbean and is positioned globally at number 22 with visa-free access to 165 countries.

Rounding out the top 5 most powerful Caribbean passports are The Bahamas, St Kitts and Nevis/St Vincent and the Grenadines (tied at No. 3), Antigua and Barbuda, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Jamaica ranks 10th on the list of most powerful Caribbean passports, after improving its 2023 ranking.

Jamaica comes in at position 60 globally for 2024. Last year, the country was ranked 63rd globally, 65th in 2022, and 68th in 2021.

The Jamaican passport allows visafree access to 90 destinations, including Singapore, Russia, Serbia, Bangladesh,



Indonesia, Philippines, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Kenva, and South Africa.

The most powerful passports in the Caribbean for 2024 are:

1. Barbados, with visa-free access to 165 destinations

2. The Bahamas, with visa-free access to 158 destinations

3. St Kitts and Nevis AND St Vincent and the Grenadines, with visa-free access to 157 destinations

4. Antigua and Barbuda, with visa- to 90 countries

free access to 153 destinations

5. Trinidad and Tobago, with visafree access to 151 destinations

6. Grenada AND St Lucia, with visa-free access to 148 destinations

7. Dominica, with visa-free access to 144 destinations

8. Belize, with visa-free access to 104 countries

9. Guyana, with visa-free access to 91 countries

10. Jamaica, with visa-free access

In a groundbreaking development on the 2024 Henley Passport Index, an unprecedented achievement is witnessed as six countries jointly claim the top spot for visa-free access to a recordbreaking number of destinations. This esteemed ranking relies on exclusive and official data from the International Air Transport Association.

France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, and Singapore have all secured the prestigious position of possessing the most powerful passport globally in 2024. These nations grant their passport holders visa-free access to an impressive 194 destinations.

On the flip side, Afghanistan holds the distinction of having the least powerful passport in the world. Ranked at number 104, it provides visa-free access to a modest 28 destinations.

The Henley Passport Index is the original and most authoritative ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa.

The index includes 199 passports and 227 travel destinations.

Court upholds conviction of former Suriname dictator

Suriname's former President Desi Bouterse, whose conviction for involvement in the killing of 15 individuals more than four decades ago was upheld in December, has been ordered to serve his sentence.

The public prosecutor announced this on Wednesday, marking a pivotal moment in a long-standing legal battle.

Reports are that Bouterse, the former president and army leader, had until Monday to request a pardon, but did not do so.

He is set to appear at a jail in the country alongside four co-defendants on Friday.

A three-judge panel affirmed the convictions of Bouterse and four others in the execution of 15 government critics, which included lawyers, journalists, union leaders, soldiers, and university professors.

This brutal incident occurred in December 1982, and it has remained a contentious issue in Surinamese society.

The legal proceedings resulted in significant penalties for the individuals involved.

in prison, while his co-defendants, Iwan Dijksteel, Benny Brondenstein, and Ernst Gefferie, each received 15-year





Desi Bouterse: ordered to serve 20 years in jail

sentences.

The five convicted individuals were summoned by bailiffs' writ on Wednesday to report to the respective locations where they will be locked up.

Dendoe, Dijksteel, Brondenstein, and Gefferie were ordered to report to the Central Penitentiary Institution in Santo Boma and the Penitentiary Institution Duisburglaan.

Reports are that Bouterse was not at home during the summons, and according to the Public Prosecution Service, his roommate refused to accept the summons on two occasions.

In light of his medical issues and his status as a former president, once

served, Desi Bouterse will be confined to a cell on the grounds of the Military Hospital in Paramaribo. This arrangement highlights the unique circumstances surrounding his incarceration.

Desi Bouterse, now 78 years old, had a long and dominant presence in Surinamese politics, spanning several decades.

His departure from office in 2020 marked the end of an era in the former Dutch colony's political landscape.

Throughout the years, Bouterse maintained that the individuals who were killed had ties to an alleged invasion plot involving the Netherlands and the United States.

EQUALITY NEWS THURSDAY JANUARY 18 2024

T&T suffers five Covid deaths so far in 2024, but 800,000 vaccines dumped

Trinidad and Tobago Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh says vaccine fatigue among the population may be why Government had to dump nearly 800,000 doses of covid19 vaccines in 2023.

Speaking at the launch of the Health Ministry's influenza vaccination drive at the Divali Nagar in Endeavour, Deyalsingh said the last remaining batch of covid vaccines had to be destroyed in September last year as they had expired.

The news came as Deyalsingh also revealed that TT has recorded five covidrelated deaths in the last three weeks, after almost two months of no covid cases or deaths.

Devalsingh revealed two of the covid-related deaths occurred between December 28 and December 31, 2023, while three more people died between January 1 and January 15, 2024.

He described the "wastage" of the vaccines as a global phenomenon.

"People were just not coming forward for covid vaccines. Many people got vaccine fatigue. Many people believed the misinformation and disinformation about covid vaccines, unfortunately.

"They believed all the outright lies about covid vaccine. And that's unfortunate. To have dumped 795,000 doses of vaccines represents a terrible waste.

"And again, this is a global phenomenon where covid19 vaccines are being dumped by the hundreds of millions around the world."

He pointed to news articles which said that almost 500 million covid vaccines, worth an estimated US\$6 billion, were destroyed by Japan, the US and European Union countries combined.

Deyalsingh was unable to provide an estimated cost of TT's expired vaccines, as he said it included multiple batches and brands of vaccines some of which were donated, not bought. He said even if he were able to quantify the figures, he was barred from discussing the cost of the vaccines because of a nondisclosure agreement signed with the manufacturers.



Covid vaccines worth some US\$16 million were dumped in Trinidad

"These vaccines are not manufactured and put on a shelf and you go like a store and pick it off a shelf. You have to commit to a minimum purchase."

Drug manufacturers can produce approximately five million doses of vaccines per week, and Deyalsingh said they were "not going to turn on a factory to make 2,000 vaccines."

He said, "One of the reasons why small countries can't get vaccines now is that the vaccines come in multi-use vials with ten doses per vial.

"Now, if we have such low levels of uptake, if I spent \$10 million to bring in vaccines and then I open one vial to vaccinate one person, what happens to the other nine doses? They are wasted. This is the problem small countries are being faced with."

Devalsingh said government is instead trying to reach out to countries who may have vaccines to donate, but that is also proving difficult.

"Even those countries who have to donate will tell you we will only donate a minimum of 5,000."

He said despite the challenges, the government is trying to acquire more covid vaccines.

experiencing winter.

Adding to the concern is the emergence of the JN1 strain of the virus, which has led to a rise in hospitalisations across the US.

General manager of Primary Care Services at the North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA) Dr Abdul Hamid said the JN1 is not more transmissible than any other previous variant.

"The JN1 is one of the generations of the Omicron strain, from what we know, and it is not any different. There's no difference in transmissibility or infectivity or complications arising from this particular strain as it is so far."

Devalsingh said as of Sunday night, the JN1 strain had not yet been detected in TT.

"That does not mean it's not here. It could be here, it just hasn't been detected," he said.

Devalsing happealed to the elderly population and people vulnerable to the virus to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves.

"These five deaths have been found to be in the typical population, that is, the elderly with comorbidities, hypertension, diabetes and so on. hypertension, obesity or respiratory diseases.

"It has somewhat of a quick onset. You also have very high fevers, muscle aches, body pains, and then your convalescent period is much longer than your common cold.

"Common cold is typically typified by upper respiratory symptoms such as runny nose, sneezing and so on, whereas the influenza virus more commonly has lower respiratory tract infections and so on, including muscle pains, body pains, and it could present with diarrhoea, vomiting, other gastrointestinal symptoms and so on."

The influenza season runs from October 2023-May 2024 and coincides with the flu season in North America.

Devalsingh suggested the increase in travellers to TT during Christmas and Carnival poses an additional risk for the spread of the flu virus, and is urging the population to get the vaccine.

"Whilst one influenza death may not sound like much, it is an absolute tragedy for the family, and we want to avoid that. We want to avoid more families having to see about their loved ones.

Director of Women's Health at the ministry Dr Adesh Sirjusingh urged pregnant women to take the vaccine, as pregnancy is a high-risk factor with the flu virus.He said previous cases of the flu in pregnant women in TT have even resulted in death.

"Some of the complications that we do see in pregnancy would be the flu, (which) can cause stillbirths, pre-term labour, as well as having smaller babies, as well as the maternal complications."

He said the vaccine will also protect the baby, who is susceptible to many illnesses in the first six months of its life.

"For women who accept the vaccine, you create antibodies that will pass across to the placenta and actually go to the unborn baby whilst in utero and give some level of protection for that newborn baby, as well as similarly, once that woman breastfeeds and has been vaccinated, the same process happens. Antibodies go to that baby while breastfeeding."

However, in October 2020, Deyalsingh revealed government allocated US\$9,741,236 for the purchase of 462,000 vaccines through the COVAX facility, meaning each vaccine cost approximately US\$21.08

If this figure is to be used, the dumped vaccines were worth US\$16,758,600 or \$113,690,995.99.

He said sourcing new covid vaccines is also proving difficult as manufacturers are not willing to sell any less than 100,000 doses in a single order. Devalsingh said nine people are hospitalised with covid, including one person in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). He said only the San Fernando General Hospital and the Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility are accepting covid patients.

"In Couva, we have three wardlevel patients. At San Fernando General Hospital, we have four adult ward-level patients, one paediatric ward-level patient, and one ICU patient."

He said the sudden increase in cases is in keeping with what is occurring internationally, as there "seems to be an uptick in covid cases." He said this is even more prevalent in the northern hemisphere, where many countries are "So we want to send out a special appeal to families with elderly with comorbidities to take the usual precautions, mask-wearing, sanitising, distancing."

Devalsingh is also encouraging the public to get vaccinated against the influenza virus so that the flu vaccines do not meet the same fate.

The ministry received 75,000 doses of the (2023/2024) influenza vaccine on October 2, 2023 and has distributed 22,566 doses.

TT has already recorded one death from the flu virus, which Hamid explained is different from the common cold. He said it results in many complications, particularly in pregnant women and people with comorbidities such as ADVERTISING IN EQUALITY NEWS WORKS. CALL NOW FOR RATES 647-216-2359

Da Silva cracks 105, West Indies draw tour match vs Cricket Australia

The West Indies played to a draw against a Cricket Australia XI in their three-day tour match, which concluded at the Karen Rolton Oval in Adelaide on Friday.

Trinidad and Tobago wicketkeeper/batsman Joshua Da Silva highlighted the day as he marked a return to form with a score of 105 after being promoted to open the batting. Middle-order batsman Kavem Hodge fell one run shy of getting a century, as he was dismissed on 99 by left-arm spinner Doug Warren.

Starting the final day with an overnight score of 137 for three and a 214-run lead, the visitors looked comfortable in the first session as the pair of Da Silva and Hodge continued their impressive fourth-wicket partnership.

The pair put on a 163-run stand, with Da Silva getting to his century with a sweet on-drive off Liam Haskett (three for 65). Da Silva added a boundary off the very next ball, but Haskett got his revenge in the same over when Da Silva whipped a ball into the hands of Jack Clayton to leave the Windies on 222 for four.

West Indies went to lunch on 241 for four, but Hodge was unable to become the second centurion on the day as Warren was able to knock him over for the second time in the match as the batsman tried to turn the ball into the leg side.

The Barbados pair of Justin Greaves (41 not out off 72 balls) and Zachary McCaskie (25 not out off 28 balls) then shared in an unbeaten 43-run stand before the Windies declared on 315 for five.

The Aussies had a solid start to the second innings as Tim Ward (39) and Jayden Goodwin (33) put on 76 for the first wicket, before WI off-spinner Kevin Sinclair (three for 38) took three wickets in quick succession. Goodwin, Ward and Teague Wylie (three) were all dismissed by Sinclair as Cricket Australia slipped to 82 for three.

The hosts lost two more wickets as both Greaves and Gudakesh Motie got in on the act with the ball, with the Aussies progressing to 149 for five before the match ended in a draw.

The likes of Da Silva and the uncapped Hodge will hope to carry over their form to the two-match Test series which will start at the Adelaide Oval from January 17. The second Test will be a pink-ball day/night contest at the Gabba in Brisbane.



West Indies batsman Joshua Da Silva

Scores: WI 251 for eight declared (Justin Greaves 65, Kraigg Brathwaite 52, Kavem Hodge 52; Liam Haskett 3-57, Doug Warren 2-47) and 315 for five declared (Joshua Da Silva 105, Kavem Hodge 99, Justin Greaves 41 not out; Liam Haskett 3-65, Liam Scott 1-15) vs CRICKET AUSTRALIA XI 174 (Tim Ward 50, Bradley Hope 24, Jayden Goodwin 18; Kemar Roach 2-23, Shamar Joseph 2-28) and 149 for five (Tim Ward 39, Jayden Goodwin 33, Jack Clayton 32; Kevin Sinclair 3-38, Justin Greaves 1-14).

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29



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African award for Ali

The Africa Prosperity Network (APN), headquartered in Ghana, has announced its decision to honor Guyana's President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, with the prestigious Global Africa Leadership Award later this month.

In a letter dated January 9, APN's Executive Chairman, Gabby Asare Otchere-Darko, emphasized the award's significance, particularly in light of Guyana's remarkable achievement as the world's fastest-growing economy and its commitment to principles of equity and probity.

The grand ceremony is scheduled to take place on January 26, coinciding with the Africa Prosperity Champions Awards and Presidential Gala Dinner, hosted by the President of Ghana in Accra.

This event is part of the Africa Prosperity Dialogues 2024, a platform dedicated to discussions on Africa's prosperity and growth.

In addition to receiving the Global Africa Leadership Award, President Ali has been invited to deliver the keynote address at the Presidential & Business Executives Dialogue, set for Saturday, January 27.

This dialogue will bring together leaders from various regions of the African Union (AU) to explore the



Guyana President Irfaan Ali

crucial topic of adding value to African products in the region and beyond.

President Ali's selection for this prestigious award stems from his transformative leadership since assuming office in 2020.

Notably, his commitment to building a united and inclusive 'One Guyana' in a multiracial society has garnered commendation from APN and its partners.

Furthermore, his adept handling of the recent border tensions between Guyana and neighboring Venezuela played a pivotal role in earning this accolade.

Gabby Asare Otchere-Darko underscored this by stating, "The award is also in recognition of the strong and principled leadership you have shown during this period of heightened territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela over the Essequibo region."

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