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### Work starts on Guyana's first School for the Deaf

AS part of continued efforts to promote inclusive education and the development of all learners, the Minister of Education, Priya Manickchand on Tuesday turned the sod to mark the commencement of construction of the country's first dedicated school for the deaf.

This landmark project, valued at G\$194,472,570 will be executed by Superior Supplies and General Construction and is scheduled to be completed within nine months, the Education Ministry said in a press release.

Located in Cummings Lodge, Greater Georgetown, the state-of-the-art facility will cater to 30 learners who

are deaf, providing a nurturing environment that celebrates and supports persons living with this disability.

The contract for the construction of the building was awarded after it went through the procurement process by way of public tender, the Education Ministry said.

Beyond being a school, the facility will serve as a resource hub for deaf youth, fostering community connections and enabling personal growth.

In brief remarks, Minister Manickchand said: "This school is a testament to our government's dedication to inclusivity and equal opportunities for all learners."

The minister commended the work the Deaf Association of Guyana has been doing over the years, and noted that the government is working towards establishing more inclusive spaces across the country.

### Transformation of communities to continue

PRESIDENT, Dr. Irfaan Ali has pledged to continue making more resources available at the community level, in order to foster further transformation.

The President reaffirmed the government's position during a community engagement with residents of Friendship on the East Bank of Demerara.

The government's aim is to advance growth and development at the community level.

"In this 2025 Budget, you will see a tremendous focus on community investment. We want to build community assets, community wealth," the Head of State said.

The meeting, one of two for Tuesday afternoon, is a part of the Head of State's drive to interact di-

rectly with ordinary Guyanese, on issues and solutions to problems.

At Friendship, he pledged to address issues of drainage, construction of roads and to work with persons to resolve longstanding land issues.

The President also met with residents of Garden of Eden, East Bank of Demerara, and listened to their concerns.

In that community, he said the government would also address issues of deplorable roads, clogged drains, absence of street lights and low water pressure.

Also, a team from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is expected to address land and air pollution and other environmental issues.

In this regard, the President said that the concerns will be addressed in the shortest possible time frame.

He also tasked the Minister of Natural Resources, Vickram Bharrat; the Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water, Susan Rodrigues and the Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister, Kwame McCoy, to work with key agencies and the communities to resolve the issues raised.

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Michael R. of East York was facing such a fate.

**“I stopped golfing. I wasn’t taking walks on the beach with my wife. I was living on gabapentin and antidepressants and everywhere I went, my doctor, the specialists, the pain institute, told me there was no cure. How are you supposed to live your life knowing that everyday brings pain and suffering?”**

Peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves, commonly caused by a lack of blood flow to the hands and feet. This causes nerves to begin to degenerate due to a lack of nutrient flow. Most peripheral neuropathy sufferers experience heightened sensitivity to touch making it almost impossible for those diagnosed to even wear shoes, much less enjoy life.

“It was like walking on sharp river rocks. I barely left my recliner,” shares Michael, whose experience is not uncommon for those diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy.

That is until he found Teresa Lau of TLC Medicine in Riverdale, Toronto. Teresa and her staff have pioneered a cutting edge, medical solution to treat neuropathy, eliminate or greatly reduce its symptoms and give people their lives back. And they’re doing it without the use of prescription medications and invasive surgeries.

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**Three months later Michael is thrilled with his progress, “I can walk barefoot on the beach again!”**

Success stories like Michael’s are not atypical for the staff at TLC Medicine. “We have a 90% success rate at treating neuropathy,” shares Teresa.

The number of treatments needed to allow the nerves to fully recover will vary from person to person and can only be determined after a detailed neurological and vascular evaluation. So long as you have not sustained more than 85% nerve damage TLC Medicine offers hope where there once was none.

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# 500 additional body cameras acquired for Guyana police force

The Ministry of Home Affairs has procured an additional 500 body cameras for members of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) to improve interactions between the police and the public.

The goal of the body cameras is to capture digital audio-video evidence for criminal, civil, and traffic-related court cases.

They will assist in accurately documenting events and interactions, enhancing accuracy in reports and reviewing procedures and interpersonal actions between police officers and the public.

The Minister of Home Affairs, Robeson Benn, said these additional systems will complement the over 200 cameras sourced last year, with additional purchases to be made in the future.

“We had situations where there is a questioning of the interaction between the police and the public and questions of professional behaviour and conduct,” he emphasised during a press conference at the Arthur Ching Conference Centre (ACCC) on Monday.

According to Minister Benn, the introduction of this initiative has helped reduce instances where officers were assaulted or disrupted in the execution of their duties.

“It’s a move towards engaging and recording and making sure that there is sufficient information to determine... which is the best approach to resolving an issue,” he said.

Officers will undergo training to ensure they know how to operate the cameras effectively.

Members of the Customs Anti-Narcotic Unit and the Guyana Prison Service are also being outfitted with similar cameras.

The Commissioner of Police, Clifton Hicken, warned police officers to ensure their body cameras are on when they are engaging with members of the public.

This initiative is aimed at modernising Guyana’s security institution and fostering trust and confidence in the country’s law enforcement agencies.



Minister of Home Affairs Robeson Benn

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## 1.7 million tonnes of bauxite produced in 2024 as industry sees boost

Guyana’s bauxite industry is experiencing a significant resurgence. The 1.7 million tonnes of bauxite that was produced in 2024 represents a 225 per cent increase when compared to 2023.

During a press briefing on Tuesday, the Minister of Natural Resources, Vickram Bharrat, described the level of production as a remarkable turnaround of a sector that he said was in decline.

He noted that a rigorous effort was made to revitalize the industry, which was still reeling from the withdrawal of the Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc (Rusal) when the PPP/C government assumed office in 2020.

“Bauxite has been a success story over the last few years. In 2023, the production of bauxite was at 523,732 tonnes,” the natural resources minister disclosed.

Between 2014 and 2020, the sector experienced a 40 per cent slump in production and half of its workforce were laid-off.

Minister Bharrat said the loss of some 500 jobs hit families and communities hard in Linden, Ituni and Kwakwani in Region Ten.

Today, more than 1,000 Guyanese are employed in the sector.

According to the minister, the hike in production and employment is largely attributed to increased investment by BOSAI Mineral Group, which has committed to expanding its operations in Region Ten.

“That is an increase of about 300 persons in 2024. We will continue to see significant investment by the company,” he noted.

Minister Bharrat noted that the company has invested in barges to transport ore to its transshipment point located a few miles off Guyana’s shore.

This development, he added, enables the shipment of larger quantities of ore from Guyana to its destinations abroad.

The logo for Barbados, featuring the word "BARBADOS" in a bold, blue, serif font. The letter "O" is stylized to incorporate a white silhouette of a sailing ship (a three-masted galleon) on a blue background.

# Guyana condemns Maduro's move to name "Governor of the Guayana Esequiba"

Guyana has condemned the latest actions of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro to assert claims over the Essequibo region.

The country via a statement through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed 'grave concern' regarding recent actions and statements by the Government of Venezuela, which constitutes a clear violation of the Argyle Agreement of December 14, 2023, and the binding Order of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued on December 1, 2023.

The ministry on Wednesday cited the Argyle Agreement, signed in the presence of regional and international interlocutors.

It reminded that this binding agreement unequivocally commits Guyana and Venezuela to refrain from escalating any conflict or disagreement arising from the territorial controversy between the two States.

"This includes refraining from actions that could aggravate tensions or alter the current situation in the disputed territory, pending resolution in accordance with international law," the statement read, adding:

"However, the announcement by President Nicolás Maduro on January 7, 2025, regarding the election of a "Governor of the Guayana Esequiba" by "the people of Guayana Esequiba" constitutes a direct violation of these commitments. This unilateral action disregards the spirit of the Argyle Agreement undermines the agreed framework for dia-



The International Court of Justice in the Hague is still to determine the legitimacy of the Venezuelan claim

logue and peaceful coexistence and significantly escalates tensions between our nations."

The Ministry noted that Venezuela's most recent assertion would be "flagrant violation" of the most fundamental principles of international law, if it forges ahead with its attempt to conduct an election in Guyanese territory involving the participation of Guyanese nationals.

Guyana also pointed out

Venezuela's violation of the international court's December 2023 order, which stated that both States must avoid actions that might aggravate or extend the controversy or make it more difficult to resolve.

"President Maduro's statement, coupled with any actions to integrate the Essequibo region into Venezuela's administrative framework, including by calling for an election "by the people of Guayana

Esequiba" of a governor of "Guayana Esequiba," represents a blatant disregard for this binding Order," the statement read.

Guyana is arguing that such actions not only jeopardize the judicial process but also undermine the authority of the ICJ as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

Guyana, the Ministry noted, also reserves the right to ask the Court for additional provisional measures in the event that Venezuela takes any steps toward conducting its so-called "election"

in Guyanese territory or involving Guyanese nationals.

Further reiterating its commitment Guyana categorically rejects Venezuela's claims to the Essequibo and is urging Venezuela to immediately cease all actions that contravene the Argyle Agreement and the ICJ Order and to recommit to the principles of international law and peaceful dispute resolution to which it agreed at Argyle.


Guyana noted that is prepared to engage in "constructive dialogue" under the agreed frameworks, but the country will not or accept unilateral actions that threaten its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana requests assurances from the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela that it will respect its international obligations and refrain from further actions that undermine the peaceful resolution of this longstanding controversy. In conformity with international law."



Guyana President Irfaan Ali with his Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro during a meeting in 2023 to discuss the border dispute





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## Going Positive

*Editorial from the Guyana Chronicle, January 15 2025*

There are some people in the opposition camp who are so blinded by negativity that they see nothing positive emanating from the policies, programmes and projects executed by the PPP/C administration.

They are so consumed by partisan politics that they find fault in everything the administration does. As the saying goes, those who only look for faults can see nothing else.

Take the recent attempts by the opposition APNU+AFC to convey the impression that funding for the gas-to-shore project by the US Exim Bank was encountering problems, despite assurances by the administration to the contrary.

Now that the loan agreement has been signed, the political opposition has found itself in an awkward position for having attempted to deceive the

Guyanese people.

That propensity by the political opposition to mislead the Guyanese people appeared so ingrained in its psyche that it is well-nigh impossible for them to acknowledge basic truths about our national life. They cannot come to terms with the fact that the PPP/C was democratically elected to office in internationally verified elections.

They continue to cast doubts on the integrity of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and its Chairperson when in fact it was the APNU+AFC that conspired with rogue elements of the GECOM Secretariat to rig the March 2020 General and Regional elections.

Unashamedly, they continue to peddle a false narrative of being cheated out of office despite the fact that the recount exercise, supervised by CARICOM observers and under the watchful eyes of local and international observers determined that the election

results truly reflected the will of the electorate.

Meanwhile, GECOM has begun preparations for yet another General and Regional elections due later this year. Already the familiar chants of GECOM's 'readiness' and 'impartiality' are being heard both from the PNC and the AFC. The opposition parties are already making frivolous demands for a new house-to-house registration and the introduction of biometrics.

As pointed out by PPP General Secretary, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, the PPP is not opposed to biometrics in principle but noted that adequate mechanisms are already in place by GECOM to ensure a free and fair poll.

The concern is that the political opposition with its propensity for mischief could see biometrics as yet another ploy at attempted manipulation of the electoral process. Regarding the sanitization of the Voters List, the introduction of Continuous Registration is

intended to do just that, which, in addition to the statutory Claims and Objections period, are reasonably adequate to ensure a clean and accurate list of electors.

The current attempt by the political opposition to question the competence of GECOM and its Chairperson to conduct free and fair elections is a worrying development. One wonders whether the opposition is already setting the stage to cry foul in anticipation of a crushing electoral defeat at the upcoming polls.

The ruling PPP/C administration, however, remains undaunted by the utterances of the political opposition and is doing everything within its power to ensure that the Guyanese people benefit maximally from the fruits of democracy and that GECOM is provided with the requisite financial and other resources to effectively carry out its mandate of delivering free, fair and credible elections.

## Absence of a fixed date does not stop election preparation

Dear Editor,

PLEASE permit me space in your letter column to given clarity to some misleading matters that were published in the January 8, 2025 edition of the Guyana Times in an article titled, "GECOM awaits official date for E-DAY to formally begin preparations – CEO – as over 2,800 transactions facilitated during current Claims & Objections period."

The article conveys that "formal preparations remain on hold, with the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) awaiting an announcement on a date from President, Dr Irfaan Ali." This is ambiguous in relation to the preparation of a work-plan (not "war plan") delineating the statutory activities and their respective enabling administrative tasks for the conduct of the elec-

tions.

Such a work-plan can be prepared only after the President would have named a date for the conduct of General and Regional Elections this year.

However, the absence of a fixed date for the elections does not prohibit the GECOM Secretariat from embarking on the conduct of non-statutory preparatory activities e.g. developing strategies for procurement, Civic and Voter Education and Logistics, and revision of the manuals in line with the amendments that were made to the Representation of the People Act to be followed by the conduct of training of management staff for the elections.

It follows, therefore, that there is no issue about GECOM being unable to initiate its official preparations for the elections until the President announces

the official date for the hosting of the elections.

I have absolutely no idea what is meant by the commission is yet to "receive the formal mandate to proceed with the necessary groundwork," and I certainly did not provide any such comment to the reporter who spoke with me over the telephone.

The reporter did ask about critical (her word) preparations, such as the in-

roduction of cameras at polling stations and the use of biometrics. I responded by emphasising that (i) the issue of biometrics was currently engaging the attention of the commission, and (ii) discussion on the issue of the introduction of cameras at polling stations had not commenced as yet.

Sincerely,

Vishnu Persaud

Chief Election Officer

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# Sarnia Mayor: Canada-U.S. relationship 'deteriorating' under Trump's tariff threats

The mayor of a Canadian border city says the prime minister and premiers should speak to communities like his about frustration with the United States that is bubbling up over president-elect Donald Trump's proposed tariffs and comments about absorbing Canada.

"[The relationship] is deteriorating and people are saying they're not going to cross the border," said Mike Bradley, the mayor of Sarnia, Ont., which has a border crossing with Port Huron, Mich.

"I'm hearing it on a constant basis: 'We don't want to do that anymore because we're being disrespected.'"

On Tuesday, Trump told a news conference he's looking to use "economic force" to "get rid" of the border between the two countries. His threat to impose 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian goods still looms large — and Ottawa is looking at options to retaliate.

Bradley described Trump's comments as "vexatious drive!" but said the Republican Party's control of the House of Representatives and the Senate gives the president-elect extra sway.

"This time it's different. He is empowered," Bradley said in an interview on Rosemary Barton Live. "He has his followers all in positions of power."

The Sarnia mayor said he expects the tariffs to happen, which he said would affect his community.

According to new data from Statistics Canada, 15.4 per cent of jobs in the Windsor-Sarnia economic region are at risk amid Trump's tariff threats.

"Yes, there will be collateral damage in the United States," Bradley told host Rosemary Barton, but he argued Trump will blame other factors if his proposed tariffs affect Americans.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will meet with provincial and territorial premiers in Ottawa to discuss Canada-U.S. relations.

Bradley said those politicians



The US border between Sarnia, Ontario and Port Huron, Michigan

should be speaking to border community mayors like him who are "on the front line. Talk to us. We understand the complexity of the relationship and know the American and Canadian people have always got along," he said.

"We need to get our game better and we need to stop the partisan politics and focus on what's best for Canadians.... What is happening in Ottawa, for all different reasons, is creating a lot of uncertainty for us trying to strategize how to deal with the Americans."

Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly said Canada has a plan that includes engaging with American officials on their concerns about the Canada-U.S. border and military spending.

"At the same time, we're working on a retaliation plan," Joly said. She declined to provide details but said "everything is on the table."

According to a senior Canadian government source, Canada might place retaliatory tariffs on several goods like American steel products, glassware and Florida orange juice. The source stressed

final decisions have not yet been made.

Joly said Canada has to be "pragmatic" and "ready" because "when [Trump] says something, he usually does it."

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Mike Bradley is the mayor of Sarnia



# Gov't boosts education infrastructure with \$31.5B investment in 4 years

WITH significant focus being placed on improving access to education at all levels across Guyana, Minister of Education Priya Manickchand has said that over \$31.5 billion has been expended on education infrastructure.

The minister outlined this during the presentation of her 2024 annual report on the work of the ministry.

She said that this sum catered for the construction, rehabilitation and extension of schools across Guyana.

"From 2020 to 2024 we've spent \$31,529,228,360 on infrastructure," she said.

On new constructions some \$13 billion was expended, reconstruction \$7 billion, major extensions accounted for \$8 billion and major rehabilitations amounted to \$2 billion.

Giving a regional breakdown of sums spent, the minister noted, "Region One, we've spent \$870 million; in Region Two, \$3.6 billion; in Region Three, \$3.5 billion; in Region Four, \$8.3 billion; in Region Five, \$897 million; in Region Six, \$751 million; in Region Seven, \$2.4 billion; in Region Eight, \$1.8 billion; in Region Nine, \$2.8 billion; in Region 10, \$825 million, and in Georgetown, \$5.3 billion."

While she added that it includes schools at all levels, she noted that specifically for secondary schools, one of the promises of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) government is to deliver universal secondary education, and the government is inching closer to this.

Manickchand indicated that all have seen the major expansions happening in secondary education across the country.

Against this backdrop, she specifically noted that secondary schools were built or are being built in all regions except for Region Five.

Manickchand went on to note that while persons may look at the investment as a purely dollar and cents in-



**37 new secondary schools like this one in Georgetown have been built across Guyana since 2020**

vestment, what is important to her is the offering of seats to children across the country who previously might not have had access to secondary education.

"We are currently building 37 secondary schools across this country," Minister Manickchand said.

This number, she indicated, equates to just around one third of all secondary schools that exist now being done in one term of under the Irfaan Ali led government.

The expansion and addition of new schools, Manickchand said, comes

as the numbers of students continue to increase and also to ensure access to education.

Going back, she gave an example of not having some 3,000 spaces at secondary schools in Georgetown and Region Three, just as the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) results were about to be announced some years ago.

At the present moment, she noted that some students were at primary-tops which she said is not a place the government wants it to be in.

As such, Manickchand affirmed: "We're not people who wring our

hands, we're people who find solutions."

Meanwhile, in addition to secondary schools, the minister indicated that primary schools and nursery schools are being built where they were non-existent.

While according to the United Nations, Guyana has already achieved universal primary education, the government will still ensure they are looking to make sure they either rebuild where necessary or build new primary schools where none existed.



**Brian Tiwarie, OMC, AA - CEO**



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# Jagdeo outlines plans to develop renewable energy and cut emissions

WITH the 2025 election quickly approaching, and the People's Progressive Party (PPP) confident of another win, General Secretary of the PPP, Dr Bharrat Jagdeo, said the administration was taking a diverse approach to develop Guyana's energy sector.

Speaking at a recent press conference, Jagdeo discussed the government's plans for the coming years, stressing the importance of transitioning to cleaner, more sustainable energy sources. As he stated, the government aims to introduce more solar power into the nation's grid.

"We plan to put in at least 100MW of solar power. This is leaving out the small solar panels that are given to each household in the riverine and the hinterland communities, but these would be connected to the grid."

He noted that about 35MW of this solar energy was already being installed in three regions – Regions 6, 2, and 10.

The General Secretary also discussed the ongoing development of the Amaila Falls hydropower project. He assured that although the project is still underway, it will play a larger role in providing energy for the country once completed.

"Now, the Amaila falls project, when we were developing it, it was 165MW. At the beginning, we told [you] that with new technology, and without increasing the size of the reservoir, you can get up to 300MW from the same project. So, it depends on what the final configuration of the project is and its output."

Originally designed for 165MW, the hydropower project could potentially generate up to 300MW, significantly contributing to the renewable energy mix. Jagdeo, who is also the country's Vice President, emphasised that while the gas-to-energy project may not be categorised as renewable, it would still play a critical role in reducing the country's carbon emissions.

"We always will get 300MW coming from the gas-to-energy project. Now, this may not be considered renewable energy, but as you saw, it would reduce the emission profile of the country," Jagdeo stated.

Moreover, he explained that using natural gas, instead of more polluting fuels like bunker C, would lower emissions. "If we burn 100 million or a million barrels less of bunker C, which is much more polluting, a million barrels per year, then we can cut from the same maybe emissions by 50% by generating with gas instead of bunker C."

The General Secretary also discussed the potential for future projects, including the possibility of bringing gas onshore from offshore sites. "We may then go to another 300MW coming from



gas. We may be able in the future to bring gas onshore from the other project that we are hoping to work with Exxon to monetise the gas."

Jagdeo acknowledged the complexity of the energy mix and the variables at play, but assured that the PPP will continue to develop the country's energy sector through a number of projects. While the exact composition of the future energy mix remains under discussion,

Jagdeo reaffirmed the government's commitment to balancing renewable energy sources, cutting emissions,

and ensuring energy security for the country.

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## Guyana to tackle respiratory disease

USING US\$15 million in funding, the Ministry of Health will be rolling out a three-year project in March to help strengthen local surveillance and laboratory systems and to recruit more specialists to combat viral diseases.

This is according to Minister of Health Dr Frank Anthony, who told reporters on Friday that the focus will not be on a single virus but everything that affects the human population.

With regard to the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) which has turned into a global epidemic, the minister told reporters following the handing over of vector-control supplies to the tune of G\$646 million, that no cases have been detected here.

He stated that in the region, the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) has the capability to diagnose



Dr Frank Anthony

and in fact, this is not a new thing, since it has been around for many years and from looking at the profile of the disease, it is not one with a high fatality rate.

"So, it's pathogens. It is not a new disease... let's say it's a cousin of the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). We can manage it quite successfully but we have seen what's happening globally. We made sure we took samples and sent it [sic] for diagnosis, so if people get sick when they come in to our facilities or come for a test, we will obviously be able to take that sample and be able to make the diagnosis, and that is what everybody is doing with infectious diseases," the minister said.

He reported that in Guyana, a lot of work has been done to manage viral diseases. This year, the work will continue, using the money that was disbursed through the Pandemic Fund.



People around the world can now enjoy Guyana's natural beauty via a new streaming channel

## Streaming platform launched to showcase Guyana's top tourist destinations

TOURISTS and adventure seekers can now enjoy the beauty of Guyana from anywhere in the world with Visitapoint.gy. Industry leaders and tourism professionals gathered on Saturday at the WANSat Office for the launch of Visitapoints.gy., a cutting-edge addition to the country's tourism landscape. Visitapoints.gy is an innovative streaming platform developed by Vista Services Inc to showcase Guyana's breathtaking natural eco-destinations.

Orson Ferguson, Managing Director of Vista Services Inc., shared that the platform aims to be the go-to place for tourists to virtually experience some of Guyana's top tourist destinations. With the use of state-of-the-art camera and footage, the platform aims to give potential tourists a pristine view of Guyana from anywhere in the world.

"Visitapoints.gy was created to make it easy for people around the world and at home to get a taste of Guyana's unparalleled natural beauty. Using solar-powered, high-definition cameras and high-efficiency satellite equipment, our platform delivers the highest quality video stream using the smallest possible footprint. This aligns with our LCDS Policy and underscores our commitment to sustainability," Ferguson explained.

He also emphasized that the company is collaborating with the Protected Areas Commission to expand the

platform by including other prominent sites. The collaboration aims to expand the platform to feature additional key locations is critical for showcasing the diverse attractions that Guyana has to offer. By highlighting a broader range of eco-destinations, Visitapoints can appeal to a wider audience of potential visitors, from adventure seekers to cultural enthusiasts.

This expansion supports local tourism by driving interest and traffic to lesser-known areas, creating opportunities for small businesses and community-based initiatives to thrive. Ferguson emphasized that collaboration with local stakeholders is vital for ensuring that these expansions are both culturally authentic and economically impactful.

Ms Dee George, Chair of the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana (THAG), highlighted the platform's potential to transform tourism.

"Visitapoints.gy provides a window into Guyana's stunning landscapes, rich culture and unique experiences. Through authentic storytelling, it connects audiences globally, fostering international tourism while preserving and celebrating our heritage," George said. She also expressed enthusiasm about Vista Services' ongoing innovations, suggesting that more ground-breaking developments are on the horizon.

Andre Jones, CEO of satellite internet provider WANSat emphasised the role that technology can play in advancing other sectors, stating that, "This collaboration demonstrates how local innovation and advanced technology can elevate Guyana's profile. The solar-powered equipment, with its programmable power-saving capabilities, aligns perfectly with our country's vi-

sion for sustainable development. Visitapoints.gy is not just a platform—it's a benchmark for digital media in the region," Jones remarked.

Moving forward, Visitapoints.gy, and similar platforms are poised to redefine how people connect with Guyana, seamlessly blending technology, cultural promotion and sustainability.



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# Health initiatives represent an investment in people, says Minister Anthony

HEALTH Minister Dr. Frank Anthony, along with President Dr. Irfaan Ali and other cabinet ministers, recently highlighted the significant strides being made in Guyana’s healthcare sector.

During an engagement with residents of Strathspey, East Coast Demerara, on Saturday, Dr. Anthony emphasised that the transformation of healthcare in the country is not centralised in major cities but is instead reaching every community. This progress is being driven by substantial investments aimed at improving healthcare infrastructure and services nationwide. The government’s efforts are focused on ensuring that people in all regions benefit from these developments, reflecting a more inclusive approach to healthcare.

Dr Anthony highlighted several key initiatives aimed at expanding healthcare accessibility, aligning with the government’s broader objective. One notable programme he cited was the eye testing and spectacles initiative, launched last year, which targeted both children and the elderly. This programme provided eye screenings, as well as spectacles for those in need.

Dr. Anthony further emphasised that the programme also addressed more serious eye conditions, such as cataracts. A list was created to ensure that individuals requiring cataract surgery would receive the necessary treatment. The initiative also extended to school children, particularly those 18 years and younger, who had eye issues.

The minister shared that the re-



President Ali greets residents of Strathspey, ECD

sponse to the programme was overwhelmingly positive, with more than 100 people taking advantage of the services offered, indicating the community’s strong engagement with these healthcare services.

“When the President spoke about interaction and working with communities, this is how we work with our communities. This is how we find people in our communities that need services.

“Prior to this, a programme like this did not exist, or you would have

had to come to the hospital to be able to get this type of service. Instead, we are bringing this service into your community so that we can make sure that people are strong,” the Health Minister said.

Also, another very important programme that the President started is one that deals with school health, the Health Minister said.

Every single nursery school child is being screened, whether it is for eye, ear or dental issues and also given a

general checkup, Dr Anthony explained.

If any issue is found, Dr Anthony said that these children are brought to the requisite facilities to get aid.

The Health Minister then said: “So it’s not waiting until the complications of these things develop. We’re actively going out, searching for the issues and fixing them.”

Last year, more than 20,000 nursery school children were screened. In addition, screening of primary school children started and more than 17,000 primary school children were screened.

The Health Minister also highlighted the big investment that the government is making in vaccines.

“For older people, of course, we want to make sure that if you got sugar, you got high blood pressure, that we can manage it properly... And, therefore, we can prevent people from getting complicated.”

Aside from those initiatives, the Health Minister turned his attention to the regional hospitals being built. He stated that progress is being seen throughout all communities.

“This is how this PPP/C government has worked. It’s all about investing in people, because we believe that our people are our greatest assets.”

For the East Coast residents, they would not have to travel all the way to the capital city, Georgetown, as there will be a state-of-the-art hospital at Enmore and a maternal and paediatric hospital at Ogle.

The World Guyanese Congress (WGC) is a federally incorporated non-partisan global organisation that represents the interests of citizens of Guyanese heritage around the world. The organisation focuses on the successful development of our communities globally with an emphasis on leadership development and collaborative activities in diaspora communities to strengthen the community worldwide.

The organisation is headquartered in Toronto, Ontario, Canada and led by a Chairman and Executive Committee supported by an Advisory Council and various Committees as well as a Board of Governors that acts as ambassadors for the organisation. It has nine national and regional chapters:

Key priorities of the WGC include:

- Build a globally cohesive community with a focus on youth and women in business and civic leadership worldwide.
- Support social entrepreneurship and civic engagement in communities around the world.
- Engage diaspora communities in the social and economic development of Guyana.

## World Guyanese Congress

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To find out more about World Guyanese Congress and our goals and priorities. Scan the QR code, or visit [www.wgc-org.com](http://www.wgc-org.com)

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# Investments geared towards economic expansion – President Ali

PRESIDENT Dr Irfaan Ali has said that his government’s policies, programmes and investments are all aimed at economic expansion and have further reinvigorated the local private sector, with expansion visible in almost every sector.

The Head of State made these remarks during a live broadcast during which he discussed the investments and jobs created over the past four years.

“Jobs and investment are critical for the expansion of the private sector, for a healthy economy, for a sustainable economy, and it’s a litmus test in relation to government’s policies and programmes and investment,” he said.

He added that these policies and programmes must lead to economic expansion and lead to confidence in the economy.

Examining the impacts of his administration’s policies and programmes from 2020 to 2024, President Ali noted that there are various comparative advantages in the region and his government prides itself in developing strategies that carry very low operational costs among other things.

Against this backdrop, he said that one of the indicators of confidence in the economy and how the private sector perceives the economy, one must look at private sector credit.

Providing figures comparing the previous APNU+AFC tenure in government to the current People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C) term, he noted that under the previous administration, there was very low confidence in the policies of the government.

Pointing to the comparative graph, Dr Ali highlighted that a flat period can



be seen in relation to private sector growth and private sector credit and very flat investment or credit to the private sector.

“The period of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic government, you can see every year continual expansion on private sector, credit, confidence in the economy, confidence to invest and as a result, credit to the private sector increased by more than 60 per cent from June 2020 to June 2024,” he expressed.

This growth, he explained, is more than three times the growth seen during the entire APNU+AFC period.

what occurred during that period was a crowding out of the private sector as the former administration was just borrowing with no plan for improving productivity or increasing opportunities for the private sector.

During this time, he added that domestic credit to the central government increased from \$28 billion in 2014 to some \$148 billion.

He added, “And that is what collapsed our economy in the past; the same philosophy of the APNU+AFC government... borrowing, borrowing, borrowing and not creating wealth. So, the government borrowing during that period in government increased by 428 per cent.”

Credit to the government was some 16 times higher than credit to the private sector and as a result, the private sector was regressing with tens of thousands of persons losing their jobs and further contributing to a loss of productivity and loss of competitiveness.

President Ali further detailed that

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# CARPHA urges Region to enhance surveillance amid rise in respiratory illnesses

THE Trinidad-based Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) urges Caribbean countries to enhance their surveillance amid reports of increased respiratory illnesses, including human metapneumovirus (HMPV).

“The Caribbean Region is currently experiencing peak travel and tourism season, marked by increased air and cruise-ship travel, which is typically associated with a rise in respiratory illnesses among both travellers and local populations. The concurrent occurrence of multiple respiratory outbreaks, as seen in China, poses a risk of straining health systems and response efforts,” CARPHA said.

“Overall cases have slightly increased, though severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) cases remain low. Influenza activity is rising, driven primarily by Influenza A (H1N1), while respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) activity, although elevated, has declined over the past four epidemiological weeks, COVID-19 activity continues at low levels.

CARPHA said it would continue to monitor the evolving epidemiological situation and analyse syndromic



HMPV Outbreak In China is causing widespread concern around the world

data related to fever and respiratory symptoms. It is focused on bolstering national and regional capacity to respond to potential outbreaks and pan-

demics.

It is recommended that Member States strengthen respiratory-disease surveillance systems and public health capacity to promptly detect and respond to suspected cases. This ensures the health system is well-equipped to deal with any possible increase in respiratory illness cases.

It also recommends appropriate non-pharmaceutical measures where there is suspected exposure or risk in keeping with established protocols and enhanced tourism-based surveillance for travellers arriving by air and sea.

“CARPHA recognises that its member countries may have molecular testing capacity for the detection of HMPV included in special viral panels such as the BioFire. For respiratory samples sent to CARPHA, the CARPHA Medical Microbiology Laboratory (CMML) follows its algorithm for respiratory testing.

“As such, samples are first screened for influenza viruses; if negative for COVID-19 and Influenza

and the samples meet the special criteria of patients under five years and over 65 years with special respiratory conditions such as pneumonia, bronchopneumonia, bronchiolitis, etc., same sample will then be tested for non-Influenza viruses, of which HMPV is one of seven.”

In 2024, the CMML did 313 tests for non-influenza viruses, of which 11 were positive for HMPV, the respiratory virus in the family with RSV, which generally causes upper and lower respiratory disease in people of all ages, especially among children under five, older adults and those with weakened immune systems.

Symptoms include cough, fever, nasal congestion and shortness of breath, which may progress to bronchitis or pneumonia, similar to other viruses that cause upper and lower respiratory infections.

The estimated incubation period is three to six days but can extend to 14 days, and the median duration of illness can vary depending on severity but is similar to other viral respiratory infections. (CARICOM)



Hospitals in China are being overwhelmed by a surge in HMPV

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# Former Canadian Envoy joins Canada-Guyana Chamber of Commerce

FORMER Canadian High Commissioner to Guyana, Lilian Chatterjee, has been appointed as the Honorary Canadian Co-Chair of the Canada-Guyana Chamber of Commerce, effective January 1, 2025.

According to a release from the body, Chatterjee has a distinguished career in public service and diplomacy and brings a wealth of experience and regional insights to the chamber. She served as Canada’s High Commissioner to Guyana, Ambassador to Suriname, and Canada’s Ambassador to CARICOM from 2017 to 2020.

Between 2021 and 2024, Chatterjee served as Canada’s High Commissioner to Barbados and six other Caribbean nations, including Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

The release pointed out that Chatterjee’s career began in journalism and expanded into public service, including roles at the House of Commons of Canada and with international NGOs.

In 2003, she joined the Canadian International Development Agency as Director General, later taking on senior executive roles at Global Affairs Canada. She holds an undergraduate degree in Journalism and a Master’s degree in International Affairs.

“We are absolutely thrilled to welcome Ms Chatterjee to the chamber,” said Patricia Bacchus, Chair of the Canada-Guyana Chamber of Commerce.

“Her deep knowledge of Guyana and the Caribbean, coupled with her distinguished career in Canadian public service will be invaluable in helping us advance our mission to promote trade, investment and strengthen the relationships between Canada and Guyana.

“I look forward to promoting bilateral trade and foreign direct investment between Canada and Guyana. We have been collaborating for centuries and have mutually benefited from the contributions of Canadians and Guyanese to both our countries,” Chatterjee said.

The release said Chatterjee’s ap-

pointment reflects the Chamber’s commitment to leveraging exceptional expertise to facilitate meaningful collaboration and growth.

“Her leadership will enhance the Chamber’s ability to connect businesses in the region, create opportunities and further strengthen economic partnerships,” said Winston Kassim, the chamber’s co-chair

The Canada-Guyana Chamber of Commerce is a non-partisan institution dedicated to promoting and facilitating investment and trade between Guyana and Canada, as well as other countries.



Lilian Chatterjee

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“We have been able, through the use of technology, to get real-time information that can help us to more strategically use our police assets,” President, Dr Irfaan Ali said during a recent event.

The data, which was collected over the course of several days, revealed that between seven per cent and 11 per cent of road users are exceeding speed limits during peak hours.

According to President Ali, this data will be instrumental in aligning police presence with actual traffic patterns, improving both efficiency and safety.

He said: “We have the time, the peak time when speeding occurs, so that we can have, as I said, more strategic alignment of our human-resource asset with real data that will help us in security and policing.”

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# Small Business Bureau trained over 10,000 entrepreneurs in 2024

THE Small Business Bureau (SBB), under the Ministry of Tourism, Industry, and Commerce (MTIC), successfully trained approximately 10,893 small businesses in 2024. This marks a significant milestone in the bureau's mission to foster entrepreneurship and strengthen the micro and small-business sectors across Guyana.

From 2020 to 2024, the bureau reported a notable increase in the number of small businesses benefiting from its training programmes. Key areas of training included: Small-Business Management; Financial Management and Record Keeping; Business Proposal Writing; Guyanese Business Toolkit; Marketing Fundamentals; Delivering Quality Service and a Label Designing Workshop.

These programmes were designed to equip entrepreneurs with essential skills to manage, grow, and sustain their businesses, while contributing to the national economy.

Looking ahead, the SBB has called for participants to represent Guyana at AgroFest 2025, scheduled from February 21 to February 23, 2025, in Barbados. The event will provide a platform for small businesses to showcase their products, network with regional counterparts and explore market opportunities.

In a landmark initiative, the bureau introduced its disability loan programme between 2023 and 2024. This



Samm businesses are being encouraged to develop throughout Guyana

programme provided \$13.25 million in funding to support small-business owners living with disabilities. It underscores the bureau's commitment to inclusivity and economic empowerment, ensuring that persons with disabilities can actively contribute to the business landscape.

The Small Business Bureau continues to play a pivotal role in developing Guyana's micro and small-business sectors. Its initiatives focus on cultivat-

ing entrepreneurship, fostering business co-operation and enhancing value chains for greater economic contributions. The bureau's main target groups include: aspiring entrepreneurs seeking to start or expand small businesses; youth and children interested in entrepreneurship and Innovators aiming to develop environmentally sustainable businesses.

The bureau operates under the guidance of the Small Business Coun-

cil, ensuring effective management and oversight of its programmes. Its efforts align with the ministry's vision of integrating micro and small businesses into the mainstream economy.

As Guyana's entrepreneurial landscape continues to evolve, the SBB remains dedicated to equipping businesses with the resources and training needed for success, while promoting inclusivity and innovation.

## Project Her Guyana takes flight on March 29

GREEN State Oil and Gas Services Inc has announced the launch of its flagship initiative, "Project Her Guyana," set to take place on March 29, 2025, at the Pegasus Suites Exhibition Centre in Georgetown.

The one-day workshop will be held under the theme, 'Recognising and Inspiring HER in the Field of Project Management.'



Project Her Guyana, the brain-child of Green State's Managing Director, Eusi Evelyn, is designed to celebrate the contributions of women in project management, while inspiring a new generation of female leaders in the field. Speaking about the initiative, Evelyn stated: "We want to change the landscape and the notion about women when it comes to project management. We intend to change that dynamic and influence the success of women one project at a time."

The workshop will feature knowledge-sharing sessions from seasoned female project-management professionals, both local and international.

Attendees will gain insights into critical topics such as building a career in project management, mastering negotiation skills, and developing impactful leadership qualities.

The event seeks to create a supportive environment for women to: overcome challenges in the project-management industry; celebrate their achievements; connect with like-minded professionals and sharpen their skills to excel in a traditionally male-dominated field.

Participants will also enjoy networking opportunities and gain priority access to discounts on select training programmes offered by Green State Oil

and Gas Services.

Interested participants are encouraged to register early as places are limited. Registration can be completed by contacting Green State on WhatsApp at +592-625-7579 for further details.

Founded in 2018, Green State Oil and Gas Services Inc is dedicated to becoming a leading oil -and-gas service provider in Guyana and the wider Region. The company partners with internationally certified training organisations to offer quality online courses in human resource management, background checks, real estate and construction, training, and capacity building.

Committed to delivering on time and leveraging green technology, Green State focuses on professional development, branding, and empowering individuals to thrive in their respective industries.

Green State expressed its enthusiasm about the initiative, emphasising the importance of equipping women with the tools to lead in project management and dismantling gender biases. The company is eager to welcome women ready to elevate their careers and unlock new opportunities through this empowering event.

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# Almost entire population now has access to potable water: Ali

PRESIDENT, Dr Irfaan Ali said that his government has invested more than \$65 billion to develop the water sector in the country, which has resulted in almost the entire population, over 98 per cent, having access to potable water.

The Guyanese Head of State made the disclosure while delivering remarks at the commissioning ceremony of the new Caledonia water-treatment facility on the East Bank of Demerara on Sunday afternoon.

The President underscored that Guyanese from all walks of life are benefiting from the efforts of GWI. He said that from 2020 to 2024, access to potable water has increased from 46 per cent to 91 per cent in hinterland areas.

Due to this drive, Guyana is expected to fulfil its United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Six commitment before the end of the year, five years ahead of the UN target.

In an effort to expand the reach and quality of water delivered to residents and for commercial use across the country, the President also announced that the Guyana Water Inc., through strategic investments from his government, will become a national water-management entity.

“Water-resource management is not only about treated water and drinking water for the population. It is about ensuring we have availability of water for all of Earth’s existence, whether it’s the trees, the animals, agriculture, and it’s about managing water resources in a way that it can meet the requirements of all that are existing in our ecosystem.”

A vital aspect of this, the President added, will be ensuring that fire hydrants, through the National Hydrants Programme, are critically integrated into the network plan of GWI to improve firefighting response time in communities.

“Important also is sustainability and part of the mandate that the management of GWI would have received was to ensure the greater use of fresh water into the water-management system, and one important project I think would commence shortly, that is the



One of the new water facilities

Hope Canal water- treatment facility.

“We’re hoping to have one in Diamond and then in Region Three, wherever we are dumping fresh water, we are dumping expensive assets and we have to convert that asset into value. So that is what the future would require of us,” he said.

The commissioned facility is the first of seven large treatment plans that are being constructed across the country.

It will serve over 12,000 people with water treated to reduce iron to 0.1 milligrammes per litre, below the World Health Organization’s (WHO) standard.



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The Naga sadhus are revered by many Hindus

## Ash-smeard holy men lead India's bathing spectacle

Ash-smeard naked Hindu holy men charged into India's most sacred river Ganges at dawn on the first most significant bathing day of the Kumbh Mela festival (also known as Mahakumbh) in the northern city of Prayagraj.

The ascetics chanted religious slogans, invoking Hindu gods and goddesses as they plunged into the icy waters.

After coming out of the water, some picked up fistfuls of the silver sand and rubbed it over their bodies.

Many carried swords and tridents and one held aloft a silver staff with a snake head.

Alongside these holy men - known as Naga sadhus - millions of Hindu pilgrims from across the globe are in Prayagraj to take part in a festival that can actually be seen from space and is billed as humanity's biggest gathering.

Tuesday's bathing spectacle comes on the second day of the Kumbh Mela which is held every 12 years. By noon local time (06:30 GMT), about 16 million bathers had taken a dip in the river. Officials said on the first day on Monday, 16.5 million pilgrims had bathed.

More than 20 million people are expected to take part in the rituals today and around 400 million over the course of 45 days, authorities say.

Hindus believe that this ritual will cleanse them of sins, purify their soul and help them attain salvation by liberating them from the cycle of birth and death.

Police struggled to manage the surging crowds at the festival on Tuesday as thousands managed to come into an arena meant for the ascetics.

Mahant Prayag Puri Ji of Juna Akhara on Tuesday accused the administration of laxity in controlling the crowds.

"We were being shoved and pushed when we went for bathing," he told me after his dip. "It was very crowded and people were very indisciplined. I fell down and hurt my foot. I had to run away from there to save my life."

Today, he said, "is the first Shahi snan".

"I hope the administration gets its act together before the next one which will be on 29 January," he added.

Tuesday's bathing rituals, called the Shahi

Snan - or the royal bath - see the ascetics arrive in batches at the Sangam - the confluence of India's most sacred Ganges river with the Yamuna river and the mythical Saraswati - in colourful processions.

Their outing is a major draw for people from across India and around the world who come to seek their blessings.

Their presence also holds a special significance for the great masses who believe that the river waters get imbued with the purity of the saints' thoughts and deeds when they bathe in the river.

There are six auspicious days to bathe this time, decided by astrologers, based on the alignment of specific planets and constellations. They are:

- 13 January: Paush Purnima
- 14 January: Makar Sankranti
- 29 January: Mauni Amavasya
- 3 February: Basant Panchami
- 12 February: Magh Purnima
- 26 February: Maha Shivaratri

Three of these - 14 and 29 January, and 3 February - have been designated as Shahi Snan days when the Naga sadhus will bathe.

The largest gathering is expected on 29 January when 50 to 60 million worshippers are expected to take to the waters.

Authorities have built a sprawling tented city on the river bank spread over 4,000 hectares to accommodate the holy men, pilgrims and tourists visiting the festival.

For the past few days, we have watched groups of saints arriving at the mela grounds in large noisy processions.

One group of ash-smeard holy men, some naked and some dressed in just a loin cloth or marigold garland draped around their necks, marched through the streets, holding tridents, swords and small two-headed drums.

Another group had its leaders on chariots escorted to their campsite in a large procession with music bands, dancers, horses and camels.

The groups - known as akharas - have set up sprawling camps which have been a hive of activity, with tens of thousands of pilgrims visiting to hear religious discourses or attend evening prayers.



**ARIES (March 21 - April 20):** There is a lot of pressure building up in your life at the moment but that's okay because you thrive on being challenged. When the going gets tough Aries is the first sign to get tough in return and today will be no exception.

**TAURUS (April 21 - May 21):** You may be in two minds about what direction you should be taking but what occurs over the next 24 hours will point the way and all you have to do is follow the lead that the universe gives you. Get past your doubts and get moving.

**GEMINI (May 22 - June 21):** If you start something new today it will take up a lot more time and energy than you expected, so think about it carefully and make sure you will be able to commit yourself 100 per cent. Anything less is unlikely to work out well.

**CANCER (June 22 - July 23):** If you know what's good for you then you won't hesitate to do what partners and colleagues expect of you today. Go along with their plans for the time being but leave some wriggle room so you can still change your mind later on.

**LEO (July 24 - Aug. 23):** You have never been the sort to care what other people think about you, so ignore the critics and push ahead with your plans. It may seem as if the whole world is against you but that will change dramatically before the end of the month.

**VIRGO (Aug. 24 - Sept. 23):** Try not to get dragged into a dispute that has nothing to do with you. Even if one side is clearly in the right and the other side is clearly in the wrong there is nothing to be gained, and plenty to be lost, from getting personally involved.

**LIBRA (Sept. 24 - Oct. 23):** You are in one of those moods when you are so determined to succeed that you will allow nothing and no one to stand in your way. There is not the slightest doubt in your mind that you will reach your ultimate goal sooner rather than later.

**SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22):** The truth is so important to you that you will refuse to say anything you know to be false or deceitful, even if it helps out a friend or a loved one. As one of the zodiac's Fixed signs you always put principle above personal feelings.

**SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 - Dec. 21):** What occurs over the next 24 hours may seem strange on a logical level but on this occasion you must listen to what your intuition tells you. Sometimes you have to ignore the facts and act on faith, and this appears to be one of those times.

**CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 - Jan. 20):** You may not care if you are on the winning or losing side of whatever game it is you are currently playing but some people are taking things more seriously and they won't be happy if they think you are not making a serious effort.

**AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 - Feb. 19):** Half-hearted efforts won't get you from where you are now to where you most want to be, so make a solemn promise that you will give everything, physically, mentally and emotionally, over the next few days. It will be a sacrifice worth making.

**PISCES (Feb. 20 - Mar. 20):** You may have doubts about your own abilities but others expect great things of you and if you put on a confident act today you may surprise yourself by how much you accomplish. After that, you will be expected to accomplish even more.

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# Jamaican celebrities lose houses in California wildfires

The catastrophic wildfires ravaging the Greater Los Angeles area have claimed thousands of homes, including those of three-time Jamaican Olympian Dr. Una Morris and Grammy-nominated Jamaican-American singer Masego.

Dr. Morris, 77, who represented Jamaica at the 1964, 1968, and 1972 Olympic Games, lost her Altadena home to the Eaton Fire, which began Tuesday, January 7, and has scorched nearly 14,000 acres. According to Nationwide News, she narrowly escaped the flames, driving through thick smoke as her house was engulfed.

Meanwhile, Masego, the acclaimed musician behind hits like Tadow, shared the aftermath of the Palisades Fire on social media, posting images of his destroyed home and car. "I'm safe and far away from the fires," he assured fans, while expressing deep sorrow for the personal losses caused by the disaster, which has swept through areas including the Hollywood Hills.

Celebrities such as Paris Hilton, actors Bily Crystal, Adam Brody, Jeff Bridges, Mel Gibson, and countless others have also lost their homes.

The fires have devastated Los Angeles County, where more than 10,000 properties have been destroyed, leaving entire neighborhoods flattened. At least 11 people have died according to CNN, with officials warning the death toll may rise as access to some areas remains restricted. Over 100,000 residents are under evacuation orders, and tens of thousands more are on high alert.

Six major fires are active across the region, though progress is being made in containing some:



Jamaican singer Masego among those who lost homes in the California wildfires

**Palisades Fire:** The largest blaze erupted on January 7 in Pacific Palisades, burning more than 21,000 acres. As of Saturday, January 11, it is 8% contained.

**Eaton Fire:** Starting on January 7, this fire has ravaged northern Los Angeles, including Altadena, consuming 14,000 acres. It remains 3% contained.

**Hurst Fire:** Breaking out on the evening of January 7 north of San Fernando, it has burned 771 acres. As of January 10, it is 70% contained.

**Kenneth Fire:** This fire began on January 9 near the Los Angeles-Ventura county border. It has burned 1,000 acres and is 50% contained.

**Lidia Fire:** Igniting on January 8 in Acton, it covered 400 acres and reached 98% containment by January 10.

**Archer Fire:** The most recent fire

started on January 10 in Granada Hills. It spans 19 acres and is not yet contained.

The earlier Sunset, Woodley, and Olivas fires have been contained.

The fires have been fueled by an exceptionally dry period and powerful Santa Ana winds, which create conditions ripe for destruction. With gusts reaching up to 100 mph, flames spread rapidly, turning smoldering embers into raging infernos in minutes.

California's Governor has called for an independent investigation into why some hydrants lost water pressure during critical firefighting efforts. A CNN review cited stretched resources as a major challenge for emergency crews.

President Joe Biden acknowledged the progress made by firefighters but cautioned that winds would continue to

pose a threat until early next week. Investigations into the causes of the fires are ongoing, with Los Angeles District Attorney Nathan Hochman pledging to prosecute any instances of arson.

"These fires are a stark reminder of how fragile life and property can be in the face of natural disasters," Hochman said. "Our immediate focus is on saving lives and homes, but we will hold anyone responsible for starting these fires accountable."

Forbes Magazine reported that the Los Angeles police arrested an unnamed man who was allegedly spotted attempting to light a fire in the city's Woodland Hills area, near the Kenneth fire. However, law enforcement officials have said they cannot confirm a connection between the arson suspect and any of the deadly fires currently burning through California.

## Suriname starts election procedures for May 25 polls

Suriname's Ministry of the Interior Director, Nasier Eskak, has announced that the official election period will begin on Tuesday with the inspection of the electoral roll.

The event will take place at the Congreshal, a convention center built for the 1999 Caribbean Community (Caricom) summit. Eskak also confirmed that the slogan and logo for the upcoming elections, scheduled for May 25, 2025, will be unveiled during the event.

He said in addition to online, eligible voters will be able to check the electoral roll at 344 locations nationwide.

Eskak told reporters that it will start with approximately 100 locations including markets and malls and that the aim is to reach as many voters as possible, so that errors can still be corrected.

The exercise will continue until February 12 with the official indicating that after that, it will no longer be possible to make changes. The electoral roll now contains more than 401,000 voters.

Eskak is calling on all eligible voters to check their personal data so that any errors can be corrected. He said this applies to all citizens who have already reached the voting age of 18 or those who will turn 18 up to the day of the elections. Only an ID card, driver's license or a valid passport is required to consult the electoral roll.

Meanwhile, the ruling Progressive Reform Party (VHP), headed by President Chandrikapersad Santokhi, says it is hoping to win at least 26 of the 51 seats in the National Assembly in order to govern the country for a second term.

In the 2020 general election, the VHP won 20 seats and entered into a coalition with other parties to form the government, thereby defeating the National



Chan Santokhi: President

Democratic Party (NDP) of then president Desi Bouterse, who died according to an autopsy report on either December 23 or 24 last year from complications of liver failure due to severe liver fibrosis caused by chronic alcohol use.

Bouterse, 79, was sentenced in 2023 to 20 years in prison over the killing of opposition members in 1982. He died as a fugitive from justice.

Speaking at a VHP meeting in Nickerie on the north-west coast, executive member, Mahinder Jogi, defended the performance of the coalition government, saying despite a huge debt and an empty state treasury, much has been done for the country.

Various speakers, including Finance and Planning Minister, Stanley Raghoebarsing, said the government has been able to implement a number of projects beneficial to the population across the country.

Jogi reminded supporters that NDP chairwoman, Jennifer Geerlings-Simons, headed the National Assembly for 10 years and could have taken corrective action and prevented the then government from bringing the country to the brink of collapse.

# Escalating danger: Barbados halts plans to send troops to Haiti

The Government of Barbados has announced the suspension of plans to deploy troops to Haiti as part of a multinational mission supporting the Haitian National Police (PNH) under the auspices of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Barbados had initially committed to contributing a contingent from the Barbados Defense Force (BDF) to the United Nations-led effort. However, on Thursday, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kerrie Symmonds revealed that escalating dangers in Haiti have prompted a reassessment of the mission.

“We are mindful of this [increasing danger], and you don’t want to send people in harm’s way [...] and the truth is that, it has to be a properly strategically planned activity. And we cannot safely say right now, that there has been the level of strategic planning at the global level that we would have wanted,” said Symmonds.

He further clarified that Barbados would now limit its involvement to providing technical assistance. “Our troops aren’t going anywhere at this point. We have indicated to everybody that Barbados would want to lend technical assistance wherever possible; and we are not at this point thinking in terms of any boots on the ground in Haiti. When I say technical assistance, there may be people with specialist skills whether medical, training, whatever...”



The first U.N.-backed contingent of foreign police officers in Haiti

Symmonds also pointed to shifting international priorities, particularly from the United States, as a contributing factor to the delay in coordinated action. “[...] we had expected confidently that the Biden White House would continue to be supportive. The election intervened, and America has pretty much stalled; and with that, the rest of the world has gone on pause [on Haiti],” he noted.

He emphasized the urgency of ad-

dress-  
ing the ongoing crisis in Haiti and expressed hope for renewed engagement from the U.S. following its presidential transition.

“Now that the Democrats have lost, they have gone silent and there has been no progress, and we have to see what will happen with the Trump administration [...] if it is that we have to wait until January 20 when a new administration is in place in the United

States, so be it [...] our foreign policy will be the same. We are going to reach out to them, and we are going to ask them to understand that Haiti cannot continue in the way it is going. And that the commitments which the United States had given before should stand, because we are talking about human beings and the welfare of human beings in the Caribbean,” he stated.

## US offering \$25 million for Nicolás Maduro’ arrest

The U.S. State Department has raised the reward for information leading to the arrest or conviction of Nicolás Maduro, the Venezuelan president charged with narco-terrorism, from \$15 million to \$25 million.

The updated offer, announced on January 8, 2025, underscores renewed efforts to bring Nicolás Maduro to justice amid ongoing accusations of corruption and drug trafficking at the highest levels of Venezuela’s government.

Maduro has led Venezuela since 2013, following Hugo Chávez’s death, but his presidency has been fraught with controversy. The United States has not recognized Maduro as Venezuela’s legitimate leader since 2019, citing significant electoral irregularities. Most recently, Maduro claimed victory in the highly contested July 2024 presidential election, which international observers and the U.S. government denounced as fraudulent.

Maduro is accused of managing the Cartel of the Suns, a Venezuelan drug-trafficking network involving high-ranking officials. Federal charges against him, filed in March 2020 in New York, include narco-terrorism, conspiracy to import cocaine, and possession of ma-



Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro

chine guns. Investigators allege Maduro worked with Colombia’s FARC rebel group to facilitate multi-ton cocaine shipments and establish a militia-like force to protect cartel operations.

This announcement comes in the

same week when the U.S. announced an extension of Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelan nationals for 18 months, “based on the severe humanitarian emergency the country continues to face due to political and economic crises under

the inhumane Maduro regime.”

The U.S. Treasury simultaneously announced new sanctions targeting eight high-ranking Venezuelan officials. These include Héctor Andrés Obregón Pérez, president of the state-owned oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA), and Ramón Celestino Velásquez Araguayán, Minister of Transportation and president of the national airline CONVIASA.

Both organizations have been previously sanctioned by the U.S., with allegations of facilitating Maduro’s repressive tactics and undermining democracy.

The sanctions extend to senior military and police officials implicated in human rights abuses and repression. Douglas Rico, director of the Scientific, Penal, and Criminal Investigations Corps (CICPC), and Jhonny Salazar, his deputy, are cited for systematic abuses, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions. Manuel Castillo, a high-ranking military commander, and José Ramón Figuera, overseeing security in Caracas, have also been linked to violent crackdowns on protesters after the contested election.



# New grant announced by Holness to address housing crisis in Jamaica

Prime Minister Andrew Holness has announced plans to launch a new social housing initiative, the Building Grant Programme, to address critical housing needs across Jamaica.

The announcement came during the handover of three new homes under the New Social Housing Programme (NSHP) in St. Mary on January 10.

The Building Grant Programme will focus on providing financial support for essential home improvements, including roofs, windows, and secure rooms. “We aim to ensure that every house has at least one secure room, offering greater resilience to disasters,” Holness explained. He cited the destruction caused by Hurricane Beryl last year as a driving factor for the initiative.

The NSHP has provided over 300 families with new homes since its inception, including the latest beneficiaries in St. Mary.

However, concerns remain about the effectiveness of Jamaica’s broader housing efforts, particularly those under the National Housing Trust (NHT).

Critics highlight that many Jamaicans relying on the NHT must wait decades to secure housing. Additionally, while the NHT offers qualifying single applicants up to \$8.5 million in loans, the funds can only be applied to properties priced at \$12 million or less. The general loan limit for a single applicant is \$7.5 million. This restriction places adequate housing out of reach for many, as a modest two-bedroom home in Kingston’s corporate area typically costs twice that amount.

In a 2024 article in the Jamaica Observer, Member of Parliament for St Ann South Eastern Lisa Hanna criti-



Prime Minister Holness (I) presents a housing grant to a resident

cized the NHT for inefficiency and administrative bloat. Despite collecting \$43.061 billion in income for the financial year ending 2024, the NHT spent \$12.946 billion on operating expenses, averaging \$6 million per unit completion between 2018 and 2022.

Hanna argued that the NHT is straying from its original mission to provide affordable housing, with much of its reported housing “solutions” failing to deliver livable dwellings. She highlighted the organization’s \$21.8 billion surplus for 2023-2024, contrasting this with its average annual completion of fewer than 2,700 units, serving only 0.18 percent of Jamaica’s em-

ployed population.

Hanna also compared the NHT’s performance unfavorably with international examples. Singapore’s housing program has provided homes for over 80 percent of its 5.6 million population, and France recognizes housing as a constitutional right, ensuring affordable rental options for low-income residents.

Hanna has called for systemic reforms to the NHT, including pre-approved standard housing designs to reduce costs and overseas financing for materials to make housing more affordable. She also suggested implementing rental housing solutions tied to income, with priority given to public servants

and export industry workers.

Holness’s new Building Grant Programme could address some of these concerns by targeting immediate housing deficiencies, but critics argue that comprehensive reform of the NHT is necessary for long-term progress. As calls for greater accountability grow, the government faces pressure to not only launch new initiatives but also ensure existing programs fulfill their mandates.

Jamaicans continue to hope for meaningful solutions that will provide more citizens with the security and dignity of homeownership.

## Fire claims lives of 3 young siblings in JA

Jamaica’s Prime Minister Dr. Andrew Holness has expressed profound sadness and outrage following a devastating house fire in Walkerswood, St Ann, early Sunday morning, which claimed the lives of three young siblings.

The victims—seven-year-old Tashawna Mattis, four-year-old Tashawnie Mattis, and two-year-old Tavano Mattis—were trapped inside their home, which was reportedly lit by lamps due to the absence of electricity.

The fire, which broke out at approximately 2:24 a.m., also left the children’s grandmother and another sibling as survivors. The Jamaica Fire Brigade (JFB) confirmed the tragic deaths following cooling operations at the scene.

This marks the second house fire involving children since the beginning of the year, sparking renewed calls for vigilance and enhanced fire safety measures.

Prime Minister Holness described the loss as “absolutely heartbreaking” and called for greater responsibility from parents and guardians. “Every Jamaican child deserves to grow up in a safe environment, and this tragedy highlights the critical gaps in vigilance and responsible parenting we face as a nation,” he said.

While acknowledging the economic pressures on many families, Holness emphasized that leaving children unattended, except in emergencies, is unacceptable. “While we understand the economic demands on

parents, particularly single-parent households, there can be no excuse for leaving children unattended or with little or no supervision,” he stated.

The Prime Minister also reiterated the government’s commitment to addressing energy poverty, noting that initiatives like the Solar Access Programme aim to provide safer and more reliable energy options for vulnerable households.

The Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) and the Ministry of Education and Youth have dispatched first responders to provide immediate assistance to the grieving family. Minister Dana Morris Dixon expressed her sorrow, saying, “The heart-breaking loss of these young lives is deeply distressing and serves as

a painful reminder of the vulnerabilities children face in cases of emergency.”

Morris Dixon added that the CPFSA team would provide grief counseling, identify other children in need of care, and offer immediate support, such as food, clothing, and assistance in replacing essential documents.

The JFB investigation revealed that the home relied on lamps for lighting due to a lack of electricity. Commissioner Stewart Beckford confirmed the fire’s devastating impact, urging families to adopt fire safety measures and avoid leaving children unattended in high-risk situations.

Holness also highlighted the government’s focus on reducing risks associated with open flames.

# SVG presents EC\$1.85 Billion 2025 budget without tax increases

Minister of Finance Camillo Gonsalves has announced that the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines will implement its EC\$1.85 billion budget for 2025 without increasing taxes or fees.

The commitment was made during his budget presentation to Parliament, where he also highlighted the government's achievements in 2024 despite the challenges posed by Hurricane Beryl.

"We are already recovering. We are already rising again, and we are energetically building a stronger, more resilient, more inclusive, more sustainable St. Vincent and the Grenadines," Gonsalves told Parliament on Monday.

The finance minister emphasized that 2024 showcased the government's dedication to addressing urgent needs while pursuing long-term development goals. He highlighted the swift response to Hurricane Beryl, which directly affected 19,000 people, describing the government's actions as both "tireless and compassionate."

While noting the extraordinary efforts required to balance disaster recovery with competing developmental priorities, Gonsalves stated, "This government has worked hard, has worked smart, and has worked well in the people's interests."

The 2025 budget allocates EC\$127 million to disaster recovery and reconstruction, targeting those affected by both Hurricane Beryl and the 2021 eruption of La Soufrière volcano.

Minister Gonsalves detailed several major initiatives included in the budget:

**Salary Increases:** A 2.5% salary hike for civil servants, completing a negotiated 7% increase over three years.

**Infrastructure Development:** Construction of over 70 road stretches



SVG Finance Minister Camillo Gonsalves

(EC\$125 million allocation), completion of the EC\$668 million Kingstown cargo port, and significant advancements on the Arnos Vale Acute Care Hospital.

**Housing and Social Assistance:** Construction of 1,000 homes for those affected by disasters and distribution of EC\$30 million in aid to farmers, fishers, small businesses, and vulnerable citizens.

**Education and Youth Development:** Building new schools, providing 2,600 laptops for students, launching a mathematics support program, and introducing a youth volunteerism initiative (GYVE).

**Sports and Culture:** Starting semi-professional netball and football leagues, supporting Olympic athletes, and launching a national orchestra.

**Tourism Growth:** Beginning construction of the Marriott Resort at Mt.

Wynne and welcoming a record number of visitors.

The budget also emphasizes healthcare improvements, with plans to construct 11 clinics nationwide and introduce free transportation services for people with disabilities.

Gonsalves reflected on the government's 2024 accomplishments, including the addition of over 400 hotel rooms with the opening of Sandals Resort and Holiday Inn Express, expanded international flights, and comprehensive distribution of EC\$27 million in supplies and production support to farmers and fishers.

Despite Hurricane Beryl's impact, the nation recorded its fourth consecutive year of robust economic growth and increased employment.

The 2025 fiscal package represents

a 14.4% increase over the previous year, broken down into recurrent expenditure (EC\$1.15 billion) and capital expenditure (EC\$698.6 million). Current revenue is projected at EC\$907.7 million, reflecting an 11.9% increase over 2024, but leaving a deficit of EC\$5.6 million.

Gonsalves described the budget as a blend of recovery and long-term development, saying, "It prioritizes our disaster response while addressing our visionary investments in major infrastructure projects and innovative social interventions."

The budget was approved after an overnight parliamentary debate, underscoring the government's commitment to delivering both immediate relief and sustained progress for the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

## 34 murders in first 11 days of 2025 in JA

Jamaica has experienced a violent start to 2025, with 34 murders recorded in just 11 days, according to the latest serious crime statistics released by the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) on Sunday.

This marks an increase of eight murders compared to the same period in 2024, when 26 homicides were reported.

Despite a 19% decline in murders in 2024—ending the year with 1,139 homicides—the new year has seen a sharp rise in violence. Between January 1 and 4, five murders were recorded. However, the pace intensified in the first full week of the year, with 29 murders reported from January 5 to 11.

In response to the surge in killings, the JCF has imposed 48-hour curfews in high-risk divisions, including Kingston Western, St. Andrew Central, St. Andrew South, and St. Catherine South. Crime data shows that 14 of the country's 19 police divisions have recorded at least one murder so far in 2025.

St. Catherine South and St. Andrew South lead the list with five murders each, followed by Kingston West and St. Andrew Central with four murders each, and St. Mary with three.

Recent progress on crime overshadowed



Jamaica Commissioner of Police Dr. Kevin Blake

The spike in violence comes just weeks after Police Commissioner Kevin Blake announced significant reductions in major crimes for 2024. Speaking on December 27, Blake highlighted an 18% drop in murders, a 10% reduction in shootings, a 25% decline in rape cases, and a 21% decrease in robberies. He credited these improvements to intelligence-driven policing, increased police visibility, and strategic

operations.

"These outcomes are a direct result of a more focused and visible policing strategy," Blake said. He also noted that the JCF prioritized apprehending suspects without resorting to fatal confrontations, reporting over 400 weapons seized and numerous arrests of high-value targets without loss of life.

# Gary Griffith: Stop linking incoming PM Young to girl on drug charges

Political leader of Trinidad's National Transformation Alliance (NTA) Gary Griffith, a former police commissioner, is urging the public to stop using Stuart Young's "stepdaughter" as ammunition in casting aspersions against him as the upcoming prime minister.

At a media conference at the party's San Fernando West constituency office on Lord Street on January 13, Griffith slammed politicians and members of the public who continue to use Young's former relation to Krystiana Sankar as a way to cast a shadow on his recent selection to become prime minister when Dr Keith Rowley resigns at an unknown date.

"Her face continues to be plastered on the media because of trying to link her with that individual (Young). That is because she was arrested by myself and they continue to demonise that young lady, to refer to her as the stepdaughter of the future prime minister. To try to go out of their way to destroy one man, you're destroying the life of a young girl because she made a mistake."

Sankar was arrested, along with Aruba Eligon, Jervon Cole and Yannis Pebbles Augustine, in a Westmoorings drug raid on December 4, 2018. Police recovered 191.66 kilogrammes (kg) of marijuana and 1.04 kg of cocaine valued at around \$3.8 million.

In driving home his belief that Sankar's actions should not be held against Young, or anyone for that matter, Griffith said he too was related to her.

"That girl is my cousin. So de-



Stuart Young with his stepdaughter, Krystiana Sankar

monise me. I have no qualms to state, yes, that is my family. She's a Daniel, and my mother was a Daniel.

"So what? You are going to con-

tinue to condemn a young lady and criticise and demonise her every single time because of your enjoyment and excitement and hatred for somebody

else?"

Also at the press conference, the NTA presented five of its candidates who will contest the general election due this year.

They are Dr Kevin Sarran for San Fernando West, Nicolene Taylor Chinchamee for Arouca/Lopinot, Gail Castanada for Port of Spain South, former UNC local government election candidate Jarzinho Rigsby for Arima, and former UNC MP Christine Newallo-Hosein for Toco/Sangre Grande.

Commander Norman Dindial will be running for Chaguanas East.

Griffith previously said he would be contesting the St Joseph seat. Savita Pierre will contest Tunapuna.

As he defended Sankar, Griffith also warned his candidates to avoid stooping to that level on the campaign trail. "The hatred and division and bitterness by politicians on all sides have destroyed the country. Our job in the NTA is to unite, to build, to be productive, and I ask all of you candidates, we are not going into this election with this gutter politics."

Despite being selected as Rowley's successor in a close contest after receiving 11 votes to his challenger Penelope Beckles-Robinson's nine during a Cabinet retreat last week, Young received unanimous support from all 21 PNM MPs at the party's monthly general council meeting on January 11.

This means Young would have the majority support in the House of Representatives to become prime minister when Rowley resigns from the post.

## 569 people arrested so far under TT's SoE

T&T's National Security Minister Fitzgerald Hinds has said the state of emergency (SoE) has been successful so far, with over 500 people arrested and a reduction in some serious crimes.

Speaking during debate in the Parliament on whether the SoE should be extended for another three months, he said the police had carried out 688 intelligence-led operations over the last 14 days.

"This has resulted in 569 arrests for drugs, and 13 per cent of the murders last year were as a result of drugs, so they're paying particular attention to that; over gang turf; possession of army-type camouflage – that is what they use in some home invasions to mislead the occupants that it's police and soldiers coming; shooting and robbery; firearms and ammunition; assaulting police officers; gang activities; larceny."

He said there were 137 people in custody, as of the 569 arrests, some would have been charged and released.

"Even though you arrest, you charge, they go about their normal business and you maintain your focus on the gang operators to deal with the gang problem."

Hinds said 3,915 searches had been done, with 32 firearms, 1,030 rounds of assorted ammunition, cocaine and different types of marijuana being seized.

"Kush marijuana, which sells at \$25,000 a kilogramme, and creepy marijuana from Colombia, which sells at \$27,000 a kilogramme and sells at \$250 per gramme on the street. If that gets into the prisons, they sell it by the pinch at \$200, so you can imagine the kind of money that turns over in the prisons?"

He said the traffic police had done 571 traffic operations and detected and

charged people for 1,470 traffic offences, with 621 patrols being done by the highway patrols.

Hinds said there had been 577 murders in 2023 and 624 in 2024.

"In 2023, 261 of those 577 murders, or 45 per cent, were classified by the police as gang-related, and in 2024, 273 of the 624 murders, or 44 per cent, were classified as gang-related. The gangs therefore contribute the largest single variable to the murder figure on an annual basis. This SoE is targeted to deal with that.

"As the Prime Minister said, 93 of the murders last year were double, triple, quadruple and quintuple. What do we do again, do we wait? We've heard of the reprisals, we've done the SoE. Do we wait to get ten at a time?"

Hinds said the 12 murders this year had been classified: five as gang-related, one as domestic, three as robberies gone bad and three unknown.

He said different types of crime require different types of policing.

He said there has been an 83 per cent drop in shootings and woundings, with four for the year to date in 2025 compared to 23 in 2024. He said there has been a 75 per cent drop in robberies, with 17 year-to-date in 2025 compared to 67 in 2024. There has been a 59 per cent drop in larceny of motor vehicles, with 11 year-to-date compared to 27 in 2024.

He said the public seems to be in full support of the SoE, other than the Opposition Leader and her followers.

Hinds called on the population to call the police if they saw someone or something suspicious in their areas.

Opposition MP Dr Roodal Moonilal said the penalties imposed on people under the SoE can already be found under existing laws.

He said the state of emergency was being used for political gain.

# 2025 Caribbean Premier League set for August 14-September 21

The 2025 Republic Bank Caribbean Premier League (CPL) bowls off on August 14 and ends on September 21.

This window has been agreed between CPL and Cricket West Indies (CWI) and once again, there will be no clash with West Indies international matches.

A January 10 CPL statement confirmed the six competing teams for the 2025 season will be defending champions St Lucia Kings, Antigua and Barbuda Falcons, Barbados Royals, Guyana Amazon Warriors, St Kitts and Nevis Patriots and Trinbago Knight Riders.

The teams will compete across 34 matches for the coveted crown.

Pete Russell, CEO of the Republic



CPL COO Pete Russell

Bank CPL, said: “We are pleased to

have once again worked with CWI to

find a window that allows the very best players from across the region to take part in the CPL. The 2024 season was our most successful to date and we are looking forward to building on that success in 2025.”

Lynford Inverary, CWI acting CEO and chief operating officer, said, “We are delighted to confirm the 2025 CPL window. While CWI continues to take a leading role in shaping our overall cricket calendar, the CPL remains a key part of our cricketing ecosystem, playing an important role in the development and promotion of the game throughout the Caribbean. Our collaboration with CPL ensures that the best talent will be on display while avoiding any conflicts with international cricket.”

## WI players urged to make use of practice match

WEST Indies batting coach Jimmy Adams said the three-day practice match leading up to the Test series against Pakistan is integral to the team’s preparation, saying it is not “just a warm-up.”

West Indies are preparing for a two-match Test series against Pakistan, which will be contested at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan, Pakistan starting on January 17.

Prior to the Test series, West Indies will play a three-day match against Pakistan Shaheens from January 10 in Islamabad from 12.30 am, TT time.

Discussing the value of the practice match, Adams told Cricket West Indies media, “I would not say just (a warm up). It is a very important part of the build-up. It will give (us) time against quality opposition and quality time in the middle is what we need going into that first Test match, so hopefully we make use of the team we are playing against and the surface that they have prepared here for us.”



A practice session ahead of West Indies' first Test against Pakistan

Adams is pleased with the venues made available for the West Indies in Pakistan.

“The conditions are really excel-

lent for cricket.

“The weather here is really good, it is not too cold, not too hot. The facilities that they have given us here have

been excellent. The guys have had everything at their disposal – good surfaces, enough practice bowlers - and they have been putting in the time and the intensity has been really good.

“At the end of the day, I think they have gotten exactly what they would have wanted and it is now for us to make use of the three-day practice game going into the first Test match.”

The mindset heading into the series is to not overcomplicate the preparations.

“All the players would be working on individual (skills)...in terms of our team focus it is more just making sure we have the basics covered,” Adams said.

“The plan generally is to ensure that we can do basics for longer than any team we play against and therefore making sure that after a long flight and a couple days of rest that they are ready on getting the basics put to bed and be ready to execute those basics come tomorrow (January 10).”

## Alick Athanaze hits fifty in drawn WI tour match

ISLAMABAD: Alick Athanaze and Tevin Imlach both got useful knocks as the West Indies’ three-day tour match against the Pakistan Shaheens predictably ended in a draw here on Sunday.

Athanaze scored 58, his second half century of the match, and Imlach added 57, as the Windies declared their second innings on 177 for five, an overall lead of 311.

Mohammad Musa Khan was the pick of the Shaheens’ bowlers with 2-5 while Ali Raza took 2-32.

Mohammad Huraria then cracked a run-a-ball 80

and Umar Bin Yousaf chipped in with 25 and the Shaheens ended on 128 for two.

Jomel Warrican grabbed 2-23 for the Windies.

Earlier, the Shaheens declared on their overnight total of 212 for nine to give the visitors a first innings lead of 136.

Scores: WEST INDIES 346-8 dec’d & 177-5 dec’d (Alick Athanaze 58, Tevin Imlach 57; Mohammad Musa Khan 2-5, Ali Raza 2-32) vs PAKISTAN SHAHEENS 212-9 & 128-2 (Mohammad Huraria 80, Umar Bin Yousaf 25; Jomel Warrican 2-23).



West Indies cricketer Alick Athanaze



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