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Mia on track for third term

Barbados prime minister and global climate action champion, Mia Amor Mottley, is on course for a third consecutive term in office, forecasts suggest, as voters headed to the polls on Wednesday (February 11).

Mottley is the country's first female leader since its independence in 1966, and her strong international advocacy for climate action and support for small and vulnerable nations have made her an influential and popular global and regional leader, experts say.

In a recent nationwide poll, nearly 80% of the decided voters interviewed said they would vote for Mottley's ruling Barbados Labour party (BLP).

The survey, commissioned by local outlets the Nation and Starcom, also gauged support for party leaders and found that 61.2% of respondents favoured Mottley, compared with only 18% for the leader of the opposition Democratic Labour party (DLP), Ralph Thorne.

Only about 10% said they would consider voting outside the two main parties.

The poll forecasts a consolidation of support for BLP, which under Mottley's leadership celebrated landslide victories in 2018 and 2022.

But it also shows voter apathy, with nearly half the electorate interviewed saying they were undecided or will not be voting.

A high cost of living and crime were identified as some of the most pressing concerns for voters, with the DLP accusing the government of broken promises, and pledging to prioritise crime reduction, reduce taxes and improve affordability.

The BLP has defended its record, arguing that it has kept its pledges to voters, "despite facing international crises, global uncertainty and volatility" brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, volcanic eruptions and tropical storms.



Ali gets Roraima Award

President Dr. Irfaan Ali was on Monday conferred with the State of Roraima's highest award—the Medalha Forte São Joaquim (The Order of Merit Fort São Joaquim)—in Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima, Brazil.

The Order was presented to the Head of State by Governor Antonio Denarium in recognition of the new economic ties between the two countries. In his acceptance speech, President Ali affirmed that Guyana and the Federative Republic of Brazil will continue to strengthen bilateral relations, particularly through Roraima, which borders Lethem. The President was accompanied by Foreign Secretary Mr. Robert Persaud and several members of the business community.

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Visitor arrivals up 17% in January

THE Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce (MINTIC), has proudly announced that Guyana recorded high visitor arrivals in January 2026, with 34,923 visitors representing a 17.2 per cent increase compared to last year.

According to the ministry, the United States led all source markets with a 38 per cent share, followed by the Caribbean at 29 per cent and Latin America at 13 per cent, while Canada accounted for eight per cent and Europe for six per cent of total arrivals.

"This strong start to the year sets a positive tone for the rest of 2026. Through ongoing public-private collaboration and a focus on expanding and diversifying the country's tourism offerings, Guyana remains well-positioned to sustain visitor growth and strengthen tourism's contribution to national development," the ministry added.

Earlier this year, it was highlighted that Guyana's tourism sector recorded its strongest performance in 2025, closing that year with a total of 453,489 visitor arrivals, which represented a 22 per cent increase over 2024 and the highest annual total in the country's history. At the time, the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) in a press release shared that the results reinforced Guyana's position as one of the fastest-growing tourism destina-

tions in the Caribbean.

The GTA presented an outlook for 2026, where it said that our nation's record-breaking tourism growth in 2025 positions the destination for continued expansion in 2026.

Building on gains in market diversification and connectivity, Guyana is expected to strengthen its global eco-tourism brand further and reinforce its role as a regional benchmark for sustainable tourism growth.

The GTA projects that arrivals should reach 550,000 by the end of 2026.

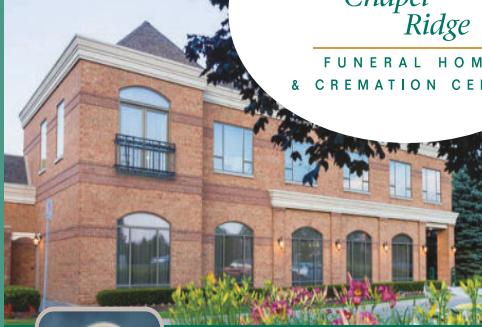
With a trillion-dollar budget presented for 2026, the government has included a number of remarkable measures for this sector. These include the removal of the residency requirements for destination weddings, reducing the cost of vehicle ownership and hinterland transport, and the removal of all import duties and taxes on all-terrain vehicles for all categories.

The goal for this year, along with opening the new Hospitality and Tourism Institute, and hosting of the State of the Industry Conference, is to position Guyana as a preferred destination for conferences, weddings and reunions, especially amongst the diaspora market, and, to continue ongoing discussions with other major carriers to expand airlift capacity in Guyana.

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Minister presents 2026 budgetary allocations for Agriculture

Agriculture Minister, Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P., presented the 2026 budgetary allocations for the Ministry of Agriculture and its agencies during Budget Day 2: Consideration of Estimates of Expenditure in the National Assembly.

As part of the parliamentary budgetary process, \$106.6 billion was approved for the Ministry of Agriculture. The allocation is aimed at advancing key priorities across the sector, including drainage and irrigation, crop and livestock development, fisheries and aquaculture, agricultural research and extension services, agro-processing, and climate-resilient agriculture.

The 2026 budget provision includes significant capital investments to expand agricultural production, strengthen food security, improve farm-to-market access, enhance flood control and irrigation infrastructure, and support innovation and value-added initiatives to improve incomes and livelihoods across rural and farming communities.

During the consideration of estimates, Minister Mustapha underscored that the approved allocation reflects the Government's continued commitment to modernising the agriculture sector while ensuring sustainability, resilience, and inclusive growth.



Minister Mustapha underscored the government's commitment to Agriculture

He noted that the investments form part of the broader "Putting People First" agenda, with agriculture remaining a critical pillar of national development and economic diversification.

Pres Ali reviews Brazil's gas-to-energy success

As Guyana advances the construction of its first Gas-to-energy (GTE) plant in Wales, President Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali recently conducted a site visit of the Jaguaticica II Thermoelectric Power Plant, a 141-megawatt natural gas-powered facility in Boa Vista, Roraima.

The president toured the facility during his visit to the northern Brazilian State, where he was conferred with the highest honour for his role in strengthening economic ties between the two countries.

According to a statement on the president's official social media page, the tour allowed President Ali to examine Brazil's use of natural gas for power generation.

The Brazilian plant has a total installed capacity of 140.8 MW and is designed to meet approximately 70 per cent to 80 per cent of Roraima's total electricity demand.

Meanwhile, Guyana's GTE project is on track for a year-end completion, with funds totalling over \$10 billion approved by the parliamentary Committee of Supply on Monday evening.

When completed, it is expected to reduce electricity costs by 50 per cent for thousands of Guyanese, helping to save at least US\$100 million each year.

Electricity prices will drop from \$0.22 to \$0.11 per kilowatt-hour, halving



President Irfaan Ali, along with the Governor of the Brazilian State of Roraima, Antonio Denarium

the cost as part of the government's efforts to tackle high living expenses.

President Ali met with Antonio Denarium, the Governor of Roraima,

Brazil, to discuss investment opportunities and partnership enhancements.

Humanity in Danger – the world without a nuclear treaty

By Former Guyana President
Donald Ramotar

On Thursday February 5th, 2026, the very last treaty, the new Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) that sought to limit the development and number of nuclear weapons, will expire. This is the first time since the 1960s that the world would be without such a treaty. This will increase the already great dangers that face our world.

The Russia President, Vladimir Putin, had proposed that this treaty be extended for another year while a new treaty is being hammered out, at least between Russia and the United States, if not with all countries in possession of those weapons of mass destruction. So far, the US has not responded.

This is occurring at a time when many conflicts are on going and causing unimaginable sufferings and millions of deaths in the world.

The genocide and ethnic cleansing are continuing in Palestine, in the Gaza, the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. This is despite the cease fire brokered by President Trump of the USA. This, of course, is not surprising since Israel, with the full backing of the United States carries out their horrendous crimes with total impunity. Many experts on genocide have concluded that more than five hundred thousand Palestinians have been killed since October 7th, 2023. This is tragic and one of the most shameful pages in human history. No other people have had to endure what the Palestinians are forced to bear.

In a few days we will be commemorating four years since the proxy war against Russia began. Ukraine has been used by NATO to try to inflict a military and an economic defeat on Russia. Some two million persons, mainly Ukrainians have died in that war. Yet European NATO countries continue to arm Ukraine in what is now obviously a futile attempt to defeat Russia. Since it is Ukrainians that are dying, the European states seem not to give a damn. This is the extent of their concern for Ukrainians.

Tensions are high in the Middle East as the United States continue to threaten Iran with war. It appears that such an attack would not remain local but can easily develop into a regional war and even a wider conflict is possible.

In our own region tensions are growing. The January 3rd kidnapping of the Venezuelan President reminds us that no country is safe from aggression. America has shown once more that it is not a respecter of law, and it is ready to use its enormous power to achieve its ends. It has set itself up as the world's sole super colonial power.

Cuba is being threatened with mil-



Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin

itary intervention. At the moment the economic sanctions imposed by the US is becoming much more severe. The new measure is an oil embargo on the island. This is causing real hardships to the people on that island, all because they dare to pursue an independent path of development. The Cuban example has to be destroyed due to fear that it would become attractive to other nations in the region; therefore the US is making its economy scream.

The United States, by those very oppressive measures is hoping to create dissatisfaction among the masses before they engage the island in a military invasion.

Even though we have seen some disagreements between the United States and the European NATO states many of those countries have adopted very aggressive positions. The US is openly threatening Denmark in its bid to seize Greenland and even Canada has been threatened and had some tariffs placed on it. There are even fears being expressed that the US is encouraging separatist forces in Canada.

France is adopting a very hostile attitude to many of its former colonies in Africa. Burkina Faso has been one of its main targets because it is trying to correct some of the historic wrongs that colonialism had imposed, particularly its efforts to take control of its own natural resources.

Added to this already dangerous situation is the weakening of Interna-

tional Institutions. The UN, the most important body is being undermined and subverted. Resources are being withheld from it to increases its woes.

In the midst of these burning conflicts, this treaty is coming to an end.

It stands to reason that many middle-developed countries are feeling very vulnerable. This was expressed very clearly and eloquently by the Prime Minister of Canada in his Davos speech last month. He even called for closer relations with countries at a similar level of development as Canada, in subsequent speeches.

In light of the ever-increasing insecurity and the growing aggressiveness by the United States in particular, many leaders would be thinking of how to secure their sovereignty.

The flawed thesis that to preserve peace a country should prepare for war could lead many non-nuclear states across the world to try to acquire nuclear weapons. Many Cubans and elements in Venezuela must be feeling

sorry that they do not possess those weapons in view of what happened and the ever-increasing threats

Clearly, we can have a proliferation of countries trying to acquire nuclear weapons. If this happens then the danger of wars could be increased tremendously.

Some time ago the famous scientist, Albert Einstein, noted that "You cannot simultaneously prevent and prepare for war."

Without any agreements, any guard rails to limit and eliminate nuclear weapons we are all in very grave danger. The possibility of such a war will dramatically increase.

Therefore, we must all make our voices heard in demanding first that this new SALT treaty be extended until new agreements are reached to reduce the amount of nuclear weapons in the world and earnest work be done to eliminate them completely.

This would be an important first step towards total disarmament.

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Road To Profitability

Editorial from the Guyana Chronicle, February 11, 2026

FOR too long, Guyana's sugar industry has been caught in political games, economic doubt, and early obituaries.

Agriculture Minister Zulfikar Mustapha's strong defence of the government's five-year plan for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) deserves recognition not just as a political move, but also as a solid plan for an industry that can and must recover.

The facts are clear. Sugar production rose to over 59,000 tonnes in 2025, up from just over 47,100 tonnes the year before, marking an increase of about 25 percent. This shows that production is on the rise, not falling.

Over 41 percent of GuySuCo's cane cultivation is now mechanised,

the highest level in the corporation's history, with 113,000 tonnes of cane harvested by machine. These achievements do not indicate an industry in decline; they show the early benefits of consistent investment.

The five-year plan aims for complete mechanisation of planting and harvesting. It includes buying billet cutters, planters, and more harvesters, as well as converting over 3,000 hectares of land for machine operations in 2026 alone.

Factory upgrades will include new sugar boilers at several estates, new conveyor systems at Albion, and improved dryers at Rose Hall and Uitvlugt.

These improvements will address processing issues that have hurt efficiency for years. Backed by a \$13.4 billion budget, this is a significant in-

vestment that will drive the industry forward.

Critics may highlight the cost. They will remind us that keeping workers at partly operating estates such as Enmore and Skeldon raises production costs. Minister Mustapha has acknowledged this, but correctly views these as temporary expenses, not permanent burdens.

The painful lessons learned between 2016 and 2020 showed what happens with estate closures; thousands of workers lose their jobs, and entire communities suffer. The PPP/C government's choice to reopen estates, keep workers, and prepare them for a mechanised future is an investment in people as much as it is in sugar.

What sets this plan apart from past promises is its clarity. It does not just demand more production. It speci-

fies procurement timelines, land-conversion goals, and a clear profit target by 2030. Involvement from Indian sugar investors and experts adds an international angle that could speed up Skeldon's return to significant output.

Shifting from bulk exports to higher-value products and partnering with the private sector for added-value production gives GuySuCo multiple revenue sources instead of relying on one unstable option.

Guyana's sugar industry has faced cycles of growth and decline for centuries. What it needs now is not more doubt but the patience to allow a well-funded and carefully structured plan to take effect. Minister Mustapha has put the plan on the table. It's time to start the journey.

Long before oil, PPP/C built household wealth

Dear Editor,

LONG before the discovery of oil, successive PPP/C governments had already established a strong record of providing both cash and in-kind transfers to support Guyanese families.

Since 2021, both the number and value of these transfers have increased, reflecting a continuation and expansion of long-standing social policies rather than a new phenomenon driven solely by oil revenues. Guyanese are well familiar with initiatives such as the Because-We-Care-Cash grant; the One Laptop per Family programme; the school-feeding programme and the provision of free textbooks, many of which predate the discovery of oil.

Similarly, the national housing programme, which has transformed the lives of tens of thousands of citizens, began in the 1990s at a time when the country was heavily indebted and emerging from decades of economic and social decay.

Of all these interventions, I be-

lieve the housing programme is among the most effective in preventing intergenerational transmission of poverty. Under this programme, beneficiaries receive multiple layers of support. To begin with, there is a substantial land subsidy: low-income beneficiaries pay only 25 per cent of the market value of house lots, effectively receiving a transfer equivalent to 75 per cent of the land price.

This is complemented by infrastructural subsidies that increase the value of these lots as roads, drains, water, electricity, and other utilities are installed within housing schemes.

Over the years, low-income households have also benefitted from reduced interest rates on low-income mortgages. The savings generated by these interest-rate adjustments, made possible by the government forgoing taxes on income from such loans, amount to a significant share of the interest that would otherwise be due and payable.

The government went further by introducing Mortgage Interest Relief, allowing homeowners to benefit from tax breaks. Over the life of a loan, these savings are equivalent to countless mortgage instalments, further easing the financial burden on working families.

When these transfers are monetised, they amount to millions of dollars received and enjoyed by beneficiaries of government house lots. More importantly, the receipt of a government house lot often leads to ownership of one of the most valuable assets a household can possess, a home.

That home, in turn, is linked to the accumulation of other assets, including household furnishings and vehicles, thereby enhancing overall household wealth and stability. Based on my calculations, the housing programme has been responsible for a significant number of individuals moving from low-income to middle-income households.

All members of these households

benefit from this upward mobility, not only through access to adequate housing, but also through the long-term security the home provides, including the potential to be inherited by future generations.

These transfers, such as free tertiary education, scholarships for post-secondary training, government payments for CXC subjects, and other education-related programmes, deliver benefits that extend far beyond a single year. They provide a lifetime of opportunity, creating households that can stand on their own and thrive without dependence on handouts.

I therefore welcome this budget and look forward to future budgets that will continue to deliver such transformative interventions, further reducing intergenerational poverty and helping to build a more progressive and resilient society well beyond 2030.

Sincerely,
Name Withheld

Union knocks Federal government for eliminating public transit program

By Milan Maharaj

LJI REPORTER

Unifor is criticizing the federal government's decision to eliminate a previously announced dedicated public transit funding program and replace it with a different infrastructure fund, arguing the move could reduce funding certainty for municipal transit systems nationwide.

In a statement released February 10, Unifor said the government has scrapped the planned Canada Public Transit Fund and moved transit infrastructure funding into a new program called the Building Communities Strong Fund. Under the new fund's structure, public transit projects will now compete with other infrastructure priorities for federal funding.

Unifor said the original Canada Public Transit Fund was set to commit \$30 billion total beginning in 2026 to support public transit systems, which they've now cut down to \$25 billion over the same ten year period. Unifor described the previous funding model as a predictable and dedicated stream for municipalities and transit agencies which allowed flow of capital to go towards specific operational needs such as gas and driver pay. The new fund almost exclusively focuses on the capital costs of tasks such as buying buses and building tracks, causing uncertainty amongst transit agencies.

"Public Transit is a public good and there is no better time to invest in both the services and the manufacturing of strong public transit in cities across Canada," Unifor National President Lana Payne stated in the press release.

Unifor says removing a dedicated fund for transit could create uncertainty for cities planning long-term transit upgrades and maintenance. It stated that municipalities may be forced to consider reductions in service, fare increases or municipal tax changes if funding becomes unstable.

The Canada Public Transit Fund was introduced by the federal government in 2024 as part of a prolonged infrastructure strategy. The program was designed to provide stable, multi-year financial funding for public transport systems, including investments in fleet replacement, expansion projects, accessibility improvements, as well as run-



Unifor National President Lana Payne

ning costs to keep systems running operationally.

During the federal government's yearly budget, they stated the fund would deliver an average of \$3 billion per year beginning in the 2026-27 fiscal year. This number totals to \$25 billion over the term of the funding commitment, which is \$5 billion less than the federal government committed to the public transport systems across Canada under Justin Trudeau. The goal stated by the government was to provide predictable baseline support to cities while advancing environmental and economic objectives tied to public transit use, and while it is yet to be delivered for the most part, it is said to create uncertainty with funding amounts, with the federal government stating funding can be found elsewhere.

In March 2025, for example, the government announced a ten year, \$5.29 million annual commitment beginning in 2026 to Fredericton, New Brunswick's transport system through the Canada Public Transport Fund for local transit projects.

Under the newly announced framework, funding previously allocated specifically to public transport is now a part of the Building Communities Strong fund, which is said to be less specific and not geared towards transit alone. The federal government has said that the new program will support a range of infrastructure projects

and priorities, though transit projects will no longer receive funding through a standalone, dedicated stream.

In its statement, Unifor said public transit systems are already facing financial troubles related to maintenance backlogs, operational demands and ridership recovery in the years since the pandemic service disruptions. The union said stable federal investment is necessary to maintain service reliability and workforce stability.

The union also stated that accessible public transportation is essential for workers, students, and lower income residents who rely on transit to get to work and access education and essential services.

Unifor referenced recent labour disputes in British Columbia's Chowichan Valley as examples of pressures that are facing transit systems. The union said funding uncertainty can contribute to larger operational challenges in the future.

The release characterized this change as a part of a wider shift in federal spending priorities. However, a detailed estimate of the financial impact was not provided beyond citing the current \$3 billion annual commitment under the Canada Public Transit Fund as well as the previous \$30 billion commitment over the full term of the funding.

Unifor has called upon federal, provincial and municipal governments to reconsider the removal of the dedicated public transit funding program and to commit to a stable long-term investment that is detailed for and dedicated to public transportation systems across Canada.

The federal government confirmed the \$3 billion annual investment in late 2025, promising permanent funding compared to term deals, however Unifor and municipalities are not satisfied as the funding lacks certain commitment to all operational sides of public transportation systems.

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Health Minister denies US pressure as Cuban medical agreement ends

Health Minister Dr. Frank Anthony has confirmed that Guyana has formally ended its bilateral medical cooperation agreement with Cuba, saying the arrangement is no longer necessary as Cuban doctors are now coming to Guyana independently to seek employment.

The quiet termination of the agreement has sparked speculation that the move was linked to allegations by the United States government regarding the alleged exploitation of Cuban medical workers. The US government had warned Caribbean nations participating in Cuban medical programmes that such arrangements may amount to human trafficking and could result in visa restrictions and possible trade repercussions.

However, Minister Anthony denied that the decision was influenced by U.S. pressure, stating that there was no specific reason for ending the agreement. Instead, he explained that Cuban medical professionals are now entering Guyana on their own and applying for jobs outside of any formal government-to-government programme.

"There is no reason. We have Cuban doctors that are coming to Guyana now they come independently, so we employ them, so there's no need for the agreement," Dr Anthony said. "Right now, what we're doing is that any doctor or nurse from Cuba who want to work in Guyana. Once they have their qualifications



The Medical Cooperation Agreement signed in 2023

and they come here, we're able to employ them, and they have the same terms and conditions like any Guyanese doctor," he added.

The minister added that Guyana is simply complying with its own labour laws, which he said align with international expectations, including those expressed by the United States. "This country has labour laws, and those laws allow people to be employed and receive their salaries. We can't break any rules that we have in our country. So we have been following those rules which are consistent with what the US government has been asking," he said.

The United States has maintained its position on holding officials accountable for facilitating what it describes as forced labour in Cuba's

overseas medical missions. In a statement issued on Friday, the U.S. Embassy to Barbados called on governments and citizens to reject what it termed forced labour, particularly within Cuban medical programmes. "By participating in these programmes, despite known human rights abuses, foreign governments become complicit in the regime's tactics," the statement said.

"There are alternative methods available for Caribbean nations to recruit foreign medical workers and ethically meet the healthcare needs of their people. The United States calls on all governments and peoples to reject forced labour schemes and join us in demanding accountability and respect for human rights," The US embassy to Barbados added.

In 2023, Guyana and Cuba had signed a new Medical Cooperation Agreement at the Ministry of Health, aimed at strengthening bilateral medical collaboration. The agreement was signed by Minister Anthony and Cuba's Ambassador to Guyana, Jorge Francisco Soberón Luis. However, under U.S. President Donald Trump's administration, Cuban medical missions have come under renewed scrutiny. During Trump's first term (2017–2021), visa sanctions were imposed on Cuba's global medical programme, which the U.S. government described as exploitative due to claims that Cuban doctors are underpaid and have limited freedoms.

In 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced further visa restrictions targeting Cuban government officials and others globally deemed "complicit" in Cuba's foreign medical programmes. The restrictions extend to current and former officials, as well as their immediate family members. Rubio called the Cuban medical programme a form of "forced labour" and the government has warned that Caribbean nations participating in these programmes could face visa restrictions as well as potential trade repercussions. The US alleges that Cuba's government exploits its medical professionals by keeping a large portion of their wages and restricting their freedoms.

China eyes deeper energy footprint in Guyana

China's Ambassador to Guyana, Yang Yang, says Chinese companies are ready to play a bigger role in Guyana's development, with energy cooperation emerging as a key pillar of the growing bilateral relationship under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Speaking during a recent interview on the Energy Perspectives Podcast, Ambassador Yang said Chinese enterprises are prepared to contribute expertise that benefits both Guyana and China. "I think Chinese companies are prepared to support China's objectives by contributing technology management expertise and talent. This creates value for businesses while delivering benefits for both countries and our peoples," she noted.

The Ambassador outlined that

Chinese companies operating in Guyana under the BRI are expected to adhere to high standards, respect local laws and customs, and take on social responsibilities.

Ambassador Yang also highlighted the growing importance of energy cooperation within the China-Guyana relationship, pointing to opportunities beyond traditional energy infrastructure, including renewable and green energy development.

"I think it's very important and looking ahead deeper and closer energy cooperation between our two nations can bring even stronger support to Guyana's economic and social transformation, generate more tangible results for two nations and the real benefits for our two peoples," Ambassador Yang noted.

ready to support more green energy projects under the BRI framework helping Guyana advancing its environmentally friendly and sustainable development goals."

The ambassador also outlined that China places strong emphasis on connectivity and capacity building, including through training and scholarship programmes in the energy sector, and expressed confidence that both countries will continue working together to strengthen regulation, supply chains and the overall business environment, lifting China-Guyana energy cooperation to a higher level in the years ahead.

China's BRI, a global infrastructure development strategy is the brainchild of President Xi Jinping. Guyana rejoined in 2018.



Yang Yang

She added, "Beyond traditional energy infrastructure, China can contribute ideas and solutions for green energy development. We are



Brian Tiwarie, OMC, AA - CEO

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Guyana president Says CARICOM differences should not be seen as divisive

Guyana's President, Dr Irfaan Ali, on Monday said that differences of opinion within the 15-member regional integration grouping, Caricom, should not be viewed as "divisive," as he sought to soften the impact of recent tensions within the regional movement.

"While we must strive earnestly for consensus, a plurality of views, and at times divergence in perspectives are essential to the vitality of our deliberations," Ali said while addressing a joint session of the Belize Parliament.

Ali, who is on a three-day state visit to the Caricom country, said that differing positions among member states can strengthen the regional bloc rather than weaken it.

"Such diversity sharpens analysis, strengthens decision-making, and ensures that outcomes are more inclusive and reflective of our lived realities. Respectful disagreements are not a source of fragmentation," he said.

The Guyanese leader noted that Caricom has remained resilient and relevant for more than 50 years, despite a rapidly changing global environment, but acknowledged that reforms are necessary to ensure its continued effectiveness. "It is now incumbent upon us to make the community stronger, more responsive, and better equipped to serve both the collective and national interests of our peoples. This requires renewal, commitment, and a shared sense of purpose," Ali said.

Caricom leaders are scheduled to meet in St Kitts and Nevis from February 24–27. In recent months, however, the integration movement has faced renewed scrutiny, particularly from



Guyana President Dr Irfaan Ali

Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who has been critical of the bloc following her country's support for the United States' war on drugs in the Caribbean.

Last December, Persad-Bissessar said the regional organisation was "not a reliable partner at this time," arguing that every sovereign state must be prepared to accept the consequences of its foreign and domestic policy choices. Her com-

ments came as she defended the United States' announcement of partial entry restrictions on nationals of Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica.

"Caricom cannot continue to operate in this dysfunctional and self-destructive manner," Persad-Bissessar said, citing what she described as poor management, lax accountability, factional divisions, destabilising policies, and inappropriate meddling in domestic pol-

itics by some member states.

She also said that the organisation's support for the then Nicolas Maduro regime in Venezuela — which has been accused of human rights violations and threatening Caricom members — further undermines its credibility. Persad-Bissessar insisted that the Caribbean cannot be described as a zone of peace, pointing to the region's violent and deadly crime levels.

Former Jamaica MP pleads guilty to manslaughter of his wife

Former People's National Party (PNP) Member of Parliament Jolyan Silvera has pleaded guilty to manslaughter in connection with the 2023 shooting death of his wife, Melissa Silvera.

Melissa Silvera, a land developer and mother of four, was found dead in the couple's Stony Hill, St. Andrew home on November 10, 2023. Initially reported to have died in her sleep, a post-mortem later revealed that she had suffered at least three gunshot wounds, prompting authorities to launch a murder investigation. Jolyan Silvera, 52, was arrested on January 18, 2024, and charged with the murder of his wife the following day. He has remained in custody since his arrest.

In addition to the murder charge, authorities also indicted him for using a firearm to commit a felony under the Firearms (Prohibition, Restriction and Regulation) Act.

The Silveras' family tragedy is compounded by the loss of their third

son, Justin, who drowned in the family pool in 2017 at the age of two. The couple also have twins, Adam and Aden, and their youngest son, Axel, born in 2019. Jolyan and Melissa had been married since 2015.

The case, which has attracted significant public attention due to Silvera's political profile, was originally scheduled to begin in court earlier but was postponed for further examination of ballistic evidence. The trial is now set to proceed in the Gun Court. Silvera's legal team includes King's Counsel Peter Champagnie and attorney Patrice Riley, while the Crown is represented by prosecutors Dwayne Green and Latoya Bernard.

A murder charge means the person is accused of intentionally and unlawfully killing someone, usually with premeditation or malice, while manslaughter is when a person causes someone's death without the same intent, either through recklessness, negligence, or in the heat of the moment.



Former PNP MP Jolyan Silvera and his wife Melissa in happier times



The victims in the wharf tragedy

'They left for work and never returned' – Families mourn men killed in wharf tragedy

FAMILIES of men who died following suspected chemical exposure aboard a cargo vessel docked at the Water Street, Georgetown wharf on Wednesday night, are grappling with sudden and devastating loss, remembering their loved ones as humble, hardworking men who went to work as usual and never returned home.

One of the deceased, 33-year-old seaman Dominic Alexis of Lot 1 De Kinderen, West Coast Demerara, was described by his brother as a humble, hardworking man and a devoted father.

"Dominique was a very humble and hardworking man," his brother, Darrel Alexis, said.

Alexis said his brother, a former member of the Guyana Defence Force Coast Guard, exited the service about a year ago and later began working with Pritipaul Singh Jr. at Guyana Port Inc., using his maritime experience to earn a better living.

He recalled that Dominic left home early on Wednesday morning, as he usually did for work, but never returned.

Alexis related that at about 19:30hrs on Wednesday night, he received a phone call from a cousin who said a staff member of Pritipaul Singh

Investments Inc. had reported that Dominic had fallen down and was not breathing properly.

He was told that his brother was taken to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), but when he arrived at about 20:55hrs that same night, Dominic was already dead.

Alexis said police informed the family that the matter is under investigation and that they are awaiting post-mortem results.

Dominic Alexis was married to Jeneva Alexis, a nurse, and was the father of five children, two from his marriage and three from prior relationships.

Meanwhile, two of the other men who died were uncle and nephew, 57-year-old Nerwaine Persaud and 25-year-old Getindra Sanchara, both of Sixth Field, Cummings Lodge, East Coast Demerara.

Nerwaine's daughter, Yeanjeie, said her father, the captain of the vessel, left home about 04:00hrs on Wednesday morning, and was expected to return later that day, but was delayed due to issues with his vehicle.

"Daddy had called to say his car was having problems and so he was not sure if he would come back home

that day. Because I told him I would send someone to look at the vehicle but before we could further enquire if he was coming home, we had no contact with him which was unusual. We knew something was wrong when both me and mom tried calling Getindra too, and they both were not answering our calls," she said.

She described her father as a dedicated, jovial, family-oriented man who started working at sea at the age of 14 and had more than 35 years of marine experience.

"Daddy was a very good person, always putting smiles on our faces, always happy to be home and he showed it by bringing us joy. He even bought water coconuts for mom and had it in the car but he didn't get to give it to her," she said.

Persaud said the family later received a call from a company staff member informing them that something had happened on the vessel and that her father was being taken to the hospital.

She noted that they were initially told he was being taken to Woodlands Hospital, but were later informed that he was instead taken to GPHC.

During a visit to the family's resi-

dence, relatives were gathered under a tent erected outside the home, as the family struggled to cope with the loss of both men. A black flag was nailed to a pole outside the yard.

Nerwaine was the father of three and had 12 grandchildren. He was described as well-known and respected within the marine community.

His nephew, Getindra was unmarried and was said to have been very close to his uncle. He reportedly switched careers from aviation engineering at the Eugene F. Correia International Airport, Ogle, to marine engineering so he could work alongside his uncle.

He was described as a willing and humble individual who enjoyed his work, and often spent one to two weeks at sea with his uncle.

The fourth deceased man was identified by police as 18-year-old Brandon Deonarine, a seaman of Support, East Bank Demerara.

An initial examination of the bodies revealed no visible marks of violence. Samples were taken and submitted to the forensic laboratory for analysis.

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Border Controversy Case: ICJ to hear merits on case come May 4

THE International Court of Justice (ICJ) will, on Monday, May 4, 2026, begin hearings on the merits in the long-running border controversy case between Guyana and Venezuela.

This was disclosed by Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Anil Nandlall, SC, during the final day of the budget debate in the National Assembly.

The Attorney General said that the ICJ notified parties on January 27, 2026.

"I am pleased to inform the House that on the 27th of January, 2026, all the parties in that case were notified by the court that the hearings on the merits of the case will open on Monday, May 4, 2026 and a detailed schedule for the hearings will be communicated shortly," Nandlall said.

Back in August 2025, Venezuela filed its rejoinder in the ongoing case concerning the Arbitral Award of October 3, 1899.

The filing, made on Monday, August 11, 2025, comes within the deadline set by the court's order of June 14, 2024. The rejoinder responds to Guyana's reply, which was submitted in December 2024, and marks the conclusion of the written phase of the proceedings.

These hearings will be followed by the court's deliberations and the delivery of its final judgment. The decision, once issued, will be binding on both Guyana and Venezuela under international law.

The Government of Guyana had welcomed Venezuela's filing, stating that it ensures the court will have "all the factual and legal arguments of both parties" before rendering its judgment.

This, the government noted, will



The International Court has been hearing the border dispute case between Guyana and Venezuela

make the ruling "fully authoritative and incontestable."

Guyana reaffirmed its commitment to resolving the long-standing border controversy peacefully and in accordance with international law.

The ministry emphasised that the matter is now in the hands of "the world's highest and most respected judicial authority."

The case before the ICJ concerns Venezuela's contention that the 1899 Arbitral Award, which established the boundary between the two countries, is null and void. Guyana has maintained that the award is a valid and binding legal instrument that settled the border over a century ago.

In accordance with the Geneva Agreement, Guyana and Venezuela en-

gaged in over two decades of Good Offices efforts on the border controversy under the United Nations' (UN) Secretary-General's auspices, in an attempt to find a peaceful diplomatic resolution.

However, on January 30, 2018, after the process failed to produce meaningful progress, the UN Secretary-General concluded that the Good Offices initiative had run its course.

In accordance with Article IV (2) of the Geneva Agreement, he exercised his authority and selected judicial settlement by the ICJ as the next method of resolution.

Guyana, in accordance with the Secretary-General's decision, filed an application with the ICJ on March 29, 2018, seeking a ruling on the validity of the 1899 Arbitral Award and the bound-

ary it established.

Venezuela, rather than co-operate, challenged the court's jurisdiction, once again arguing that the Geneva Agreement did not allow for judicial proceedings.

After receiving extensive written submissions from both parties and holding oral hearings in June 2020, the court issued its judgment on jurisdiction on December 18, 2020.

The court found that: "Guyana and Venezuela mutually conferred upon the Secretary-General the authority to choose the means of settlement of the controversy, and on 30th January 2018, the Secretary-General exercised this authority by choosing judicial settlement before the Court."

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.

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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

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Guyana's economy on upward trajectory – Minister Indar says

DURING the 2026 budget debate, Minister of Public Utilities and Aviation, Deodat Indar, said Guyana's economy is on a clear upward trajectory, supported by measurable growth across all major sectors, particularly manufacturing, energy, agriculture and aviation.

Indar told the National Assembly that "every metric is on the rise, every sector is rising," pointing to concrete data that demonstrates expanding economic activity nationwide. He criticised the parliamentary opposition for refusing to acknowledge these gains, despite what he described as overwhelming evidence embedded in the national budget.

A major focus of Indar's presentation was the private sector, noting that manufacturers are already benefitting from government policy, citing industry data that shows increases across the sectors.

According to Indar, manufacturing remains central to Guyana's economic stability. He warned that heavy reliance on imports exposes the country to imported inflation, reinforcing the need to build domestic productive capacity.

"If you do not manufacture, you have to import," he said, adding that local production is essential to protect-

ing consumers and sustaining growth.

The Minister outlined several large-scale industrial and energy initiatives aimed at strengthening that capacity. Among them is a proposed gas bottling and logistics facility, for which requests for proposals (RFPs) will be issued this year. The facility is designed to produce more than three million gas cylinders annually, allowing Guyana to manufacture both gas and cylinders locally.

The government is also advancing plans for fertiliser production, another initiative tied to the country's natural gas resources and the Minister explained that between 70% and 90% of natural gas is used globally as feedstock for fertiliser manufacturing. An RFP has already been issued for a fertiliser plant capable of producing 300,000 tonnes per year. The project is intended to lower input costs for farmers and reduce food prices by making agricultural production more affordable.

Renewable energy also featured prominently in the presentation and he confirmed that the Amelia Falls hydropower project, expected to generate 65 megawatts of electricity, is moving forward after years of stagnation by the previous administration. "We will make



Minister of Public Utilities and Aviation, Deodat Indar

it a reality, the project will play a critical role in diversifying Guyana's energy mix and supporting long-term industrial growth.

Turning to employment, Indar dismissed claims that the government has failed to create jobs. He referenced data from the Ministry of Labour indicating that tens of thousands of jobs have been created over the past five years, with additional opportunities emerging this year, particularly in aviation.

He noted that job fairs are now required to meet demand at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, with openings for engineers, electricians, plumbers, cargo agents, ramp attendants, administrative staff, aviation security personnel, customer service workers, and duty-free employees.

Significant investments are also being made to modernise aviation infrastructure and he disclosed that \$800 mil-

lion has been allocated this year to relocate the airport's control tower to accommodate increased aircraft parking, a development he said reflects the rapid expansion of air traffic.

An additional \$100 million has been earmarked for training Guyanese pilots, engineers, and aviation professionals, alongside the establishment of a dedicated aviation training school.

In maritime infrastructure, Indar pointed to an allocation of \$6.3 billion for dredging the Demerara River, a move expected to improve navigation and support increased commercial activity.

The Minister concluded by stressing that these initiatives reflect deliberate long-term planning and investment, arguing that large-scale projects, not short-term thinking, are what will continue to move Guyana's development forward.



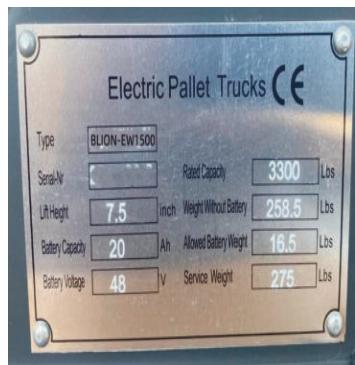
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Digital seafood market to connect local fishers with local, int'l buyers

A DIGITAL seafood market platform is among several key initiatives outlined in the 2026 National Budget to support the continued expansion of Guyana's fisheries and aquaculture industry.

This was last week revealed by Agriculture Minister, Zulfikar Mustapha, during his contribution to this year's Budget Debate.

"The fisheries department, as I said, \$1.5 billion is allocated to this sector. We'll see upgrading of new landing sites. We'll see the construction of a feed mill, we'll now produce our own larvae [and] the shrimp hatchery will come into effect this year," he said.

This year's fiscal package also includes plans to develop aquaculture hubs and expand cage culture in hinterland communities, upgrade marine landing sites, and strengthen management systems for industrial fishing fleets.

"We'll expand the cage culture, and we'll install more vessel-tracking devices, and also we'll launch a digital seafood market platform from the Ministry of Agriculture," Minister Mustapha told the National Assembly on Tuesday last.

The digital platform will connect fisherfolk directly with local and international buyers.

In 2025, the government facilitated the construction of 236 acres of brackish water shrimp pond and installed 37 fish cages and operationalised 14 in Regions Two, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Nine and 10.

The government also installed 100 vessel-monitoring devices, completed the infrastructure for a shrimp hatchery, and advanced the civil works for a feed mill.

President Dr. Irfaan Ali had previously pledged heavy investment in mega-scale farms and artificial intelligence -driven production systems, to transform the country's food production systems leveraging new technologies.

The President had explained then that the integration of digital platforms is expected to become a central tool for farmers, providing round-the-clock access to expert guidance, real-time data, and on-demand support.

The ultimate aim is to modernise traditional agricultural practices, and enable farmers to adopt more precise, efficient, and climate-resilient methods.

President Ali reiterated that the initiative forms part of a broader commit-

ment to modernise agriculture, increase competitiveness, and position the country as a regional leader in food production.

The government has already mapped out plans for a smart surveillance system which supports predictive analytics and early-warning mechanisms, enabling a more proactive approach to farming.

This digital transformation of Guyana's agriculture sector aligns with broader national goals of food security, climate resilience, and economic diversification.



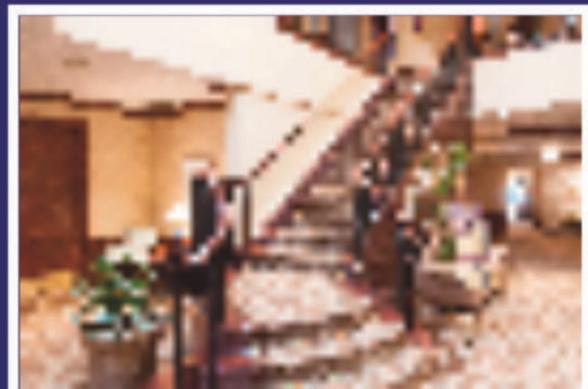
Agriculture Minister, Zulfikar Mustapha

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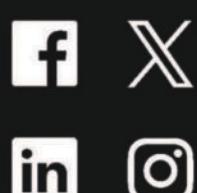
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New lands to be available soon for residential, agricultural purposes

FUNDING earmarked in Budget 2026 for the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GL&CS) will be channelled toward surveying thousands of acres of new lands to support the Central Housing and Planning Authority's (CH&PA) expanding housing drive as well as open new lands for agriculture.

During the consideration of the budget estimates in the Committee of Supply on Monday, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Gail Teixeira, said the commission has an extensive programme of cadastral and occupational surveys aimed at opening up thousands of acres of land for agricultural and residential use.

The 2026 allocation includes over \$200 million to allow precise levelling and a series of cadastral surveys. The work will establish national vertical controls and regularise land parcels across multiple regions.

The programme targets roughly 4,000 acres for subdivision into a mix of five-acre, 2.5-acre, 10-acre and smaller plots. Notable sites named in the plan include Wauna and Sugar Hill in Region One; Golden Fleece in Region Two; Loo Creek Region Four; and several inland areas earmarked for small-scale agriculture and homesteads.

Some projects will create large tracts for agricultural development for example, a terrestrial survey of 1,075 acres intended to yield a combination of 12-acre and 2.5-acre plots while others focus on resolving discrepancies between plan records and on-the-ground boundaries in established settlements.

Minister Teixeira emphasised that the surveys are intended to formalise



land tenure, and support both farming expansion and residential needs. Questions were raised during the session about whether any of the newly surveyed land has already been leased to which Teixeira replied that the surveys are preparatory steps prior to allocation.

For 2026 alone, the government has allocated \$159.1 billion for housing development. With these resources, the government plans to distribute 8,000 house lots and issue at least 7,000 certificates of title, allowing thousands of families to receive

legal ownership documents for their properties.

"Imagine presenting 7,000 Guyanese families with legal titles—transforming them into landowners and homeowners in their own right," Finance Minister Dr Ashni Singh had told the Assembly during the presentation of the government's fiscal plan to the House.

The housing push builds on years of heavy state investment in residential infrastructure, including road networks, drainage, water supply, and electricity in areas such as Cummings

Lodge, Prospect, Felicity, Great Diamond, Amelia's Ward and other expanding communities.

To improve efficiency and reduce delays, the government has already introduced a single-window approval system for building applications and has digitised several previously manual processes within the housing sector.

Beyond the construction of homes, the 2026 programme places strong emphasis on improving the quality of life in existing communities.

Successive PPP/C govt's pulled Guyana from bankruptcy

THE Senior Minister within the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, last Friday mounted a robust defence of the government's fiscal management, pointing to Guyana's low debt burden as evidence of what he described as prudent and responsible economic stewardship.

Bringing the 2026 Budget debate to a close, Dr Singh contrasted Guyana's current debt-to-gross-domestic-product (GDP) ratio with those of countries across the hemisphere and beyond, many of which exceed 80 per cent and in some cases surpass 100 per cent.

He reported that Guyana's debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 28.6 per cent at the end of 2025, making it the second lowest in the western hemisphere.

He further highlighted sharp improvements in the country's debt-service obligations, noting that in 1993,

Guyana had been spending more than its total revenue to service debts.

By comparison, he said, in 2025 the debt service-to-revenue ratio had fallen to 5.53 per cent, meaning that just over five per cent of government revenue was now being used to meet debt payments.

"When countries around the hemisphere and around the world have a debt-to-GDP ratio that exceeds 100 per cent, and in even more cases that exceed 60,70 80 per cent, Guyana's debt-to-GDP ratio at the end of 2025 was 28.6 per cent, like I said, the second lowest in the western hemisphere. Mr Speaker, and the same applies to our debt service to revenue ratio," Dr Singh told the House.

He added: "It is this People's Progressive Party/Civic government and our predecessors that brought Guyana back from bankruptcy."

The minister explained that this

fiscal space has allowed the government to pursue aggressive investments aimed at transforming the country's long-term economic prospects, while simultaneously expanding and improving social services for citizens.

"...in 2025, the debt-service-to-revenue ratio in Guyana was 5.53 per cent. Coming from a position where we were spending more than 100 per cent of our revenue, we are now spending 5.5 per cent of government revenue to service our debt. And at the same time, sir, we are investing aggressively to transform our country for the long term. And at [the] same time sir, we are improving and expanding social services," he told the National Assembly.

He dismissed criticisms from the opposition benches, accusing some members of distorting facts and misrepresenting the country's economic reality in an effort to mislead the pub-

lic.

Emphasising that the current period marked a clear break from past practices, the minister maintained that the government's approach reflects a new era of sound financial management focused on sustainability, development and social progress.

During his presentation of Budget 2026, he had said the ratio of total public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt to Gross Domestic Product had fallen from 47.4 per cent at the end of 2020 to 28.6 per cent by the close of 2025.

He disclosed that total PPG debt stood at US\$7.7 billion at the end of 2025, reflecting net inflows from both domestic and external financing sources. Domestic debt accounted for the larger share at 62.3 per cent, or US\$4.8 billion, while external debts made up 37.7 per cent, totalling US\$2.9 billion.

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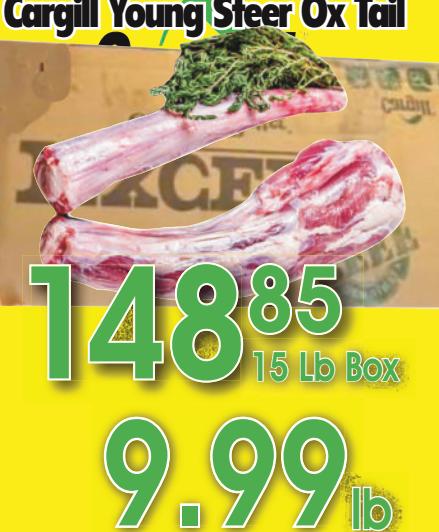
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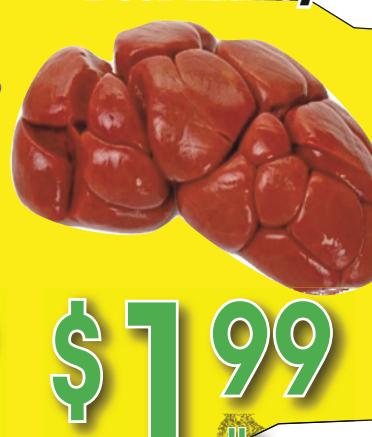
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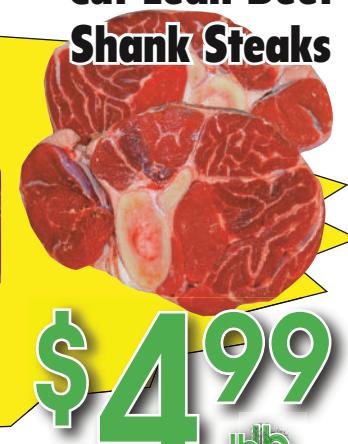
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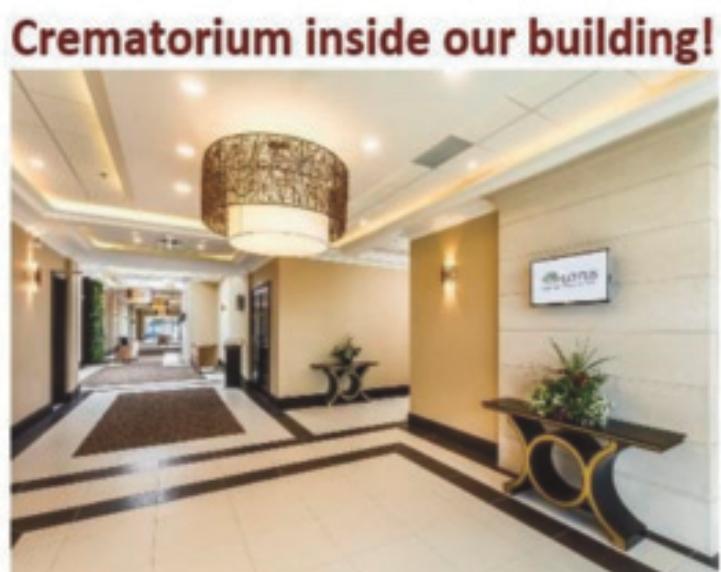
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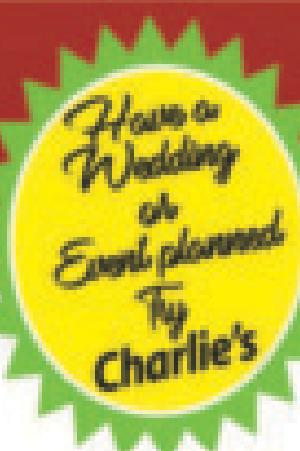
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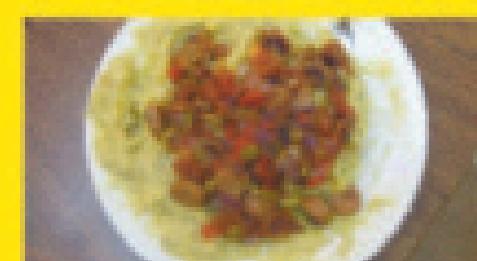
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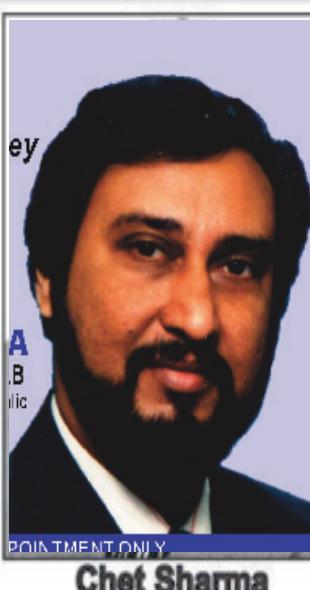
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Opposition Leader Mohamed denied adjournment in extradition hearing

Guyana opposition leader and US-indicted businessman Azruddin Mohamed was on Thursday denied a further adjournment of his extradition committal hearing in the Georgetown Magistrates' Courts, despite arguments that his constitutional responsibilities as Leader of the Opposition required his full attention.

The application was made by Attorney-at-Law Siand Dhurjon before Principal Magistrate Judy Latchman, who told the court that Azruddin's duties in the National Assembly, particularly during the ongoing budget debates and the upcoming line-by-line consideration of estimates, made it necessary for him to dedicate his time and focus to parliamentary proceedings.

He argued that granting the adjournment would be in the public interest.

Dhurjon further explained that Mohamed's role in Parliament extended be-

yond delivering a speech, as he was required to listen to hours of debate, identify key issues, and respond to points raised by the government.

As such, he described it as "unfair" to continue the committal proceedings during this period and added that Mohamed was suffering from a migraine and was taking medication.

But Magistrate Latchman rejected the request.

Speaking after the court session, special prosecutor Terrence Williams argued that the court proceedings needed to move ahead without delays.

The extradition of the Mohameds is being sought under the Guyana-United Kingdom extradition treaty, which continues to operate in Guyana pursuant to Section 4(1)(a) of the Fugitive Offenders Act, Cap. 10:04, as amended by Act No. 10 of 2024. The extradition request was formally submitted on October 30, 2025.



Azruddin Mohamed

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Guyana's unemployment falls 50% as wages surge up to 100% since 2020

Citing figures from the Bureau of Statistics, Guyana President Dr Irfaan Ali revealed that the unemployment rate in the country has dropped by a stark 50% while workers' earnings have grown between 50% to 100% from 2020 to 2024.

In a live broadcast, the Head of State said unemployment fell from 12.8% in 2020 to 6.8% in 2024. However, he contended that the 6.8% rate could be further analyzed since there are "a lot of people" in the unemployment bracket "who would not accept a job outside of what they are seeking", for instance, in construction where there are significant labour shortages.

Importantly too, the President pointed out that female unemployment rate dropped from 14.4% to 9% over the same period. The unemployment rate is also fairly balanced across the country's regions, he added.

In providing a further breakdown, the Guyanese leader said that between 2020 to 2024, more than 104,000 persons became employed. "So, persons employed moved from 264,000 to almost 370,000 in the last quarter of 2024," the President noted. "That is more persons in the labor force because there are more jobs available, because the economy is growing."

Furthermore, President Ali noted that the average earnings across the major sector also grew exponentially between 2020 and 2024.

Beyond oil and gas, he said there was an 84% increase in earnings in agriculture, forestry and fishing; followed by mining and quarrying at 59%; manufacturing at 57%; electricity, gas and steam at 61%; construction at 71%; wholesale and retail trade at 69%; transportation and storage at 62%; information and communication at 88%; professional, scientific and technical services, over 100%; health and social work, 63%; art, entertainment and recreation, over 114%; and other services, 112%.

"There is no other economy that is more diversified. There is no other structural growth in employment and earning like we have in Guyana. These are the facts," President Ali asserted.

"Most sectors saw growth in average earnings ranging between 50% and 100%, reflecting rising wages amidst



President Irfaan Ali

Guyana's economic expansion. And the rising wages was not followed by the type of inflation that we see around the world," he added.

This is as a result of the prudent management of the economy by the Peoples Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) administration, he noted. The President explained that diversification of the economy is key, noting that it is reflected in the emergence of new jobs.

"You will see that there are a number of areas where the new jobs are distributed: agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning, water supply, construction, wholesale retail trade, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities, information and communication, financial and insurance activities, real estate activities, professional scientific and technical activities,

administrative and support service activities, public administration and defense, education, human health and social work activities, arts, entertainment and recreation, other services activities," he listed.

"These are the areas in which we see that structural change, that structural change in our employment profile and earning profile," the President outlined.

Notwithstanding, as a consequence of the government's aggressive developmental agenda, there is a serious labour shortage challenge in key sectors and studies show that the country will need thousands of workers in the years ahead to keep up with its economic growth.

President Ali cited a labour assessment conducted by the Center for Local Business Development in Guyana which shows that the country is short of 52,396 workers.

He also referenced an assessment

done by the International Organization on Migration (IOM) which states that even if Guyana were to harness all of its unemployed and discouraged workers, the potential labour requirement would still be 63,000 in the medium term but would still need some 160,000 workers in the longer term to realise the growth agenda being pursued by the government.

"The report, the IOM studies, also pointed to indirect and induced demand which will create job opportunities in construction, hospitality and tourism, commerce and specialised services, agricultural food systems, health and social services and green technology and climate resilience. That is what the international study is telling us, that the areas in which the government is promoting investment and the private sector is growing in, that these are the areas of growth and development," President Ali emphasised.



In Eko, a Malayalam-language film, Momin plays an enigmatic elder living alone

A teacher who has become a sensation in Indian cinema

At 70, Biana Watre Momin took a leap far from home.

The retired college teacher left the Garo Hills in north-eastern India's Meghalaya state, where she led a quiet family life - caring for four dogs and doting on her grandchildren - and travelled more than 3,000km (1,864 miles) south to Kerala to act in a film.

She was dealing with a language she did not understand, embracing a role whose meaning would only reveal itself once the camera began to roll.

The film was Eko, a Malayalam-language film that would change the course of her life.

For Momin, a member of the Garo tribe - one of the indigenous communities of Meghalaya, a largely tribal state - acting had never been an ambition, or even a distant curiosity.

"Growing up, my town did not have a cinema or theatre," she told the BBC. She was never trained in the performing arts, "unless you'd call teaching in a classroom a kind of performance", she adds with a laugh.

A retired English literature teacher from Tura Government College, with a fondness for Romantic poetry, Momin had little reason to believe that a camera would one day frame her face. Yet when Eko entered her life, it offered an unexpected adventure.

"I was initially hesitant as I had no experience in acting and was concerned about the long travel from home," she says. "But my daughter nudged me, saying, 'Have faith in yourself and try something new.'"

In Eko, a title that plays on the word "echo", Momin plays Mlathi Chettathi, an enigmatic elder living alone in the Western Ghats, a vast mountain range along India's western coast known for its dense forests and mist-covered hills. As the film's lead, her presence anchors its fog-laced landscape and moral core.

Shot on a modest budget and completed in 45 days, Eko, showing on Netflix, has emerged as a critical success.

Much of the intrigue surrounding the film

centres on Momin's performance, both for its quiet power and for her unusual profile.

Director Dinjith Ayyathan was searching for a fresh face to play an elderly Malay woman who flees Malaysia during the Japanese invasion of World War II and arrives in Kerala accompanied by men with hidden motives.

Over decades, she lives alone in a crumbling house atop a forested mountain, sharing her world with feral dogs and drifting clouds, while men claiming friendship and family ties attempt to unravel the mystery around her.

The search for the right actor led the Eko team to reach out to friends in the fledgeling film industry and even the Indian army stationed across the eight north-eastern states, looking for someone whose features might plausibly pass as Malay.

It was then that images and clips of Momin, who had recently appeared in a short film on Garo folklore exploring the transformation of human souls into animals, found their way to the Kerala-based scouting team.

"It seems an unusual coincidence that a short film involving animals led me to a role also set in the company of animals," Momin says.

On a rainy day, she travelled with her son to meet the director and writer for an audition.

"We gave her a fictitious situation: approaching police officers to report her missing son," says Eko's writer and cinematographer Bahul Ramesh. "Her spontaneity, emotive restraint and quiet confidence stood out immediately. Her courage to move far from home and attempt something entirely new at this age won us over."

Though often described as an eco-mystery or psychological thriller, Eko resists easy categorisation - and so does Mlathi Chettathi. She is neither ornament nor mystical cliché. Instead, she carries a quiet authority, observant and grounded.

"I am proud, as an indigenous person, that there are creative people willing to take a chance on me at this age," Momin says. "I hope it inspires more representation."

Ramesh describes her performance as "organic and intuitive".



ARIES (March 21 - April 20): Someone you meet on your travels today will get your heart beating faster but don't get carried away. This could be one of those relationships that starts with fire and passion but soon slips into boredom, so don't commit yourself too quickly.

TAURUS (April 21 - May 21): Someone in a position of power thinks you are capable of bigger and better things and you must go out of your way to prove them right. You have allowed others to hog the limelight for too long and now it is your turn to shine.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21): Venus moves into the career area of your chart today, which among other things means that any difficulties you've been having with colleagues and employers can easily be straightened out. A bit of give and take on both sides will be worth it.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23): Try spending less time sorting out other people's problems and more time sorting out your own. It's good of you to want to help friends and workmates but your own needs must come first. Your time and your energy are not unlimited.

LEO (July 24 - Aug. 23): You may be feeling guilty because so many things are going right for you now while friends and family members are struggling but you are not to blame. The best way to help is by showing them how to get on with life without moaning about it.

VIRGO (Aug. 24 - Sept. 23): Love planet Venus moves into the relationship area of your chart today, so even if you tend to keep your feelings low key a bit of passion is sure to creep in. A new arrival on your social scene could become more than just a friend!

LIBRA (Sept. 24 - Oct. 23): It will pay you to be a bit more forgiving when dealing with people who fail to live up to your high standards. Not everyone is blessed with your ability to see both far and deep, so make allowances and help them when you can.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22): The cosmic picture is beginning to change and with Venus joining Mercury in the most dynamic area of your chart today new opportunities will appear as if out of nowhere. Maybe they were always there but you just failed to see them.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 - Dec. 21): This is still a great time for travel and social activities but you also need to pay attention to what's taking place at home. Does a loved one need your help? Then pay them some attention and let them know you will always be there for them.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 - Jan. 20): The more you are on the move today the more you will prosper. On the work front especially some of your colleagues will surprise you with their passion for new ideas and their desire to get things done. You could make a good team.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 - Feb. 19): Venus leaves your sign today but the Sun and Mars remain to keep both your energy and your confidence on a high. What can you do to make life more exciting? Do it and don't listen to those who are constantly urging you to be cautious.

PISCES (Feb. 20 - Mar. 20): The intensity of your emotions will surprise you today, and maybe scare you a bit too, but your passion has been bubbling under for quite some time and what occurs over the next 24 hours will bring it to the surface. Watch out world!

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Over 2,000 Guyanese return home under gov't diaspora remigration drive

As part of efforts to tap into the vast expertise and resources within the Guyanese diaspora, the government has facilitated the successful remigration of more than 2,000 overseas-based Guyanese citizens over the last five years.

This was revealed by Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Minister Hugh Todd on Wednesday evening as he delivered his presentation to the ongoing debates on Budget 2026 in the National Assembly.

The Dr Iraan Ali-led People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration has positioned diaspora engagement as a critical part of its development agenda and the Foreign Affairs Ministry is tasked with connecting members of the Guyanese diaspora with what is happening across various sectors in the country.

"So far, between 2020 and 2025, we've assisted approximately 2,162 Guyanese who have successfully re-migrated to Guyana, and that is a part of our development agenda because, as you're aware...His Excellency, the President would also like to tap into the human capital that can actually return to Guyana and to be a good fit in areas where we may have a need for their level of competency," Minister Todd explained.

In addition to expertise, the Guyana Government is also looking to tap into the resources of Guyanese liv-

ing overseas. According to the Foreign Affairs Minister, several overseas-based Guyanese business owners are returning, moving capital and/or expanding their businesses here or even partnering with companies in Guyana.

"So, it's doing a lot for us in terms of creating employment and helping to build out our economy. So, we're very focused, Mr. Speaker, on ensuring that we remain connected to the diaspora, remain engaging with the diaspora and to ensure that that connection can lead to a return, reintegration and allowing those diaspora to enjoy building out Guyana," Todd posited.

In fact, during the 2020 to 2025 period, the Guyana Government, through the various embassies and consulate offices, had engaged approximately 3,000 residents from the diaspora in Suriname, the United States, Canada, and Trinidad and Tobago.

To further facilitate similar diaspora engagements this year, the Ministry has allocated some \$35 million in Budget 2026. According to Todd, they are working on a roadmap that will see not just overseas visits to meet with the diaspora, but also increased webinars and conferences to gauge the level and areas of interest by those persons living overseas as well as to help them seamlessly re-migrate to Guyana.

Moreover, the Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Ministry has

also made it easier for members of the Guyanese diaspora to return home through enhanced efficiency at the overseas consulate offices especially with regards to passport services.

As a matter of fact, over the last five years, approximately 17,000 Guyanese passports have been processed for persons living in the diaspora and according to Minister Todd, they plan to ramp up this process in order to allow more persons to travel back to Guyana.

"We are attracting a lot of our returning Guyanese and if we're going to be able to support our returning Guyanese through the diaspora engagement, then being able to facilitate travel documents and other instruments are

very important for us. So, we're taking that role also very seriously...and we have been very effective even more so now because we have a new technology in issuing of the passports."

"And for those persons who may not have had or renewed their passports for many decades, in some cases decades, we want to ensure that they can have their passports because for them, that is, bringing their identity back and giving them an opportunity to return home even for visit because as you're aware...His Excellency, the President is very focused in having more traffic, not only from outside the diaspora but also from within the diaspora," he asserted.

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Scholarship launched for children of Jamaican farm workers in Canada

Jamaica's Ministry of Labour and Social Security, in partnership with the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association (OFVGA), has launched a scholarship programme to support the children of Jamaican farm workers participating in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme (SAWP) in Ontario, Canada.

The grant, valued at Can\$10,000, will assist 10 children or wards of current SAWP workers by helping to offset educational and school-related expenses. Each successful recipient will receive \$115,000 to cover items such as books, uniforms, examination fees, transportation and lunch.

Speaking at the launch held Thursday (February 5) at the ministry's North Street office in Kingston, Portfolio Minister Pernell Charles Jr. welcomed the initiative and underscored the wider impact of education.

"The thing about education is that it has a multiplier effect. That's what we want from this scholarship, to have a positive multiplier effect echoing across the communities so that these 10 scholarships will multiply into hundreds of persons being impacted to want to do more. I believe that because it is blessed, this investment is going to be a blessing to many," Minister Charles Jr. said.

He noted that the scholarship reflects the shared vision of the ministry and OFVGA to demonstrate the link between worker welfare, education and opportunity.

The initiative also marks the 60-year partnership between Jamaica and Canada under the SAWP, which addresses labour shortages in Canada's agricultural sector while providing employment opportunities for Jamaican workers.

Minister Charles Jr. said the new scholarship programme symbolises the strength and longevity of that relationship.

"That's why we see this as a symbol of the strength and the enduring and lasting relationship that I believe will stand another 60 years. Things are changing... but I believe that once we continue to have conversations, plan, strategise, be agile... we will be able to formulate and adjust to make sure that this programme continues to be relevant," he said.

The scholarship is open to children or wards of current SAWP workers who have participated in the programme in Ontario for at least three consecutive years and remained with the same employer during that period. Eligible students must be enrolled in a recognised secondary institution and maintain at least a 'B' average on their most recent report card. Applicants



Canadian and Jamaican officials at the launch of the scholarship

must not have previously benefited from the JN Money Fields of Opportunity Scholarship.

Supporting documents required include proof of the worker's participation with the same Ontario employer, a birth certificate or proof of guardianship for the student, and the student's report card.

OFVGA Communications Adviser Benjamin Murray said the scholarship

reflects the association's appreciation for Jamaican workers and their families.

"The workers' hard work and commitment mean a great deal to our farms and our communities back home. This scholarship is something we're extremely proud of..., supporting a participant's child and continuing their education is a meaningful way for us to give back, while also recognising the

sacrifices that these families and workers have to make year after year," Murray said.

Applications for the OFVGA Scholarship Programme open April 1, 2026 and close June 30, 2026, with awards to be granted for the 2026/2027 academic year. For further information, persons may contact the ministry's Family Services Unit at 876-676-5557 or 876-676-5659.

Jamaica opens consulate in Lagos

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has announced the opening of a Jamaican consulate in Lagos, Nigeria, aimed at expanding the country's presence in one of Africa's leading commercial, financial, and technology hubs.

In a post shared on X, the ministry said the consulate, led by Aima Lijadu, will strengthen connections with the Jamaican diaspora in Lagos while supporting the country's broader commercial and technological interests.

The consulate will operate under the guidance of the Jamaican High Commission in Abuja and will provide services including processing applications for Jamaican passports and citizenship, as well as



facilitating visa applications for foreign nationals.

"We warmly welcome members of the Jamaican Diaspora in Lagos to take advantage of our services, including applications for Jamaican passports and citizenship. Nigerian and other foreign nationals residing in Lagos are also invited to submit visa applications," the ministry stated.

Services are available to the public on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Enquiries can be directed to the consulate via telephone at +234 916 0323 314 or by email at jamconsulatelagos@gmail.com.

Expert points to 'a lot of evidence' as Jamaica offshore oil search advances

An industry expert involved in Jamaica's ongoing offshore exploration says there is mounting evidence suggesting the island could sit above an active petroleum system, as scientific surveys of its seabed continue.

A UK-based oil and gas exploration company currently surveying Jamaica's seabed for potential petroleum resources says there is growing evidence suggesting the island could sit above an active offshore oil system.

United Oil & Gas Plc, which holds the Walton Morant offshore licence, has launched a new internal technical podcast outlining the geological case for oil exploration around Jamaica, as it continues a multi-week scientific survey of the seabed.

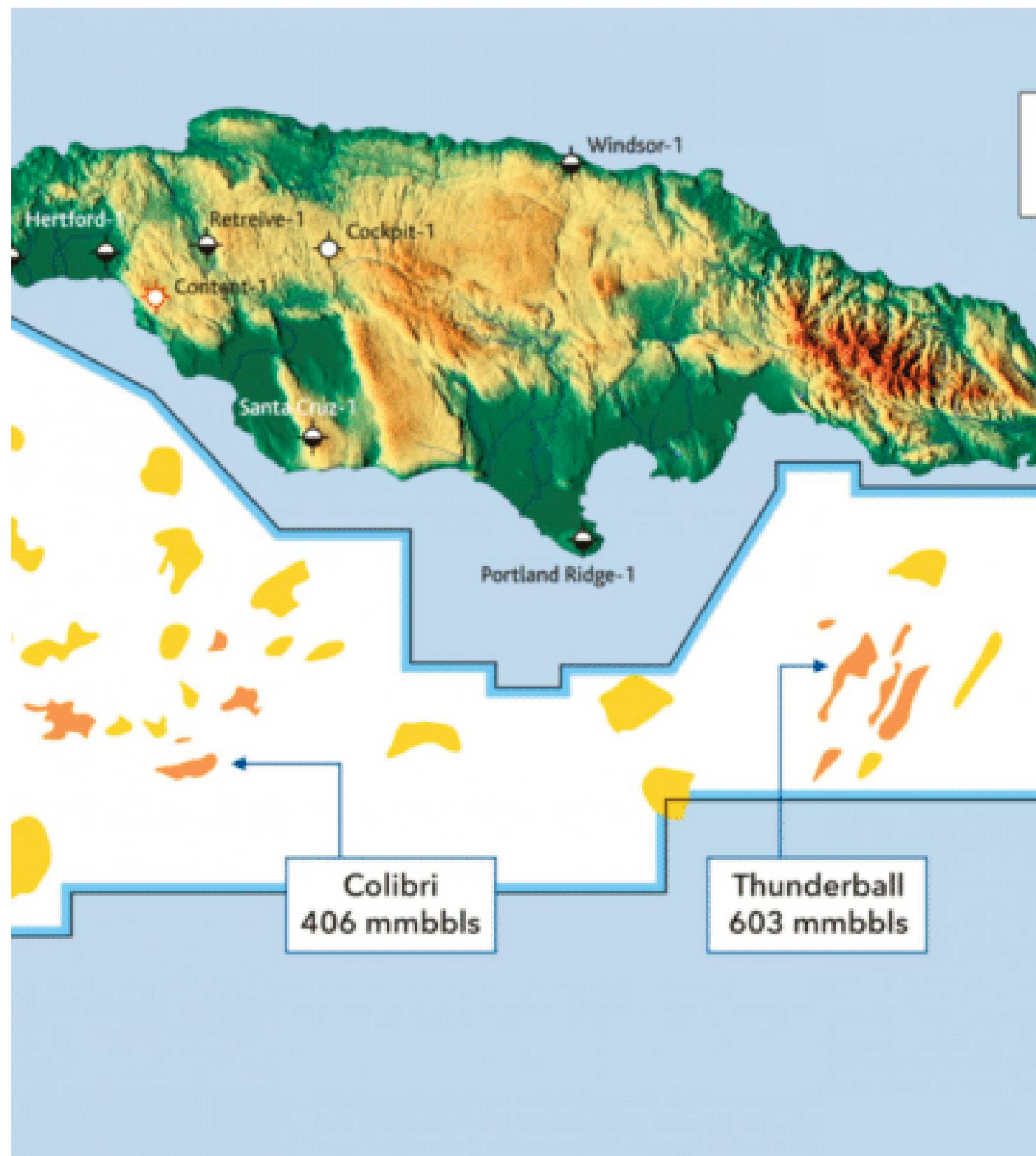
The podcast, *On the Rocks*, is intended to give shareholders and stakeholders a deeper look at the data guiding the company's exploration programme. Its first episode features Business Technical Manager Paul Ryan and Head of Business Development Donal Meehan, who discuss what they describe as strong indicators of a working petroleum system offshore.

"There's really just an awful lot of evidence there," Meehan said in the debut episode. He pointed to what the company describes as a proven petroleum system onshore in Jamaica and a combination of offshore indicators including satellite data, seismic interpretation and rock analysis. "Everything's pointed in the right direction that we do have an active petroleum system in the offshore as well as the onshore," he added.

The podcast launch comes as United Oil & Gas recently deployed the research vessel R/V Gyre to Jamaican waters to begin a geochemical exploration survey on the Walton Morant licence. The vessel, operated by TDI Brooks International, departed Trinidad last month and is conducting seabed mapping, heat flow measurements and sediment sampling in deep waters more than 450 metres below sea level.

The survey is designed to determine whether oil-like substances previously detected beneath Jamaica's waters could be commercially viable. According to the company, the work focuses on gathering scientific evidence rather than drilling.

Ryan said some of the data collected so far suggests hydrocarbons de-



Oil exploration is taking place in Jamaican waters

tected in the area are likely natural rather than man-made. "I think the signature is suggestive of a thermogenic origin, which means that it's more than likely coming from a seep on the seabed that's venting up," he said, explaining that the geochemical signature differs from refined fuels such as diesel.

He added that upcoming seabed "piston coring" will aim to confirm what the company calls circumstantial evidence from satellite imagery and seismic anomalies by collecting physical samples from the ocean floor. The goal is to determine whether thermally derived hydrocarbons are present in the

sediments.

Despite the growing optimism from the company's technical team, Jamaican officials have urged caution about interpreting the current activity. Energy Minister Daryl Vaz previously stressed that the programme is strictly scientific and does not involve oil drilling or extraction.

United Oil & Gas Chief Executive Officer Brian Larkin also emphasised that the survey represents early-stage data collection. "We are not drilling a well. This is data collection, arguably the final piece of the jigsaw before you move towards potential exploration drilling," Larkin said during a media

tour of the research vessel at the Port Royal Cruise Terminal in January.

The offshore programme includes multi-beam seabed mapping followed by heat flow measurements and piston coring at roughly 41 selected sites. The company says the results will help determine whether an active petroleum system exists offshore Jamaica and whether further exploration, including drilling, could eventually be justified.

For now, the exploration remains in its evidence-gathering phase — but company officials say the indicators so far are pointing in a promising direction.

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UN warns of humanitarian ‘collapse’ in Cuba amid fuel shortages

The United Nations has warned of a potential humanitarian “collapse” in Cuba as the country faces severe fuel shortages amid U.S. pressure to block oil shipments. The United States has threatened tariffs on any nation supplying oil to Cuba, compounding the effects of decades-long trade restrictions and recent events in Venezuela.

“I can tell you that the Secretary-General is extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Cuba, which will worsen, and if not collapse, if its oil needs go unmet,” UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said on Wednesday. He noted that the General Assembly has called for an end to the U.S. embargo for more than 30 years and urged “all parties to pursue dialogue and respect for international law.”

The fuel crisis has pushed up food prices, caused severe shortages, and led to rolling blackouts nationwide. Francisco Pichon, the UN’s top official in Cuba, described the situation as “a combination of emotions...a mix of resilience, but also grief, sorrow and indignation, and some concern about the regional developments.”

Pichon pointed to Venezuela, where 32 Cubans were killed on January 3 during a U.S. operation to capture Nicolás Maduro, as a factor intensifying regional tensions. “The last two years have been quite tough,” he said, stressing that urgent changes are needed to sustain Cuba’s social model “in the midst of the severe economic, financial and trade sanctions.”

Even amid these challenges, the UN continues to support Cuba through long-term programs. “The energy transition is a major priority due to reduced access to fuel and infrastructure chal-



UN Cuba UN Resident Coordinator Francisco Pichón speaks with civil defence authorities in Santiago de Cuba.

lenges,” Pichon said, adding that investment bottlenecks remain a significant hurdle.

The UN’s engagement includes institutional reforms, economic transformation, disaster risk management, and social protection. During Hurri-

cane Melissa in October 2025, the UN pre-positioned supplies through the Central Emergency Response Fund, enabling aid to more than 2.2 million people and preventing direct loss of life.

“All of this is happening in the

context of the U.S. embargo against Cuba,” Pichon noted. He emphasized the UN’s guiding principles: “To be present. To support. To act based on cooperation, respected for international law, and the UN values.”

Canada suspends flights to Cuba amid fuel shortages

Airlines, including Air Canada and WestJet, have announced the suspension of flights to Cuba due to a lack of guaranteed aviation fuel at the island’s airports, as the country faces a deepening oil crisis. Cuban officials warn that jet fuel will not be commercially available from February 10 through March 11, affecting commercial air travel and forcing airlines to adjust operations.

Air Canada said it would fly empty planes to repatriate approximately 3,000 customers already in Cuba and cancel seasonal flights to Holguín and Santa Clara for the remainder of the season. Flights to Varadero and Cayo Coco, normally year-round routes, are temporarily suspended with a tentative restart planned for May 1. WestJet confirmed it would wind down winter operations as of February 9, with plans to resume service on April 26.

The fuel shortage is linked to the



Three major airlines in Canada have cancelled flights to Cuba

fact that Cuba has not received an oil shipment since December 2025. The situation intensified after U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order on January 29 threatening tariffs for

countries supplying fuel to Cuba.

“I find that the policies, practices, and actions of the Government of Cuba constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat, which has its source in whole or

substantial part outside the United States, to the national security and foreign policy of the United States,” read the order.

Cuba’s Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez described the move as an “international emergency” that poses an “unusual and extraordinary threat” to national security and foreign policy.

Air Canada noted that its decision followed advisories issued by governments (NOTAMs) regarding the unreliability of fuel supplies at Cuban airports. The airline said it will tank up in extra fuel and make technical stops on return journeys as needed.

The shortage highlights the growing strain on Cuba’s energy infrastructure, which has already struggled to meet domestic demand due to reduced oil imports and sanctions, affecting transportation, industry, and daily life on the island.

St Vincent PM unveils EC\$1.9b 2026 budget with no new taxes

St Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Dr Godwin Friday has unveiled a EC\$1.9 billion national budget for 2026, assuring citizens that no new taxes will be introduced despite increased government spending.

Presenting the fiscal plan in Parliament, Friday said the expanded budget will be financed through improved revenue collection, concessional loans and grants, alongside the re-establishment of a Fiscal Responsibility Framework aimed at reducing deficits and gradually lowering public debt to the Eastern Caribbean benchmark of 60 percent of GDP by 2035.

The 2026 Estimates project current revenue at EC\$906.9 million, while the capital programme is set to rise to EC\$577.3 million. The increased allocations are expected to support infrastructure development, housing recovery and climate-resilient projects. By comparison, current revenue in 2025 stood at EC\$855.6 million and the capital programme was EC\$510 million.

Friday said the budget is designed to stabilise public finances while protecting households from additional financial strain. Among the relief measures announced is a doubling of Public Assistance to EC\$500 per month, along with tax-free cost-of-living support for public sector employees. Additional funding will also be directed to healthcare, education and vocational training to strengthen human capital and reduce poverty.

"We will not mortgage our children's future for our present benefit," Friday told lawmakers. "Fiscal discipline is not an end in itself; it is the means by



Dr Goodwin Friday

which we create the space to invest, the confidence to grow, and the conditions to employ."

The nearly EC\$200 million increase over last year's budget will be managed without new taxes through strengthened compliance measures, modernised property tax administration,

rationalised import concessions and targeted expenditure controls. These controls are intended to prioritise capital investment while avoiding significant growth in recurrent spending.

Government officials say the absence of new taxes is expected to shield Vincentians from additional financial

pressures, while expanded social support will help ease cost-of-living concerns. Increased capital investment is also projected to stimulate construction, tourism and job creation, with upgrades to airports, ports and housing aimed at strengthening competitiveness and resilience to natural disasters.



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Jason Holder becomes first West Indian with 100 wickets across formats

West Indies all-rounder Jason Holder etched his name into cricket history on Saturday, becoming the first West Indian to claim 100 wickets in all three international formats.

The 34-year-old Barbadian reached the milestone by dismissing Scotland captain Richie Berrington at deep point during the West Indies' 35-run victory in their ICC Men's T20 World Cup opener.

Holder now boasts 162 wickets in 69 Tests, 159 wickets in 138 ODIs, and 101 T20I wickets in 90 matches, a testament to his longevity, adaptability, and consistent excellence across formats.

In a candid interview on Monday, Holder reflected on the significance of the achievement, acknowledging both his personal satisfaction and the role of his teammates in helping him reach the milestone.

"For me personally, 100 wickets in this format is a blessing to be fair. I guess at the start of my career I wouldn't have imagined this moment, being the first to take 100 wickets in each format of the game, but I take it as it comes," Holder said.

"I'm very, very happy and I thank my teammates over the years, and hopefully I can get a few more."

Despite his historic feat, Holder emphasized that team success came first, underscoring the importance of securing two points in the opening game.

"First and foremost, to get two points on the board was key. It was a very crucial game for us to start the campaign really well. Credit to the boys, we played a really good game," he said.

Holder highlighted the resilience of the team during critical phases.

"I think we were challenged at certain stages of the game, and we came through in those tough situations, which are strong signs for the team going forward," he noted.

With a pivotal Group C clash against England set for Wednesday, Holder stressed that consistency would be crucial as the tournament progresses.

"I think we ticked a lot of boxes in the first game. We keep challenging ourselves in each department and we all know we can improve as we go on in this tournament," he said.

The all-rounder singled out fielding as an area needing urgent improvement.

"But for me, just be consistent; consistent with our attitude, consistent with our bowling and also consistent with batting as well. We've definitely got to touch up in the field; we've been letting ourselves down and dropping a few chances so that's an area we can definitely improve on as well too," Holder explained.

"All in all, I'm really happy with how we started, and I just think for us it's really important to continue to build."



Jason Holder — reached milestone

Hope calls for fresh focus as Windies reset for T20

West Indies captain Shai Hope has insisted that his team's uneven form throughout 2026 will not dictate their fate at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, stressing that the global tournament represents a clean slate and a renewed opportunity.

The West Indies launched their bid for an unprecedented third T20 World Cup title with a convincing 35-run victory over Scotland at Eden Gardens on Saturday, a performance that immediately shifted focus away from recent disappointments and toward renewed belief.

The opening success was built on standout contributions from Shimron Hetmyer and Romario Shepherd. Hetmyer anchored the innings with a fluent 64, while Shepherd produced a devastating spell with the ball, claiming five wickets for 20 runs to dismantle the Scottish chase.

The win, however, was just the Caribbean side's third T20 international victory in eight matches this year, including a warm-up fixture against Afghanistan. It followed bilateral series defeats to Afghanistan and South Africa last month, as well as a 3-1 T20I series loss to New Zealand in December.

"This is a World Cup we're play-

ing"

Speaking at the post-match press conference, Hope acknowledged the team's recent struggles but emphasized that the World Cup demands a different mindset.

"That is my focus here today. We started the tournament; this is a World Cup we're playing," Hope said. "Yes, you have to look at what happened in the past, but our main focus was to start the tournament well and continue the momentum for as long as we can and see how deep we can go in the tournament, and hopefully, at the end, we can lift the trophy again similarly to what the guys did back in 2016."

Hope was equally candid about the challenges the team has faced.

"We can't hide from the truth. We haven't had the success that we would have liked in the last few bilateral series, but again, the main focus is here on this World Cup. Put the past in the past, and let's make sure that we do the business here in India," he said.

Eden Gardens holds special significance for West Indies cricket, having been the venue where they secured their second T20 World Cup title in 2016 with a dramatic four-wicket victory over England.

Hope said beginning the current



Shai Hope

campaign at the same historic ground provided an added psychological lift, particularly with members of the 2016 triumph still embedded within the setup.

Head coach Daren Sammy, along with players Johnson Charles and Jason Holder, were all part of the 2016 championship team, and Hope believes their presence continues to resonate within the squad.

"If we were placed at a different venue, the same mindset would have applied, the same plans, maybe slightly different depending on the type of surfaces that you're playing on," Hope explained.

"But we have a few members in our squad who have been a part of that, from the coach to a couple players in Johnson Charles and Jason Holder, so that does instil some extra confidence in the dressing room and a bit of experience as well."

Hope added that lived experience of winning on the biggest stage can be invaluable.

"Being in that position, knowing what it feels like to lift the trophy, just trying to share that amongst the group, I'm sure the guys are really ready to go, but it's a good feeling to have two guys who've been there and done that in a sense."

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