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Marriott Hotel at Ogle opens its doors

Guyana has gotten another brand new hotel that will serve visitors to the country as well as the local business community.

The AC Marriott Hotel near Ogle Airport in Georgetown was opened on January 11 by President Dr Irfaan Ali said that it sends a powerful and unmistakable message that Guyana is "modernising rapidly, confidently, purposefully" with a commitment to excellence.

The Head of State made the comments while delivering feature remarks at the official opening of the US\$50 million hotel on Saturday evening.

"This hotel sends a clear message beyond our borders. It says that Guyana is open. Guyana is confident. Guyana is serious about quality. We are not waiting to be discovered. We are preparing to be chosen. Chosen by investors. Chosen by visitors. Chosen by partners who value stability, ambition, and integrity. We are not asking the world to notice us—we are inviting it to engage."

The hotel includes a swimming pool, fitness room, lounge, library, meeting rooms, reception area, courtyard, retail stores, and an outdoor area.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, the Honourable Susan Rodrigues, other Cabinet Ministers and Government officials were also at the event.



President Dr Irfaan Ali and the Prime Minister of Belize, John Briceño

President Ali for State Visit to Belize

Guyana President Dr Irfaan Ali will make a State Visit to Belize from February 1 to 3, 2026, as Guyana continues to deepen its diplomatic and economic engagement within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) of Belize, announced that a major highlight of the visit will be President Ali's address at the opening of a new session of the Belizean Parliament, reflecting the strength of bilateral relations between the two CARICOM member states and Guyana's expanding leadership role within the region.

As CARICOM's Lead Head of Government with responsibility for agriculture, President Ali is also expected to engage Belize's productive sector, with a focus on strengthening regional co-operation, investment, and trade.

These engagements are aligned

with advancing shared priorities in food security, agricultural development and economic resilience across the Caribbean.

The visit is expected to culminate in the signing of several co-operation agreements, aimed at further formalising collaboration between Guyana and Belize in key areas of mutual interest.

President Ali will also hold high-level bilateral meetings with Governor-General of Belize, Dame Froyla T'zalam and Prime Minister John Briceño.

Discussions are expected to cover a range of regional and international issues, including CARICOM integration, development priorities and the expansion of political and economic ties.

Belize and Guyana have historically maintained strong and robust bilateral relations, grounded in a shared commitment to regional solidarity.

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Nations founder O'Toole passes

DIRECTOR and Co-founder of School of the Nations and Nations University, Dr Brian O'Toole, died on Saturday following a period of illness.

The 71-year-old Canadian was a patient in a city hospital at the time of his death, his wife Pam O'Toole confirmed.

She told this publication that he was admitted twice to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in recent weeks, adding that medical professionals tried their best.

Noting his decades-long contribution to Guyana's education landscape, she said her husband also worked with children with disabilities, something he was very passionate about.

Mrs O'Toole said that he first came to Guyana in 1977 as part of the Baha'i Faith and fell in love with the country. Here he remained, becoming a well-respected member of the Faith. He later contributed to the establishment of School of the Nations, which was subsequently expanded to include Nations University.

The couple has been living together in Guyana for some 48 years and they have two sons Liam and Cairon and five grandchildren.

Mr O'Toole, an Arrowhead of Achievement (AA) recipient, will be remembered for his kindness, strong work ethic, service to humanity, sense of humour, and unwavering commitment to his students, religion, family and Guyana.

The enduring legacy of his service, mentorship, and compassion was reflected in the many condolences and



Dr Brian O'Toole — lasting legacy

tributes posted on social media.

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Reg. 4 fisherfolk benefit from \$150,000 relief grant

Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, Guyana's Minister of Agriculture, on Monday distributed cheques to more than 2,000 fisherfolk from Region Four as part of the Government of Guyana's ongoing efforts to deliver relief to fisherfolk across the country.

The distribution exercises, held at the Everest Ground in Georgetown and in Lusignan and Unity on the East Coast of Demerara, formed part of a commitment made by H.E. President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and represent a government investment of approximately \$309 million.

Overall, approximately 7,000 fisherfolk nationwide are set to benefit from approximately \$1,050,000,000.

While addressing the gatherings, Minister Mustapha said this is the second time fisherfolk are receiving assistance in the form of a grant from the PPP/C government. He further noted that, in addition to direct cash support, the government has been making significant investments to strengthen the fisheries sector.

"We've expended millions of dollars to upgrade the landing sites across the country because we want to ensure the facilities are in place for the sector to develop and make it resilient. We've built sheds, installed water, lighting, security, and washroom facilities. While we are making these investments, as fisherfolk, you must have a broader outlook because you can no longer depend on one activity. We have to diversify the sector. When I meet with fisherfolk across the country when catches are low, they insist that they do not have any



Minister Mustapha (l) presents a cheque to a fisherman

other activity. So, as fisherfolk, you have to diversify," the Minister said.

He also indicated that institutional support for fisherfolk is being strengthened and that fisherfolk will soon benefit from training to commence additional wealth-generating activities while away from sea.

"We've been working with various organizations within the sector. I resuscitated the National Fisherfolk Organization, and they, along with the Fisheries Department, will work with you to see how we can assist individual fisherfolk to get involved in other activities so that you don't have to depend solely on fishing. So, if you have your homestead, we can assist you with a small shadehouse

to cultivate different crops in your backyard because you do not need a lot of land for that. We've already started that process in several areas in the country," he noted.

Highlighting safety and cost-reduction measures implemented by the government, Minister Mustapha spoke about some additional interventions that were implemented by the government to improve the livelihood of fisherfolk.

"We've been working with you to put new mechanisms in place. Many of you who are boat owners know that we have been procuring and installing Vessel Monitoring Systems on vessels so that we can respond to emergencies at sea. We removed all the taxes from fish-

ing inputs. Things like seine, twine, and rope. We also removed the taxes on outboard engines up to 150 horsepower so that boat owners can have this equipment at a cheaper cost," he explained.

He also spoke about ongoing efforts to create new opportunities within the sector through training and value-added initiatives.

"The President spoke about value-added being prioritized within the agriculture sector. So, the Fisheries Department will be working with the various fisheries organizations to train fisherfolk across the country so that they can get involved in value-added initiatives and other alternative livelihood opportunities that we have planned for fisherfolk," the Minister explained.

Turning to aquaculture development, Minister Mustapha noted that the sector is being expanded to create new income streams for fisherfolk.

"We are also developing the aquaculture industry. We started to produce our own prawns, and soon, we'll commence exporting these same prawns across the region. In the coming years, that project will also be replicated across the country. The brackish water project that started in Region Six is another success story. We are now working with other persons to replicate that project in region five and other parts of the country. So, when we are speaking about the fishing industry, we are not only speaking about marine fishing. We are speaking about diversification and expanding the industry and how we can support our fisherfolk," he said.

Emergency response system gets \$123M boost

A new modernised Search and Rescue Information and Management System (SARIMS) has been installed and launched at the Timehri Control Tower Complex to strengthen Guyana's capacity to respond to emergencies and save lives.

The \$123 million system was implemented in collaboration with the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA).

Addressing the launch on Monday, Minister of Public Utilities and Aviation Deodat Indar explained that the platform is a critical component for the country's search and rescue framework, noting that it will significantly reduce deployment time.

He explained that a faster response time is vital in life-saving emergencies.

"When you are getting a stroke or a heart attack, you know there is something called the golden half hour or golden hour, which is the time between when you can save a life or lose a life. That is what the reduction in time does

to the process. It makes sure all the information is quickly available so you can deploy assets faster," Minister Indar said.

The system was supplied and installed by Canadian firm, Intelcan Technosystems Inc., in collaboration with the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR).

Previously, search and rescue operations relied heavily on manual processes, including telephone calls, faxes and emails. Information was recorded by hand in log sheets, often involving several staff members at different stages of an operation.

This labour-intensive process increased the workload of the Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) personnel and contributed to a higher risk for human error.

In prolonged missions, hundreds of pages of notes could accumulate, making the timely retrieval and analysis of information difficult.

The new system computerises the



Deodat Indar

management and coordination of search and rescue operations, streamlining workflows and improving accuracy.

With increased flight operations in Guyana, the SARIMS platform inte-

grates all relevant local and international agencies on a single system, allowing missions to be executed more efficiently and cost-effectively within the shortest possible time.

The digital platform is also expected to enhance decision-making by providing real-time data integration of resources and operational guidance to agencies involved in search and rescue missions, which will be housed at the Georgetown Rescue Coordination Centre.

Minister Indar added that 16 individuals from agencies were trained as search and rescue mission coordinators by experts from Canada. The coordinators were drawn from GCAA, Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and Ogle Airport.

Meanwhile, the government is also moving forward on the construction of a maritime search and rescue centre at Kingston, which will mirror the system implemented at Timehri.



An artist's rendition of what the Life Sciences Park could look like

Biobank, pharmaceutical, vaccine manufacturing part of Life Sciences Park plan

THE possible establishment of a biobank alongside pharmaceutical and vaccine-manufacturing facilities is being advanced through plans to develop a Life Sciences Park in Guyana, Minister of Health Dr Frank Anthony has said.

The minister made this known in a video message during which he said, "We also intend to develop a Life Sciences Park, and this programme came about with the President meeting with Prime Minister Mottley and two of them having a meeting with the President of the EU."

According to Dr Anthony, those discussions resulted in a special programme through which the European Union will support both Barbados and Guyana in developing Life Sciences Parks.

He revealed that Guyana is close to formalising a partnership with a leading Life Sciences Park in Belgium, which will play a key role in shaping the local initiative.

"We are on the verge of signing an agreement with one of the top Life Sciences Parks in Belgium and once that is signed, the park in Belgium is going to work with us here in Guyana to develop our life science park here in Guyana," Dr Anthony said.

In addition to this, he stated that a major aspect of the initiative will be the development of a biobank, aimed at advanc-

ing research into diseases affecting the local population, including cancer.

"We also want to ensure that we develop bio banking that is from different tissues. We'll be able to bank them, where researchers then would be able to use the tissue to do more research on understanding different types of cancers and how they interact in different mediums," Dr Anthony said.

He explained that the biobank would strengthen research capacity and expand scientific knowledge relevant to Guyana's health challenges.

"So, we would be working on establishing a bio bank capable of doing these types of research and extending our knowledge in some forms of these cancers that have been affecting our local population," he said.

Beyond research and discovery, the Life Sciences Park is also expected to support manufacturing, particularly in the pharmaceutical and vaccine sectors, through partnerships with international companies.

"We are also going to be working with various partners and companies to establish manufacturing in Guyana," Dr Anthony said.

He disclosed that discussions are already underway with several partners interested in setting up pharmaceutical

manufacturing plants in the country.

"We want to do more manufacturing of pharmaceuticals. And already, we've been talking to a number of partners that over the next couple of years, will be coming to Guyana to establish manufacturing plan for pharmaceuticals," he stated.

In addition, talks are ongoing to establish local vaccine-manufacturing facilities.

"We have also been talking to a number of partners to set up plants here to do the manufacturing of vaccines," Dr Anthony said.

According to the health minister, the combined initiatives would generate employment opportunities, while positioning Guyana as a centre for medical research and innovation.

"So once completed, what we'll be doing is creating more jobs. What we'll also be doing is creating an academic cen-

tre where we can conduct research in medicine and to do new discoveries that would enhance the types of medicines that people would be using in the future," he said.

Further, he stated that over the next few years, citizens will see the government moving in this direction, facilitating collaborations with various global partners and academic institutions.



Dr Frank Anthony

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Authentic Progress

Editorial from the Guyana Chronicle, January 13 2026

GUYANA'S latest population census sends a strong message worth celebrating and reflecting on. Our population increased from 747,955 in 2012 to 878,674 in 2022, a significant rise of 17.63 percent. Projections estimate that we reached about 956,044 by the end of 2024.

This growth shows not just a change in numbers but a shift in the migration story that has affected Caribbean nations for years. For decades, Guyana saw many talented citizens leave for better opportunities elsewhere. Now, the findings from the Bureau of Statistics indicate a positive change: more Guyanese are choosing to stay, and many who left are deciding to return.

The importance of this trend is huge. A rise in population driven by citizens staying and returning shows real economic confidence. When people choose to live in or come back to their homeland, they express a strong

belief in the opportunities and future of their country.

The government's investments in social services, infrastructure, and job creation seem to have made a real impact. This isn't just government talk; it proves that the policies are working.

What stands out in Guyana's growth is how it spreads across the country. Population increases are happening in all regions, with Region Three now being the second most populated region, overtaking Region Six.

This shift suggests that economic activities and opportunities are reaching places outside our usual population hubs. Even Region Eight, which is the least populated, has seen some growth, indicating that development benefits are reaching areas beyond the coast. This is a positive step towards more balanced growth across our nation.

The census data also shows a healthy demographic balance, with a nearly equal sex ratio of 101 males for every 100 females among our 878,674 citizens. We have 271,946 households now, compared to 204,625 a decade

ago.

This suggests stronger family formations and social connections as the economy grows. These numbers reflect the choices made by Guyanese to build their lives and families here instead of overseas.

This population growth arrives at a time when our economy needs more people to seize unprecedented opportunities. With economic growth projected at 43.6 percent in 2024 and a non-oil economy expansion of 13.8 percent in 2025, our growing population provides the local workforce needed to turn these economic gains into real benefits for everyone.

Every new resident brings potential talent, entrepreneurial spirit, and consumer demand, which strengthens our economic base.

Importantly, this census happens during a major transformative period for Guyana. Senior Finance Minister Dr Ashni Singh rightly pointed out the link between favourable conditions and population retention. The government's efforts to improve healthcare,

access to education, housing programmes for vulnerable groups, and infrastructure have created solid reasons for people to stay or return. These are practical improvements that citizens can see and feel.

However, numbers also create obligations. As our population approaches one million, we need careful planning, infrastructure that is fair across all regions, and economic opportunities that reach beyond Georgetown and the coastal areas.

This census snapshot marks a crucial moment. The Guyanese people have shown their faith in the country's future. They have chosen to build their lives here rather than abroad, which is encouraging but also comes with an expectation: the government and private sector must ensure that this growing population of nearly one million citizens enjoys fair access to the benefits being created. As we continue to shift from uncertainty to hope, let's make sure this population growth leads to shared and sustainable development for everyone in all regions.

Commending the govt's airstrip rehabilitation initiatives

Dear editor,

I WANT to strongly commend the recent initiative taken by the Guyana Government to rehabilitate a number of airstrips in the hinterland regions of Guyana.

While I certainly believe that the positive impact on Guyana's infrastructure is commendable, it is even more imperative to point out that rehabilitation of these airstrips has a direct impact on Guyanese people, business and national development.

Travel by air in the hinterland is necessary. The travel time on roads and rivers is often prohibitive, river travel can be dangerous at certain times of the year, and weather and terrain can make it impossible to reach certain locations

by land or river at certain times. Reliable airstrips are not a luxury in Guyana, but a critical means of transportation for many.

Repairing and maintaining hinterland airstrips provides multiple benefits. First and foremost, having airstrips that are in good condition is a boon for safety. A safe, predictable and well-maintained runway helps minimise the risk of accidents during landing and takeoff, which are the most critical parts of any flight.

Measures such as flattening the terrain, improving drainage, removing obstacles, strengthening runway edges and generally improving minimum standards help pilots have better control over their planes during critical

flight operations, and lead to less wear and tear on aircraft overall. Safer airstrips also allow for better planning of trips, since flights are less likely to be cancelled as a result of substandard runway conditions.

Rehabilitated airstrips can also help reduce the cost of air travel. Poorly-maintained airstrips mean higher costs for operators and airlines, as well as higher risks.

Everything from increased aircraft maintenance to potential loss of business caused by reputation-damaging cancellations or flight delays can raise the cost of operations, which then must be passed on to passengers. Better infrastructure should lower these costs in the long term and can make routes

more viable for air operators, enabling lower fares.

While airfare is also a function of several other variables, improvements to airstrips may be a critical first step to making air travel more affordable for students, workers, families visiting loved ones and patients seeking medical care.

Tourism in the interior, in particular, is reliant on the comfort and confidence of visitors, and those start with safe and well-run entry points. Better airstrips open up possibilities for local employment and business opportunities while also allowing visitors to access the hinterland's cultural and natural riches.

Philip Inshanally

Federal government invests \$15M to benefit businesses in GTHA

By Milan Maharaj

LJI REPORTER

The government of Canada has announced a new investment of over \$15 million to benefit businesses in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area on Tuesday, January 13th. This funding's purpose is to support eight businesses with business growth, technology adoption, and advanced manufacturing. The money is being delivered through the Federal Economic Development Agency of Southern Ontario, known as FedDev Ontario.

Federal officials have said the funding is intended to support companies in the GTHA, a region that plays a key role in Ontario's manufacturing and industrial sectors. This investment is part of ongoing federal programs aimed at regional economic development.

Announcement of the investment took place in Scarborough on January 13th during a visit to Celplast Metallized Products Limited, which is one of the companies receiving some of the funding. The announcement was made by Maggie Chi, MP of Don Valley North, and Evan Solomon, the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation. He is also responsible for handling FedDev Ontario. Speaking at the announcement in Scarborough, Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation Evan Solomon said the funding is meant to support innovation within local businesses. "The GTHA has a proud manufacturing legacy, and today's investments of over \$15 million will help eight local companies continue to innovate and grow."

The financial backing is distributed among eight companies that are operating in manufacturing, food production, transportation, cybersecurity, and clean technology. Recipients include Celplast Metallized Products Limited, which received more than \$1.6 million for specialized production equipment; A.B.M Tool and Die Company Ltd out of Brampton, which aims to expand into the electric vehicle sector, and Hamilton-based GH Power Inc, which seeks to scale clean technology production. Additional funding is going to companies such as Hitachi Rail, Imagoh Foods Ltd, Redstone Food Group, Paradigm Shift Technologies Inc, and Quantum Bridge Tech-



Evan Solomon, Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation

nologies Inc, for many projects involving communications technology, food manufacturing, automation, industrial coatings, and cybersecurity. Federal officials said the projects are meant to target a range of industries within the region's economies, and are expected to be rolled out over the coming years.

According to the federal gov-

ernment, similar investments have been made across southern Ontario through FedDev Ontario programs. They stated the agency has provided funding to nearly 520 projects across the region, amounting to around \$475 million in investments, and over 31,000 jobs. The government states that these programs aim to assist job creation, moderniza-

tion, and business expansion.

The \$15 million in funding that will be distributed across eight companies located in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area is aimed to boost the economy in the region, and the projects are sought to be carried out over the following years.

Student suspended over vaccinations

Brampton father Andrew Steeves says he submitted his son's immunization records at least four times to Peel Public Health, proving his 10-year-old had received all of his routine vaccinations. But last week his son was still pulled out of class and suspended because the public health unit claimed it didn't have any record of the submissions.

Parents, not doctors, are required to report their child's vaccinations to Peel Region. To do so, they upload an image of the yellow immunization card provided by their physician or seek a formal exemption for medical reasons or on the grounds of conscience or religious beliefs. All non-medical exemptions require that parents and guardians complete a mandatory education session.

When children are being registered for school for the first time, parents have to provide vaccination information—failure to do so can result in school suspension.

Based on documents Steeves provided, he received confirmation the immunization records he uploaded on Oct. 1 and again on Nov. 20 went through. He then received a letter from Peel Public Health, dated Dec. 3, stating his son's school, Jefferson Public School, would be required to suspend him for 20 school days because the health unit had not received proof that he had been vaccinated against diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

The suspension was to take effect on Jan. 8. Steeves showed he had tried on two more occasions—on Dec. 27 and Jan. 5—to update the vaccination records.

But, on Jan. 8, Steeves says he got an automatic email, instructing him to pick up his son from school be-

cause he was suspended.

"The last updated records they had, according to Peel Public Health, is from 2021," Steeves was quoted on CTV News Toronto as saying on Monday. "He should have been suspended for years. There's a ball that's been dropped."

After the suspension order, Steeves spoke with the school's principal and scheduled an appointment with their family doctor to seek further guidance, so his son wouldn't have to miss out on weeks of school—which he says is critical as he requires dedicated, one-on-one instruction at school.

"He's, there's a learning disability there, but we're not sure what it is yet. So, we're trying to work with the school, work with him and get him caught up," Steeves said.

Steeves says Peel Public Health called him back, something he adds was surprising as he was told "more than 50 people" were ahead of him waiting for their phones to ring.

"They have now fully updated his record with the 'missing' data, and rescinded the suspension effective immediately," Steeves said, noting his child returned to school on Tuesday morning.

Peel Public Health (PPH) confirmed that, as of the morning of Jan. 13, around 2,350 PDSB students remained suspended from non-compliance with the Immunization of School Pupils Act.

According to PPH, they issued two waves of suspensions in contravention with the TSPA.

'Guyana has what it takes to compete and win' – Agriculture Minister

AGRO-PROCESSING infrastructure is expanding beyond Guyana's coast with the establishment of 15 new agro-processing and packaging facilities across multiple regions, according to Minister of Agriculture Zulfikar Mustapha, who has signalled the government's aim to boost value-added production and open up opportunities for farmers to access regional and international markets.

The minister made these remarks during a recent video address in which he highlighted government's economic diversification strategy.

"Today, across the country, we are seeing processors who are creative, determined and committed to transforming our local produce into high-quality products, whether it is pepper sauce, cassava flour, fruit mixes, coconut product, or any of the new lines emerging across our region, our agro-processors are proving that Guyana has what it takes to compete and to win."

To support this momentum, he said there has been the construction or retrofitting of 15 agro-processing and packaging facilities in various regions, including Regions One, Two, Six, Seven, Nine and 10, among others.

With that said, the minister pointed out that it is evident that the developments are not only occurring in the urban areas alone, but across the country.

These facilities are now being used to produce and package cassava bread, pepper sauce, green seasoning, coconut oil, jams, coconut flakes, and many other value-added products that reflect the richness of Guyana's agriculture, Minister Mustapha stated.

"Our strategic focus now is to build a vibrant value-added industry and expand market access. This includes completing the food hub supporting food, pulp, juice and coconut-based industries, and promoting certification so that our products can enter regional and international market," he added.

The agriculture minister then shifted his attention to the government's target to strengthen the domestic market through expanded Guyana shop outlets.

"Now, let me be clear, going forward, Guyana will be positioned as a major food-producing hub in the region," he said.

The plan revolves around building the next generation of Guyanese food brands that stand proudly in supermarket shelves across the Caribbean and beyond, the minister said, while emphasising that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) government's ambition is "bold and achievable."

The minister also noted that the government has invested in a cassava-processing facility at Parika, which will support more than 200 farmers by purchasing fresh cassava and producing over three tonnes of cassava flour per day. This facility will become operational in early 2026 and will help promote a healthier and locally produced alternative to imported flour.

Over the past month, he said there has been engagements with ANSA McAL and Massy Stores to create new opportunities for Guyanese products to reach supermarket shelves across multiple Caribbean destinations.

"These partnerships open doors, but it is now up to our agro-processors to seize these opportunities and scale up production," he stated.

With the government committed to converting Guyana into a leader in value-added food production and producers requiring access to capital, Minister Mustapha said this is where the Guyana Development Bank stands as a critical pillar of this transformation.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) will be able to access up to \$3 million in zero-collateral loans through this bank, which is expected to become fully operational before the end of the first quarter of 2026 and will receive an initial injection of US\$200 million from the government.



Agriculture Minister Zulfikar Mustapha

"This is the missing link in the value-added, chain-affordable financing that empowers our people to produce, innovate more and earn more," the minister stated.

Additionally, to accelerate this transformation, the government has extended to agriculture and agro-processing, the same fiscal space traditionally reserved for health and education, Minister Mustapha said.

He first pointed to the removal of corporate tax within agriculture, along with the implementation of unprecedented incentives that cover a number of elements from primary production to manufacturing, packaging and distribution.

tion, and fertiliser.

Beyond tax relief, the government went a step further by directly supporting producers with the provision of free fertilisers, planting materials, and shade houses.

"We are building a system that gives every processor a fair chance to compete globally as part of our broader diversification agenda," he minister said, adding, "We are building infrastructure, the partnership and the market pathway; now together, we must build the product, the scale and the global present that will define Guyana as a leader in value-added food production."



Brian Tiwarie, OMC, AA - CEO

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Toronto police announce three arrests in \$500,000 fraud probe

By Milan Maharaj

LJI REPORTER

Toronto police have arrested three Brampton men in connection with a nationwide fraud investigation that investigators say resulted in losses of roughly \$500,000.

The Toronto Police Service said its Financial Crimes Unit launched the investigation — dubbed Project Carbon Copy — in February 2025.

Police allege a group carried out organized fraud offences across Canada, travelling to deposit fraudulent cheques into bank accounts before quickly withdrawing the funds through ATMs and point-of-sale purchases.

Investigators say some of the proceeds were also obtained at casinos.

On Monday, Dec. 16, 2025, officers executed Criminal Code search warrants at a residence in Brampton and on two vehicles. During the searches, police seized about \$70,000 in cash, precious metals including gold, cheques, bank documents, high-end clothing, cellphones and two vehicles. An image of the seized cash has been released by police (at right).

Jashanbir Jabbal, 23, of Brampton, has been charged with two counts of fraud over \$5,000.

fraud over \$5,000.

Aryan Gupta, 23, of Brampton, faces the same charges.

All three are scheduled to appear at



the Ontario Court of Justice at 10 Armoury St. on Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2026, at 10 a.m., in room 201.

Anyone with information is asked

to contact police at 416-808-7300 or Crime Stoppers anonymously at 416-222-TIPS (8477) or online at 222tips.com.

Disappearance of Toronto man now a potential homicide

By Milan Maharaj

LJI REPORTER

Toronto police say the disappearance of Taron Stepanyan, who was reported missing more than a year ago, is now being investigated as a potential homicide.

Detective Sgt. Phillip Campbell of the Toronto Police Service Homicide and Missing Persons Unit provided an update on the case on Thursday, saying recent developments have raised concerns that foul play may have been involved.

Stepanyan, who was 40 years old at the time, was last seen on the evening of Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023, leaving his residence at 20 Chichester Pl., in the area of Victoria Park Avenue and Sheppard Avenue East.

Since he was reported missing, the investigation has been led by 42 Division, with support and oversight from the Homicide and Missing Persons Unit.

Police say new information has now met the threshold to reclassify the

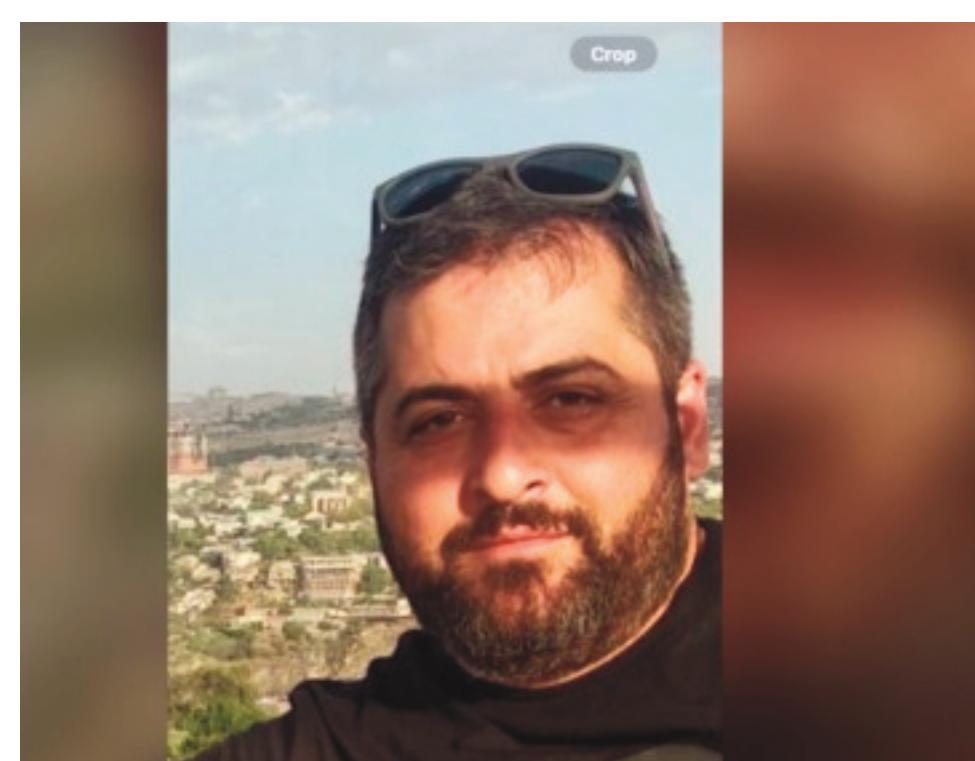
case as a homicide investigation.

“While I cannot go into specific investigative details — and I want to be clear that we cannot share the information that led to this assessment — this remains an active and ongoing investigation, and releasing those details could compromise our work,” Campbell said. “What I can say is that we believe there is a strong possibility that foul play was involved in Taron’s disappearance. We continue to actively investigate what happened and are pursuing all available leads.”

Campbell also issued a warning to anyone who may have assisted in covering up the crime.

“I also want to be very clear: if anyone has information about this case — including helping someone after the fact or assisting in the destruction or concealment of evidence — they could be charged with accessory after the fact. Now is the time to come forward,” he said.

Police say officers will be canvassing the neighbourhood around Chichester Place to speak with resi-



Missing: Taron Stepanyan

dents and anyone who may have information related to the case.

Stepanyan is described as five feet 11 inches tall, weighing approximately 229 pounds, with short brown hair, a brown-and-grey beard and brown eyes.

Images of him have been released by police.

Anyone with information is asked to contact police at 416-808-7400 or Crime Stoppers anonymously at 416-222-TIPS (8477).



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Gov't tackling gaps in eco-tourism, resort-style accommodation

GOVERNMENT is intensifying efforts to position Guyana as an emerging tourism destination, with a strong focus on expanding accommodation options, encouraging local investment and widening access to incentives across the sector, according to Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce Susan Rodrigues.

Speaking on Sunday's episode of the Starting Point podcast, Rodrigues said a range of tax incentives already exists within the tourism, hospitality and services sectors, but noted that while progress has been made in hotel construction, gaps remain in eco-tourism and resort-style accommodation.

She explained that recent policy actions were shaped by the need to address those gaps. "One of the things that we are lacking in the sector is the expansion in accommodation, and that is what prompted us to publish the call for proposals for the eco-lodges," she said.

Over the past five years, Guyana has added six internationally branded hotels, contributing an additional 600 rooms to the country's accommodation stock. Minister Rodrigues said brands

such as AC Marriott, Aiden by Best Western have already been opened, while a Sheraton, Hyatt, among other brands, are under construction. In addition, she noted that 15 hotels are currently being built, and together they are expected to add a further 2,000 rooms once completed.

While traditional hotel accommodation is largely on track, the minister said attention has shifted to eco-lodges and resort-type facilities, which are critical to Guyana's tourism product. She observed that visitors increasingly seek varied experiences and accommodation options, particularly those linked to nature and community-based tourism.

Minister Rodrigues also stressed that government incentives are not limited to large-scale investors. She said Guyanese are being encouraged to participate directly in the sector, even on a small scale. "Even if it's adding two or three bedrooms and marketing it as an Airbnb, that is something that we are incentivising," she explained.

According to the minister, concessions and tax incentives are available to small and medium investors who expand or upgrade accommoda-

tion, including those adding as few as three to five rooms. She said this approach reflects a broader policy objective of ensuring that ordinary citizens and small businesses can benefit from the growth of tourism.

She highlighted ongoing expansion by existing operators, noting that Baganara Island Resort is commissioning additional accommodation this month.

Minister Rodrigues said such developments are welcome, as the government continues to drive visitor arrivals and interest in Guyana.

Looking at the broader vision, the minister said, "Our strategy is to open up Guyana as a new frontier," adding that tourism is seen as a key pillar in diversifying the national economy.

She emphasised that the benefits of tourism are expected to flow mainly to small businesses, including transport providers, food vendors and homeowners offering accommodation.

She also pointed to opportunities for indigenous communities, which stand to gain from increased visitor numbers by providing services and sustaining livelihoods through tourism-related activities.

Beyond incentives, the minister said government agencies are actively working to help operators understand and access available concessions. She explained that this includes guidance on how to structure proposals to qualify for benefits, as well as continuous engagement through the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA).

Minister Rodrigues said the GTA plays a central role in marketing private-sector tourism products locally and internationally, offering what she described as "free marketing" for operators.

She also highlighted the authority's investment in training, noting that 8,500 people have been trained in tourism and hospitality over the past five years, with training ongoing.

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Ecuadorian firms explore strategic investment opportunities in Guyana

COMPANIES from Ecuador are exploring a range of strategic investment opportunities in Guyana, signalling growing regional interest in the country's infrastructure-led development agenda.

The engagement is being led by the Chief Investment Officer for Guyana and Agency Head of the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest), Dr Peter Ramsaroop, the entity posted on social media.

Dr. Ramsaroop, during the engagement, met with representatives of Ecuadorian firms CIPORT and SGV – Soluciones Globales de Vivienda, along with local partner Excel Guyana Inc. The discussions focused on investment opportunities aligned with Guyana's national development priorities.

During the meeting, Dr. Ramsaroop outlined the Government of Guyana's development trajectory and highlighted the central role of infrastructure, energy, housing and industrial expansion in supporting sustained and inclusive economic growth.

The post noted that he also provided an overview of Guyana's broader transformation agenda, pointing to major public and private sector investments currently underway, as well as those planned over the next five years.

These initiatives include the development of deep-water port infrastructure, the expansion of regional and industrial ports, large-scale bridge and road construction projects, airport and runway upgrades, and energy generation projects linked to the gas-to-shore initiative. Plans for the establishment of industrial zones to support manufac-



Ecuadorian firms are exploring investment opportunities in Guyana

ing and agro-processing were also outlined as part of the country's long-term development strategy.

Dr. Ramsaroop noted that these projects form part of the vision articulated by President Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali to leverage Guyana's energy resources as a catalyst for economic modernisation, industrialisation and

long-term resilience. He emphasised that this approach is intended to position Guyana as a competitive hub for logistics, manufacturing, agro-processing and regional trade.

Particular attention was given to opportunities for structured public-private partnerships and innovative financing models, alongside the importance of

local content development and capacity building. The discussions also examined Guyana's comparative advantages, including declining energy costs, preferential market access through CARICOM, expanding regional demand, and a policy framework designed to support investment in housing, infrastructure and value-added production.

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

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

Key priorities of the WGC include:

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

World Guyanese Congress
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To find out more about World Guyanese Congress and our goals and priorities. Scan the QR code, or visit www.wgc-org.com

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CANU made significant gains in fight against drugs in 2025

THE Customs Anti-Narcotic Unit (CANU) has reported significant operational gains in 2025, marked by major drug seizures, the launch of a national Early Warning System, and expanded regional and international co-operation, as Guyana continues to strengthen its position against transnational organised crime and narcotics trafficking.

According to the Unit's 2025 public briefing, the year was defined by a shift toward more intelligence-led and co-ordinated enforcement, supported by new technological and analytical tools. A major milestone was the formal launch of Guyana's National Early Warning System (EWS), designed to detect and respond to new psychoactive substances and emerging drug threats. The system integrates law enforcement, forensic, health, and analytical inputs to support rapid alerts and evidence-based policy and operational responses, bringing Guyana in line with regional and international best practices.

Throughout the year, CANU intensified operations targeting known trafficking routes, organised criminal networks, and high-risk ports and border points. These efforts resulted in substantial seizures and arrests, reinforcing the

country's role as an active disruptor rather than merely a transit point in regional drug trafficking networks. Inter-agency collaboration was also strengthened, improving information sharing, joint operations, and coordinated responses to drug-related threats across the state sector.

On the international front, CANU deepened engagement with regional and global partners through joint operations, intelligence exchange, technical co-operation, and capacity-building initiatives. These partnerships enhanced cross-border threat awareness and reinforced Guyana's commitments under regional and international drug-control frameworks.

In terms of results, CANU reported the seizure of 235.9 kilograms of cocaine, 726.3 kilograms of cannabis, 674 grams of ecstasy, 83 grams of methamphetamine, and 9.16 grams of cannabis products during 2025. Cocaine and cannabis remained the dominant threats, accounting for the vast majority of trafficking attempts. The Unit noted that the reduced quantity of cocaine seized compared to 2024 was largely due to the absence of a single extraordinary seizure similar to one recorded in Region One

the previous year.

Regionally, Region Four recorded the highest cocaine seizures at 172.8 kilograms, while Region Six accounted for the largest volume of cannabis seized at 576 kilograms. Although synthetic drugs were intercepted in relatively small quantities, their increasing presence has prompted continued monitoring through the Early Warning System.

Law enforcement action during the year led to 117 arrests, with 62 persons formally charged. Approximately 82 per cent of those arrested were male, reflecting global patterns in drug-related crime. The highest number of arrests occurred in April, May, July, and September. CANU also secured 29 drug-related convictions, including 14 for cocaine, 12 for cannabis, and three related to synthetic drugs and cannabis products. Penalties included fines of up to \$311 million and prison sentences of up to

four years, depending on the quantity involved and the intent to traffic.

The total estimated street value of narcotics seized in 2025 was placed at \$433.9 million, with cocaine accounting for \$235.9 million and cannabis \$197.7 million. Together, these two drugs represented more than 99 per cent of the total estimated value of all seizures.

The Unit also highlighted the continued link between narcotics trafficking and firearms. Thirteen firearms were seized during operations in 2025, with 9mm pistols being the most common. Half of the recovered weapons were directly linked to drug trafficking operations. Although ammunition seizures declined by 62 per cent, CANU noted that the continued recovery of 9mm and shotgun ammunition underscores the persistent overlap between drug and firearm networks.



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GUYAM was established in 1995, with the support of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), as Guyana's first licensed merchant bank, serving both institutional and individual investors.

The bank's Marketing Officer Moesha Marshall shared this information in a live broadcast where she explained that most people think they need a lot of money to invest, which is a myth. Investments can be made with \$25,000 or less.

Calling for consumers to invest in companies they frequently support, Marshall said the bank has investment options for the Guyana Stock Exchange, with companies like Demerara Distillers Limited and Banks DIH.

"We have the GBTI mutual funds that we manage, that has a collection of local, international, regional stocks and bonds, and we also have the interactive brokers platform. So, it allows customers to be able to trade on the US stock market so you can buy some Apple shares, you can buy anything, and a lot of people now are into AI so you can buy some Nvidia stocks. You know, you can get into the US stock exchange," she said.

For persons who want to invest for their children, there is a smart start programme. Because parents are always searching for ways to save money for their children's education, or to give them a start, Marshall said the GBTI Mutual Funds is a basic option for the average investor to start with.

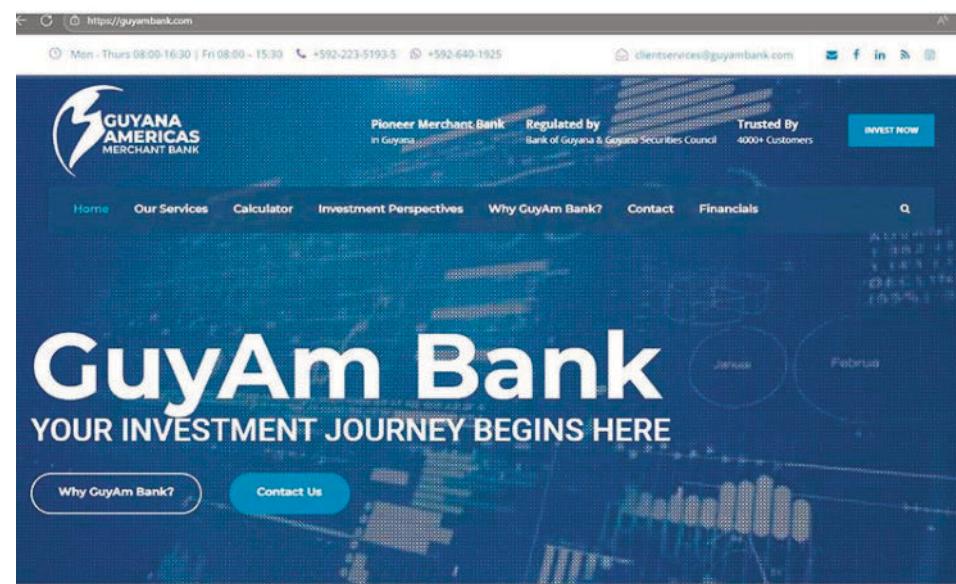
"We also have pension plans available for large companies...we currently manage Exxon Mobil's Pension plan. So, we have something for companies, individuals, we have a whole suite of investment products for everybody," she disclosed.

Alongside this, she revealed that the Guyana Americas Merchant Bank has licensed investment advisors, to give advice to customers, adding, "we have people that know what they're talking about and can guide you."

To get started Marshall shared that all individuals need is their identification card, proof of address, their taxpayer identification number (TIN), and proof of income, and for the mutual funds and smart start, an initial deposit of \$25,000 is needed.

"So, if you have the plastic driver's license, well, everybody should by now, that covers your ID, your proof of address and your TIN," Marshall stated.

She cautioned that this is investing in the long term. "It's investing, it's long term and you also have to be prepared to ride the tide of the market as well."

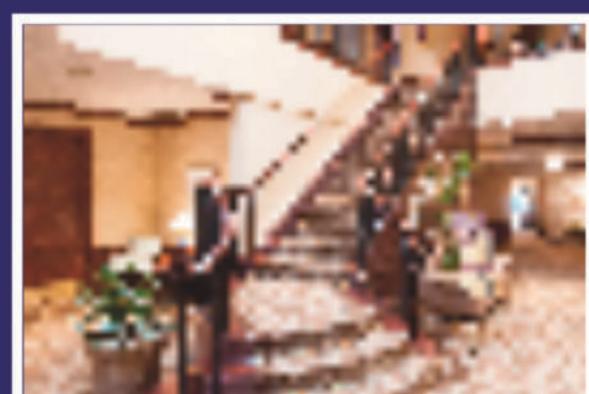


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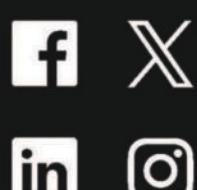
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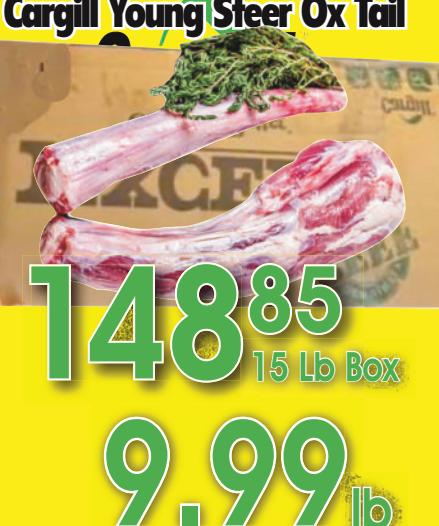
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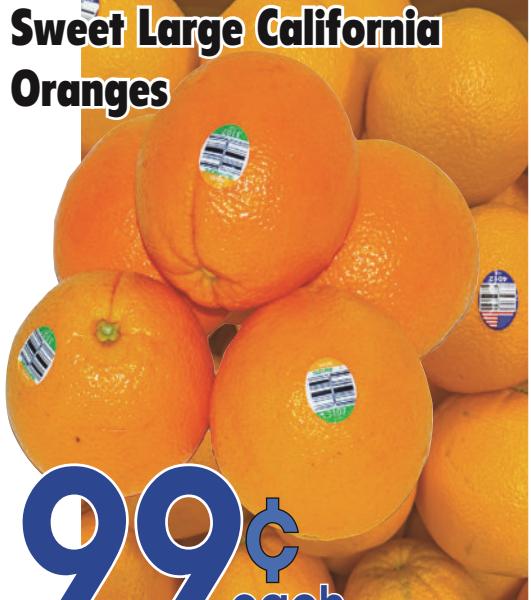
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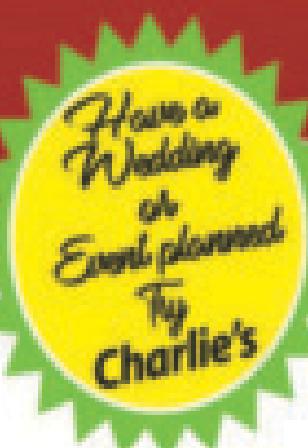
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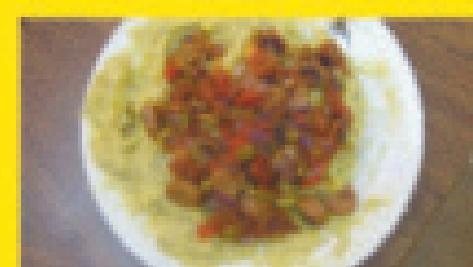
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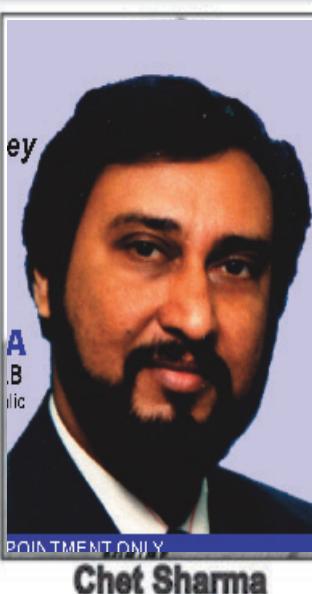
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President Ali to make state visit to Belize in February

President Dr. Irfaan Ali will make a State Visit to Belize from February 1 to 3, 2026, as Guyana continues to deepen its diplomatic and economic engagement within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) of Belize, announced that a major highlight of the visit will be President Ali's address at the opening of a new session of the Belizean Parliament, reflecting the strength of bilateral relations between the two CARICOM member states and Guyana's expanding leadership role within the region.

As CARICOM's Lead Head of Government with responsibility for agriculture, President Ali is also expected to engage Belize's productive sector, with a focus on strengthening regional cooperation, investment, and trade. These engagements are aligned with advancing shared priorities in food security, agricultural development and

economic resilience across the Caribbean.

The visit is expected to culminate in the signing of several cooperation agreements, aimed at further formalising collaboration between Guyana and Belize in key areas of mutual interest.

President Ali will also hold high-level bilateral meetings with Her Excellency Dame Froyla T'zalam, Governor-General of Belize, and Prime Minister Hon. John Briceño. Discussions are expected to cover a range of regional and international issues, including CARICOM integration, development priorities and the expansion of political and economic ties.

Belize and Guyana have historically maintained strong and robust bilateral relations, grounded in a shared commitment to regional solidarity, sustainable development and Caribbean integration.



President Dr Irfaan Ali

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US Ambassador urges Guyana to appoint opposition leader

United States Ambassador to Guyana, Nicole Theriot, has called for the appointment of an opposition leader in Guyana, stressing that the move is necessary for the proper functioning of the country's democracy following the September 1 general and regional elections.

The polls returned the ruling People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to office and reshaped the parliamentary opposition, with the newly formed We Invest in Nationhood (WIN), led by Azruddin Mohamed, emerging as the second-largest party in the National Assembly. WIN overtook A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), which had previously held that position.

Despite the outcome, the National Assembly has met only once since the elections, on November 3, 2025. To date, Speaker of the National Assembly Manzoor Nadir has not convened the constitutionally required meeting of the 29 opposition parliamentarians to elect an opposition leader, a process widely expected to result in Mohamed's selection.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday after an event at Banks DIH, Theriot said a functioning parliament depends on having a recognised leader of the opposition. "I think it's incredibly important that you have a functioning parliament in any democracy and in order to have that, you do need a Leader of the Opposition. It just makes things work properly," she said. She added, "I do think it's very important for Guyana, as soon as possible, to elect a Leader of the Opposition".

Over the weekend, President Irfaan Ali dismissed claims that the government has avoided calling parliamentary sittings to prevent Mohamed's election, describing the suggestion as "absolutely ridiculous."

"Absolutely ridiculous! The opposition can elect whoever they want as Opposition Leader so it's absolutely ridiculous. That's their business. We have no business in the opposition electing whoever they want as Leader of the Opposition," Ali told reporters.

Mohamed's political rise has unfolded alongside ongoing legal proceedings in the United States. He and his father, billionaire businessman Nazar



Nicole Theriot

"Shell" Mohamed, are contesting extradition requests from Washington. On October 30, 2025, US authorities sought the extradition of the 76-year-old father and his 38-year-old son on multiple charges, including wire fraud, mail fraud, money laundering, conspiracy, aiding and abetting, and customs-related violations tied to an alleged US\$50 million gold export and tax evasion scheme. Their extradition committal hearing is scheduled to resume on February 5, 2026.

Theriot acknowledged that the legal matter complicates engagement but said it should not stall Guyana's democratic processes. "Like I've said before, it complicates matters. It's not the easiest thing in the world to deal with but what's most important is that your democracy functions and I think in order for Parliament to do that and to

represent the will of the people, who elected this person or who chose this person to have a significant number of seats or chose his party, that they need to move forward with the election," she said.

She added that while Mohamed's role would not affect the US legally, it could limit engagement in specific areas. "It doesn't impact on us legally but if he is involved in certain aspects of government that we have to deal with; if

it involves anything financial or contractual then that might be a slight problem for us and we would just have to ask that someone else work on that issue so for us we can work around it," Theriot explained.

The ambassador also noted that the call for the appointment of an opposition leader is not coming from the United States alone, pointing out that the European Union, Canada, and the United Kingdom have made similar appeals.

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Vijay's new film will open to nearly 5,000 cinemas across India and overseas in January

Indian superstar taking a shot at political greatness

India's southern state of Tamil Nadu has a long, peculiar political tradition: here, cinema doesn't merely entertain, it also governs.

From extremely successful political stints of MG Ramachandran - popularly known as MGR - and Jayalalithaa to the more ambivalent experiments of Rajnikanth, Kamal Haasan, Khushbu and Vijayakanth, the state has repeatedly seen cinema icons turn into full-time politicians. MGR and Jayalalithaa even became chief ministers.

Now Tamil superstar C Joseph Vijay, known as "Thalapathy" Vijay (General Vijay), is the latest to join the list.

He launched his political party, Tamilaga Vetti Kazhagam (TVK), in 2024 and soon after announced that he would retire from films to pursue politics full-time. His upcoming film this month, *Jana Nayagan* (The People's Hero), would be his farewell release, he said.

Vijay's reasoning was explicit: politics, he argued, is not something one can dabble in. Tamil Nadu's voters, he said, deserved nothing less than full commitment. And the state's political history supports that calculation.

MGR and Jayalalithaa withdrew from active stardom before consolidating power. But Kamal Haasan's hybrid approach, which involves being active in cinema and politics both, has yielded limited electoral results. Vijayakanth's party rose quickly but faltered organisationally. Tamil politics has little patience for half-measures.

It is against this unforgiving backdrop that *Jana Nayagan* arrives.

Steeped in political imagery and rhetoric, Vijay's new film will open in nearly 5,000 cinemas across India and overseas this month. At 51, the star is stepping away from a career most actors would be reluctant to leave. He remains among Indian cinema's most bankable stars, driving festival releases and revenues across the global Tamil diaspora - from satellite rights and music to merchandise.

Chennai-based film critic Aditya Shrikrishna noted that Vijay's appeal has not rested on acting prowess alone. "He's not a Kamal Haasan or Ra-

jinikanth in terms of filmography," he said. "But his box office pull and fandom are huge and undeniably influential. Dancing, comedy and a keen understanding of populist cinema are his strengths."

Vijay's stardom, however, has never been accidental, said Pritham K Chakravarthy, film academic and critic. "The seed was planted by his father who had Communist leanings and was keen on joining politics."

Vijay began as a child actor in the 1980s and was launched as a lead actor in 1992 by his parents - filmmaker SA Chandrasekhar and singer-writer Shoba Chandrasekhar - with *Naalaiya Theerpu*. The film flopped, but his career did not.

Over the next three decades, he appeared in nearly 70 films, charting a carefully calibrated rise - from playing the romantic hero in his films in the late 1990s to acting as an angry young man in the 2000s to a carefully-honed image as saviour and vigilante in films after 2012.

Though Vijay's early roles often leaned into hyper-masculine tropes, he later "consciously course-corrected his image", points out Shrikrishna. He later started projecting a saviour figure rooted in social justice in his movies. He spoke of farmers' distress in *Kaththi*, healthcare corruption in *Mersal*, supporting women's sports in *Bigil* and electoral manipulation in *Sarkar*.

"Now it's a different Vijay. His on-screen persona as incorruptible, restrained, morally upright, mirrored the ethical imagination of Dravidian politics, a cinematic grammar Tamil audiences recognise instinctively," says Chakravarthy.

Long before Vijay launched his party, his cinema had thus already done the ideological groundwork. Audio launches doubled as soft political addresses. Fan clubs quietly transformed into grassroots networks.

The fandom is intense and ritualistic, with celebratory first-day screenings, midnight and 04:00 shows, milk offerings on towering cut-outs, garlands, drums, and whistles.

"Vijay remains capable of turning a movie release into a mass civic event. He is perhaps the last of the mega stars of this scale," Shrikrishna said.



ARIES (March 21 - April 20): The best way to deal with information that does not make sense is to ignore it. It may seem important now but with so many changes on the horizon you will have forgotten about it by this time tomorrow – so it can't be that significant can it?

TAURUS (April 21 - May 21): The next few days are going to be special for everyone but especially for you. Cosmic activity in your fellow Earth sign of Capricorn is intensifying by the minute, so what might be considered outrageous today will seem perfectly normal tomorrow.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21): It may be tempting to do what is expected of you just to stay in the good books of your employer or a senior colleague but you need to be more adventurous, and honest, than that. Call it as you see it and to hell with the consequences.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23): No, time is not running out and you do not need to start taking the kind of risks that are unlikely to pay off. Breathe deeply, relax and let the universe guide you along the path you are destined to take. Why struggle when you don't have to?

LEO (July 24 - Aug. 23): It may be tempting to seize the initiative and hurry things along but cosmic activity in the work area of your chart means you must stay calm and react to events rather than try to direct them. A more defensive approach will work best for you today.

VIRGO (Aug. 24 - Sept. 23): You must make sure that your dreams and schemes are realistic, because if they are disconnected from what's going on in the world you won't get far. As one of the zodiac's Earth signs you know better than most how to stay grounded.

LIBRA (Sept. 24 - Oct. 23): Your ruler Venus enters the most dynamic area of your chart at the end of the week, making this a good time for plans of a creative nature. Is there something you started long ago but never got round to finishing? Give it another go soon.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24 - Nov. 22): You don't have to wade through a mountain of facts and figures to get at the truth, you just need to stand back from what's going on and let yourself see the bigger picture. Chances are it's a picture that is actually quite pleasing.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23 - Dec. 21): Why are you looking in every direction but the one that is right for you? Most likely it's because you've had your head turned by someone who doesn't know what they are talking about. Accept the fact that you might have been deceived.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 - Jan. 20): The next few days will see the pace of life pick up dramatically but you are so in tune with the spirit of the times that you won't fall behind for even a moment. Focus on your number one objective and go for it with total self-belief.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21 - Feb. 19): It may seem as if your plans are falling apart but one day in the not too distant future you will look back and recognize that it was for your own good. Take it easy over the next few days and allow your world to be radically reordered.

PISCES (Feb. 20 - Mar. 20): Saturn in your sign has been a challenging influence for quite some time but it has also helped you to toughen up and make the best of life's inevitable setbacks. More challenges are coming but no way will you buckle under the pressure.

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Melissa cuts Jamaica's air traffic by over 500,000 passengers in 2025

Jamaica closed 2025 with 524,000 fewer air passengers, the steepest annual decline since the COVID-19 pandemic, after Hurricane Melissa severely disrupted the island's tourism sector late in the year.

According to the Pacific Airport Group (GAP), which operates Jamaica's two largest airports, both Montego Bay and Kingston were affected by storm-related disruptions. "Montego Bay and Kingston recorded decreases ... as a result of disruptions caused by Hurricane Melissa," the airport operator said in its year-end report.

Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay bore the brunt of the impact, handling 4.47 million passengers in 2025, an 11.6 per cent decline from 2024. The drop translated to 588,000 fewer travellers year-on-year. Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston, meanwhile, recorded modest growth, welcoming 1.84 million passengers, up 3.6 per cent, or roughly 64,000 additional travellers. Combined, traffic at the two airports fell by a net 524,000 passengers.

The decline followed a period of gradual recovery after Hurricane Beryl in 2024, but Melissa's strike in October reversed those gains. Montego Bay traffic had already slipped 3.0 per cent in 2024, while Kingston managed a 1.0 per cent increase despite the earlier storm. By comparison, during the height of the pandemic in 2020, passen-

ger traffic at Montego Bay plunged 66 per cent, though Kingston's figures that year were influenced by the timing of GAP's takeover of the airport.

GAP, which manages 12 airports in Mexico and two in Jamaica, reported a marginal 0.1 per cent year-on-year increase in overall December traffic across its portfolio. Jamaica's downturn, however, stood out, highlighting the island's exposure to external shocks. Hurricane Melissa damaged hotels and disrupted tour operations, triggering widespread cancellations. While Kingston benefits from business travel and returning residents, those segments were insufficient to offset the collapse in leisure arrivals concentrated in Montego Bay.

Before Hurricane Melissa struck, tourism indicators had been trending upward. The Planning Institute of Jamaica estimated that the country recorded 535,643 stopover arrivals in July and August 2025, a 7.0 per cent increase year-on-year, generating US\$786.8 million in earnings, up 10.1 per cent. Those gains, however, were ultimately overshadowed by the late-year impact of the storm.

Despite the decline in passenger traffic, the tourism industry formally resumed full operations in December 2025. Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett said in November that the sector is expected to return to full operational capacity by May 2026,

underscoring the length of the recovery ahead.

Speaking on November 13 to the United States-based Fox News Network, Bartlett acknowledged the scale of the damage caused by Hurricane Melissa, particularly in western Jamaica, where much of the island's resort infrastructure is concentrated. He said government agencies and nonprofit

organisations have mobilised food aid, clothing, tools and other essentials, supported by international donations and volunteer efforts.

At the same time, Bartlett framed renewed travel as a key component of the recovery. "The best way to give back is to come back," he said, urging visitors to return as rebuilding continues.

New T&T gas discovery an important boost, says Energy Minister

Energy Minister Dr. Roodal Moonilal and Minister in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries Ernesto Kesar have welcomed a successful development drilling operation by Touchstone Trinidad in the onshore Central Block, calling it an important boost for the country's energy sector.

The discovery was made at the Carapal Ridge-3 Development Well, the first drilling activity in the Central Block in nearly 20 years. The last onshore well in the area was drilled in 2006.

According to information released on January 7, the well was drilled to a depth of approximately 8,200 feet, successfully penetrating the targeted Herrera sands, which were confirmed to be gas-bearing. Completion and testing of the sands are currently under way, with production expected to be tied into the Central Block gas processing facility in the first quarter of 2026.

In addition to the primary discovery, the well also encountered gas-charged Karamat sands. These are now being assessed as a separate prospect for possible future development.

Touchstone acquired the Central Block in May 2025 and has since undertaken a detailed evaluation of the area's remaining resources. That assessment led to the decision to drill Carapal Ridge-3. The company is now reviewing three additional development drilling opportunities, applying insights gained from the initial well.

The energy ministers said the successful drilling effort supports the government's priority of increasing natural gas supply and bringing new production to market, particularly at a time when additional gas is critical to sustaining Trinidad and Tobago's energy and industrial sectors.

Trinidad and Tobago Cabinet approves paternity leave in labour law reform

Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has announced major labour law reforms after Cabinet approved amendments to the Maternity Protection Act and the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, clearing the way for the introduction of paternity and parental leave in Trinidad and Tobago.

In a post on her X account on Sunday, January 11, Persad-Bissessar described the approvals as “major wins for working families,” noting that the reforms are intended to modernise workplace protections and better reflect contemporary family realities.

The changes, first outlined publicly by Labour Minister Leroy Baptiste at a United National Congress news conference in Chaguanas, will for the first time formally recognise paternity leave and parental leave in national legislation. The benefits will extend beyond biological fathers to adoptive parents and guardians, and will also apply in cases where a mother dies following childbirth, allowing fathers or guardians to access parental leave.

Baptiste said Cabinet has already approved the amendments and confirmed they are now before Attorney General John Jeremie for drafting, ahead of their introduction in Parliament.

Among the measures outlined by the Prime Minister are paid breastfeeding breaks, stronger protections against workplace discrimination, a ban on pregnancy testing for job applicants and employees, and a guarantee that workers can return to the same job after maternity, paternity, or parental leave. The reforms will also shift the burden of proof onto employers in workplace disputes, extend full labour protections to contract workers, and introduce mechanisms to fast-track cases through the Industrial Court.

A long-criticised provision limiting maternity benefits to once every 24 months will also be removed. Baptiste said the restriction was “contrary to the general rules,” adding that women should not be penalised for becoming pregnant twice in one year.

Addressing breastfeeding protections, the Labour Minister said lactating mothers will be statutorily entitled to paid time for breastfeeding and expressing breast milk, with no penalty. The amendments will also prohibit demotion or loss of pay linked to paternity leave or breastfeeding breaks and guarantee the same job, pay, and employment conditions upon return. He noted that employers who breach anti-discrimination provisions could face fines.

Persad-Bissessar used her an-



Kamla Persad-Bissessar

nouncement to speak directly to young women, stressing that family life and professional ambition need not be at odds. “You do not have to choose between a career and a family — you can have both,” she said.

She also highlighted the role of women in national development, stating: “Our nation was built by genera-

tions of women who ensured their children had better lives in a stronger, more progressive country.”

Baptiste described the legislative changes as transformative, saying they would have an impact on women, fathers, adoptive parents, and contract workers, while providing safeguards for employees facing job loss. He

added that consultations have been held with trade unions and employer groups, including JTUM, NATUC, and the Employer Consultative Association.

The reforms are expected to rank among the most far-reaching labour law changes in recent years, with wide-ranging implications for employers, employees, and families across T&T.

New Coat of Arms for T&T banknotes

The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago has announced that the country’s new Coat of Arms will begin appearing on banknotes from August, starting with the Series 2026 TT\$100 denomination.

In a press release, the Central Bank said the Coat of Arms forms part of the design of all Trinidad and Tobago banknotes and coins and has been valid since February 25 last year. However, under the National Emblems of Trinidad and Tobago (Regulation) (Amendment) (Extension of Time for Use of Former Coat of Arms) Order, 2025, the former Coat of Arms will remain valid until January 2, 2031.

According to the Central Bank, following the introduction of the Series 2026 TT\$100 banknote, all \$100 notes and other denominations with series dates prior to 2026, as well as all coins bearing the former Coat of Arms, will be replaced on a phased basis. Old notes and coins with the former Coat of Arms that are in active circulation will remain legal tender until January 2, 2031, or a later date if extended by the Minister of Home Affairs.

Providing an update on the launch of the Series 2026 TT\$100 banknote, the Central Bank said the current \$100 note in circulation belongs to the 2019 Series. It explained that, based on standard banknote industry practices used by monetary authorities globally, a mid-series upgrade is typically issued within seven years. The bank said this approach supports modernisation and reflects advances in technology, including enhanced substrate materials, advanced security features, improved printing techniques and greater durability.



The Central Bank said the Series 2026 TT\$100 banknote will enter circulation from August and will co-circulate with the 2019 Series. The timing, it said, allows for activities required ahead of currency issuance, including secure shipment and distribution to stakeholders, adaptation of cash processing machinery and training. Additional time is also required for infrastructure modernisation to accommodate processing of the new note based on its specifications and security features, as well as for the rollout of a comprehensive “Know Your Money” public education campaign.

Body cameras now deployed among 1,000 members of JA Constabulary

The Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) says it has received and begun deploying 1,000 body-worn cameras, marking a major step in its ongoing effort to strengthen accountability and modernize policing.

In a statement issued Monday, the JCF said the cameras were in an advanced stage of procurement during the final quarter of 2025. The Commissioner of Police had previously announced during a nationally broadcast interview in September 2025 that the Force was nearing completion of the acquisition. Despite disruptions caused by Hurricane Melissa, the procurement process was completed, the JCF said.

The Axon Body Camera III devices are now being deployed, with priority given to police formations that experience high levels of interaction with the public. According to the Force, rollout is being guided by operational needs, training readiness and established governance protocols. Procurement is also underway for an additional 1,000 cameras, with acquisition and deployment expected during the next financial year.

The rollout comes amid long-standing public debate and calls for broader use of body-worn cameras in Jamaica. Human rights advocates, including Jamaicans for Justice (JFJ), have repeatedly urged the JCF to equip officers with cameras, particularly during planned operations and tactical deployments, arguing that independent video evidence could help clarify encounters and build community trust. Advocates have also pointed to several fatal police shooting incidents in which officers were reportedly not wearing



The body cameras come as human rights advocates call for more accountability

cameras, fueling public suspicion and eroding confidence in law enforcement.

The JCF has defended the pace of the rollout, citing procurement challenges, logistical hurdles and funding constraints. The Force has said equipping more than 8,000 frontline officers is a complex and costly undertaking and has pushed back against claims that it is resistant to accountability, describing such narratives as misleading. According to the JCF, decisions on deployment are driven by operational considerations rather than reluctance to oversight.

Prime Minister Dr. Andrew Holness has also previously addressed concerns about delays, noting that body-worn cameras require significant supporting infrastructure, including secure data storage systems. He has said the government is installing the necessary technology alongside the cameras to ensure the system functions properly.

The JCF maintains that the use of body-worn cameras is a central pillar of its transformation and modernization agenda, aimed at protecting citizens' rights while also safeguarding officers who operate within the law. The Force

said the cameras will help reduce false allegations, resolve disputes through evidence and strengthen professional oversight.

"This initiative represents a significant step in enhancing transparency, reinforcing public confidence in policing, and deepening trust," the JCF said, adding that its approach is grounded in verified facts rather than competing narratives.

The Force reiterated its commitment to modern, professional and accountable policing in service of Jamaica.

Antigua details conditions of deportee pact

A letter sent in August 2025 by Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the United States, Sir Ronald Sanders, outlines detailed conditions under which the twin-island nation would consider accepting third-country nationals, including refugees, as part of a proposed arrangement with Washington. The existence of the correspondence predates the government's announcement earlier this month that an agreement had been reached, even as officials insist the arrangement remains non-binding and has not been operationalised.

The letter, dated August 11, 2025,

was addressed to Mike Kozak, a senior official in the US State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. In it, Sanders thanked US officials for what he described as constructive discussions and confirmed the Antigua and Barbuda Embassy's receipt of a July 28, 2025, diplomatic note transmitting draft proposed text for an understanding between the two governments.

The disclosure comes amid public concern that Antigua and Barbuda could be positioned as a destination for people the United States is unable to return elsewhere. The government has

pushed back on that characterization, maintaining that no binding commitments exist and that any future arrangement would include strict safeguards.

According to Cabinet notes issued on January 8, 2026, Prime Minister Gaston Browne told ministers that the proposed memorandum of understanding would allow the United States to propose transfers strictly on a case-by-case basis. Antigua and Barbuda, he said, would retain an "absolute right to reject" any individual, with transfers capped at no more than 10 people per year.

However, the embassy letter itself

proposes a slightly different ceiling. In a section addressing capacity, it suggests a hard annual cap of no more than 12 people in aggregate per calendar year, including immediate family members. The letter points to Antigua and Barbuda's small-state constraints, referencing a population of approximately 95,000 and a land area of about 440 square kilometres.

Sanders' correspondence also sets out proposed duration and exit conditions. It calls for temporary immigration status for accepted transferees for up to 24 months, with any extension requiring mutual consent.

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Guyana's population reaches near 900,000, shows significant growth

Preliminary results from the Guyana National Population and Housing Census 2022 show the country's population at 878,674, representing a 17.6 percent increase since the 2012 census. The findings were presented on Monday at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre by Chief Statistician Errol La Creuz and Deputy Chief Statistician Vanessa Profit, who handed the report to Minister within the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh.

The data provides insights into population size and distribution, household composition, population density, sex ratios, local and foreign-born populations, and building stock. The Bureau of Statistics said these findings will be refined in a final report to be released later.

On Census Day, September 15, 2022, Guyana had 878,674 residents. Accounting for natural growth and net migration, the population is estimated to have risen to 956,044 by the end of 2024, approaching the one-million mark.

All regions recorded population growth since 2012. Region Four (Demerara-Mahaica) remains the most populated, with 347,759 people (39.58%), while Region Three (Essequibo Islands-West Demerara) overtook Region Six as the second most populated at 143,884 (16.38%). The least populated region continues to be Region Eight (Potaro-Siparuni) with 13,598 residents (1.55%).

Region Seven (Cuyuni-Mazaruni) saw the highest annual growth rate at 5.14%, followed by Region One (Barima-Waini) at 3.49%, and Region Three at 2.93%. Coastal areas accounted for 87.16% of the population, while hinterland regions made up 12.84%.

Locals—those born in Guyana or to Guyanese parents—comprised



Guyana's population is approaching the 1 million mark

96.93% of residents, while foreign-born residents accounted for 3.07%, up from 1.1% in 2012. The Bureau noted some foreign-born residents may remain unaccounted for due to undocumented status.

The census counted 271,946 households, up from 204,625 in 2012. The average household size fell to 3.23 persons, down from 3.65 a decade earlier. Region Four had the highest number of households at 112,876.

Population density rose nationally from 3.47 to 4.09 persons per square kilometre, with Region Four the most densely populated at 155.81 persons/km² and Region Nine the least at 0.52 persons/km².

Of the total population, 440,882 were male (50.18%) and 437,792 female (49.82%), reversing the 2012 ratio of 99 males per 100 females. Hinterland regions recorded a higher male-to-female ratio of 113:100, compared with 99:100 in coastal areas.

National building stock grew 42%, from 219,509 in 2012 to 311,742 in 2022. Coastal regions hold 88.58% of buildings, with hinterlands at 11.42%. About 81% of buildings were occupied, 4.47% under construction, 1.41% dilapidated, and 13.13% vacant or unclassified. Region Seven recorded the largest growth in building stock at 105%, while Region Six had the lowest at 22.89%.

More than 2,000 temporary staff were engaged for the exercise, supported by regional and international partners including the CARICOM Statistical Unit and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America. The 2022 census was the first in Guyana to use Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology via tablets, representing a significant advancement in data collection.

Minister Singh said preparations are ongoing for the final report, emphasizing the importance of accurate data for policy-making, resource allocation, and demographic analysis.

St Kitts eyes plans to address declining birth rates

St. Kitts and Nevis Prime Minister Dr. Terrance Drew has revealed plans to bring a government submission to Cabinet aimed at addressing declining birth rates, framing it as an investment in families, future generations, and national stability.

In a brief post on social media this week, Dr. Drew said he will propose measures to support families and encourage higher birth rates, adding: "This is about supporting families, securing our future, and investing in the next generation. I am included. #morebabies." No further details were provided in the post.

The announcement comes at a time when many Caribbean countries are recording significant drops in fertility

and birth rates, triggering concerns among policymakers, demographers, and social planners about future population structures and economic sustainability.

Jamaica's birth rate has trended downward for decades, with a 17.1% decline between 2011 and 2021, according to official data. Live births fell from about 39,700 in 2011 to roughly 32,900 a decade later, contributing to a rapidly aging population and slower population growth.

More recent data shows Jamaica's fertility rate — the average number of children a woman is expected to have in her lifetime — has fallen to around 1.9 births per woman, well below the replacement level of 2.1 required to sus-

tain population size without immigration.

The United Nations Population Fund's 2025 State of World Population Report highlighted Jamaica's fertility rate at just 1.3 births per woman, among the lowest in the world and similar to rates seen in countries facing long-term demographic decline like Japan and Italy.

Across the Caribbean, many nations now record fertility measures below the replacement rate. A demographic shift noted in regional data shows that 22 of 26 Caribbean countries have fertility rates below replacement level, raising concerns about the balance between working-age and dependent populations in the years ahead.

Experts point to a mix of socio-economic factors — including higher costs of living, urbanization, greater female participation in education and the workforce, and changing family norms — as key drivers in falling birth rates across the region. Regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced some of the sharpest fertility declines globally.

The demographic transition carries wide-ranging implications, influencing labor markets, social protection systems, and long-term economic planning. Governments and policy experts in some islands are now debating incentives such as parental support programs, housing benefits, and workplace policies to make childbearing and rearing more feasible.

Tobago People's Party sweeps THA elections, winning all 15 seats

The Tobago People's Party (TPP), led by Farley Augustine, secured a clean sweep in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) elections on January 12, winning all 15 seats and decisively defeating the People's National Movement (PNM).

The TPP declared victory shortly after 9 p.m., improving on its 14-1 seat tally from 2021, when the PNM's Kelvon Morris narrowly won the Darrel Spring/Whim seat by just three votes. By 10 p.m., it was clear that Morris had lost his seat, confirming the TPP's complete takeover.

The PNM spent the evening waiting to see if recounts or close results might change the outcome. At around 10 p.m., PNM Tobago leader Ancil Dennis announced he would step down, stating, "I support the transition to new leadership." He added that the party would pursue recounts in several constituencies, including Darrel Spring/Whim, where Morris lost by 17 votes.

The TPP's sweeping victory builds on its recent electoral success. In the 2021 THA elections, the predecessor PDP—whose members now make up the TPP—won 58% of the vote (16,932 votes), ahead of the PNM's 41% (11,942 votes). In the 2025 general election, the TPP, positioning itself as the sole Tobago-focused party, captured two parliamentary seats with 55% of the votes cast (13,857 votes to the PNM's 11,000).

Analysts had been cautious in predicting a clean sweep, though Augustine had signaled confidence in his party's prospects. Augustine remains a popular figure in Tobago and has pledged that the TPP will use its four-year mandate to focus on building the island and delivering on its development agenda.



TPP leader Augustine Farley

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West Indies icons hail Joel Garner after Barbados National award

Accolades continue to arrive with unrelenting force for legendary West Indies fast bowler Joel “Big Bird” Garner following his induction into the Order of the Freedom of Barbados, the nation’s highest honor.

The award was presented during Barbados’ 2025 Independence and Republic celebrations in recognition of his “distinguished and extraordinary service in sports.”

For a cricketer whose presence once dominated pitches around the world, the honor stands as a formal acknowledgment of a career that shaped an era and defined excellence.

Standing 6 feet 8 inches tall, Garner was a commanding figure whose physical stature translated seamlessly into cricketing intimidation. Yet beyond the fear he inspired in batters, he was revered equally for his humility, composure, and unwavering commitment to team success.

As a cornerstone of the dominant West Indies teams of the 1970s and 1980s, Garner embodied the balance between ruthless competitiveness and quiet leadership, qualities that remain etched in the sport’s collective memory.

Former West Indies captain Sir Clive Lloyd, himself a knight of the realm, led the tributes, emphasizing Garner’s rare blend of skill, discipline, and camaraderie.

“He was a great team person,” Lloyd said. “He added something differ-

ent; he got the ball to rise disconcertingly from just short of a good length, and he bowled one of the best yorkers I know. The minute the tail end was in, he would remove them. He was a great fellow to have in our team.”

Lloyd’s words captured what many opponents learned the hard way: when matches reached their decisive moments, Garner was often the one delivering the final blow.

Former fast-bowling spearhead Ambassador Courtney Walsh offered a deeply personal reflection, addressing Garner not just as a teammate, but as a lifelong influence.

“Big Bird, my good friend, man. From teammate to roommate. Someone I’ve always admired and looked up to as a young man,” Walsh said. “Thanks to all that you have passed on to me. Truly well-deserved award. Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.”

Walsh’s tribute underscored Garner’s enduring role as a mentor and standard-bearer for generations of West Indies fast bowlers.

Andy Roberts, a fellow member of the famed “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” provided sharp technical insight into why Garner was so devastating. Though he joined the quartet after Roberts, Michael Holding, and the injured Colin Croft had already established their fearsome reputation, Garner quickly became indispensable.

“He made the most integral and im-



Joel “Big Bird” Garner

portant part of that unit,” Roberts said. “He used his great height far better than any other fast bowler the world has produced from that height.”

Roberts singled out Garner’s signature delivery as the ultimate expression of that advantage.

“He had a great yorker. He didn’t need to bowl bouncers because once he released that ball from that height, it was

basically a more important weapon than what I could do. His height alone did everything.”

Decades after his final delivery, Joel “Big Bird” Garner continues to command reverence across the cricketing world. The Order of the Freedom of Barbados not only honors past achievements but affirms a legacy built on excellence, innovation, and quiet authority.

Shallow calls for accountability after disappointing year

Cricket West Indies (CWI) President Dr. Kishore Shallow has candidly acknowledged that the senior men’s team underperformed across formats in 2025, reflecting a year that fell well below expectations.

Speaking on the Mason and Guest radio program, Shallow assessed the team’s record and emphasized the need for accountability at all levels of the organization.

Under all-format head coach Daren Sammy, the West Indies struggled to find consistency last year. The team managed just one win from 10 Test matches, captured only one of five One-Day International series, and claimed two victories across five T20I series.

Shallow highlighted both the highs and lows of the campaign. “We have seen glimpses of really great performances by our team, whether it was in Australia or Pakistan,” he said, “but there have been lows, lows that we all are very disappointed in because there were opportunities where we believed we could have won matches and series that we haven’t.”

The CWI president did not shy away from assigning responsibility,

emphasizing that shortcomings were shared across leadership, coaching, and players.

“There must be collective responsibility, including the head coach Daren Sammy. Players have to take responsibility as well, and the board,” Shallow said. “We understand where we are in global cricket. We have not achieved the level of success that we want and certainly not at the pace that we want.”

Shallow’s comments signal an awareness within Cricket West Indies that systemic changes may be required to restore competitiveness. While glimpses of brilliance were evident, the overall results of 2025 underline a pressing need to convert potential into sustained success.

By acknowledging the challenges openly, Shallow set the stage for a year of reflection and recalibration, stressing that rebuilding momentum will require accountability, commitment, and strategic planning from all involved.

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CWI President Dr. Kishore Shallow



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West Indies name Afghanistan squad as World Cup countdown begins

Cricket West Indies (CWI) has unveiled a 16-member squad for its three-match T20 International series against Afghanistan, marking the Caribbean side's first major competitive step toward the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

The series will be contested from January 19-22 at the Dubai Cricket International Stadium in the United Arab Emirates.

With the World Cup set to begin on February 6, the Afghanistan series represents a critical checkpoint in West Indies' preparation, providing match exposure in subcontinental-style conditions and an opportunity to evaluate personnel ahead of final squad selection.

T20 captain Shai Hope will miss the series due to commitments in the ongoing SA20 tournament, along with Roston Chase, Akeal Hosein, and Sherfane Rutherford. In Hope's absence, Brandon King has been appointed captain.

King is no stranger to leadership at this level, having previously captained the West Indies in T20 Internationals, including the home series against South Africa in early 2024. His appointment brings continuity and experience to a

squad navigating both transition and preparation.

The series also marks the return of two important attacking options. Shamar Joseph and Evin Lewis have both been cleared to play after successfully completing return-to-play protocols following injuries sustained in earlier assignments.

Fast bowler Alzarri Joseph, who was sidelined toward the end of 2025, continues to make encouraging progress but has been left out of the squad as a precaution following medical review. CWI confirmed that he will remain under close observation as selectors assess his readiness for potential inclusion in the World Cup squad.

Meanwhile, Quentin Sampson, the Breakout Player of the 2025 Caribbean Premier League, has earned his maiden international call-up. Sampson replaces Rovman Powell, who has been rested for the series alongside Jason Holder and Romario Shepherd as part of a broader workload management strategy.

Head Coach Daren Sammy emphasized that the Afghanistan series is as much about preparation as it is about assessment, particularly for players return-



Brandon King

ing from extended absences and those stepping into new responsibilities.

"The opportunity to play competitive matches in subcontinental conditions is ideal, as it assists with our preparations and confidence building ahead of what will be a competitive T20 World Cup," Sammy said. "It also presents a valuable platform to assess players who would've missed significant

time towards the end of 2025, as well as those stepping into important roles for this series, prior to the selection of the final squad for the international tournament."

The final World Cup squad is expected to be announced ahead of West Indies' subsequent three-match T20I series against South Africa, scheduled for January 27-31.

The West Indies squad will depart the Caribbean on January 14 and arrive in the UAE on January 16, allowing time to acclimatize before the opening match.

Squad: Brandon King (Captain), Alick Athanaze, Keacy Carty, Johnson Charles, Matthew Forde, Justin Greaves, Amir Jangoo, Shamar Joseph, Evin Lewis, Gudakesh Motie, Khary Pierre, Quentin Sampson, Jayden Seales, Ramon Simmonds, Shamar Springer, Shimron Hetmyer.

Team Management Unit: Team Manager: Rawl Lewis, Head Coach: Daren Sammy, Assistant Coach (Batting): Floyd Reifer, Assistant Coach (Bowling): Ravi Rampaul, Assistant Coach (Fielding): Rayon Griffith, Physiotherapist: Dr. Denis Byam, Strength & Conditioning Coach: Darc Browne.

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World's fastest man Oblique Seville to make first US public appearance

Jamaica's dominance in global sprinting will be on full display in South Florida next month, as newly crowned 100-meter world champion Oblique Seville makes his first public appearance in the United States.

The Calabar Alumni Association Florida Chapter, Inc. announced that Seville will headline Green-and-Black Ness: Day Experience, a daytime cultural celebration scheduled for February 21, 2026, from noon to 6 p.m. at Markham Park.

Fresh off his historic world title, Seville—now officially the world's fastest man—will be the featured guest at the outdoor event, which blends Jamaican cultural pride with music, food, and community fellowship. Organizers describe the experience as part day fete, part traditional Jamaican cookout, offering a relaxed but festive atmosphere rooted in heritage and excellence.

While based in South Florida, interest in the event has already spread across Jamaican diaspora communities throughout the southeastern United States, positioning it as a regional destination gathering.

A major highlight of the program will be the presentation of the inaugu-

ral Lion Heart Award of Courage to Seville by Calabar Alumni Florida. The honor recognizes his discipline, resilience, and rise to the top of global athletics. Seville is also expected to address attendees, sharing his personal journey—from challenges and setbacks to standing atop the sprinting world.

"To make my first public appearance in the United States in a space that celebrates Jamaican culture and community means a great deal to me," Seville said. "Calabar is part of my journey that helped shape who I am, and to be honored by my people in the diaspora is special. I hope my journey reminds young people everywhere that with discipline, belief, and hard work, anything is possible."

Karl Thompson, president of Calabar Alumni Florida, said the event goes beyond entertainment.

"Green-and-Black Ness is more than an opportunity to have a good time," Thompson said. "It is a moment of cultural pride for the diaspora—it's really more of a green, black, and gold thing. It's a celebration of Jamaican excellence and courage, honoring one of our own and inspiring the next generation through his achievements."



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24, 2026

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Pan in de
Avenue
Main Street,
G/Town

Friday Jan.
30, 2026

Mash
Jamboree
Linden
Bayroc Track
& Field
Stadium

Saturday Jan.
31, 2026

Pop up
Concert
Essequibo
Anna Regina
Car Park

Sunday Feb.
1, 2026

Masquerade
Jamboree
Essequibo
Anna Regina
Car Park

Sunday Feb.
1, 2026

Banks
Mash in de
Avenue
Main Street
G/Town

Friday Feb.
6, 2026

Mash
Jamboree
Tapachinga
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Saturday Feb. Thurs. & Fri. Feb.
7 2026 12-13, 2026

M.O.E
Children's
Mashramani
Finals

Friday Feb.
13, 2026

Pop Up
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Moruca
Region 1

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13, 2026

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Costume
Parade

Saturday Feb.
14, 2026

Calypso
Monarch
Mabaruma
Region 1

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14, 2026

Dancehall
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1823
Monument
Site Kitty
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15, 2026

Panorama
Kingston
Beach

Thursday Feb.
19, 2026

Soca
Monarch
Georgetown
Bus Park
Linden

Friday Feb.
20, 2026

Chutney
Monarch
Albion
Stadium

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21, 2026

Masharama
National
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21, 2026

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Providence
National
Stadium

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22, 2026

Republic
Flag
Raising
Public
Buildings

Sunday Feb.
22, 2026

Costume
& Float
Parade
Georgetown

Monday Feb.
23, 2026