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Vol. 42 • No 12 • February 19, 2025 • Tel: 905-738-5005 • 312 Brownridge Dr. Thornhill, ON L4J 5X1 • indocaribbeanworld.com • indocaribbeanworld@gmail.com

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## Our Community Is Thriving!



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PMCF's Miyo Yamashita

### Game-changer as Cricket to Conquer Cancer launched

**O**n February 4, World Cancer Day, the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation launched *Cricket to Conquer Cancer*, Canada's first-ever street cricket fund-raiser, set to take place on May 31 at Mississauga's Celebration Square. The unveiling brought together community leaders, corporate partners, and supporters, all committed to *Carry The Fire* in advancing cancer research and care.

The evening featured keynote speeches from Miyo Yamashita, President and CEO of the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation, and a special appearance

by international cricket star Carlos Brathwaite, who encouraged teams to register for the inaugural event. Attendees also celebrated the announcement of the 2025 Honorary Chairs Sara Mazhar, Mehran Shahriar, Reetu Gupta, and Bobby Sahni. The event also saw *Ethnicity Matters* confirm its sponsorship while issuing the call to other corporations to join the cause.

With 80 teams set to compete, *Cricket to Conquer Cancer* is already 50 percent sold out. [Click here for information on sponsorship or for team registration.](#) Also, [turn to Page 22](#) for more information.



Carlos Brathwaite. PMCF photos



Marit Stiles



Doug Ford



Bonnie Crombie



Mike Schreiner

### Ontario leaders intensify final campaign push

— As Election Day nears, the NDP and Liberals are in a competitive battle for second place, each working to consolidate progressive voters in order to challenge Doug Ford's PCs. While Ford aims to strengthen his hold on the province, the opposition parties are fighting to define themselves as the most viable alternative.

...

**Toronto** — With Election Day fast approaching on February 27, Ontario's political leaders are intensifying their campaigns in a bid to shore up support, solidify their party's standing, and challenge Doug Ford's governing Progressive Conservatives.

This week each leader continued to target key voter blocs across the province, vying to either maintain ground or gain momentum in what is shaping up to be a fast-paced snap election.

Ford, who is leading the PCs into an election for the third time, previously secured majority victories in both 2018 and 2022. Meanwhile, Marit Stiles is leading the Ontario New Democratic Party into her first election since assuming the

party leadership in February 2023.

It will also be Bonnie Crombie's first campaign as leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, having won the party leadership just over a year ago in December 2023.

Among the major party leaders, Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner holds the longest tenure, having served in the role since 2009.

With Toronto playing a decisive role in the electoral landscape, this week Stiles was campaigning in the NDP-held riding of Spadina-Fort York, where she unveiled her party's *Plan for Toronto*, which includes key pledges aimed at renters and transit riders. These voter groups form a significant portion of the city's electorate, where nearly 50 percent of residents are renters.

Among the NDP's proposals is a commitment to reinstate rent and vacancy controls, prohibiting above-guideline rent increases, and halting rent hikes between tenancies.

Stiles contrasted her party's stance with that of Liberals' leader Crombie, who has promised a "phased-in" rent control

**See Page 9: Ontario heads**

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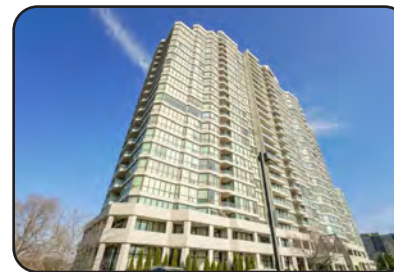
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Campbell (second from right) with sons (left to right) Malik, Nickolas, and Kadeem



JCA President David Betty (left) pins the King Charles III Coronation Medal on Campbell

## Crowning achievement as Campbell honoured for leadership

— Chris Campbell's journey is one of breaking barriers and building bridges. As a champion for diversity in the trades, his leadership has opened up opportunities for under-represented groups while setting a precedent for equity within labour organisations. His dedication was recognised at the Jamaican Canadian Association's Boonoonoos Brunch, where he received the King Charles III Coronation Medal – a fitting tribute to a leader whose life's work embodies the event's theme of Legacy and Resilience.

**Toronto** – The Jamaican Canadian Association hosted its annual Boonoonoos Brunch on February 9, transforming its Arrow Road headquarters into a hub of community, heritage, and celebration.

The event, held in recognition of Black History Month, focused on the theme of *Legacy and Resilience*, drawing together community leaders, dignitaries, and guests to reflect on the enduring impact of Black Canadians.

The brunch featured speeches, awards, and reflections on the contributions of Black Canadians to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the nation.

Among the eminent speakers addressing the audience was JCA President David Betty, who underscored the importance of preserving Black heritage and strengthening community bonds through collective action and advocacy.

Also among the main highlights at the event was the presentation of the King Charles III Coronation Medal to Chris

Campbell, a long-time advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the trades.

As president of the Carpenters' Union Local 27 and director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Carpenters' Regional Council, Campbell is an indefatigable champion for fair representation and opportunities for marginalised communities in the skilled trades.

Beyond his national advocacy, Campbell's historic milestone as the first Black president in the 140-year history of the Carpenters' Union was recognised at the event, making the award for his pioneering work all the more significant.

The formal presentation was conducted by Scarborough Centre's MPP David Smith, who acted on behalf of King Charles III, while Betty had the honour of pinning the medal onto Campbell's jacket.

The King Charles III Coronation Medal is a prestigious commemorative honour marking the May 6, 2023 monarch's coronation. Reserved for Canadians who have made significant contributions to their communities or to the nation, it reflects a tradition of recognising service, leadership, and achievement across various fields.

This year, 30,000 medals were distributed across Canada, with 4,000 allocated to members of the Canadian Armed Forces, while others have been awarded to individuals nominated by provincial and territorial governments, Members of Parliament, senators, and community organisations.



The Bharat Sevashram Sangha in India has over 100 schools. Earlier this month, Swami Pranavananda Vidypith Primary Section English medium school in Tollygunge, Kolkata celebrated its Golden Jubilee. In attendance at the celebration in Kolkata was Toronto's Swami Bhajanandaji (left in photo); the General Secretary of Bharat Sevashram Sangha Srmat Swami Biswatmanandaji; and other religious and government officials. The school was founded in 1975 with 17 pupils; it was upgraded to a junior high in 1998, and to a higher secondary school in 2002. Today, it has 150 teachers and employees, and close to 3,500 students. *Facebook photo.*



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BridgGroup's President Natasha Bridgmohan (second from left) with (left to right) Jey Jeyakanthan, founder of Landed for Success, BridgGroup's CEO Glenn Bridgmohan, and Niagara International Film Festival's Gordon So at the celebration. *Photo by Ramesh Ramkalawan*

## Bridgmohan receives milestone award

— *Natasha Bridgmohan's latest achievement in an honorary doctorate is a testament to her dedication to financial education, business excellence, and community empowerment. With a career defined by both professional success and corporate social responsibility, she continues to inspire and lead, reshaping the financial landscape through education, advocacy, and strategic innovation.*

Financial expert and motivational speaker Natasha Bridgmohan recently marked another milestone in her career, receiving an honorary doctorate from the Malaysia South India Chamber of Commerce. The premier group awards honorary doctorates to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to society, particularly in the realms of business and community empowerment.

A traditional *puja* was held to commemorate the achievement, which saw the evening imbued with gratitude, blessings, and cultural reverence in recognition of Bridgmohan's far-reaching contributions to business and community empowerment on a global scale.

Bridgmohan's journey is one of perseverance and success. Having immigrated to Canada from Guyana with her parents, she now serves as the President and Chief Visionary Officer of The BridgGroup of Companies, which is located in Woodbridge.

Guided by a philosophy that emphasises financial education and empowerment, she has dedicated her career to equipping individuals with the knowledge and tools necessary for sound financial decision-making. As highlighted on the [company's website](#), her initiatives span a broad audience, from children and youth groups to business owners, couples, families, and seniors, through workshops, seminars, and educational talks.

A transformative leader in the finance sector, Bridgmohan has positioned The BridgGroup of Companies as a driving force for financial independence and stability. Her expertise and motivational approach enable individuals to take control of their financial futures, fostering clarity and confidence in their wealth-building journeys.

Beyond her corporate achievements, Bridgmohan is an established author and media personality. She hosts *The Financial Room* on GLOBAL/CHEX TV, and has been featured in various television and radio programs, alongside numerous print publications. Her influence extends beyond the screen, as she actively engages in philanthropic initiatives, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to community upliftment.

Bridgmohan's philanthropic efforts include her involvement with organisations such as the Vaughan Food Bank, Downsview Hockey Club, Ontario Society of Senior Citizens Organisations, and the Brampton Senior & Youth Centre Scholarship Fund. She also sponsors non-profit initiatives such as BSM, Pranav, and Black Moms Connection, and provides specialised financial literacy workshops for disadvantaged youth and children.

Her contributions to business and finance have earned her numerous accolades, further cementing her influence in the industry. Among her recognitions are the 2022 National Mortgage Top 20% Sales Award, the Trusted Financial Advisor designation in Vaughan for 2023, and the 2014 Business of the Year-Young Entrepreneur Award. Additionally, she has been named among the Top 50 Influential Women, and was a nominee for the Small Business of the Year Award in 2012.



Honorary Consul Mani Singh and members of the Consulate General for Guyana in Toronto joined the Association of Concerned Guyanese at their annual Valentine's Day Dinner and Dance, which took place at the Elite Banquet Hall on February 15. Addressing attendees that included members of the diaspora and friends of Guyana, Honorary Consul Singh delivered a message of inclusivity, tolerance, and love on behalf of Guyana's President Dr Irfaan Ali, the government of Guyana, and the diaspora. Despite the extreme weather, the evening was a warm and resounding celebration of unity and togetherness. In photo, Honorary Consul Singh (at centre) with ACG officials and invited guests. *Facebook photo.*



Among celebrations in Toronto to mark Grenada's 51st anniversary Independence was a flag-raising ceremony, which was held on February 7 at the Legislative Assembly, Queen's Park. At the reception (in photo below) with Grenada's Consul General Gerry Hopkins (second, left) were (left to right) St Lucia's Consul General Henry Mangal; Dominica's Trade and Investment Commissioner Frances Delsol; and Guyana's Honorary Consul Mani Singh. *Facebook photos.*



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**Editorial**

**Our love for salt**

**I**n the grand mosaic of public health concerns, while some threats are immediately noticeable, others infiltrate into our daily lives unnoticed until their consequences are irreversible. Among these silent threats is the excessive consumption of sodium, or table salt, a ubiquitous yet insidious accomplice in the global crisis of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Recent data underscore the urgency of this issue: as Canadians, we consume, on average, 2,758 milligrams of sodium per day, which far exceeds WHO's recommended limit of 2,000 mg. As we all know, sodium overconsumption is among the drivers of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and other serious health complications.

Excess sodium at the national level takes on particular significance when viewed through the lens of our Caribbean diaspora. Our culinary traditions, deeply rooted in histories of bold and spicy seasoning, often incorporate high levels of sodium. This cultural affinity, when transposed onto our Canadian landscape that is already predisposed to excessive sodium consumption, creates an intersection of risk factors that demands our urgent attention.

The implications are clear that even without GTA-specific studies, it is reasonable to infer that our Caribbean diaspora is well within, or may even be exceeding, the excessive national sodium consumption trend.

Our argument is further reinforced by sobering findings in the Caribbean itself. According to recent data from PAHO, sodium consumption across the region mirrors Canada's high number, exceeding WHO's recommended two grams per day. For example, in Barbados, ultra-processed foods account for 40.5 percent of daily caloric intake; also, a study in Trinidad and Tobago found that food categories consistently exceeded recommended sodium thresholds.

Meanwhile, progress remains inconsistent across the Caribbean to curb sodium intake. A 2021 PAHO assessment found that while 70 percent of surveyed Caribbean and Latin American nations had NCD reduction policies recommending lower sodium intake, only six had implemented comprehensive national strategies.

Such absence of higher-level regulatory consistency means that many Caribbean populations, and by extension our diaspora communities here in Canada, and elsewhere in the world, continue to face heightened risks from sodium-related health conditions.

PAHO's findings carry critical implications. If sodium consumption remains a pervasive issue in the Caribbean, then it follows that our diaspora, with its strong cultural and culinary ties to the homelands, are most likely maintaining similar dietary habits; now add to this the excess-sodium overlap with our consumption of mainstream food.

It means that as a diaspora, we face layers of exposure to excessive sodium, which now necessitates deliberate and targeted public health interventions. Also, it means that public health discourse must meet the challenges with specific engagements to deal with this vulnerability.

This underscores even further the pressing need for targeted sodium-reduction initiatives in the GTA, across Canada, and wherever our diaspora has settled abroad.

There is now a critical need for our public health stakeholders to move beyond generic dietary recommendations, and instead embrace an approach that speaks to our diaspora's lived experiences. It means working with chefs, restaurants, community groups and its leaders, and nutritionists who understand the cultural nuances of Caribbean cuisine in developing low-sodium alternatives that do not sacrifice taste or tradition.

It also means prioritising education and access to healthier food choices through community-based programs, food subsidies, and transparent food labeling policies.

The time for action is now. The health of our diaspora hinges not only on recognising the problem, but on enacting solutions that respect cultural heritage while safeguarding future generations.

Sodium may be an invisible and insidious adversary, but its consequences are all too real. A collective, culturally informed response is not just advisable, it is an imperative.

**Distinct approaches to Ontario's ballot-box question**

**V**oters in Ontario will go to the ballot box on February 27, and will have the opportunity to keep the current Progressive Conservative government under Doug Ford's leadership, or seek an alternative government to lead Canada's largest province.

Ontario was not due to have an election until June 2026, but Ford read the political tea leaves, and has taken a chance to prematurely renew his mandate with an early election.

There are 124 seats in the Ontario Legislature. Therefore, 63 is a critical number for a party to form a majority government. Before the legislature was dissolved, Ford's PCs held 79 seats. The NDP 28, the Liberals nine, the Green Party two, and six Independent MPPs were sitting in the legislature.

Before the election call, a leaked internal memo that went out from Ford's chief of staff stressed "the stronger the mandate the better", which hinted that the ruling PCs intends to increase their majority mandate at Queen's Park.

Ford's message to voters was that with the threats from the new administration of US President Donald Trump, he needed a renewed mandate to provide the support to sustain the province's economy. This included potentially "tens of billions of dollars" to support workers that could be hit by US tariffs.

From the get-go, Ford established that this election was necessary to ensure he had the tools needed to reinforce Ontario's economy. One can argue that he already had that mandate.

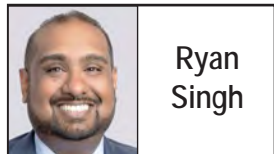
However, Ford crafted a narrative there was a significant threat to Ontario, and an election was necessary to elect a government that would best defend against this taking place.

With a 28-day campaign period, Ford is hopeful that it would be the only message in the heads of voters. He pre-emptively shaped the ballot box question ahead of the election itself.

The narrative during an election is critical to political parties. It defines the campaigns, and it establishes what the big question is for voters when they cast their ballots.

For political parties and their strategists, it is vital to establish this question as an attempt to persuade voters what issue should be on the top of their minds when they cast their ballots.

There is no science to predict what the ballot-box question will eventually be in any election; however, a political party with a leader who has a grasp and a clear message on that question is



Ryan Singh

more than likely to be successful.

To Ford's credit, he provided Ontarians with a ballot-box question before the election was called. Having this in hand would likely eliminate his competitors before the election even began.

But is the ballot-box question the need for a government that is ready to respond to threats by President Trump?

The Liberals under the leadership of Bonnie Crombie, former Mayor of Mississauga, have attempted to define the election on their own issue. The message branded across Crombie's campaign bus reads: "11,000 people died waiting for surgery last year". This was a specific focus on a very specific issue – the state of health care in the province.

Crombie's campaign has latched on to the deteriorating healthcare system in Ontario. She has promised to end hospital hallway health care in part by paying nurses and personal support workers more, and ensuring wage parity across the entire system.

Meanwhile, Ford left the province for a visit to Washington, DC, to meet with officials regarding looming US tariffs.

"On Your Side" is the campaign slogan for the Ontario New Democratic Party. Under their leader, Marit Stiles, they have opted for a broad campaign focused on affordability, which is still a concern in many households across the province.

It means there are distinct approaches and attempts to define the final ballot-box question for voters.

Crombie and Stiles will continue to call out the failures of the Ford government, and that those important domestic issues, health care, education, and so on, have been made worse.

However, in a condensed campaign period, and with news media constantly focused on the actions of US President Trump, it is hard to escape the reality of what will be at the top of voters' minds.

As we inch closer to the election, time is limited for Ontario's Opposition leader, and Ford will continue his forceful message that his party is here to "Protect Ontario".

The fundamental basics come down to driving voters to the polls on fear. Fear of the ramifications to our economy and well-being with the threats of tariffs. This might be enough to ensure Ford enough support to acquire another majority mandate.

**No low-hanging fruits, so we learned to aim higher**

**T**he sky always announced its coming. At first a low hum, the crop duster's approaching drone then rippled through the stillness of the early morning, ripping its peaceful skein in places so the neighbourhood's backyard chickens paused their relentless scratching in the dirt to look upwards, their heads cocking in tilts of anxiety.

I was a young boy then, back in the homeland with my peers, together chasing the light aircraft's oversized dragon-fly shadow as it invaded our adobe village, then crossing to the fields of canes beyond.

We chased the aircraft to the pot-holed, gravel-road boundary between our huts and the fields. As we ran, the crop duster was descending in altitude, enough for us to see the helmeted head of its pilot bobbing in the cockpit, even as its front wheels came so close they were almost touching the tips of the tallest canes.

We never questioned the crop duster's purpose as the pilot released its contrails of chemicals from the back of its wings onto the unending sea of sugar canes below. Positioned at the margin, we inhaled the drifting mist, its acrid scent settling on our skin, burning our eyes and the backs of our throats, and clinging to our hair, clothing, and memory.

Enchanted by the drone of the aircraft as it returned for run after run, we looked on as the pilot descended continuously, releasing its payload of chemicals oblivious to our presence at the edge, as if from its lofty height, we too were tiny pests endangering the enriching fields of sugar canes.

But there was one among us who was not enchanted by the dragon looping overhead. Perhaps there was a seed of rebellion germinating within; an incipient spirit of resistance emerging, an anger that was being readied for a spark.

Maybe, just maybe, there was the foreshadowing of a time that would come later in his adult years, when he would rise up against the crop duster's owners and its pilot who both were apathetic to our presence; against those who were the architects that had embedded thick, restraining iron rings into our history, similar to the ones now threaded for control through the nostrils of the beasts of burden labouring in the fields.

And against the privileged, who briefly leaving their air-conditioned offices, leaned comfortably and securely against insulations of iron rails, looking down with menace as our parents fed the hungry mills with sugar canes.

I recall the time arrived when my young friend could take it no more. It was as if a vessel within him had brimmed into an overflow from the nuisance of the aircraft's thrumming

propellers and its chemicals. It was these chemicals, which in its village-wide drift, left behind white residue each morning on my grandmother's soot-blackened work clothes drying on makeshift clotheslines strung between bamboo poles.

He began hurling rocks. It was a natural crossover from our foraging for food when our parents and guardians were away, my grandmother coughing as she dusted off the granular residue dew had glued to her work clothes before she headed to the cane fields, leaving me behind to forage among razor-sharp fields of grass.

Then we were warriors, little Davids hurling rocks at the Goliaths that were mango trees. We finessed our throwing skills through daily skirmishes against fruit trees fortified with unyielding fortresses of branches made thick with an armour of leaves. Even then we had come to understand that in our deprivation and lack, there would be no low-hanging fruit in our early lives.

So it was the rocks we hurled targeted lofty, distant fruit with a precision born out of a will to survive; out of an early and resolute faith in making do with what we had, a mantra our parents recited daily to themselves, and to us in our childhood lives.

We made do, putting to fruitful use river-rounded pebbles, flat rocks that hovered like flying saucers, slinging them so they sailed unerringly and accurately between gnarled trunk and networks of twigs, aiming to bring down fruits cleverly ensconced behind nests bristling with highly-territorial wasps.

And so it was that these acts of foraging, procurements borne out of deprivation and necessity, found us ascending into a higher plane, climbing upwards confidently like the crop duster as it left us behind with fits of coughing after deploying its bloated cargo of poison among the sugar canes, and into our houses.

Soon it was not just about foraging to fill our empty stomachs. Throwing a rock was an act of elevation, about acquiring one of life's more refined skills. Accuracy in bringing down a fruit was about artistry; about one's pride, self-worth, and an inherent potential to succeed in life made manifest via the arc of a well-thrown rock sailing unerringly to find the sweet spot, severing a mango where it was glued to its stem.

And so, without knowing it, one in my cohort was preparing for a bigger battle. We watched each attempt fail, each arc of a hurled rock rising, then descending, always too short of the crop duster, falling and being absorbed into the sugar cane fields.

Once he made contact, the rock bouncing off the descending aircraft's fuselage, the pilot's startled response a glimpse through a window that one day we could be uplifted to the stars.



Romeo Kaseram

Views expressed are not necessarily those of this publication. Letters to be published will be edited where necessary. Publisher: Harry Ramkhalawan Editor: Romeo Kaseram Columnists/Writers/Photographers: Vidur Dindayal, Bernard Heydorn, Dwarka Lakhan, Dhanpaul Narine, Ryan Singh, Nalini Mohabir, Ramesh Ramkhalawan, Russell Lutchman. Contact Information: Indo Caribbean World Inc. 312 Brownridge Drive, Thornhill, Ontario. L4J 5X1 (905) 738-5005; indocaribbeanworld@gmail.com Website: www.indocaribbeanworld.com



## World in chaos, but we can make Trinidad and Tobago a better place through selfless acts

Dear Editor,

I grew up in a community in Trinidad and Tobago where we had neighbours of every race and religion. The camaraderie was infectious.

As I took the two-mile trek to and from elementary school, I was expected to greet everyone, and address each adult as "uncle" or "aunty".

I recall once crying on the way to school, because I did not have a red-inked pen, and a neighbour took me to the shop and bought me one.

Our Grenadian neighbour always had something for us to eat and drink when we visited. Other neighbours shared treats from religious holidays with us. Schoolmates and relatives lent us textbooks. My love of reading was possible because I was able to borrow novels from the villagers.

We would sometimes wait for hours after school for a ride home from a relative while attending secondary school in San



The author recalls picking guavas in Trinidad

Fernando. The kindness was not just that of "strangers", but also of relatives.

## Guyana must accept new era, embrace opportunities ahead

Dear Editor,

A recent study by *Forbes India* that was released on January 10 has placed Guyana ninth in GDP per capita. This positions Guyana just ahead of the US, which placed tenth and Denmark which placed eleventh.

Luxembourg and Singapore topped the list in first and second place respectively.

It is a very humbling and motivating metric, especially when one considers the history of Guyana and the difficulties that we have faced over the years since having a strong position prior to Independence.

We have overcome a very difficult embargo to reach this point of increasing wealth and prosperity. What still lies before us is an opportunity to regain the peaceful existence that we had prior to our difficult times.

We must now embrace this new era in our national development, and accept the responsibility that comes with it.

We must also resist the temptation to revert to internal strife and conflict. If internal conflict is allowed to flourish during the upcoming elections, then our growth as a nation could be hindered. The "Mo fyah slow fyah" mentality must be put aside to prevent the destruction that comes with it.

Our nation must overcome that which hinders law and order from taking root, and we must aid in the growth of our nation's

stature on the world stage.

The strength of Guyana was always rooted in the way we treated each other with dignity and respect. Now that we have an opportunity to share equally in our nation's prosperity, we must encourage our leaders to work equitably and fairly with each other.

Our treatment of our fellow Guyanese is also within our individual actions and words. To see our fellow citizen for the unique person that he or she represents will help us find common purpose, which will allow us to grow to be much stronger than we are today.

It is still the beginning of our journey as a nation, and making our growth sustainable for future generations is within us the six peoples of Guyana. This is a choice we can and must make. We must choose to be better each day. We must choose to be a promoter of equality and peace.

We must choose to help each other succeed. We must choose to free each other from corruption and harm.

These are the choices we can, and must make to help ourselves and those around us achieve the Great land of Guyana.

Congratulations to my fellow citizens and God guard you, great Mother, and make us to be more worthy of our heritage, land of the free!

Jamil Changlee, Guyana, via email.

I came from a very humble home but never felt poor. I grew up with seven siblings. My father was the disciplinarian and bread winner.

My mother took on the roles of educator, barber, doctor, seamstress, cook and economist. She ran the household on my father's meagre earnings.

My mother took groceries on credit from the village shop. Sometimes she concocted meals where taste and appearance were not options. She did everything in her power to ensure we got a proper education, and frequently visited our primary school to discuss issues affecting our schooling.

I would traverse the vacant land all around us to pick guavas for jam, would also pick mangoes, cut cane, and partake of fruits that did not belong to us. No one minded. That is how we lived. We felt safe because everyone looked out for each other.

Our community had a huge impact on our lives. My family benefited greatly with the help of neighbours, relatives, and conscientious parents. Many of those who helped us have passed on, but from time to time I still think of their generosity.

My God-fearing grandparents, Sunday school classes, and exposure to hymns and psalms also helped to develop a social conscience, integrity, and compassion.

We cannot exist in a world caring only for those with whom we are comfortable. We owe it to society and mankind to be our brothers' keeper. The government cannot meet all the needs of all the citizens.

Today, so many of us are in a better place financially. All of us have benefited from free education up to secondary school level, and, in recent times, many from free tertiary education. Let us use our knowledge to mentor or tutor a child that needs help. Let us give back to our school or community.

I try as much as possible whenever I step out of my home to do something to make someone else's life better, and I make every effort to adhere to my goal.

The world is in chaos because of apathy, discrimination, selfishness, huge egos, and greed. We can all make Trinidad and Tobago a better place with our selfless acts. Parents have to do their part as well, as mine did under difficult circumstances. Poverty is not an excuse.

Our mission is to use our skills, talents and resources to make this place a better world. We will forever live behind bars if we do not change our thinking and behaviour.

S. Ramkissoon, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.



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# Additional flavours required for Ravi Dev's 'Seven Curry' analysis

Dear Editor,

Ravi Dev's detailed letter on 'Seven Curry', which appeared last month in the Guyana media, on social media, in other publications abroad, offers an insightful perspective on its historical and cultural roots. However, certain claims made in it merit clarification, and a more nuanced analysis.

While Dev's discussion on the history of Indentured labourers and their culinary adaptations is valuable, some of his assertions lack comprehensive evidence, or fail to account for broader contexts.

As he claimed, "Ghee was unavailable to Hindus, implying they cooked their food primarily with water."

However, this claim oversimplifies the dietary practices of Indian Indentured labourers and their descendants. Ghee has always held religious and cultural significance in Hindu traditions, used especially during festivals, weddings, and religious offerings, even in times of economic hardship.

Historical records show that Indentured labourers prioritised religious observances, often saving scarce resources to ensure that rituals, including the use of ghee, were performed according to tradition.

Researchers like Dr Brinsley Samaroo and Dr Lomarsh Roopnarine have documented how Indentured Indians in the Caribbean maintained cultural practices by sourcing essential items like ghee, or substituting with locally available alternatives when necessary.

The persistence of ghee in Hindu pujas, even today, underscores its cultural continuity,



**Brinsley Samaroo**

rather than its absence.

Additionally, while cooking oils like mustard oil were commonly used among poorer classes in India, the dietary habits of Indentured labourers in British Guiana evolved as their economic circumstances improved. By the early 20th century, many Indo-Guyanese could afford to incorporate ghee or other oils into their diets.

Now let us take a look at Dev's second claim, namely, that 'Seven Curry' is a relic of indentured subsistence practices.

'Seven Curry', far from being a static culinary tradition rooted in deprivation, reflects a sophisticated adaptation of Indian dietary practices. The concept of serving multiple dishes on a single platter or leaf is directly derived from the Indian *thali*, a balanced meal offering a variety of tastes and nutrients.

According to culinary historian Colleen



**Lomarsh Roopnarine**

Taylor Sen, the *thali* tradition was common across regions in India, emphasising nutritional variety by including dishes rich in protein (*dhal*), fibre (vegetables), and carbohydrates (rice or *roti*).

In Guyana, 'Seven Curry' adapted to local resources, incorporating ingredients like eddo leaves, pumpkin, and bora. This adaptation underscores resilience and cultural ingenuity, rather than a mere echo of subsistence living.

Mauritius, another former Indentured colony, provides a parallel example with its *sept-cari* ('Seven Curry'), which has similarly evolved into a cherished national dish while maintaining its cultural and religious symbolism. This global context demonstrates that 'Seven Curry' is not a mere relic of Indentured hardship, but a dynamic cultural expression that has transcended its origins.

Now let us look at Dev's third claim, namely that Indo-Guyanese cuisine reflects a singular experience.

His framing of 'Seven Curry' as the definitive marker of Indo-Guyanese culinary identity risks overshadowing the diversity within the community itself. Tamil Indentured labourers, who constituted a smaller but significant percentage of migrants, brought distinct culinary traditions with them, including spicy tamarind-based dishes and coconut-rich curries. Their influence is evident in dishes like *dhal puri* and *amchar*, which have become integral to Indo-Guyanese cuisine.

Moreover, Indo-Guyanese culinary practices have not developed in isolation, but in interaction with other cultural groups in Guyana, including Afro-Guyanese, Indigenous peoples, and Portuguese. This interplay has enriched the nation's culinary heritage, with dishes like curry and *roti* being embraced beyond the Indo-Guyanese community.

While 'Seven Curry' is a significant cultural tradition, it is essential to view it as part of a broader, evolving Indo-Guyanese identity. Historical and contemporary evidence contradicts the notion of ghee's absence in Hindu practices or 'Seven Curry's' static origins.

Instead, these traditions reflect the community's adaptability, resilience, and contributions to Guyana's multicultural fabric.

By acknowledging the diversity within Indo-Guyanese cuisine and its interaction with other cultural influences, we can foster a more inclusive understanding of Guyana's rich heritage.

**Banmattie Singh, Guyana, via email.**



**PM Rowley plants yams while Minister Kazim Hosein looks on**

## TT govt sowing seeds, reaping distractions

Dear Editor,

In what can only be described as a performative political charade, four sitting government ministers, including Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley and the Prime Minister-designate, Stuart Young, gathered with pomp and ceremony to plant yams. Yes, yams!

A full production was staged, complete with microphones, a podium, a tent, chairs, and an audience, all for the symbolic planting of a root crop. We reach, yes.

This grand display raises serious questions about the government's understanding of economic diversification. Are we truly meant to believe that yam production will become a major driver of economic transformation in Trinidad and Tobago?

Have we abandoned the pursuit of meaningful industrial, technological, and service-sector expansion for going after the exporting of yams?

Meanwhile, the PNM government has strangled the economy, destroying the country's foreign exchange supply through the closure of Petrotrin. This reckless decision has left countless small- and medium-sized businesses struggling. Many are forced to close their doors because they simply cannot access the foreign exchange needed to purchase goods.

Rather than addressing these economic failures, the government stages these theatrical distractions, hoping to convince the public that planting yams is a viable path forward.

The absurdity does not end there. If history is any indication, this initiative will likely be accompanied by the establishment of a new state enterprise – let us call it YAMdeCoTT, complete with a well-paid CEO, a politically appointed board, and an army of bureaucrats.

What will follow? Lavish office spaces, expensive vehicles, foreign 'consultants', and a few jobs that do little to uplift the wider population. The farmers will not benefit from this; unemployed citizens will not get any jobs from this; only a select few in the political and corporate elite will benefit.

This entire staged event reeks of political gimmickry, designed to create the illusion of progress while the nation grapples with real economic challenges. The people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve more than these elections stunts. They deserve leadership that understands and pursues real diversification, not just the planting of distractions.

It is time to call elections and make a change to this administration.

**Neil Gosine, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.**



**PM Rowley speaks at the yam planting last week. Also at the exercise were (left to right) Senator Avinash Singh, Minister Kazim Hosein, Minister Foster Cummings, and PM-designate Stuart Young.**

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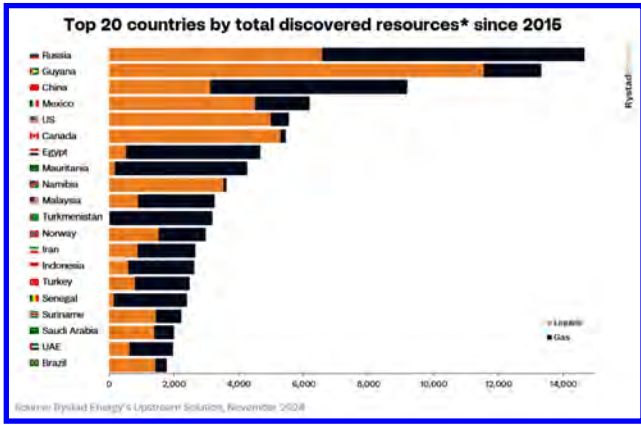


Figure One

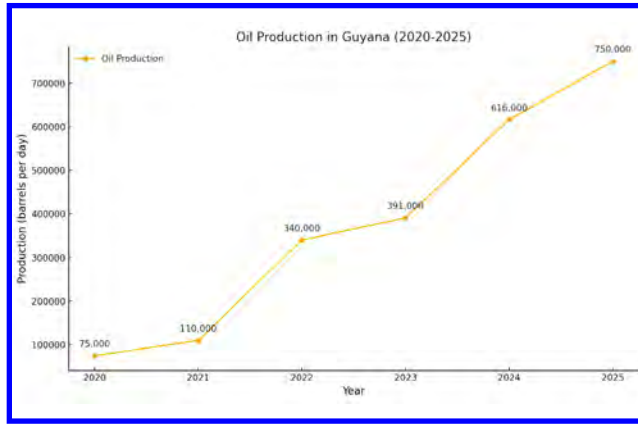


Figure Two

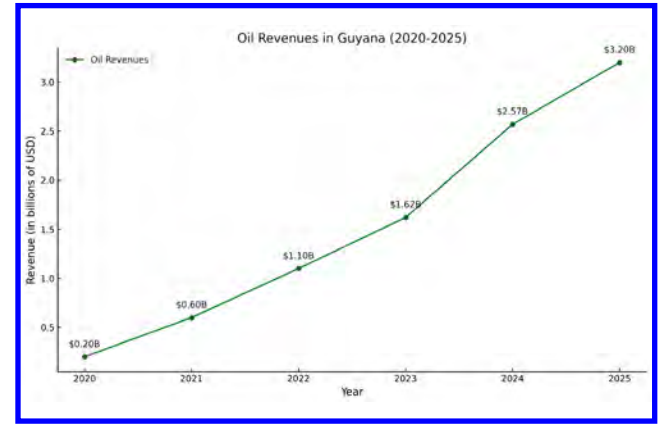


Figure Three

# Guyana's booming oil industry fuelling shift from poverty to affluence

Not so long ago, Guyana was ranked as one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. But in five short years it has emerged as one of the richest, thanks to its booming oil industry. Guyana first discovered oil in 2015 and commenced production in 2020.

"Since 2015, Guyana has emerged as the global leader in oil discoveries, with unmatched volumes boosting its position in the energy sector," according to Rystad Energy, the Norway-based intelligence company. The country now ranks as Latin America's fifth-largest crude exporter, behind Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia.

As the chart *Top 20 countries by total discovered resources* shows (Figure One above), Guyana has discovered significantly more oil than any other country. Russia, which appears at the top of the chart, has discovered more gas, not oil.

Guyana's oil boom has significantly reshaped its economy, propelling its GDP to grow by 43.6 percent last year, marking its fifth consecutive year of double-digit expansion. It has also unlocked unprecedented opportunities for investment and infrastructure expansion in a range of sectors, among them healthcare, education, agriculture, roads and bridges, security, and social services.

Last year, Guyana's oil output soared to an average of approximately 616,000 barrels per day (bpd) – a staggering 57.7 percent increase from the year 2023 production levels of around 391,000 bpd. Since 2020, oil production "oil has increased from 75,000 bpd and is forecasted to reach 750,000 bpd by the end of this year. The chart, *Oil Production in Guyana 2020-2025* (Figure 2 above), shows the trend of increasing production.

And it is anticipated that oil production could increase significantly in the next few years if Exxon and its partners, Hess and

CNOOC, obtain environmental approval for its eighth project at Longtail in the Stabroek Block offshore.

ExxonMobil and its partners Hess and CNOOC are seeking environmental approvals from Guyana for their eighth project, Longtail, which is expected to add up 250,000 bpd of crude oil production capacity and one billion cubic feet (bcf)/day (10.3 billion cubic meters (bcm)/year) of natural gas by 2030.

Exxon intends to increase output capacity in Guyana by 53 percent in 2025, from 615,000 bpd in 2024 to 940,000 bpd in 2025, thanks to upgrades at two of its three floating oil facilities (the *Liza Destiny*, *Liza Unity* and *Payara* FPSOs) and the arrival of a fourth vessel. Production target is 1.7 mb/d by end of 2029, once the first seven offshore projects are operational.

The project will be operated by ExxonMobil (45 percent) in partnership with Hess Corp (30 percent), and China's CNOOC (25 percent). The partnership also has two other projects under development with a FPSOs capacity of approximately 250 kb/d (thousands of barrels per day) each (the *Uaru* and the *Whiptail* projects) which are expected to come online in 2026 and 2027, respectively.

Since the *Liza* find, Exxon has amassed over 30 discoveries, the last being *Bluefin* in the Stabroek Block. There have also been finds in the Corentyne Block. This year, Exxon has flagged 30 wells to be drilled for three major Stabroek Block developments – *Yellowtail*, *Uaru*, and *Whiptail*.

The increase in oil production has been accompanied by a dramatic rise in oil revenues, which climbed from \$1.62 billion in 2023 to \$2.57 billion in 2024 – nearly a 60 percent increase. Revenues are forecasted to climb

to \$3.2 billion in 2025. (See *Oil Revenues in Guyana 2020-2025* – Figure Three above). This growth was supported by an increase in government profit "lifts" of crude oil, with 27 lifts completed compared to the originally projected 25.

Crude exports also surged, with the number of exported cargoes jumping from 136 in 2023 to 225 in 2024. Approximately 66 percent of these exports (388,000 bpd) were destined for European refiners, a notable increase from the 62 percent recorded the previous year.

Incidentally, Guyana's sweet, light crude has gained popularity among European refiners looking for alternatives to Middle Eastern grades. This has positioned the country as a reliable supply source amid global geopolitical tensions.

Strategic partnerships and a favourable investment climate have also attracted foreign capital, with negotiations ongoing to expand trade relations with India, for instance.

Guyana's oil industry is a testament to the transformative potential of natural resource

wealth. From record-breaking production levels to substantial economic gains, the country has made impressive strides in a short period.

However, the real test lies ahead: leveraging its oil wealth to build a diversified, equitable, and sustainable economy.

If managed responsibly, Guyana's oil boom could serve as a model for other emerging petrostates. Conversely, failure to address its inherent risks could lead to the pitfalls that have plagued many resource-rich nations.

For now, Guyana stands at a critical crossroads, with its oil industry offering both immense promise and profound responsibility. Most of all, the country has been transformed from a poor agrarian-based economy to a wealthy petrostate in a very short period of time.

\*\*\*  
Dwarka Lakhani, BA, MBA, FCSI, FICB is a Member of the Canadian Association of Journalists, and an accomplished financial writer. His book, *Winning Ways, Real World Strategies to Help You Reimagine Your Practice*, is available on Amazon and on [winningways101.com](http://winningways101.com). He can be reached at [dlakhani@rogers.com](mailto:dlakhani@rogers.com).



Dwarka Lakhani

## Ontario heads into fast-paced snap elections

From Page 1

"I'm really proud that we are the only party talking about bringing back real rent control. Honestly, the Liberals, they don't seem to realise there are tenants in this province and those tenants are the folks that are losing their homes and ending up in our communities in encampments," Stiles told her supporters.

Additionally, the NDP's transit plan includes a promise to upload 50 percent of the TTC's operating costs back to the province, arguing that this is the only way to make transit more affordable and reliable.

As the Liberals attempt to regain political strength, this week Crombie took a direct approach in appealing to traditional NDP voters, urging them to rally behind her party as the strongest alternative to Ford's PCs.

"I'm reaching out today to NDP voters, and I'm asking them, if you want to change our health-care system, please vote for Ontario's Liberals, and together, we can change the government," Crombie said at an event in Hamilton, a city with longstanding NDP roots.

The Liberals' challenge is twofold. While aiming to gain ground in key ridings, they also need to secure at least 12 seats in the legislature to regain official party status, which would

provide additional resources and procedural privileges.

At dissolution the Liberals held nine seats, making their path to official status a central focus of their campaign.

Meanwhile, with polling aggregates indicating that the PCs are maintaining a strong lead over both the NDP and Liberals in many parts of the province, Ford has framed the election as an opportunity to expand his party's mandate.

The PCs are aggressively targeting NDP-held seats in Northern Ontario, where the New Democrats made notable gains in 2022.

Ford's strategy also includes flipping ridings in urban centres, where the NDP and Liberals are competing for progressive voters. He has repeatedly positioned the election as a referendum on his leadership, emphasising his government's record and the need to secure an even larger mandate.

Meanwhile, Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner and Deputy Leader Aislinn Clancy this week focused their campaign messaging on affordability issues affecting working-class families. Their *Plan for Working Families* includes cutting income taxes for households earning under \$100,000, and expanding affordable child care spaces by increasing wages for early childhood educators.

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# TWF's Black History Month Symposium draws strong community support

— The Walnut Foundation remains committed to addressing pressing health and social issues within our Black community, and the success of its recent Annual Black History Month Symposium underscores its growing impact in building conversations, and in engaging support systems for elder care.

**Brampton** – The Walnut Foundation (TWF) hosted its Annual Black History Month Symposium on February 8 at the Paul Palleschi Recreation Centre in Brampton. The hybrid event, which combined in-person and online participation, was a resounding success, with in-person attendance selling out – an indication of our community's deep engagement with the symposium's central theme, namely, elder care.

Charles Estridge, TWF Secretary and event coordinator, highlighted the increasing importance of elder care as Canada's population ages.

"Families are increasingly facing challenges related to loneliness, downsizing, medication management, and transitioning loved ones from hospital to home or long-term care. These stress points are why we chose to focus on this issue in 2025," he said.

The symposium featured a distinguished panel of guest speakers who provided expert insights into key aspects of elder care, including hospital-to-home transitions; long-term care; end-of-life planning; and the critical role of caregivers.

In addition to the panel discussions, attendees had access to community service agencies and vendors offering essential services such as transportation, counseling, rehabilitation, personal support, and end-of-life planning.

Among the notable speakers were Olu Muili, who shared her heartfelt personal experiences in caring for her mother. Another speaker was Dr Elsie Osagie, who provided professional insights on elder care in a hospital setting and strategies for navigating the healthcare system.

And there were Hennifer Oteng, RN (Specialty in Ageing), who addressed hospital-to-home and long-term care transitions; Loretta Karikari, Social Worker, who discussed the responsibilities of caregivers and the importance of self-care; and Diana Klisamin, from Ward Funeral Home, who offered guidance on end-of-life planning and celebrations of life.

The symposium's impact was reflected in the level of engagement from attendees, both in-person and online. Participants posed thoughtful and passionate questions, shared emotional



**TWF's Annual Black History Month Symposium drew widespread and focused community participation**

testimonials, and expressed overwhelmingly positive feedback about the event.

TWF extended its appreciation to all organisers, speakers, and attendees for their contributions.

"We hope the discussions and resources provided... will lead to better health outcomes and reduced stress for our community," said Estridge.

Special recognition was given to event moderator Melizia Mensah, whose expertise and warmth helped create an engaging and informative experience. Additional appreciation was extended to the event's vendors and The Art of Catering for ensuring a welcoming and hospitable atmosphere throughout the day.

[For more information, click here to visit TWF's website.](#)

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**Culture, celebration, community**

The Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association lit up the Grand Cinnamon Banquet & Convention Centre in Scarborough with energy and dynamism when it held its annual Fete Gala fund-raiser on February 8.

The evening saw a dazzling blend of music, dance, and community spirit, with the gala assembling a powerhouse of our community's top performers, each adding their own spark to ignite the celebration.

On stage were the legendary Terry Gajraj, who captivated the audience with his signature melodies, while Natasha Sundar, granddaughter of the late, great Sundar Popo, honoured her family's musical legacy with a soulful and charismatic performance. The rhythm of the evening then picked up with DJ Navin keeping the momentum high, while Tropical Flava Entertainment warmed up the dance floor. Also hitting the right registers for rhythm and energy were the Mystic Rhythms Tassa's drumming that echoed throughout the ballroom.

Adding the visual to the rhythmic were Footsteps Dance and Independent Dance, while the ICCA's Star Bhai young talents brought their youthful vibrancy into the spotlight. Hosting the evening were Shivani and Bombay Lemonade.

More than just a night of festivity, the Fete Gala is the heart-beat of ICCA's mission, our community's own not-for-profit organisation that is dedicated to connecting, uplifting, and amplifying our Indo-Caribbean community in Canada.

Since its founding on May 1, 2020 during South Asian Heritage Month, the ICCA has remained at the forefront of preserving and promoting Indo-Caribbean heritage, from book donations to children in Trinidad & Tobago and Guyana, to providing culturally-appropriate groceries to the GTA's food banks, mentorship programs for young men, and advocacy for community representation.

With the energy of the Fete Gala fueling its initiatives, proceeds from the night will directly support ICCA's vital community projects and programs. To connect, celebrate the culture, and be part of the movement, [click here to learn more about ICCA's ongoing work.](#)

**In photos, fans, family, and friends had a wonderful time at the ICCA's Fete Gala. Photos courtesy ICCA.**







Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley is met by Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed upon arrival at Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa, for a State visit aligned with the 38th African Union Summit. Accompanied by Foreign Affairs Minister Kerrie Symmonds and Barbados' Ambassadors to Kenya Alexander McDonald and Juliette Ghana's Bynoe-Sutherland, Mottley emphasised strengthening collaborations and finding pathways for working together. The AU Summit, which ended late last week, was themed *Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations*, and convened leaders from all 55 AU member States to advance reparatory justice and racial healing.



Alan Garber



Sir Ronald Sanders

## Antigua presses Harvard on slavery ties

Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the US, Sir Ronald Sanders, has called on Harvard University to honour its commitments in addressing the institution's historical financial ties to slavery in the Caribbean nation.

In a letter sent to Harvard President Dr Alan Garber on February 11, Sir Ronald raised concerns over the university's decision to terminate its Harvard Slavery Remembrance Program (HSRP) research team and transfer its responsibilities to an external genealogical nonprofit without prior consultation with the Antigua and Barbuda government.

According to the *Caribbean Media Corporation* and other Caribbean media outlets, Sir Ronald, acting on the instructions of Prime Minister Gaston Browne, underscored Harvard's direct economic ties to the forced labour of enslaved individuals in Antigua. He pointed to the family, the Royall's and their slave-owned plantations, whose profits helped finance Harvard Law School and other university initiatives.

"Harvard's historical ties to Antigua and Barbuda are clear. The wealth derived from the forced labour of enslaved persons on Antiguan plantations – including those owned by the Royall family – helped to fund Harvard Law School and other aspects of the University's development," Sir Ronald stated in his letter.

He further emphasised that Harvard bears both a moral and practical responsibility to Antigua and Barbuda, given the foundational role that the labour of enslaved people played in the institution's financial growth.

"The lives and labour of those enslaved individuals were intrinsic to Harvard's early financial capacity, and as such, Harvard bears not only a moral debt but a practical one to Antigua and Barbuda," he wrote.

The letter expresses deep concern over

Harvard's recent decision to dissolve the HSRP research team, led by Dr Richard J. Cellini, and assign its work to American Ancestors, a New England-based genealogical nonprofit. The program had identified nearly 1,000 individuals enslaved by Harvard donors, with several hundred specifically traced to Antigua and Barbuda.

"It is, therefore, with deep surprise and concern that we have learned that Harvard has terminated the work of the HSRP research team... This decision was taken without consultation or notification to the government of Antigua and Barbuda, despite the significance of this initiative to our nation and its people," Sir Ronald wrote.

He urged Harvard to ensure that any entity now responsible for this research maintains direct engagement with the Antigua and Barbuda government, and keeps it fully informed. He also emphasised that symbolic gestures would not suffice in addressing Harvard's historical obligations.

"The people of Antigua and Barbuda are not seeking mere symbolic gestures but substantive and meaningful engagement. Harvard has an opportunity to lead by example in the global reparatory justice movement – through deepened and sustained commitment," he stated.

Sir Ronald concluded by urging Harvard to uphold its pledges and ensure that research into these historical injustices continues with full institutional rigor and transparency.

"I trust that Harvard will uphold its pledges and will ensure that this important work continues in a manner that is both transparent and inclusive of those most directly affected by the legacies of slavery," he wrote.

He reiterated that Harvard's historical debt extends beyond conscience, as the ancestors of Antigua and Barbuda played a direct role in the university's early financial foundation.



# Ask Jay...

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## IMPORTANCE OF A PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMPANY THE MISSING LINK TO WEALTH CREATION

Although real estate investment is lucrative, many people prefer investing in other areas, such as the stock market, because they do not like the day-to-day headaches of rental properties. One investor said you must be prepared to shovel more snow if you have many roofs. Hiring a property management company could be the missing link that can free up your time. The good news is that a property manager's fees are considered tax-deductible expenses. Many high-paying professionals are encouraged to grow their real estate portfolio with the help of a good property manager.

If your rental property is out of town, it can be challenging to tend to its day-to-day operations, be on time, or find a reliable contractor when something goes wrong. A local property manager can inspect, maintain, collect rent, and handle bookkeeping for the investor.

Still, one of the most significant advantages is that there is a buffer between you and your tenant. If there are multiple residences, investors may be unable to deal with the stress of daily life, such as handling tenant disputes, lease violations, late payments, and evictions. If you are self-managing, and anytime something goes wrong, it will induce stress, and you will eventually resent owning rental property – one of the best ways to build real wealth.

Managing even one rental property can be stressful. I recall an incident where the property became infested with rats because the tenant frequently left the garage door open and stored pet foods. The rats chewed up the electrical wires. The owner, a lawyer, was on the brink of selling the property, knowing he would suffer a financial loss, although the property had future growth potential. A good property management company would have a checklist and be proactive with upkeep.

A property management company would have a list of trusted local contractors who can complete repairs promptly. Since the company manages many properties, it can negotiate a discounted price with contractors because of its business volume. On the other hand, with self-management, if you do not have experience in repair or know a reliable contractor, you can end up with costly, subpar maintenance. Emergencies can happen anytime, disrupting your day, but a property management company would be available around the clock, relieving you from the stress.

It is imperative to choose quality tenants for rental properties. A tenant with excellent job stability and clean credit might seem like an ideal fit, but what if you discover after they move in that they are party animals? Property managers are trained to look for good tenants holistically. This will improve profitability because there will be fewer vacancies and less money to prepare the property each time you change tenants.

As your portfolio grows, record-keeping and accounting can take up a lot of your time. Imagine a medical doctor sitting at his desk at 3:00 am, sorting out accounting issues. This can be daunting. Property managers have programs that can track rental payments and generate a financial statement, rent roll, maintenance checklist, or balance sheet with the touch of a button.

A good tenant in a rental property can eventually face hardships. Things change over time; for example, when one income earner moves due to a divorce, the financial strain can become too heavy for the other partner. Without any emotional attachment, property managers can be firmer with rental collection and handling. Since they are familiar with landlord and tenant issues, they can use the appropriate rental tribunal forms to address problems, and when needed, evict the tenant.

A property management company is essential for building a strong real estate portfolio. It creates a barrier between you and your tenants, making the interaction professional. Owners tend to be more flexible when dealing directly with tenants, but property managers know how to be gentle yet firm. You will save time and heartache dealing with rental issues, which is worthwhile. You can use the extra time relaxing or planning your next financial adventure, knowing that your property manager is there for you.

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Farah Khan receives her certificate



Shazeeda Hoosein is recognised



Job well done, Vibert Alexander

## Certificates of appreciation for One Love volunteers

Volunteers at One Love Family Services earlier this month demonstrated the power of collective generosity when they assembled food hampers and distributed winter clothing, sleeping bags, and other items for the homeless as part of their Black History Month initiative and outreach.

The items were distributed to residents in the Jane and Finch area. One Love Family Services works alongside the well-known volunteer and activist for the area, Andrea Topner.

This year's BHM outreach concluded with the team of dedicated volunteers at One Love Family Services receiving certificates of appreciation from MP Judy Sgro, who represents Humber River-Black Creek.

Volunteerism is often seen as the quiet backbone of Canadian society, as an ethos that extends far beyond individual acts of kindness to shape communities and foster a culture of care. One Love Family Services has been a beacon of this humanitarian spirit, mobilising volunteers to combat food insecurity, poverty, and homelessness across the Greater Toronto Area.

From curbside food distribution to community-building events, the charitable group has consistently worked to uphold dignity and support vulnerable populations.

Its BHM food drive was more than just a seasonal act of charity. It was a reflection of One Love Family Services' broader mis-

sion, which is to uplift, empower, and create sustainable support systems for marginalised communities.

Its volunteers are at the heart of this worthy initiative. In the work being done, they do not just distribute essential items, but build connections, offer warmth beyond the physical necessities, and are a reminder to those who are struggling that they are not forgotten.

MP Sgro's recognition of the contributions made by the dedicated cohort working with One Love Family Services underscored the indispensable role grassroots volunteerism plays in shaping Canada's humanitarian landscape.

At a time when economic hardships and housing instability disproportionately affect members in our Caribbean community, and other marginalised groups, the commitment of One Love Family Services and its cadre of volunteers is a testament to the impactful power of community-driven action.

The certificates of appreciation were not just about the volunteers. Instead, it extends into a legacy that is being created through One Love Family Services and its team of volunteers, who are rewriting narratives of hardship into positive stories of hope, resilience, and solidarity, proving that small, consistent acts of kindness and generosity can reverberate far beyond the moment of giving.



Executive Director of One Love Family Services Habeeb Alli (right), presents Ali Shaw with his certificate of appreciation from MP Judy Sgro



Marcia Khan receives her certificate



Walter Taylor with his certificate of appreciation



Volunteer Shafeeya Nazeem holds up her certificate



Wilma Alexander is recognised for her good work



Lou Francavilla with his acknowledgement



Malton One Destiny Lions Club was also thanked



# Persistence the reason why women hold up more than half the sky

By Dhanpaul Narine

It is Black History Month. The schools have dusted the books from last year; lesson plans on the achievements of a few Blacks will be highlighted. At the end of the month the books will be packed away until next year.

In many school districts Black History is confined to a month. But Black History is American History, and it should be an essential part of the daily curriculum.

If people are not reminded of their history, then apathy occurs; they lose their sense of belonging and 'drift in the desert sand of dead habit'.

Civics is not a strong subject with our children. While they talk about the latest video games, smart technology, and brand-name products, the achievements of Black heroes escape them.

Black History is rich with examples of perseverance, and the struggles for acceptance and recognition in a world in which the deck is stacked against peoples of colour.

Women, in particular, have fought tirelessly against the odds to secure an education, employment, and space in which to raise their families. The administration led by US President Donald Trump has divided America. Washington is poisoned by rancour, and is inflamed with suspicion and discord; each day brings its own conspiracy, and we are only a month into the new administration.

In this politically charged atmosphere, Coretta King might have gone unnoticed if Senator Elizabeth Warren were allowed to read her letter. But in an act of unfettered hubris Warren was silenced by the Senate. What did she do to earn this rebuke?

Warren read letters from the late Senator Ted Kennedy that called Jeff Sessions "a disgrace to the Justice Department".

This was in 1986, and Sessions was nominated to a federal judgeship. Coretta King also had reservations on the nomination of Sessions.

She said, "It is my strongly held view that the appointment of Jefferson Sessions to the federal bench would irreparably damage the work of my husband; Al Turner; and countless others who risked their lives and freedom over the past 20 years to ensure equal participation in our democratic system."

King went on to describe how Sessions had used the power of his office "to chill the free exercise of the vote by Black citizens"

Sessions was the 2017 nominee for Attorney General of the US, and the criticisms proved too much for the Republicans. The Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell reacted by quoting an arcane rule to silence Warren.

According to McConnell, "She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted."



Coretta Scott King

The Republicans appeared to ignore the power of social media and popular opinion. In a matter of minutes, the letter was read by millions on the Internet, and Coretta King was resurrected as a modern-day icon of the civil rights movement.

McConnell may have handed a campaign slogan to Warren in 2020. But when one looks at the struggles that women have had to face, isn't not about 'persistence'? Isn't it about fighting the mountain for a place in the sun?

They beat her, but Harriet Tubman persisted and freed many slaves on her Underground Railroad. They broke up her family, but Sojourner Truth persisted to spread the message of gender and racial equality.

There were also Mary McLeod Bethune, Ruby Bridges, Dorothy Height, Audre Lorde, Ella Baker, Marsha P. Johnson, Fannie Lou Hamer, Diane Nash, Septima Clark, Daisy Bates, Anna Hedgemen, Frances Harper and Anna Julia Cooper.

They all persisted to make an invaluable contribution to the civil rights movement. There was Hattie McDaniel, who won an Oscar, but could not sit with the other stars at the ceremony because of her skin colour.

Rosa Parks was thrown off the bus because

she wouldn't sit at the back anymore. Maya Angelou uncaged her hurt and sang through her writings and activism. Persistence, it seems, is the history of everything.

The story across the continents has been the same: women have had to bear the brunt of pain and suffering to protect their families and to effect change. They have become the victims of guns, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and neglect. But they have not given up. They want a brighter future for their children.

Women have been beaten up, spat upon, and made to feel less than a person, but their spirits have not been broken.

Malala Yousafzai was shot in the head because she wanted girls to be given a chance to read. In a world that relies ever more on peace and security, women continue to hold up more than half the sky. They do so because of their persistence.

Coretta King was a persistent peacemaker. She could have retired after the assassination of husband Dr Martin Luther King. But she did not allow this tragedy to dampen her spirit. Instead, it energised her to lead the movement.

She mobilised support for the Birmingham Bus Boycott in 1955 that featured Rosa Parks, another mother of the civil rights movement. The Boycott was successful and the laws in Montgomery were changed. But the stress on Coretta King was incredible. She had to cope with constant threats and danger. Her home was bombed, and yet she remained calm.

According to one report, "the harassment, the jailings, the bombings, and the threats terrified all of them".

When MLK was stabbed in New York, she set up a temporary office in the hospital so that her husband could carry on his work. Her later visits to Ghana and India broadened her

outlook on world

In 1983, Coretta King coordinated a movement to mark the 20th anniversary of the March on Washington. She was arrested in 1985, along with her children, for protesting against apartheid in South Africa.

One of her lasting legacies was the founding of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Change in Atlanta. This began in her basement, but has grown to cover several blocks. The Center attracts over a million visitors each year, including scholars from all over the world.

The track record of Coretta Scott King indicates that she is well-qualified to speak on the subject of discrimination, segregation and voting. Her criticisms of Jeff Sessions were well-founded at the time. But there is dissension in the King clan concerning her views.

Bernice, Coretta King's daughter, praised Senator Warren for bringing the letter to the floor of the Senate, while Alvida, Coretta King's niece, called the letter "a bait and switch" to stir up emotions.

Alvida said that she voted for Trump. Whatever the political views, the fact is that Coretta King re-energised the debate on race relations in America. She did so at a time when questions are asked about the direction in which America is proceeding in regards to Blacks, immigrants, and other minorities.

If Coretta King were around today, she would be in the forefront in the campaign to revitalise our cities. She would lead a movement to end poverty in the US.

Politicians will do well to heed the call of Coretta Scott King, and others. Providing equal opportunities for all is the basis of effective public policy.

*Republished from our May 4, 2022 edition.*

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# Mapping our belonging: Indo-Caribbean art finds a place at the ROM

By Nalini Mohabir

As anyone who has visited the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) knows, the Sir Christopher Ondaatje South Asian gallery is one of the most eye-catching galleries in the museum, combining ancient statues and artifacts with contemporary art, representing South Asia across a span of time (roughly 5,000 years) and space, capturing the dispersions of a global South Asian diaspora.

This is not the ROM I grew up with as a child. The ROM of my childhood memories (prior to the architect Daniel Libeskind's crystalline entrance) was a place of natural history, such as taxidermied birds, a bat cave, and dinosaur bones. The museum expanded to represent the diversity of Toronto especially with efforts in the late 1980s to early 1990s, including the poorly conceived – not to mention racist – exhibit *Into the Heart of Africa* in 1989, which drew vigorous protests from the Afro-Caribbean community.

Advocates in the South Asian community, such as Arti Chandaria, were also working tirelessly behind the scenes to expand inclusion, and make South Asia a more visible presence at the ROM. Although Chandaria passed away 20 years ago, her legacy lives on through her tireless efforts to raise substantial funds for the ROM, which resulted in the South Asian gallery we have today.

Chandaria also mentored and supported the current Curator of Global South Asia at the ROM, the accomplished Dr Deepali Dewan. She has notably expanded the South Asian Gallery's contemporary art holdings, by focusing on post-colonial visual practices within South Asia and its diasporas.

Following ceramic artist Heidi McKenzie's solo exhibit at the Gardiner Museum and invited participation in the Indian Ceramics Triennale in New Delhi last year, the ROM has since acquired two pieces of her work.

McKenzie grew up in New Brunswick, but her father was from Trinidad, and worked at the Pointe-à-Pierre oil refinery before moving to Canada. She has grappled with her own familial relationships to indentureship and its long shadows of history cast into the present through her art.

The evocative piece entitled *First Wave* (2021) represents the



Heidi McKenzie's evocative *First Wave*



*Illuminated*. Photos © Royal Ontario Museum/Paul Eekhoff

*Fatel Razack*, the first ship to bring indentured labourers from India to Trinidad, in 1845, in ceramic form; her ancestors might have been on this ship.

On the *Fatel Razack's* wind-blown ceramic sails are a direct replica of the ship's manifest, pulled from the archives, with its columns listing ship passengers, handwritten in that familiar colonial cursive script found in so many of the archives of

Indentureship.

The ship echoes the *kala pani*, the *mise-en-scène* for our diasporic rupture and discontinuous history with India and accompanying concerns about belonging, connections, and relations across multiple spaces.

The second piece acquired by the ROM, *Illuminated* (2021) comprise three LED light boxes with images of "coolie belles" from colonial photo studios, initially reproduced as colonial-era postcards, and reproduced again here; now the women are brought to life and light through backlit images on handmade porcelain tiles.

To the best of my knowledge, these are the first two art works ever acquired by the ROM to represent Indo-Caribbeans, thanks to the foresight of Dewan to include us in Global South Asia.

We might be small in number relative to the overall South Asian diaspora in Toronto, but we have had an outside impact on the landscape of the city, not only through Carnival and roti shops, but also through the establishment of Caribbean studies by pioneers such as Drs Frank Birbalsingh and Arnold Itwaru.

The subjective imaginations of Indo-Caribbean art is often shaped by a long memory of India that lives on in the entangled relations of diaspora. If the past is a place and a position, then India is not our only past, we are also deeply shaped by the cultural plurality of the Caribbean, to the point that it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand an Indo-Caribbean past without understanding a relationship to, or conversation with, Blackness.

In museum galleries bounded by geographies, South Asia on one hand, the gallery of Africa, the Americas, and Asia-Pacific on the other, in which gallery do we belong?


Museum artefacts are coded and catalogued by geography, or a geography representing race. While I am grateful for our particular representation in this venerable institution, what are the dialogues that this inclusion might open up for understanding our syncretic past and present, as well as our entanglements and imaginative connections and contributions through multiple routes?

Dr Nalini Mohabir is an associate professor in the department of Geography, Planning, and Environment at Concordia University.

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# Silence, but not absence: Understanding women's voices during BHM

By Romeo Kaseram

## An LJI Series for the Caribbean Diaspora

Black History Month is a time of remembrance, celebration, and reclamation. It is a moment to amplify voices that history has silenced, voices buried beneath the weight of Empire, voices that deserve to be heard. Among these voices are the women of Windrush – the mothers, daughters, labourers, and writers who journeyed across the Atlantic in pursuit of opportunity, yet found themselves relegated to the margins of both history and literature.

For decades, the Windrush literary canon was dominated by male voices – Sam Selvon, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul. These writers were brilliant chroniclers of the migrant experience, yet their narratives often revolved around only Caribbean men who were navigating the cold, grey, and unfriendly streets of London. Women existed in these stories, but only as background figures, as shadows behind the struggles of men.

Yet the Windrush woman's journey was no less epic, her exile no less profound. While men sought work in factories and on railways, women became the backbone of Britain's health and service industries, taking up jobs as nurses, seamstresses, cleaners, caregivers, and clerical workers. They endured racism, misogyny, and class barriers, often with little recognition.

However, if our Windrush literature began as a single voice, today it is a carnival of voices, a chorus of perspectives, dialects, and experiences.

As we celebrate Black History Month, here is the opportunity for us to trace the emergence of Windrush women's voices in literature, starting with early precursors as Jean Rhys, through to the reclamation of history by Andrea Levy, to the radical polyvocality of Bernardine Evaristo.

In our ongoing series for our Caribbean diaspora here in the GTA, today we are presenting the story of the Windrush woman: how she was silenced, how she resisted, and how, today, she cannot, and will not be erased.

Before we begin our exploration, we need to situate our narrative about the transformation of Windrush literature away from what was then its male-centred canon. What we have today is a polyphonic and inclusive landscape when viewed through the lens of the carnivalesque tradition, which was articulated by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque refers to a form of

artistic and literary expression that disrupts hierarchies, subverts dominant ideologies, and allows for multiple voices to coexist. Rooted in medieval and folk traditions of carnival, Bakhtin saw literature as a space where official narratives could be challenged, and where the voices of the oppressed could rise in defiant chorus.

One of his main concepts that is central to understanding the emergence of Windrush women's literature is his carnivalesque subversion. As we know, Carnival celebrations now underway in the Caribbean grew out of these roots of disruption. For Bakhtin, Carnival is a space where the rigid structures of society similarly break down, where the subaltern can mock the powerful, where jesters speak truth to power, and where hierarchies dissolve.

Windrush women's literature follows a similar pattern in its disruption of imperial histories in how it overturns dominant narratives, and how today it ensures that women, once sidelined, are out of the margins and are firmly rooted at the centre of our storytelling tradition.

The carnival of voices with its interplay of perspectives, languages, and disruptions helps us to define the evolution of Windrush women's literature. What was once a singular, male-dominated history is now an expansive, inclusive, and multi-dimensional tradition, ensuring that no singular voice dictates the telling of our stories about migration, exile, and belonging.

Before the Windrush generation climbed up to the shore from the waves of Caribbean migration to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, our own Jean Rhys was already chronicling the experiences of exile. Born in Dominica in 1890, she straddled two worlds, one that was shaped by the remnants of British colonialism, and the other, which was defined by its dispossessed subjects.

Her *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is as seminal as it was a radical act of literary reclamation. It was a welcome rewriting of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Bertha Mason, the Creole who was the "madwoman in the attic". Through Rhys' pen, Bertha was fleshed out and lifted away from being a mere instrument in the novel's plot. Instead, she was redrawn and humanised into a tragic figure that was destroyed by colonialism, gendered oppression, and cultural exile.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* prefigured later Windrush feminist literature by exposing how colonial narratives erased Caribbean women's identities. It also explored themes of madness, exile, and racial identity, and lay down the foundation for later writers to build upon, such as Andrea Levy and Bernardine Evaristo,



Andrea Levy

The quaint town of Willow Creek had always been a place of serene beauty and whispered legends. It was here, in an old Victorian mansion on the outskirts, that Emily decided to host her bridal shower. The mansion, with its ivy-clad walls and towering spires, had been the family home for generations and held a special place in her heart.

Emily's closest friends and family attended with gifts and well-wishes for the bride-to-be. Laughter and joy echoed through the halls with a background of soft melodies playing from the stereo system.

Among the guests was Sarah, Emily's childhood best friend. Emily never suspected that Sarah had always harboured secret envy toward her best friend's seemingly perfect world. When Emily won Jack, their mutual school crush, jealousy raised its ugly head in Sarah. After Emily and Jack became engaged, evil thoughts of revenge invaded Sarah's dreams and consumed her every waking moment.

As the evening progressed, while the guests played games, shared stories, and toasted to Emily's happiness, Sarah excused herself for a bathroom break but headed for the attic. During their growing-up years, Sarah had discovered an old family secret – an ancient book of spells hidden in the mansion's attic.

With a thumping heart, she picked up the book and lit the candles that she had placed there for the ritual. After her trembling voice whispered the incantation, a cold breeze swept through the attic, extinguishing the candles. Sarah shivered from fear and the sudden chill.

The ballroom was plunged into darkness. The guests murmured in confusion. Emily tried to calm everyone, but a sense of unease had settled over the gathering. Suddenly, the chandelier above them began to sway, its crystals clinking ominously. The temperature dropped, and an eerie fog crept into the room, obscuring their vision.

Panic set in as grotesque shadows danced on the walls. The occasion had turned into a nightmare. On a hunch, Emily called out for Sarah but got no response. They were the only ones who knew how the spell worked. Sarah had unleashed a vengeful spirit that thrived



## The Supernatural The Bridal Shower

on terror and chaos. It had been trapped for centuries and now it was free to exact revenge on Emily's family.

The spirit descended upon the ballroom, its presence palpable. It whispered haunting echoes of the past, revealing secrets long buried. The guests were paralysed with fear as the walls dripped with blood, the floorboards creaked under unseen weight, and ghostly apparitions materialised, their faces twisted in agony.

Emily raced to the attic where she found Sarah standing before the open book, her eyes glazed with malevolence.

"Sarah, what have you done?" Emily cried, tears streaming down her face.

"I wanted you to feel my pain, Emily. To understand what it's like to lose everything." Sarah's smile was cold and unfeeling.

Emily's sorrow turned to anger. She lunged at Sarah, knocking the book from her hands. The spell was broken, but the spirit's wrath remained. It howled in fury, shaking the mansion to

its foundations. The walls cracked, and the ceiling began to collapse. In a desperate bid to save everyone, Emily grabbed the book and recited a counter-spell she had found in the margins. The spirit screamed, its form dissipating into a cloud of smoke. The mansion fell silent, the fog lifted and the temperature returned to normal.

The guests, though shaken, were unharmed. Emily's bridal shower had turned into a night of dread, but they had survived. Sarah, realising the gravity of her actions, broke down in sobs and ran away from the mansion, leaving behind the scars that would forever be etched in everyone's mind.

As the days turned into weeks, the town of Willow Creek buzzed with the news of Emily's bridal shower. The old mansion, now tainted by the haunting events, stood as a grim reminder of the night. Emily and Jack got married a year later in a small, private ceremony, far from the haunted mansion. They burned the book

who have since centred the voices of Black British women.

If Jean Rhys asked the question, 'Where is the Caribbean woman's voice?', then Andrea Levy replied with eloquence.

Born in London to Jamaican parents, Levy grew up in a Britain where Windrush stories were largely told from a male perspective. Her writing changed the focus away from where our emerging literature was speaking with the voices of men.

Change came to that perspective after she wrote *Small Island* (2004). It was a novel that was pivotal in the Windrush firmament, and a turning point in British literary history.

At the heart of *Small Island* is Hortense, a Jamaican woman who migrates to Britain with dreams of being a schoolteacher, only to find herself pushed into domestic labour. Through Hortense's struggles, Levy exposes the betrayal of Empire, where Jamaicans were taught that Britain was their "motherland", but upon arrival, were 'Othered' and treated as outsiders.

What we see emerging here is the resilience of Caribbean women, who despite the racism and exclusion, were able to carve out lives, families, and futures in the unwelcoming "motherland". We are also made aware of the necessity to reclaim our history through the telling of stories that were long ignored, or misrepresented, and were becoming victims of erasure.

Levy rewrote the Windrush narrative by placing a Black Caribbean woman at the centre of the plot. No longer a side character or a silent presence, Hortense speaks, dreams, and fights for recognition. In so doing, she enables agency, ensuring that Windrush women are remembered not as passive figures, but as comparable contributors, and pivotal history-makers.

If *Small Island* reclaimed the voice of one Windrush woman, then Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) brought many to life. Structured as an interwoven tapestry of 12 Black British women's stories, *Girl, Woman, Other* spans multiple generations, showing how the Windrush experience shaped not just the first migrants, but their daughters and granddaughters as well.

With *Girl, Woman, Other*, Evaristo proves that Windrush literature no longer belongs to just one voice, but to a thriving, ever-expanding collective.

As we celebrate Black History Month, for our Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, it is a time to not only celebrate our heritage but to engage deeply with the stories that have shaped us. Let us commit not just to remembrance, but to knowing, reclaiming, and becoming. Our collective history is about resilience and belonging, and now that we have acquired a carnival of voices, let us listen to them tell stories about our polyvocal legacies.

For further reading, check out these texts at your neighbourhood library: *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys; *Small Island* by Andrea Levy; and *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo.

Kamil  
Ali



of spells.

The townspeople whispered about the events, each retelling more embellished than the last. Some claimed to have seen the spirit lingering around the mansion, seeking revenge for being summoned and then banished. Others spoke of strange occurrences near the mansion – unexplained noises, sudden chills, and flickering lights. The legend of the bridal shower grew, becoming a part of Willow Creek's folklore.

Emily and Jack settled into their new life, trying to put the past behind them. They moved into a cozy cottage on the other side of town, hoping to escape the memories of that dreadful night. But the shadow of the mansion loomed large in their minds, a constant reminder of the thin line between love and vengeance.

Sarah, now ostracised by many in the community, sought redemption. Determined to set things right, she approached Emily to ask for her forgiveness. Emily forgave her but she distrusted Sarah's intentions. Concerned about her marriage and the safety of her future offspring, Emily ended their friendship, hoping that time would eventually heal Sarah's betrayal.

Sarah did not escape the spirit's wrath. Though the book of spells was burned to ashes, teenagers on a dare a decade later played with an Ouija Board behind the mansion and opened a portal to let the spirit escape once again. After the demon attacked the teens with extreme terror that drove them mad, rage propelled it to Sarah.

Emily visited sleep-deprived Sarah in a mental asylum where she resided in a padded cell, trapped with the malevolent spirit. Though her friend had sought to harm her, Emily did not have the heart to abandon her once childhood best friend. She stood outside the door of the padded cell and recited a prayer through a window in the door to seal the demon in hell for eternity. Sudden screams of agony and the rumbling of an earthquake subsided into deafening silence.

"Thank you..." Sarah sobbed. Her cracked lips mouthed the soundless words to Emily.

"Goodbye, Sarah..." Emily walked away.



# Master artist and TT icon LeRoy Clarke's painting returns home

**Port-of-Spain** – A painting by the late Trinidad and Tobago master artist LeRoy Clarke, once stored in a basement in Guyana, has been restored and returned to Trinidad and Tobago.

Last week Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley formally unveiled *Ogun, Eyed Shaped Worlds* at the Diplomatic Centre in St. Ann's, marking the artwork's long-awaited homecoming.

"Welcome home!" Rowley declared as he revealed the painting, which was originally sent on loan to the Caricom headquarters in Georgetown in 1997. However, it was later forgotten in storage.

Rowley explained that all 15 Caricom member states had been asked to contribute a piece of art for display in the regional headquarters. Trinidad and Tobago selected Clarke's piece for the collection, but instead of being showcased, the painting ended up in a basement, where it suffered damage over time.

"Of course, paintings do that throughout history, and this painting was in a place where it was damaged," Rowley noted. Fortunately, a staff member recognised its significance and brought the matter to his attention.

Restored by Caricom, the painting was returned to Trinidad and Tobago during Rowley's recent trip to Guyana. The Diplomatic Centre was chosen as its new home, given the building's role in hosting high-ranking officials and public events.

"So we got it back, and I am excited to see what it looks like on a wall," Rowley said before unveiling the restored piece.

Among those in attendance was Clarke's daughter, Adaeze, who became emotional upon seeing the artwork once again. She recalled its presence in their family home in Mount Hope during her childhood.

"Trinidad and Tobago is his home; he believed in Trinidad



PM Rowley (left to right) stands before the restored LeRoy Clarke painting along with artist James Armstrong and Adaeze Clarke following its unveiling last week at the Prime Minister's Residence and Diplomatic Centre in PoS

and Tobago. He came back to Trinidad and Tobago, so he too came back home to build his country, to build a nation," she said of her late father.

Tobago East MP Ayanna Webster-Roy, who was also present, shared photos from the event on social media and used the opportunity to encourage young artists to pursue their dreams.

"...I was humbled to witness the unveiling of an art piece of the late and great LeRoy Clarke at the Diplomatic Centre," she wrote.

Additionally, "A talented artist, Clarke's legacy in visual arts, poetry, philosophy, and spiritual leadership is a beacon of light shining for our later generations to be inspired and forge their way into historical greatness."

Webster-Roy highlighted Clarke's international acclaim, and encouraged Tobagonian artists to follow their creative paths.

"If you are a young or older artist, I believe in you. Be brave, let your creativity thrive, and share your art with the world in whatever medium. And maybe next time, it will be your art shared with Caricom and viewed in a New York gallery," she added.

Clarke, who passed away on July 27, 2021, at the age of 82, is considered one of Trinidad and Tobago's most distinguished contemporary artists. Born in Belmont, he was the first artist in Trinidad and Tobago to be conferred with the title of *Master Artist* by the National Museum and Art Gallery.

Beyond his work in visual arts, he was a poet, philosopher, and set designer, contributing to the Trinidad Theatre Workshop. He authored several books, and was deeply involved in cultural and spiritual leadership.

Over the course of his career, he received numerous accolades, including an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the *National Living Treasure* award from the Trinidad Hilton, and was declared a national icon by the government.

In 2005, Clarke was bestowed with the *Staff of Eldership and Chieftaincy* title at the sixth Shango/Oshun Rain Festival, recognising his contributions to the Orisha tradition.

Adaeze expressed her belief that her father was finally receiving the recognition he deserved.

"Slowly but surely, you know it is almost four years since he passed away, and things are happening, slowly behind the scenes," she said.

She also revealed that she had not known about the painting's damage until hearing Rowley's speech, but was relieved and grateful that efforts were made to bring it back to the country.

## Unions, experts denounce govt's salary increase

**Port-of-Spain** – The government's decision to increase salaries for top officials has sparked outrage among trade unions and economic experts, who accuse the administration of hypocrisy and financial mismanagement.

The Public Services Association (PSA) and the Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM) last week condemned the move as a betrayal of the working class, particularly as public sector workers were offered only a four percent increase in recent negotiations.

PSA president Leroy Baptiste described the salary hikes as "hypocrisy personified", calling on the public to reject the government's actions at the polls.

"There's a golden rule in life, do unto others as you'd have them do unto you. If you don't like it for yourself, you ought not to like it for others," he stated.

Adding, "But clearly, this particular administration... I wish there's another word that I could find, some euphemistic way of saying wicked. But I can't, I'm lost for any other word other than it's an act of wickedness; it's an act of hypocrisy; and they have done nothing other than fix themselves."

He warned that citizens must not forget this decision when elections come around.

"They say Trinidadians have their nine-day wonder society where you remember for a few days and then it's forgotten. I pray that they remember at the appropriate time. Because in the final analysis, the citizenry has the last say," he added.

JTUM general secretary Ozzi Warwick also denounced the increase, calling it part of a "continued pattern of complete insensitivity, disregard, disrespect, and disconnect from the hardships of ordinary working people".

He was particularly critical of Finance Minister Colm Imbert's response when asked whether funds were available for the raises. Imbert had stated, "Well I would think so."

Warwick labeled Imbert's response as disgraceful.

"You just have to find the money. So, what we have is a politi-

cal elite, who are in a position of privilege, and having no difficulty whatsoever in providing for themselves and completely disregarding the pain, suffering, and concerns of ordinary people," he said.

Economists have also raised concerns about the decision, warning that it could widen economic disparities and fuel social unrest.

Economist Dr Vaalmiki Arjoon criticised the government's approach, stating, "Such actions do raise critical questions about where the fiscal priorities really lie. It raises questions about equity, and it potentially erodes the trust between the government and its workforce."

He warned that the move promotes selective financial management, where political elites benefit while workers feel "undervalued and marginalised".

Dr Indera Sagewan echoed these concerns, arguing that politicians do not deserve a salary increase given their lack of economic progress.

"In my humble view, I would argue that certainly, the politicians have not done the work that is required to justify this [increase], because their mandate that was offered to us and that was accepted by the population spoke to a different economy today," she stated.

She insisted that the government should lead by example.

"And even if the minister can in fact comfortably find the money to meet this SRC, fulfilling the approval of the SRC recommendation, the government simply should not because it is the wrong thing to do at this time," she said.

The increases, recommended by the Salaries Review Commission (SRC), will take effect retroactively from October 1, 2023. The Prime Minister's monthly salary has now risen to (TT) \$87,847, with a back payment of approximately TT\$1 million before tax.

The President's salary, currently at TT\$67,270, has been increased to \$73,920 for the period between April 1, 2020, and March 31, 2023, and then further raised to \$81,170 from April 1, 2023.



Ozzi Warwick



Leroy Baptiste



Kamla Persad-Bissessar

## 'No choice but to accept'

**Port-of-Spain** – Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar said last week she has no option but to accept the forthcoming salary increase approved for parliamentarians.

Persad-Bissessar stated, "I was advised by my MPs and others that I have no choice (but to accept). It is not something I can reject because the government has taken that decision and it is in the hands of the government."

However, she repeated her opposition to the increases, pointing to the country's economic difficulties, stating, "So calling on me not to accept, they told me I cannot do that. I think once before we tried to refuse an increase and it didn't happen. It is fully in the hands of the government."

The Salaries Review Commission recommended in November 2024 that the Opposition Leader's salary rise from (TT) \$29,590 to \$52,159 – a 76 percent increase effective October 1, 2023.

Persad-Bissessar strongly opposed the raises at the time, stating, "I don't believe the Prime Minister should get an increase at this time. I don't believe the President should get an increase at this time. I don't believe that Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Opposition Leader, should get an increase at this time. No, no! Now isn't the time when you're offering people one percent, two percent, four percent; it's obscene! It's disrespectful at this time."

Meanwhile, she continued to advocate that salary increases should prioritise judges and public servants.





Persad-Bissessar (centre) with (from left to right) LOVE leader Lennox Smith; PEP leader Phillip Alexander; OWTU president general Ancel Roget; and GWTU president general Ermine DeBique-Meade.

## UNC announces 'coalition of interest' ahead of elections

Port-of-Spain – UNC leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar last week announced a “coalition of interest” with the Laventille Outreach for Vertical Enrichment (LOVE) movement, the Progressive Empowerment Party (PEP), the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union (OWTU), and other unions ahead of the 2025 general election.

However, she made it clear that the UNC has no intention of working with the National Transformation Alliance (NTA), led by former police commissioner Gary Griffith.

“Let me make it very clear. As leader of this party, I am not interested in working with the NTA. The NTA has been very disrespectful to elected members of my executive, and I cannot see how we can work with them in that kind of scenario,” Persad-Bissessar stated.

The announcement was made at the UNC headquarters in Chaguanas, ahead of the party’s candidate screening process. She emphasised that while discussions with coalition partners were ongoing, all candidates would ultimately be presented under the UNC banner.

Additionally, she confirmed that the UNC would not contest the two Tobago seats.

“...[We] had some meetings with PEP, the LOVE Movement and the OWTU and other unions. We have all agreed to engage to work together with respect to a coalition of interest. We have

spent some time discussing the logistics and details of how that engagement should take place... we are looking at messaging, strategies, candidates for seats, no decision has been made but we are bouncing off seats where each may have a competitive advantage,” she said.

OWTU President-General Ancel Roget welcomed the collaboration, stating that the coalition provided an opportunity to advocate for the interests of workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

Similarly, LOVE Movement leader Lennox Smith said his party shared a common cause with the UNC, particularly in opposing the PNM. He also recalled that LOVE had previously contested the 2007 general election under the UNC-A.

PEP leader Phillip Edward Alexander expressed confidence in the coalition’s potential, noting that the UNC’s strong support base positioned them as the best chance to unseat the PNM.

Persad-Bissessar emphasised that the coalition was distinct from other alliances that had emerged in the lead-up to the 2025 elections, pointing out that the participating groups had been actively engaged at the grassroots level for years. She confirmed that the party would continue screening candidates and that the UNC’s manifesto would be released in the coming weeks.

While discussions on seat allocation are ongoing, Persad-Bissessar described the coalition as a work in progress, with further negotiations expected before final decisions are made.

## CAL introduces gift cards, expands loyalty programme

Port-of-Spain – Caribbean Airlines is positioning itself as more than just a transportation provider, unveiling a range of new initiatives aimed at strengthening customer engagement and enhancing its brand identity.

Last week, the airline announced the introduction of Caribbean Airlines Gift Cards, allowing customers to share the gift of travel with friends and family. The initiative aligns with CAL’s broader vision of becoming a ‘lifestyle brand’, integrating travel with culture, convenience, and unforgettable experiences.

CAL’s Chief Executive Officer Garvin Medera made the announcement at the Welcome Home to Love and Loyalty customer appreciation event in Port-of-Spain, where he reaffirmed the airline’s commitment to its passengers and partners.

“At Caribbean Airlines, loyalty is more than just miles. It is about relationships, trust, and the shared journeys we take together. This evening is about reaffirming our commitment to you, our valued stakeholders, who continue to make Caribbean Airlines the airline of choice in the region,” Medera said.

As part of its expanding product offerings, CAL also revealed plans to extend its Jetpak courier service to additional territories later this year. Meanwhile, the airline relaunched its Caribbean Miles programme, which now offers customers more ways to earn and redeem miles. Passengers can accumulate miles through flying with CAL or using the RBC/CAL Visa credit card, earning one mile for every US\$1 spent.

“The enhancements to the programme will open up even more opportunities for members to earn and redeem miles, making travel within the region and beyond even more rewarding,” CAL stated in a release.

At the same event, Trinidad and Tobago’s Minister of

Finance, Colm Imbert, highlighted Caribbean Airlines’ continued recovery and financial growth.

He reported that in 2024, more than two million passengers traveled to and from Trinidad and Tobago, with approximately 600,000 passengers (30 percent) using the domestic airbridge.



Garvin Medera

“This achievement underscores the trust you place in Caribbean Airlines and the airline’s commitment to you,” Imbert said.

Imbert praised CAL’s financial turnaround, noting that the airline moved from an operating loss of US\$36.7 million in 2022 to an operating profit of US\$24.7 million in 2023, excluding debt service.

However, in 2024, operating profit dropped to US\$12.1 million due to rising costs in maintenance, handling, security, and flight operations.

Despite these challenges, CAL’s revenue has continued to grow. The airline recorded a 41 percent revenue increase from US\$306.4 million in 2022 to US\$430 million in 2023.

In 2024, revenue rose again to US\$444.6 million, reflecting a 5.2 percent increase.

“This was despite a decline of US\$15 per passenger on international routes due to competition. This achievement underscores the resilience and dedication of the entire CAL team,” Imbert declared.

The evening’s event also featured vibrant entertainment from some of the Caribbean’s top soca artistes, including Mical Teja, Bunji Garlin, and Machel Montano, who released the airline’s latest jingle, reflecting CAL’s spirit of celebration and cultural pride.

Additionally, the airline showcased its ongoing partnership with Angostura Ltd., which has led to the creation of its exclusive CIM Rum Punch.

## Govt loses appeal over Rambarran dismissal

Port-of-Spain – The Court of Appeal has upheld a High Court ruling that the dismissal of former Central Bank Governor Jwala Rambarran was unlawful, dealing a significant legal blow to the State. In a judgment delivered last week, the appellate court affirmed that Rambarran’s termination was unconstitutional and procedurally unfair, leaving the government liable for millions in compensation.

On February 11, Justices of Appeal Nolan Beraux, Mark Mohammed, and Peter Rajkumar ruled that Rambarran’s removal from office violated his constitutional rights, agreeing with the High Court’s earlier finding that he was denied due process.

Writing the 149-page decision, Beraux stated, “In my judgment, the respondent was not treated fairly. He was not told the specific allegations against him nor was he given any real opportunity to respond to the charges.”

The judges determined that Cabinet had a duty to inform



Jwala Rambarran

Rambarran that his termination was under consideration, provide him with reasons, and allow him an opportunity to respond. Their failure to do so rendered the dismissal “unfair, illegal, null, void, and of no effect”.

The ruling also found that the dismissal breached Sections 4(b) and 5(2)(e) of the Constitution, which safeguard due process and procedural fairness.

The judgment specifically criticised Finance Minister Colm Imbert’s handling of the matter.

“By Minister Imbert’s own admissions in cross-examination, he did not inform the respondent that his dismissal was under active consideration. The minister also admitted that he did not invite the respondent to take legal advice on the accusation that he (the respondent) was in breach of the law,” Beraux wrote.

Imbert had argued that the complaints against Rambarran were already in the public domain, and that it was unnecessary to formally notify him. However, the Court of Appeal rejected this reasoning.

“I do not consider that that was sufficient. The matters in the public domain did not signal to the respondent that his dismissal was under active consideration by the Cabinet, and was indeed imminent, such as to give him the opportunity to deal with that,” Beraux ruled.

Additionally, the court found no justification for failing to afford Rambarran a fair hearing, noting that there was no urgent fiscal crisis requiring his immediate dismissal.

“Urgency or administrative necessity do not excuse the failure to give the respondent an opportunity to be heard in this case. The uproar did not precipitate some fiscal emergency which required immediate action in regard to the respondent,” Beraux stated.

While the court upheld the High Court’s ruling that Rambarran’s termination was unlawful, it adjusted some of the financial compensation awarded by Justice Devindra Rampersad.

Beraux and Mohammed struck down bonus payments amounting to (TT) \$1.3 million, along with a prorated sum of \$751,551.67 and \$175,000 in vindictory damages. However, Rajkumar dissented on this point, awarding Rambarran half of the bonus amount (\$982,798.33) and \$100,000 for distress and inconvenience. Despite these adjustments, Rambarran is still set to receive approximately \$4 million in compensation.

The Attorney General had sought to overturn Justice Rampersad’s entire ruling, while Rambarran had filed a cross-appeal arguing that the compensation was insufficient. The Court of Appeal granted a 14-day stay of execution, which is shorter than the 21 days requested to allow time for the State to consider further legal action.

Senior Counsel Russell Martineau, representing the Attorney General, stated that he needed time to review the judgment and advise on a potential appeal to the Privy Council.

Rambarran’s attorney, Anand Ramlogan, SC, opposed any extended stay, arguing that his client had been financially ruined while awaiting the court’s decision.

Rambarran was appointed Central Bank Governor in July 2012. He was dismissed in December 2015 on the advice of the Finance Minister. His termination followed his public disclosure that Trinidad and Tobago was in a recession, and his release of the names of some of the country’s largest foreign-exchange users.



# Mohammed Rafi's centenary reveals a voice resonating for eternity

— The centenary birthday celebrations for the iconic Mohammed Rafi on December 24 last year were more than moments of reflection on how this legend shaped the identity of Indian music. As India honoured him with grand concerts and glowing tributes, it emerged that reverence for his resonating voice would always remain eternal.

A century has passed since a voice was born that would become the soul of Indian cinema. December 24, 2024, marked the grand centenary birthday celebration of Mohammed Rafi, one of India's most iconic playback singers. Affectionately known as the *Voice of God*, Rafi transcended generations, lending his golden voice to melodies that remain woven into the fabric of millions of lives.

On this milestone birthday celebration, a spectacular event unfolded at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre in Mumbai, where Sonu Nigam, backed by a 50-member symphony orchestra, brought Mohammed Rafi's classics to life in a breathtaking three-hour tribute concert.

The performance electrified the air, leaving the audience spellbound, and as song after song reverberated through the theatre, it became quite evident that Mohammed Rafi's voice was not coming from the past, but was resonating as an eternal melody in the present, and into the future.

The commemorative event, titled *Sau Saal Pehle*, drew a full house of admirers and industry stalwarts. Nigam performed an astounding 54 Mohammed Rafi classics, and described the experience as deeply personal.

"Rafi Sahab is my musical father and guru. My papa introduced me to Rafi Sahab's music, and I grew up learning from him. ...I could have never imagined that I would be paying tribute to a legend who I grew up idolising on his centenary birth anniversary. I cannot thank God enough," Nigam said.

The concert featured timeless classics such as *Yeh Chand Sa Roshan Chehra*, *Maine Poocha Chand Se*, *Pukarta Chala Hoon Main*, *Kya Hua Tera Wada*, and *Aaja Aaja Main Hoon Pyaar Tera*.

With every note, Nigam honoured Mohammed Rafi's unparalleled ability to evoke deep emotion, his voice evocative alongside the symphony orchestra. The audience, carried along in the current of nostalgia, sang in unison, celebrating the indelible mark Mohammed Rafi left behind for Indian cinema.

The event also saw the participation of Mohammed Rafi's family members, including his son Shahid Rafi and daughter-in-law Firdaus Rafi, who were visibly moved by the tribute.

Organisers of the event, Rabbani Mustafa Khan and Namrata Gupta Khan dedicated months to ensuring the event's success, and presented Nigam with a bust of Mohammed Rafi to mark the occasion.

Beyond the grand concert, tributes poured in from across the country, none more prominent than the heartfelt homage from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Taking to social media, Modi lauded Mohammed Rafi's versatility and enduring legacy on X, formerly *Twitter*, stating, "Remembering the legendary Mohammed Rafi Sahab on his 100th birth anniversary. He was a musical genius whose cultural influence and impact transcend generations. Rafi Sahab's songs are admired for their ability to capture different emotions and sentiments. His versatility was extensive as well. May his music keep adding joy in the lives of people!"

Meanwhile, at Mohammed Rafi's birthplace in Kotla Sultan Singh near Amritsar, fans made their annual pilgrimage to honour the legend, with the centenary marking an especially emotional gathering.

"He continues to live in the hearts of millions of his fans," said Om Prakash, who traveled from Jammu to visit the village. Prakash, like many others, celebrated by singing Rafi's songs, among them the eternal, *Mere Pairon Mein Ghungroo Bandha De* from *Sunghursh* (1968).

Among the attendees was 80-year-old Adarsh Kumar Pruthi, who traveled from Delhi with his wife to pay his respects.

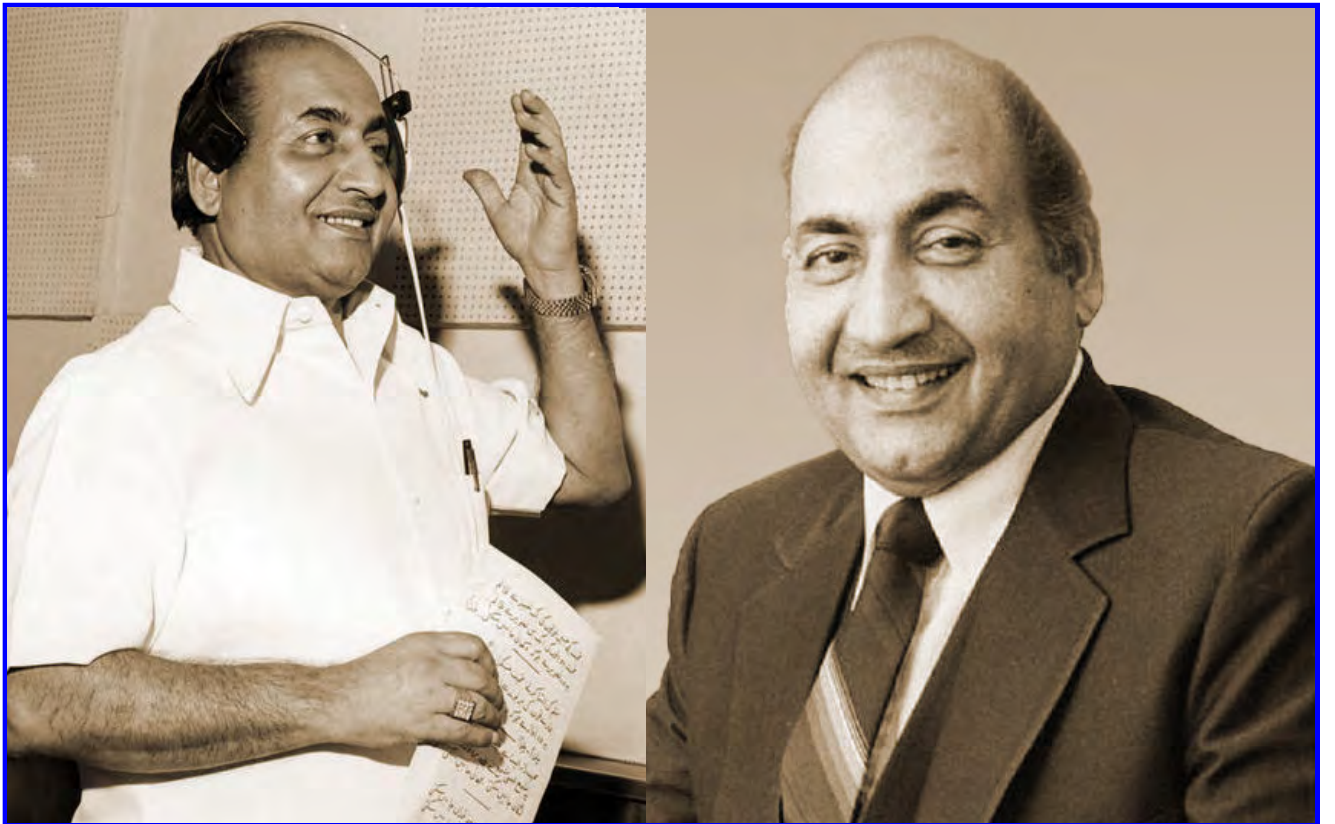
"I have been his great fan since childhood. I had this great desire to visit [Mohammed Rafi Sahab's] village on his 100th birth anniversary," he shared.

Fans from Lucknow and across Punjab joined locals in cutting a cake in Mohammed Rafi's honour as they gathered near his statue to offer floral tributes.

Village elder Hardeep Singh, 82, took visitors on a tour of the places that Mohammed Rafi frequented in his youth, including the school where he studied. The event in his birthplace underscored the depth of love and admiration that the legend continues to inspire across generations.

Born on December 24, 1924, in Kotla Sultan Singh, a small village near Amritsar, Mohammed Rafi's musical journey began with simple village performances before formal training in Lahore under Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan.

In 1944, he moved to Bombay (now Mumbai), where his collaborations with composer Naushad cemented his place in Bollywood history.



The legendary Mohammed Rafi

## When a power outage energised a legend

Mohammed Rafi's journey into the world of music was as remarkable as the voice that would one day define Indian cinema. Born in the quiet village of Kotla Sultan Singh near Amritsar, he was the second of six brothers in a Punjabi Jat Muslim family. The family later moved to Lahore, where the young Mohammed Rafi spent his early years helping out at his elder brother's barber shop. Academics did not hold his interest, but music did, and this was another story entirely.

Mohammed Rafi's love for music was ignited when a Sufi holy man visited the village, filling the air with soulful melodies that stirred something deep within him. Captivated by the haunting depth of the holy man's singing, young Rafi would often trail after him, singing along in the streets. This deep connection to music and spirituality remained throughout his life. Later, after becoming successful, he made it a tradition to serve home-cooked meals to Sufi holy men twice a month, sometimes eating with them.

While fate was incubating its plans for him, destiny came along to give him a rather dramatic push onto the stage. It was over 85 years ago in Lahore when legendary singer K.L. Saigal was set to perform at an event. Just as the excitement peaked, a power outage struck, leaving the stage in darkness and the microphones dead.

Saigal, known for his perfectionism, refused to sing until the issue was resolved, leaving the restless audience growing

impatient. In a moment of serendipity, Mohammed Rafi's friend Abdul Hameed persuaded the organisers to let the then 13-year-old unknown sing in Saigal's place. As his voice rang through the air, the audience fell silent, enraptured. Among them was music director Shyam Sunder, who was so impressed that he offered Rafi his first commercial song, *Soniye Nee Heeriye Nee*, for the 1941 film *Gul Baloch*.

From that fateful day, there was no turning back. Mohammed Rafi eventually moved to Mumbai, where his golden voice itself soon became a soundtrack for Bollywood's most unforgettable melodies.

So unmatched was his versatility that he could switch effortlessly from energetic tracks to patriotic anthems, from soulful ballads to romantic melodies, from *Qawwalis* to *Ghazals* and *Bhajans*.

His collaborations with musical greats like Shankar Jaikishan, R.D. Burman and S.D. Burman, Laxmikant Pyarelal, O.P. Nayyar, and Madan Mohan remain legendary, a testament to his inherent ability to adapt to any mood and genre.

But Mohammed Rafi's brilliance was not confined to Hindi cinema alone. He lent his voice to songs in multiple languages, including Punjabi, Telugu, Kannada, and Bhojpuri, effortlessly bridging linguistic and cultural gaps with his music. His legacy, recognised with India's prestigious *Padma Shri* in 1967, is one that continues to resonate through generations.

Mohammed Rafi's ability to capture the subtlest nuances of human emotion made him the voice of legendary actors such as Dev Anand, Dilip Kumar, Shammi Kapoor, and Rajendra Kumar.

His range was staggering and extensive, with romantic ballads like *Chaudhvin Ka Chand Ho*; patriotic anthems, soulful ghazals, and playful numbers like *Yahoo Chahe Koi Mujhe Junglee Kahe*, which all bore his unmistakable vocal imprint.

Mohammed Rafi's delivery, empathy, and artistry were so accurate and convincing that Shammi Kapoor once famously remarked that the legend was not just his playback singer, but an extension of his own identity.

Mohammed Rafi's musical collaborations extended beyond actors to enduring partnerships with Johnny Walker, for whom he provided over 100 playful and comedic hits, and screenwriter Salim Khan, who recalled that the singer had an innate ability to bring cinematic characters to life through his voice alone.

Notably, Mohammed Rafi's depth of empathy was evident in his collaboration with Guru Dutt, which remains one of the most poignant in Indian cinema for its accuracy in capturing the nuances of existential despair and melancholy, particularly in *Pyaasa* (1957), and *Kaagaz Ke Phool* (1959).

As the *Deccan Herald* noted, "Dutt's on-screen presence in front of the microphone becomes one with Rafi's melancholic voice... After watching it, one gets the feeling that it was as if Guru Dutt's soul was bared and only Rafi could have done it."

While his professional achievements were unparalleled, Mohammed Rafi's humility and generosity were equally legendary. He often waived his singing fees for struggling filmmakers, and quietly assisted those in need.

As son Shahid Rafi has revealed in media interviews, "He

was a very charitable person, he took care of so many people in terms of their education or to get them married. Dad never said no to anyone".

One of the most poignant anecdotes of his kindness was recalled by his neighbour, a widow, who after Mohammed Rafi's passing, discovered that the money orders she had received for years had come from the singer himself. It was only when the funds stopped arriving, and following a visit to the post office, that she learned the true identity of her benefactor.

Mohammed Rafi's generosity also extended to filmmakers who struggled to finance their projects. As reported, he would often record songs for free if he believed in their artistic vision.

Mohammed Rafi passed away on July 31, 1980, at the age of 55, leaving behind a staggering legacy of over 7,000 songs. His funeral drew tens of thousands of mourners, a testament to how deeply he was cherished. More than four decades later, his influence remains omnipresent. His songs continue to be remixed, covered, and celebrated, though purists argue that no modern rendition can match the depth of his original recordings.

As India celebrated the 100th birth anniversary of Mohammed Rafi, it was more than just a tribute to an iconic singer. It was homage to a man who sang not just with his voice, but with his soul. His melodies continue to be the soundtrack of longing, love, and life itself, etched into the cultural consciousness of millions upon millions of people across the globe.

As Modi aptly put it, "Rafi Sahab's songs are admired for their ability to capture different emotions and sentiments."

Decades may pass, and new voices emerge, but Mohammed Rafi's *oeuvre* will remain timeless, irreplaceable, and forever resonating in millions of hearts.



## Rautela steps away lightly from criticism of dance moves in *Dabidi Dibidi*

— *Bollywood thrives on spectacle, but Dabidi Dibidi has turned heads for all the wrong reasons. Now Urvashi Rautela is once again caught in a storm of backlash. From viral dance missteps to flaunting luxury watches at the worst moments, her defenses have only fueled the fire.*

In the grand tradition of Bollywood spectacle, where larger-than-life heroes take centre stage and dance numbers are gospel, *Dabidi Dibidi* was meant to be a dazzling showpiece. Instead, it tripped over its own choreography and landed squarely in the realm of social media mockery.

The song from *Daaku Maharaaj*, featuring Nandamuri Balakrishna and Urvashi Rautela, has left fans wincing rather than humming, with criticisms ranging from its eyebrow-raising choreography to the visible and visceral age gap between its stars.

Yet, in the face of the backlash, Rautela remains steadfast, twirling away from criticism with a series of statements that, much like the dance moves in question, may not be landing as intended.

“When you talk about my choreography, it’s actually very simple. There’s nothing wrong with it. In fact, if you just focus on me in the frame, you’ll see that it’s really fantastic,” she assured, as if a strategic zoom-in could erase the optics of an aging action hero smacking his co-star mid-routine.

But as social media continue to roll its eyes harder than a camera pan in a melodramatic close-up, the bigger question lingers: was this just a case of miscalculated ‘mass appeal’, or did *Dabidi Dibidi* misstep its way into cinematic infamy?

A song meant to energise Balakrishna’s devoted fan base has instead left the audience baffled, with the choreography drawing flak for what many have deemed “cringe-inducing” and “vulgar” moments.

In the viral clip, the 64-year-old actor is seen smacking Rautela’s belly button in rhythmic precision. Then into the number, he proceeds to lift her by her dress, and later punctuates the sequence with a hit to her hips.

While the scene might have been conceived as a quirky moment of on-screen chemistry, audiences are saying they have found it more uncomfortable than entertaining, and this has sparked widespread ridicule and online roasting.

Yet, Rautela remains unfazed by the outrage, chalking it up to an overreaction rather than a legitimate concern.

“It wasn’t like I was shocked or doing something completely out of the ordinary. During rehearsals, everything was smooth and under control. But honestly, everything happened so suddenly that it has been hard to assess why people are talking about the choreography in this way,” she explained, painting a picture of a production process that seemingly never saw the controversy coming.



Balakrishna and Rautela in the song and dance number *Dabidi Dibidi*

But while Rautela might be baffled by the criticism, audiences have been quite vocal about their grievances. For many, it is not just about the dance; it is about what the dance represents.

The persistent trend of pairing older male stars with significantly younger female leads in Indian cinema has long been a point of contention.

For example, in *Samrat Prithviraj*, Akshay and Manushi Chhillar were romantic leads despite an age gap of 29 years. Katrina Kaif and Salman Khan, who is 17 years older, have worked as co-stars in six films. Salman Khan has also worked with Disha Patani in *Radhe* and *Bharat*, with Disha 26 years his junior.

And now *Dabidi Dibidi* as come along and reignited the age gap debate. Add to that the choreography’s uncomfortable and suggestive physical interactions, and it is no surprise that audiences found themselves raising eyebrows, rather the tapping their feet.

Meanwhile, despite the social media discourse, Rautela remains committed to her belief that the criticism is misplaced.

“Since day one, I have always made sure to keep my identity and professionalism separate. Whatever constructive criticism comes my way, I make sure it doesn’t overshadow my passion and enthusiasm. I always embrace constructive criticism as an artist and remain mindful of my work,” she said, signaling that, as far as she is concerned, she is unfazed by the reception.

Still, her most striking defense remains her insistence that viewers should simply focus on her, and disregard the larger visual context.

As she stated, her choreography was actually very simple; there was nothing wrong with it, and if viewers focused only on her in the frame, they would see it was really fantastic.

It is an interesting proposition, one that suggests audiences should wilfully ignore the uncomfortable optics, and appreciate *Dabidi Dibidi* purely for Rautela’s individual performance.

Unfortunately, social media users do not view the world that way, and selective focus is rarely an option in an era where viral memes define the narrative.

But this is not the first time Rautela has found herself at the receiving end of online backlash. Just last month, she was criticised for flaunting her expensive Rolex while discussing the knife attack on Saif Ali Khan.

For being tone deaf, social media were quick to label her as a “beauty without brains”, questioning the insensitivity surrounding her remarks.

When asked by *Instant Bollywood* about the negativity, she dismissed it with a comparison that only fueled the fire more.

“The thing is... even the Prime Minister of our country, Shri Narendra Modiji, and my most favourite superstars, Shah Rukh Khan and Salman Khan, are not spared by people. So, you tell me, what can be done about this?” she remarked.

The response, intended as a defense, only exacerbated the social media trolling, with many pointing out the absurdity of placing herself in the same league as the country’s most influential figures.

The trigger to this backlash started in early January, when she flaunted her watch and jewellery while speaking about the attack on Saif Ali Khan.

During a conversation with ANI, she stated, “It is very unfortunate. Now, *Daaku Maharaaj* has crossed Rs 105 crore at the box office, and my mother gifted me this diamond-studded Rolex, while my father gifted me this mini watch on my finger. However, we don’t feel confident wearing these items openly due to the insecurity of being attacked. Whatever happened was very unfortunate.”

A day after facing criticism for her statement, she posted an apology on her *Instagram* account but later deleted it.

When questioned about the deletion by *Filmfare*, Rautela defended herself by claiming that she had not been aware of the attack when she made the statements.

“It happened at 4 am, and my interviews were scheduled for 8 am,” she reasoned, implying that her comments were a result of unfortunate timing rather than insensitivity.

Meanwhile, the *Daaku Maharaaj* team may not have anticipated this level of backlash, with the song’s reception indicating that not all ‘mass appeal’ moments land as intended.

Whether Rautela and her co-star expected a different outcome or not, *Dabidi Dibidi* has already cemented its place in the annals of cinema’s an unfortunate misfire. And as audiences continue to dissect, meme, and lampoon the number, one thing is certain: some missteps are far harder to dance away from than others.

## Karan Johar reflects on gender politics and flaws in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*

— *Director and writer Karan Johar’s latest reflections on Kuch Kuch Hota Hai indicate a shift in his perspective on storytelling and gender representation in cinema. He acknowledges the film’s impact and its continued popularity, but is also candid about its shortcomings and the ways in which it contributed to the problematic portrayal of women.*

Karan Johar has acknowledged that he did not fully consider the social and cultural implications of his 1998 directorial debut, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, at the time of its release. In a recent podcast conversation with *YouTuber Lilly Singh*, Johar admitted that his primary motivation for making the film was not to address societal issues, but rather to ensure a box-office success that would restore his father Yash Johar’s struggling production house.

“I just wanted to make a very big hit. I was 24 years old when I wrote *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, and as a producer’s son, I grew up understanding box office business and how our country has a varied audience,” Johar said.

He explained that his father, a well-loved film producer, had faced a string of five consecutive commercial failures. As the younger Johar stated, his main objective was to create a film that would revive his father’s prestige.

“I wasn’t thinking of contributing to society or to make a film that would make a difference, or a politically correct thing that would be impressionable. And I wanted to do this not for material reason but for prestige reason and my father to get his moral back,” he said in the Lilly Singh’s podcast.

While the film went on to become a massive commercial suc-



Karan Johar

cess, Johar admitted that in hindsight, certain elements of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* make him uncomfortable.

“When I look back at my first film, I’m very proud of all the love it has received, but I also question the gender politics, some of the dialogues, and the cringe moments. When I see them now, I think, ‘What was I thinking?’ I was young and new to cinema. I am allowed to make my mistakes,” he stated.

One of the key criticisms of the film has been its portrayal of the protagonist, Rahul, played by Shah Rukh Khan.

Johar now acknowledges the flaws in the character’s arc, admitting, “That character came from me because I was writing the dialogues. He fell for the hot girl, and then when the girl he

didn’t like became hot, he fell in love with her. Was he just chasing surface-level good looks? That was all my writing. I didn’t realise at the time that I was feeding a certain school of thought. I just wanted to make a blockbuster.”

The gender issues in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* have been widely discussed over the years. Critics have pointed out how the movie reinforces the idea that a woman’s worth is tied to her appearance. The character of Anjali, played by Kajol, undergoes a transformation from a tomboyish persona to a traditionally feminine one, only then being seen as romantically desirable by the male lead.

This narrative has been criticised for perpetuating the notion that female attractiveness and worthiness of love are contingent on adhering to conventional beauty standards.

Additionally, the film’s depiction of female characters within a rigid framework of traditional femininity has been cited as problematic in contemporary discussions on gender representation in Bollywood.

Johar also recalled a conversation with veteran actress Shabana Azmi, who had questioned the film’s gender politics soon after its release.

“Shabana Azmi called me and even reprimanded me, and she was like, ‘I saw your debut film, congratulations, done very well, but I have a few questions. My first question is, what kind of politics are you talking about?’”

He admitted to apologising in response, saying, “Ma’am I am really sorry. I wasn’t thinking any of this. I grew up on a certain fodder in the cinema. I just want to platform that. There was a latent hypocrisy.”



# Cricket to Conquer Cancer takes guard against a global opponent

— More than just a tournament, *Cricket to Conquer Cancer* is bringing into play resilience, endurance, and the fighting spirit, qualities that define both cricket and the battle against cancer. This initiative, launched by the PMCF, is more than a fund-raiser; it is a movement to Carry The Fire, a symbol of relentless hope and determination. It is also a call to action for our community to step up to the crease to bat for a future without cancer.

The thud of bat on ball. The rhythmic chants of players. The tense moments between deliveries. Cricket has always been more than a game for our Caribbean community – it is a shared legacy, a bond passed from generation to generation.

Come May 31 at Mississauga's Celebration Square, cricket will take on a new and urgent purpose: *Cricket to Conquer Cancer*, a tournament where every run scored carries the weight of hope, and every wicket taken brings us closer to a cure.

Organised by The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation (PMCF), this inaugural street cricket fund-raiser will rally over 100 teams in a high-energy T5 format, raising funds to support world-leading cancer research at the PMCF. With a goal of \$1 million, this historic event is calling on cricket lovers, philanthropists, and corporate sponsors to step up to the crease and make a difference.

At the February 4 launch, international cricket star Carlos Brathwaite spoke to the cause, encouraging teams to register and take part in this unique tournament. Also attendees at the event were mindful of an earlier statement made by Miyo Yamashita, the PMCF's President and CEO, when she had said, "Imagine a world free from the fear of cancer. We can. It's why we Carry The Fire".

The format of *Cricket to Conquer Cancer* is as dynamic as the mission it serves. Each team will battle it out in a five-over-per-side format that demands adrenalin-driven reflexes, sharp strategy, and unwavering teamwork. But beyond the boundaries and wickets, the real contest will unfold off the pitch, where every dollar raised will translate into lifesaving breakthroughs for cancer research at the PMCF.

Fund-raising begins the moment teams sign up, with each squad targeting \$6,000. The stakes are high, with top fund-raisers being able to earn the opportunity to recruit celebrity cricket talent, turning an already thrilling event into one that could see the participation of legends in the game.



The tournament is expected to be fast-paced and action-packed, with high-energy matches, community festivities, and the shared goal of making a tangible impact in the fight against cancer.

We all know that cancer remains one of the most formidable opponents humanity has ever faced. Despite ground-breaking advancements in treatment and research, the disease continues its inexorable march worldwide. By 2050, global cancer cases are expected to surge by 77 percent, with younger generations facing the sharpest increases.

More than one million people under 50 die from cancer each year, and this number is projected to rise by 21 percent by 2030.

While survival rates have improved, the burden remains immense. In Canada, the five-year survival rate for all cancers combined has increased from 50 percent in the early 1980s to approximately 63 percent today.

The rise of early-onset cancers among individuals under 50 has climbed by nearly 80 percent since the early 1990s.

With its world-class diagnostics, research, and treatment innovations, the PMCF has been at the forefront of life-saving discoveries from stem cell research to immunotherapy break-

throughs.

Through *Cricket to Conquer Cancer*, every donation, every sponsorship, and every run scored will contribute to early detection, targeted treatments, and comprehensive patient support programs that can save lives.

The *Carry The Fire* initiative, the latest branding thrust by the PMCF, embodies the unyielding fight against cancer and the collective effort to create a future free from its fear. It represents the spirit of resilience, determination, and hope that fuels advancements in cancer research and care.

Through *Cricket to Conquer Cancer*, every player, donor, and supporter will help take *Carry The Fire* forward, ensuring that patients and families affected by cancer continue to receive world-leading treatments and support.

Just as cricket demands patience, precision, and teamwork, so too does the fight against cancer – a battle that requires global collaboration and unwavering commitment.

For our Caribbean diaspora, cricket is more than just a sport; it is a bridge that connects people, cultures, and generations. Whether it is a casual street game played in the back streets of Port-of-Spain, Kingston, or Georgetown, or an international Test match at Kensington Oval, cricket has always embodied resilience, camaraderie, and the spirit of collective effort. These are the very same qualities that define the fight against cancer.

Now, as cricket lovers across Canada and beyond, we have an opportunity to pick up the bat for an even greater cause. This is a game where every shot played, every partnership built, and every wicket taken carries meaningful significance, making it one that extends far beyond the boundary.

The *Cricket to Conquer Cancer* campaign is already gaining momentum, with registration 50 percent sold out. Whether as a player, donor, or supporter from the sidelines, there is a role for everyone. Corporate sponsors are stepping forward, setting a precedent for others to follow.

This is the moment for our community to be part of something bigger. Whether we form a team, donate, or spread the word, our every action counts. Every dollar raised is a run scored in the fight against cancer.

Join us at the crease. Together, we can bat for a future free from cancer. [Click here for more information, or to register.](#) Now is the time to take guard, face the delivery, and send the ball soaring for a cause that truly matters.

# RAISE YOUR BAT. RAISE HOPE.

2 in 5 Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. It's a scary statistic, but it's not just a number. It could be someone you love. But there is hope for a brighter tomorrow. You can help create a world free from the fear of cancer.

Step up and join our inaugural street cricket fundraiser on May 31, 2025.

Your participation will fuel life-saving research at The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, one of the world's leading cancer research and treatment centres.

Come, let's win this game together.

CARRY THE FIRE

Supporting Cricket to Conquer Cancer accelerates life-saving cancer research.

Scan to find out more



# USA win historic all-spin no pace ODI

The USA and Oman etched their names into cricketing history on February 18 when their ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 match in Al Amerat became the first-ever completed men's ODI without a single ball of pace or seam. All 61 overs were delivered by spinners, marking an unprecedented moment in the 4,671-match history of the format.

Despite posting just 122 in 35.3 overs, the USA defended their total with remarkable efficiency, bowling out Oman for 65 in 25.3 overs to secure a 57-run victory. This feat shattered the record for the lowest total successfully defended in a full men's ODI, surpassing India's 125 against Pakistan in the Rothmans Four-Nations Cup in 1985, a match they won by 38 runs.

Left-arm spinner Nosthush Kenjige was the architect of USA's triumph, claiming a career-best five for 11 as Oman's batters faltered



Nosthush Kenjige

against relentless spin. The match also equaled the record for the most wickets taken by spinners in an ODI, with 19 dismissals matching the tally from a Bangladesh-Pakistan clash in Chattogram in 2011. The lone non-spin dismissal came via a run out.

With just 187 runs scored across both innings, this contest also registered as the second-lowest aggregate in a full ODI where both teams were bowled out, trailing only the 163-run encounter between India and Bangladesh in 2014.

The spin-heavy nature of the game followed a recent trend at Al Amerat, where slow bowlers have dominated proceedings. Teams batting first in all eight of Oman's matches in this tournament have failed to reach 170, while other fixtures have seen totals exceeding 240. In their previous match at the venue on February 16, Oman struggled in a chase of 96 against Namibia, losing eight wickets.



Jasprit Bumrah

## Injury keeps Bumrah out of Champions tour

India fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah has been ruled out of the Champions Trophy due to a lower back injury. The 31-year-old, who suffered back spasms during the fifth and final Test in Australia last month, has not recovered in time for the tournament.

Harshit Rana has been named as Bumrah's replacement in India's 15-man squad. The 23-year-old pacer made his ODI debut against England on February 6 and has taken four wickets in two matches against Jos Buttler's side.

India have also made an additional squad adjustment, bringing in leg-spinner Varun

Chakaravarthy at the expense of opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal. Chakaravarthy recently became India's second-oldest ODI debutant at 33 years when he played in the second match against England in Cuttack on February 9.

Rohit Sharma will captain a squad featuring several of India's senior players, including Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant, and Mohammed Shami.

The Champions Trophy begins today and will be held in Pakistan, though India's group-stage matches, a potential semi-final, and the final – should they qualify – will take place in Dubai.



Sri Lankan women in a celebratory moment

## Sri Lanka drop Ranaweera, Kanchana

Sri Lanka have omitted experienced left-arm spinner Inoka Ranaweera and seam-bowling all-rounder Ama Kanchana from their squad for the upcoming white-ball tour of New Zealand, which comprises three ODIs and three T20Is.

Also missing from the touring party are batter Hasini Perera and 16-year-old left-arm wristspinner Shashini Gambini, both of whom featured in Sri Lanka's most recent international assignment at the 2024 T20 World Cup.

However, the squad has seen an influx of young talent, with Manudi Nanayakkara and Rashmika Sewwandi earning call-ups. Both players represented Sri Lanka at the Under-19 World Cup earlier this year, though this will be Nanayakkara's first appearance in the senior setup.

Sewwandi was included in the squad for the home T20Is against West Indies last year, but did not feature in any matches.

Chethana Vimukthi is the other uncapped player in the squad, while Imesha Dulani and Kaushini Nuthyangana bring limited experience with five caps each. Sachini Nisanla, who has played 19 matches, also retains her place.

Sri Lanka's top order remains unchanged,

with captain Chamari Athapaththu set to lead alongside Harshitha Samarawickrama and Vishmi Gunaratne, who has already amassed 18 ODI and 47 T20I appearances.

Athapaththu is currently participating in the Women's Premier League in India, where she is representing UP Warriorz. The WPL runs until March 15.

Sri Lanka depart for New Zealand on February 22, with two warm-up matches scheduled in Lincoln on February 27 and 28.

The ODI series begins in Napier on March 4, followed by matches in Nelson on March 7 and 9. The teams will then shift to Christchurch for the first two T20Is on March 14 and 16, before concluding the tour in Dunedin on March 18.

...

Sri Lanka Women squad for New Zealand ODIs and T20Is: Chamari Athapaththu (capt), Harshitha Samarawickrama, Vishmi Gunaratne, Nilakshika Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Anushka Sanjeevani, Manudi Nanayakkara, Imesha Dulani, Achini Kulasuriya, Udeshika Prabodhani, Sachini Nisansala, Kaushini Nuthyangana, Inoshi Priyadarshini, Sugandika Kumari, Rashmika Sewwandi, Chethana Vimukthi.

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