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Keith Rowley

SoE, PM resigns in TT

Port-of-Spain – In the wake of the sudden declaration of a State of Emergency on December 30, days later into 2025, Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley made another bombshell declaration: his decision not to contest a seat in the next Parliament, and his imminent, early retirement from the office of Prime Minister.

In the days following Rowley's dramatic announcement, he named Stuart Young as his successor.

The announcements of a SoE and Rowley's departure took the nation by surprise in a time when it was reeling from a record 624 murders in 2024, and having just emerged out of the Christmas season, with nationals gearing up for Carnival 2025.

In the first astonishing announcement, on December 30 the government imposed a SoE in Trinidad and Tobago, saying it had to act "decisively to restore a balance between the fundamental rights of all citizens and the protection from the dangerous excesses carried out by a lawless few". The move followed a record 624 murders for 2024.

According to the government, it introduced the SoE due to the threat to national security that was being posed by reprisal gang killings, and the use of high-powered weapons by criminals.

Acting Attorney General Stuart Young later told the media the SoE

Turn to Page 19: Rowley steps down



Stuart Young

Winston Kassim appointed to Order of Ontario

By Romeo Kaseram
LJI Reporter

Toronto – Winston Kassim, a retired executive officer of the Royal Bank of Canada and a tireless advocate for global humanitarian causes, has been appointed to the Order of Ontario, the province's highest civilian honour. The announcement was made on January 1 by the Honourable Edith Dumont, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario and Chancellor of the Order of Ontario, recognising Kassim as one of 29 distinguished appointees for 2024.

"The 2024 appointees to the Order of Ontario have enriched the lives of countless people in our province and well beyond," said the Honourable Edith Dumont in a press release. "Together, they have attained the highest level of excellence in many fields, and may we all be inspired by their remarkable contributions."

This latest recognition of Kassim's community service builds on previous awards in 2009 and 2012, and recognises more than four decades of helping those in need and supporting humanitarian causes in more than 25 countries, including Canada.

In 2009, Kassim became the first Canadian of Guyanese heritage to be made a member of the Order of Canada, one of the nation's highest civilian awards, for advocating on behalf of ethnic communities and humanitarian causes at local, national, and international levels. His community service was recognised once again in 2012, when he was awarded a

Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for volunteerism.

Dhaman Kissoon, lawyer, professor, and the Canada-Guyana Chamber of Commerce fund-raising chairman, expressed congratulations to Kassim on his achievement.

"I am extremely proud Winston has received the Order of Ontario, and previously the Order of Canada – both are well-deserved. He is a respected member of our community, and also a universal player, helping not only the Muslim community, but members of the Hindu, Jewish, and other faiths."

Kissoon added, "Also, as a member of the Canada Guyana Chamber of Commerce, I am happy that the Ontario government has seen it fit to recognise Winston's work. We at the Chamber are also quite elated that Winston, who is the CGCC's co-chair, has been given this recognition, as it shows the quality of the people that are governing the Chamber."

Co-founded by Kassim in 2020, the CGCC aims to strengthen trade and investment opportunities between Canada and Guyana.

Kassim's appointment was also celebrated by leaders and organisations across Canada.

Fareed Amin, CGCC's Managing Director, praised Kassim for his extraordinary contributions.

"On behalf of everyone at the Chamber, I want to congratulate Winston Kassim on being recognised for his outstanding service to communities around the globe,"

See Page 5: Winston Kassim honoured



Winston Kassim

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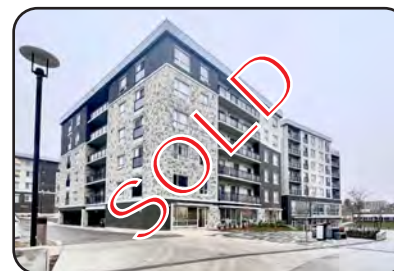
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Singh (second from left), with MP Paul Chiang (left), NEPMCC member and the co-host Roberto Hausman (third from left), Jessie Singh at right, Dr Carlton Singh (back row at right), and young family members

NEPMCC honour for Ken and Jessie Singh

— Dr Ken Singh and wife Jessie Singh were recipients of the NEPMCC's Humanitarian Award last month. The award recognised not only their business achievements but also their exceptional philanthropic work in making a lasting difference in our community and abroad

Toronto – In a heartwarming celebration of dedication, community service, and business excellence, Dr Ken Singh and his wife, Jessie Singh, were honoured with the prestigious Humanitarian Award by the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada (NEPMCC) at its annual dinner on December 20.

The award recognised the couple's remarkable philanthropic efforts and business acumen, which have left a lasting impact both in Canada and abroad.

The award celebrations began with a moving introduction by their son, Dr Carlton Singh, who set the stage for the couple's recognition.

"My parents come from humble beginnings," Carlton said. "A farmer's son and a headmaster's daughter", the couple persevered through "the struggles of venturing into a new country, on the backbone of steadfast commitment to one another, to their family, and to their community", he added.

He continued by offering gratitude to the NEPMCC nominating committee for honouring his mother.

"I would like to thank the nominating committee for the recognition of my mother, who I call 'Doctor Mom,' because she made me a doctor, and she made Dad a doctor," he told the appreciative audience.

He also thanked the committee for recognising his mother's public service contributions to "our wonderful, growing community".

He added a light-hearted moment to his introduction with reference to a popular cultural quote, drawing a playful but powerful image of his parents' partnership.

"There's a quote from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, which goes, 'The man is the head of the household, but the woman is the neck, and she can turn the neck in whichever direction she pleases'. My father is a dreamer, and my mother has nurtured all of his dreams into their reality and success," he declared.

Carlton also emphasised how his parents' relationship shaped their success.

"[My father] is a husband because of her; he is a father because of her; he is a successful businessman because of her; he is a doctor because of her..."

His words underscored the extraordinary partnership

between Singh and his wife, whose combined efforts continue to make an indelible mark on our community, and in the broader Canadian landscape.

Following Carlton's heartfelt tribute, the NEPMCC presented the Humanitarian Award to the Singh's in recognition of their extraordinary contributions. The award celebrated the couple for their business acumen, philanthropy, and unwavering commitment to the betterment of society, both in Canada and globally.

Singh is a Guyana-born Canadian entrepreneur and influential business leader. Owner of the prominent companies Atlas Cargo, Canadian Customs Brokers Inc., and Central Global Cargo North America, he is a leader in business fields spanning transportation, security, customs, and trade.

Born in Strangroen, East Coast Demerara, Singh moved to Canada in 1977. Here he earned degrees in Sociology and Business Administration from York University, followed by specialised certifications in traffic, cargo insurance, and project management.

Known for his global charitable initiatives over the past 40 years, Singh has received numerous awards, including Ottawa's Businessman of the Year (2005), and honours from Singapore and Tanzania. He is active on advisory boards at York University and Humber College, and as a member of the Indo-Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

The Singhs were chosen by the NEPMCC to receive its Humanitarian Award for exemplary work in service to the community, as well as their personal commitment to fostering inclusivity and opportunity for all.

The NEPMCC, which represents a vast and diverse network of media outlets across the country, annually honours individuals and organisations that have made significant strides in promoting multiculturalism, communication, and community engagement.

Its membership spans 800 media outlets in print, radio, and television, in over 104 languages across Canada. These members play a vital role in keeping immigrant and minority communities informed and connected to the broader Canadian society.

Each year, the NEPMCC's awards recognise outstanding contributions to the media industry and communities. In addition to recognising media practitioners for their work in promoting the industry and keeping their communities informed in their native languages, the NEPMCC also presents posthumous tributes to those who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

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Trudeau steps down as Prime Minister

Ottawa – Facing growing pressure from his own party, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced on Monday that he will step down, ending his nine-year tenure as leader. Trudeau told reporters he would stay on in office until his Liberal Party chooses a new leader, and that Parliament would be prorogued until March 24.

“This country deserves a real choice in the next election and it has become clear to me that if I’m having to fight internal battles, I cannot be the best option in that election,” he said.

Trudeau’s personal unpopularity with Canadians became an increasing drag on his party’s fortunes in advance of federal elections later this year.

“Last night, over dinner, I told my kids about the decision that I’m sharing with you...,” he told reporters in Ottawa.

He added, “I intend to resign as party leader, as prime minister, after the party selects its next leader through a robust nationwide competitive process.”

President of the Liberal Party, Sachit Mehra, later said a meeting of the party’s board of directors would be held this week to begin the process of selecting a new leader.

In a statement, he added: “Liberals across the country are immensely grateful to Justin Trudeau for more than a decade of leadership to our Party and the country. As Prime Minister, his vision delivered transformational progress for Canadians.”

Responding to the announcement, Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre said “nothing has changed” following Trudeau’s resignation.

“Every Liberal MP and Leadership contender supported EVERYTHING Trudeau did for 9 years, and now they want to trick voters by swapping in another Liberal face to keep ripping off Canadians for another four years, just like Justin,” Poilievre posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Trudeau faced growing calls to resign from inside his Liberal Party, which ramped up in December when deputy prime minister and long-time ally Chrystia Freeland abruptly resigned.

In her resignation letter made public, Freeland cited US President-elect Donald Trump’s threats of tariffs on Canadian goods, and accused Trudeau of not doing enough to address the “grave challenge” posed by Trump’s proposals.

Trump has promised to impose a tax of 25 percent on imported Canadian goods, which economists have warned would significantly hurt Canada’s economy, unless the country takes steps to increase security on its shared border.

Canada has since announced that it will implement sweeping new security measures along the country’s US border in response to the threat.

In an online post, Trump claimed that pressure over tariffs led to Trudeau’s resignation, and repeated his jibe that Canada should become “the 51st State”.

“If Canada merged with the US, there would be no Tariffs, taxes would go way down, and they would be TOTALLY SECURE from the threat of the Russian and Chinese Ships that are constantly surrounding them,” he posted.

Following Freeland’s resignation, Trudeau lost the backing of parties that had previously helped to keep the Liberals in power. They were the New Democrats with its support agreement with the Liberals, and the Quebec nationalist party, Bloc Quebecois.

The largest opposition party, the Conservatives, have maintained a significant two-digit lead over the Liberals in polls for months, suggesting that if a general election were held soon, the Liberals could be in for a significant defeat.

Liberals will now choose a new leader to take the party into the next election, which must be held on or before October 20.

Sources in Ottawa told the media the race for leader is an open contest, and that the Prime Minister’s Office will fully stay out of the process, leaving it to Liberal Party members to decide their future.

Meanwhile, Bloc Quebecois leader Yves-François Blanchet suggested that an early election be called once the Liberals choose their new leader.

Trudeau is the son of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who dominated the Canada’s politics in the 1970s and 1980s.

The younger Trudeau became prime minister after the Liberal Party won a sweeping majority in 2015 amid a promise to usher in a new, progressive era of “Sunny Ways”.

His record includes a commitment to gender equality in his cabinet, which continues to be 50 percent women; progress on reconciliation with Indigenous people in Canada; bringing in a national carbon tax; implementing a tax-free child benefit for families; and legalising recreational cannabis.

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak praised Trudeau’s track record on indigenous issues following his resignation, saying in a statement that he “has taken meaningful steps to address issues that matter to First Nations”.

Nepinak added, “While much work remains, these actions have laid a foundation for future governments to build upon.”

Dark clouds began arriving in Trudeau’s government in recent years, which weathered a series of often self-inflicted scandals, among them controversy over a deal with a Canadian firm facing corruption charges.

Vaccine mandates and other restrictions were also met with fierce backlash by some Canadians, leading to the Freedom Convoy truck protests in early 2022. Trudeau eventually used unprecedented emergency powers to remove the protesters.

As Canada began to emerge from the pandemic, housing and food prices skyrocketed, with his government pulling back on ambitious immigration targets as public services began to show strain.



Justin Trudeau



Stephen Lecce

Govt unveils energy plan

Toronto – The Ontario government is launching new energy efficiency programs, including the new Home Renovation Savings Program, aimed at helping families and businesses reduce costs. The programs are part of a new \$10.9 billion, 12-year investment in energy efficiency, which is the largest in Canadian history.

“As the demand for electricity continues to rise, we’re giving families and small businesses more ways to save money and energy as we launch the largest energy efficiency program in Canadian history,” said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Energy and Electrification.

He added, “Ontario’s new Home Renovation Savings Program will put more money back in your pockets, covering up to 30 percent of the costs of new windows, doors, insulation, heat pumps, rooftop solar panels, and battery storage.”

The new Home Renovation Savings Program will launch on January 28, 2025, and offer rebates of up to 30 percent for home energy efficiency renovations and improvements, including new windows, doors, insulation, air sealing, smart thermostats, and heat pumps, as well as rooftop solar panels and battery storage systems for people who want to generate and store energy at home.

Later in 2025, the program will expand to include rebates for energy efficient appliances, including refrigerators and freezers.

The government’s Affordable Energy Act, which came into force on December 4, 2024, ensures the new Home Renovation Savings Program, and other program offerings, will be expanded to homeowners who heat their homes by propane and oil, instead of being restricted to those who heat with electricity, as it was under previous governments.

The province is also expanding the popular Peak Perks program with a new program specifically targeted to small businesses, including convenience stores and restaurants. Businesses will receive a financial incentive of \$75 upon initial enrollment in the program, and \$20 per year for each eligible smart thermostat connected to a central air conditioning system or heat pump unit.



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Kissoon's enduring legacy at Queen's Law champions education and justice

— Trailblazing lawyer and university lecturer *Dhaman Kissoon stands as a beacon of justice, compassion, and transformative education. Celebrated for his role as an Adjunct Professor at Queen's University in The Queen's Law Reports, 2024, his tireless commitment to tackling systemic inequities and empowering future legal professionals has cemented his legacy as a force for change, both in the classroom and beyond.*

• • •

Dhaman Kissoon, a celebrated lawyer, humanitarian, community builder, and Queen's Law *alumnus* from the Class of 1989, has spent more than three decades shaping the future of legal minds as an adjunct professor at his *alma mater*.

His unwavering commitment to justice and education, as profiled in *The Queen's Law Reports, 2024* by Ken Cuthbertson, is a testament to his profound impact as both a mentor



Budhendranauth Doobay

and a pioneer in legal education.

Reflecting on his teaching journey, Kissoon told Cuthbertson, "I feel I am giving back and making a real difference", his statement encapsulating the commitment and ethos that drive his work.

Born in Guyana, here in Canada Kissoon has dedicated much of his professional life to addressing systemic inequities. Specialising in criminal and immigration law, he balances a thriving practice in Etobicoke, Ontario, with his long standing teaching role at Queen's Law.

As Cuthbertson reported, since 1990, Kissoon has made the weekly journey to Kingston each fall to teach his ground-breaking course, *Racism and Canadian Legal Culture*, a seminar that remains both contemporary and transformative.

As detailed in *The Queen's Law Reports, 2024*, Queen's Law faculty relies on the expertise of



Fareed Amin

Winston Kassim honoured for community work

From Page 1

Amin said.

He added, "Winston's volunteer work has positively impacted countless people in Guyana, Canada, Africa, and Asia, brought thousands of people from different religions and backgrounds together, and touched the lives of millions."

Omar Farouk, President of the IMO, also spoke highly of Kassim's humanitarian efforts.

Said Farouk: "He is a genuine human being; he is there for everyone. He shows concern for the community in helping and trying his very best to improve [its] welfare and happiness as best as he can. He loves to see people when they are happy, and whatever he can do to reduce hardship, suffering, and difficulties, he would try his very best in a humanitarian way to accomplish these goals. He is also a prudent and thoughtful person."

Dr Budhendranauth Doobay, founder of the Canadian Museum of Indian Civilisation, and a former recipient of both the Order of Canada and the Order of Ontario, highlighted Kassim's instrumental role in supporting various community initiatives.

"Winston Kassim played instrumental roles in helping establish the Canadian Museum of Indian Civilisation in Toronto, in raising funds to establish the Doobay Gafoor Medical Centre and Research Centre in Georgetown, in supporting the growth and development of various community organisations across Canada, and much more," said Doobay.

The CMIC is North America's first museum dedicated to showcasing the essence and history of Indian culture, and is a sister organisation of the Voice of Vedas Cultural Sabha Inc. and the Vishnu Mandir.

Since arriving in Canada more than four decades ago, Kassim has made outstanding contributions in the areas of philanthropy, community service, and international relations.

By sharing his expertise in governance and sustainability, acquired during his tenure at RBC, Kassim has supported many organisations, including the Sunatul Jamaat of Ontario, Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Malton Islamic Centre, International Development Relief Foundation, Canadian Museum of Indian Civilisation, and the Institute for

Canadian Citizenship.

His efforts have mobilised resources, and led fundraising initiatives to support recovery and development efforts worldwide.

Last week, Kassim shared his reflections on receiving the prestigious Order of Ontario with *Indo-Caribbean World*. He described feeling deeply privileged to serve, and expressed gratitude to the many people he has worked alongside over the years. He also acknowledged the profound influence of family members in shaping his formative years in Guyana.

Stating that his father helped lay the foundation for his early education, Kassim added that his mother's devotion and leadership in Guyana and Canada to religious service in the Muslim community also inspired him.

He also paid tribute to his wife Kameni and her family, describing them as significant sources of inspiration.

"My wife's family come from the West Bank Demerara in Guyana. Her parents were responsible for the construction of several mandirs," he said.

The humanitarian and religious work by his in-laws in Guyana paved the way for Kassim's involvement with Vishnu Mandir in Toronto, where he worked closely with Doobay.

"I helped with the mandir's Peace Park, with the Wall of Peace, and with the Doobay Gafoor Medical and Research Centre. I did fund-raising through several areas over the past ten to 12 years," Kassim recalled. "And the rest is history."

The Order of Ontario, established in 1986, recognises individuals who have demonstrated the highest level of excellence in their fields, and whose contributions have shaped the province and beyond. Members of the Order represent Ontario's finest citizens, selected from a population of 16 million people.

"We are fortunate to have leaders the calibre of Winston Kassim supporting our work at the Chamber and in our communities," Amin declared.

He added, "We are delighted that Winston was among the 29 appointees included in this year's Order of Ontario recipients, and I join my colleagues in extending to him and his family our heartfelt congratulations on achieving yet another honour for his community work."



Dhaman Kissoon

outstanding adjunct professors like Kissoon to enrich its academic program. In the 2023–2024 academic year, 35 adjunct professors – 32 lawyers and three judges – complemented the school's roster of 35 full- and part-time faculty members, a tradition that dates back to 1959.

These adjuncts, many of whom are alumni, bring cutting-edge expertise from their specialised fields, bridging the gap between theory and practice via focused courses across ten subject areas, including international law, litigation, and corporate law.

"Our adjunct professors are respected experts in their specialised fields," explains Dean Colleen M. Flood in the report. "They work at the cutting edge of their specialised fields and equip students with advanced skills that are essential for success in practice. As teachers, our adjuncts take great pride in educating the next generation of lawyers."

Kissoon's seminar, the first of its kind in Canada when it was introduced, continues to address systemic racism within the legal profession and Canadian society.

"During my student days, my Law '89 classmate Ian Smith – who is now an Ontario

Superior Court justice – and I, did some research that looked at racism and the Canadian legal system," Kissoon recalled in the report.

He added, "When we graduated, then-Dean John Whyte asked if we would be interested in teaching a course based on what we had learned."

The course has since become a hallmark of Queen's Law's curriculum, reinforcing the school's leadership in addressing critical social issues.

"Since then, a lot of other law schools have come on board," Kissoon noted. "That said, Queen's Law has always been a leader in this area, and I am pleased and honoured to still be teaching this course."

Kissoon's teaching style fosters collaboration and critical thinking. Instead of traditional lectures, he engages students with real-world problems, encouraging them to work together on solutions.

"Students enjoy this approach," he shared, adding, "I wish I could say that with the passage of so many years, the topics we talk about are different. However, the reality is that while the case law has changed, the issues we are dealing with have not."

As highlighted in the report, the seminar remains in high demand, consistently achieving full enrolment.

Kissoon's positive impact on students has been recognised through four Stanley M. Corbett Awards for Teaching Excellence, a prestigious accolade voted on by the Law Students' Society.

Alumni testimonials further underscore his eminent influence. Rashmi Kumar, Law '17, now an assistant Crown attorney in the Greater Toronto Area, noted in the report, "Professor Kissoon's course reshaped my understanding of Canadian law... and cultivated critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are essential for success in law and in the everyday world."

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Editorial

TT at crossroads

Trinidad and Tobago finds itself at a critical juncture as it enters 2025. The declaration of a State of Emergency in the dying days of December to address spiraling gang violence, coupled with a tectonic shift in its political firmament mere days into 2025, have cast a shadow of uncertainty over the nation.

For those of us in the diaspora whose familial ties and investments remain deeply rooted in our homeland, these developments are cause for concern. The implications via crime and political uncertainty ripple far beyond our vibrant twin-island republic, threatening not only our homeland's stability, but also the confidence of foreign investors, tourists, and its own diaspora.

The SoE, announced on December 30, was a response to escalating violence that saw the year ending with a record 624 murders. Acting Attorney General Stuart Young justified the SoE citing intelligence that "there would be increased and heightened brazen acts of criminal activity with the use of illegal firearms that [were] going to endanger public safety through reprisal attacks".

Under the SoE, Trinidad and Tobago's security forces have been granted expanded powers, including warrantless searches and detentions. Understandably, the move rippled abroad, with updated travel advisories issued by the US, the UK, and Canada warning visitors to expect an increased police and military presence, with security forces empowered to search persons and property, arrest, and detain without a warrant. Such measures, while aimed at curbing crime, also inevitably heighten anxiety both within and beyond Trinidad and Tobago.

The consequences of these developments also extend into the economic sphere. As the local media reported, regional security consultant Garvin Heerah articulated a clear link between crime and Foreign Direct Investment, stating, "FDI is driven by investor confidence, and one of its key prerequisites is a stable and secure environment. The current narrative, amplified by the SoE, paints a picture of instability that could deter potential investors. For businesses already operating in Trinidad and Tobago, there may be concerns about operational risks, supply chain disruptions, and employee safety."

Tourism, a crucial pillar of economic diversification, is also at risk. Travel advisories issued in major source markets like the US, the UK, and here in Canada, could deter our diaspora, and other visitors. Heerah also warned that "travel advisories often lead to a sharp decline in tourist arrivals, particularly as potential visitors perceive the country as unsafe".

Complicating matters further for Trinidad and Tobago is the recent tectonic shift in its political landscape following the resignation announcement by Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley. In the wake of his disclosure, the decision to endorse Stuart Young as the next Prime Minister, while incumbent Rowley remains party leader, has introduced a dual-headed leadership dynamic that analysts have described as "risky".

Political scientist Dr Hamid Ghany observed that this unprecedented arrangement "weakened" the ruling PNM's position, noting that "the Prime Minister who is not the party leader and the party leader who is not the Prime Minister" creates mixed messaging challenges.

Dr Bishnu Ragoonath also raised concerns about the party's internal cohesion, questioning whether decisions about leadership should be left to the parliamentary caucus, or involve broader membership participation.

The inherent uncertainties borne along these political crosscurrents risk compounding the economic and crime challenges by undermining governance and public trust, further dampening investor confidence. For the diaspora and our interests in the homeland, these developments are unsettling as we consider possible instability ahead.

Yet we remain hopeful. Trinidad and Tobago has weathered many storms before with resilience and an indomitable spirit. The crossroads at which our homeland stands today, while fraught with challenges, also offer opportunities for renewal and recovery, which have always been bedrocks upon which strong nations rebuild and thrive.

Prorogation a time for a govt to reorganise, reset

Prorogation is political lingo that Canadians rarely hear about and is sometimes misunderstood.

When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced earlier this week that he would resign as leader of the Liberal Party, and in effect as the Prime Minister of Canada, he also indicated that Parliament would be prorogued.

Prorogation in Canada refers to the formal ending of a session of Parliament by the Governor General, on the advice of the Prime Minister. This action temporarily halts all parliamentary business, suspending the functioning of both the House of Commons and the Senate.

Prorogation is typically used to mark the end of a parliamentary session and to give the government the opportunity to reorganise, reset priorities, or introduce a new legislative agenda.

In the above-mentioned instance, the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament as his political party, the Liberal Party of Canada, would be conducting a leadership process to replace him.

This would ensure there would be some stability during this transition period, and during a minority government.

A previous famous instance of prorogation in Canada occurred in 2008, when Prime Minister Stephen Harper made the request to avoid a vote of no confidence in his government, which could have led to a potential defeat.

There is nothing illegal about prorogation, and it is a completely legitimate legislative tool. However, it can be controversial when a prime minister (or premier) invokes the power to prorogue Parliament.

In the examples of Prime Ministers Trudeau and Harper, there are thoughts that these were done for political reasons. As it was in the case with Harper, who avoided an immediate vote of no confidence in his government, which he was leading at the time.

Beyond the above-mentioned, there is a perception that because Parliament has been shut down, the work of government is completely stalled.

It is a natural assumption since Parliament is not meeting that no work is being done. Indeed, bills are not debated and voted on, daily Question Period (when MPs pose questions to the government) cannot occur, and legislative committees do not meet to consider legislation or hold consultations.

The lack of these legislative functions can lead to the thinking that politicians are not working, which is an easy and natural assumption to make.

Finding a fine balance in riding back then and now

Our modern-day bicycle comes adorned with so many bells and whistles, one wonders if its true purpose is mobility or a balancing act of technology. A simple stroll into any bike store is like entering a futuristic tradeshow, where high-tech robots with sleek frames compete for my attention.

Here bikes are lightweight alloys, thin as eggshells, and even lighter than half a dozen eggs, promising a future of riding that gleams with bling. Specialised models balance with handstands in rows proclaiming purposeful intent as uphill conquerors, downhill racers, and kilometres of flatland riding... in cruise control.

I am exaggerating, of course; but perhaps only slightly, since our modern-day world of bicycles is one of choice, research, and the inevitable expense.

Yet, for all the sophistication, today's bikes appear to have traded their souls for technology. Now I am not against modern bikes; however, I feel they have become detached from the practical rhythms and textured realities of life that I knew growing up back home.

Growing up as a young boy, a bike was not an accessory, but a necessity, a two-wheeled companion that turned an ordinary street into an extraordinary marketplace.

Throughout the day the street resonated with a symphony of bicycle bells, each rider conducting a concerto with arrival.

There was the mailman and his government-issued brown bag, a daily messenger of anticipation. He arrived with letters from overseas pen pals, bills with their whispers of unavoidable obligation, and handwritten scrawls from relatives too lazy to walk across from a nearby village.

Our postman rang once, his staccato bell a call to action for housewives, who abandoned the laundry in its tub, wiping sudsy hands on the sides of their skirts.

Looking back, I understand now our postman traversed a liminal line between the distant and the immediate, bringing worlds, and the next village, together one envelope at a time.

Then came the fisherman, who arrived on a cargo bike with its deep trays trailing drops of meltwater from blocks of ice. He heralded his arrival with the squeeze of a tube horn that emitted a mournful chorus in accompaniment to the sibilance of his, "Fisssh! Get your fresssh fisssh!"

Again abandoning chores, grandmothers, mothers, and daughters met him with voices sharp and wary with suspicion.

However, despite prorogation, Members of Parliaments still have ongoing responsibilities. When the House of Commons is not in session, or when it is prorogued, many MPs will be found in their constituencies.

All MPs have offices that engage with residents daily on a number of items. These offices provide support on important federal items, such as immigration requests, access to government programs, and support on community needs.

The time an MP can spend in their constituency office is valuable. Rather than be in Ottawa amongst other politicians, it is a prime opportunity to directly engage with residents and support their needs.

During prorogation, the break from business in Ottawa can see MPs hosting more community events, attending important local functions, connecting with stakeholders, and most importantly, being in their constituency to speak with local residents.

Despite the perception that the House of Commons is not meeting, there is still important work for elected representatives.

Aside from their constituency duties, many MPs will also conduct other activities related to their role. For example, some MPs who are Cabinet Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries will continue to serve in their portfolios. This will also require them to be occasionally in Ottawa, or elsewhere at various locations across the country.

Further, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries will continue to conduct departmental work that operates the functions of government. Prorogation will also be an opportunity for MPs, who are politicians at the end of the day, to conduct political aspects of their roles.

With the upcoming election, many MPs who are seeking to be re-elected will leverage the opportunity to get prepared.

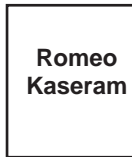
Some would argue that this is also an important function of the life of an MP, and the time back in the constituency to re-engage voters is valuable in their work.

However, there is also this side to the coin - that when invoked, prorogation raises alarms. The optics of a shutdown in Parliament is rightfully worrisome, as there are many important legislative functions that are paused.

But despite the lack of parliamentary duties on their schedules, MPs are anything but not at work. The work they do shifts, and if done correctly, is an opportunity for them to be out in the community to serve us directly.



Ryan Singh



Examining fish limp with exposure to the humidity, transactions between buyers and the seller were a fine balance of skepticism, wariness, and haggling.

Equally iconic was yet another mid-morning concerto, this one played on the bike's bell by our neighbourhood's 'Papers Man'. So it was that this man's calling in life defined his functional name. To the end his 'birth paper' name remained elusive, even after he was laid to rest following his passing, his grave minus a tombstone and its cryptic distillation.

His bike bore a tray with a snapping spring clamp that secured the day's newspapers securely against a wayward breeze. As he weaved through our streets, his Pavlovian ringing attracted the annoyed attention of the village dogs.

His visit to our gate was contemplative and fulsome for my wide, curious eyes. Sometimes he requested a drink of cool water, and in return, made small talk in what was an exchange of headlines for hydration.

Wiping his mouth with the back of a hirsute hand, his short legs then performed a comical run for momentum before he bounded onto the bike weighted down with news of the nation. It was a precarious moment of liminality finding his centre on the saddle, the bike wobbling tenuously like an overweight duck before smoothening out in flight.

Talking about the liminal, looking back, I see these riders not as tradespeople, but the lifeblood of a community held together by their mobility. While each figure was a balancing act of precarity and liminality, at the same time they were emblematic of a connectivity that brought the world beyond to our front gates in moments that were transactional and temporal.

I recall watching their legs heaving at the pedals as they rode away, and dreaming about similarly riding out of my ordinary into their extraordinary worlds. While their bikes were not alloyed wonders but patched and re-purposed, with the brakes sometimes nothing less than a shoe burning against the front tire, they were still vehicles on which to start out in life with a wobble before finally soaring, up, up, and away.

I wonder what we have gained and lost. Modern bikes, with its precision engineering, are marvels of technology. But somehow they lack the soul of our early bikes, and the stories that are woven into each frame, spoke, and flat tire. It seems bikes shifted away from being a thread in narratives about a community to become a vehicle for individual pursuit... in cruise control.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of this publication. Letters to be published will be edited where necessary. Publisher: Harry Ramkhelawan Editor: Romeo Kaseram Columnists/Writers/Photographers: Vidur Dindayal, Bernard Heydorn, Dwarka Lakhani, Dhanpaul Narine, Ryan Singh, Nalini Mohabir, Ramesh Ramkalawan, 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

TT nationals must begin fight for a nation that is safe, just, and free

Dear Editor,

The murder of Trinidad and Tobago's special prosecutor Randall Warren Hector on the final day of 2024 marked a grim end to a year that saw 624 homicides in Trinidad and Tobago – a toll that weighs heavily on the nation's collective soul.

This tragedy, much like the brutal assassination of attorney Dana Seetahal in 2014 is more than just another statistic. It is a stark reminder of the fragility of justice, the entrenchment of corruption, and the creeping despair that threaten to consume a nation.

Trinidad and Tobago's battle with violent crime is not new, but its persistence reveals a deeper sickness in the society.

Trinidad and Tobago is blessed with abundant natural resources and a resilient people. Yet it finds itself gripped by fear, as criminal enterprises grow bold and State institutions falter.

Hector, like Seetahal before him, symbolised the courage to stand against the tide of lawlessness. Their murders were not just attacks on individuals, but on the very ideals they represented: justice, accountability, and hope.

Seetahal's assassination shook the nation to its core. Her murder was a calculated act of terror, a public demonstration of the power wielded by criminal networks. A decade later, her killers are yet to face justice. The delays, excuses, and bureaucracy all serve to erode the public's faith in the judicial system.

How can a nation heal when its wounds are left to fester? How can justice have meaning when its pursuit is mired in inefficiency and neglect?

The murder of Hector feels like a cruel



Dana Seetahal

echo of that tragedy. It is a signal that little has changed. When those charged with upholding the rule of law become targets, it sends a chilling message: no one is safe.

The ordinary citizen sees these events and feels an acute sense of vulnerability. If the powerful and principled can be silenced with bullets, what hope is there for the rest of us?

But despair cannot be our answer. Trinidad and Tobago is at a crossroads. We can allow ourselves to be paralysed by fear and cynicism,



Randall Hector

or we can rise to meet this challenge with the urgency and determination it demands. This is not just a battle for safer streets; it is a fight for the soul of the nation.

To confront crime, we must first confront corruption. The lines between organised crime and certain elements of the State have blurred to a dangerous degree.

This symbiosis fuels the violence, undermines governance, and steals opportunities from those who need them most. Rooting out corruption requires courage, accountability, and the political will to dismantle networks of complicity that have thrived for far too long.

The Judiciary, too, must rise to the occasion. The delays in prosecuting Seetahal's killers are

emblematic of a system that has lost its way. Justice delayed is not just justice denied; it is an invitation for further impunity.

Modernising the judicial system, investing in technology, and ensuring that cases move swiftly through the courts are not just administrative reforms – they are acts of national salvation.

Yet, tackling crime and corruption is not solely a matter for law enforcement and the courts. It is a societal issue rooted in inequality, exclusion, and disillusionment. Too many of our young people see crime as their only path to prosperity. Too many communities feel abandoned by the State.

Addressing this requires more than platitudes. It demands investments in education, job creation, and community development. It calls for leaders who inspire and empower, rather than divide and exploit.

The murders of Hector and Seetahal are painful chapters in our story, but they need not define our future.

In their memory, we should recommit ourselves to building a society where justice is not an ideal but a lived reality. Let us demand accountability from those in power. Reject the normalisation of violence. Let us be unyielding in our belief that a better Trinidad and Tobago is possible.

The road ahead is long and arduous but it is one we must travel together. For every life lost to violence, for every dream stolen by corruption, we owe it to ourselves and future generations to fight for a nation that is safe, just, and free.

This is our moment to act – not with fear, but with hope. Because hope, when coupled with action, has the power to transform even the darkest of nights into a brighter dawn.

Osazé Moraldo-Bowen, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.



Acting Attorney General Stuart Young (left) and Security Minister Fitzgerald Hinds address the media following declaration of a SoE last week

SoE example of reactive governance

Dear Editor,

The decision to call a State of Emergency in Trinidad and Tobago mere months before a general election, after nine years of rampant crime and almost 5,000 citizens tragically lost, is not only an indictment of this government's incompetence, but also a glaring example of reactive governance at its worst.

This move appears less like a genuine attempt to address the root causes of crime and more like a desperate ploy to salvage shattered public confidence.

The absurdly ridiculous excuse of gang reprisal wears thin on a tired and besieged population, fed up of excuses and excesses. Security Minister Fitzgerald Hinds' loquacious explanation would have brought no comfort that any relief is likely.

The government has known for the last nine years where the gangs reside, and operate, and who their members are, and has been comatose to their actions. The use of high-powered illegal weapons in murderous sprees is nothing new.

For nearly a decade, the administration has had ample opportunity to implement meaningful reforms to tackle crime, strengthen institutions and our borders, and address the

socio-economic inequalities that breed violence. Instead, the past nine years have been marked by neglect, mismanagement, and an alarming inability to curb the bloodshed. This eleventh hour declaration of a SoE does not inspire confidence – it reeks of political expediency rather than a well-thought-out strategy to protect citizens.

A SoE might temporarily suppress criminal activities, but it does not resolve systemic issues like corruption, inadequate policing, lack of economic opportunities, or the breakdown of trust in law enforcement and the Judiciary. It is a short-term plaster on a festering wound caused by years of institutional degradation.

True leadership would have prioritised proactive measures, community policing, judicial reforms, and investments in education and employment to provide sustainable solutions.

This government's decision underscores its failure to lead effectively and its willingness to use extraordinary measures to paper over its long-standing inadequacies. Citizens deserve a government capable of implementing lasting solutions, not one that scrambles to contain crises of its own making as an election looms.

Vasant V. Bharath, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

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Facing collective traumas from our past - Wismar victims deserve closure

Dear Editor,

The Peoples Temple Agricultural Project (Jonestown) was the subject of recent discussions in the local media. A comprehensive history of the 1978 mass murder/suicide is compiled [here](#) by the San Diego State University.

Eusi Kwayana authored a book on Jonestown, *A New Look at Jonestown*, which I reviewed some time ago. I agree with Kit Nascimento that a private tour company may choose to exploit Jonestown for profit, but the Guyana government should not. Tourists may be more inclined to visit Guyana should the government lobby the World Heritage Committee to make permanent our five UNESCO designated landmarks.

Renewed interest in Jonestown is a reminder that we cannot escape from collective traumas of the past. Like Jonestown, Linden, a vibrant enclave of economic development in the 1960s, bears the scars of two national tragedies – the anti-Indian violence and ethnic cleansing of Wismar in May, and the *Son Chapman* river launch explosion at Hurudaia in July 1964.

In the latter, 43 Africans died. Dr Cheddi Jagan referred to the anti-Indian acts of May 23-26, 1964, as a “massacre”. Dr Davies-Webb of Mackenzie Hospital acknowledged that on July 7, five Indians among 300 re-invited by Demba were killed before police could conduct an investigation into the explosion. No evidence of human subversion was ever established as the cause of the explosion.

Under Chapter 59 of the Commission of Inquiry Ordinance, a COI was gazetted, with meetings held at 252 Thomas and Murray Streets, commencing on October 31, 1964. Commissioners were tasked with investigating the “disturbances which took place at Wismar, Christianburg, and Mackenzie... investigate the conduct of the Security Forces... and to determine the number of deaths and the extent of injury, loss, and damage”.

The Commission met for 19 days, interrogated 86 witnesses (six on camera), and recalled eight for further testimony. The COI Report concluded that: “We have come to the conclusion that the disturbances which took place in the Wismar-Christianburg-Mackenzie area on May 25th, 1964, were politically and racially inspired... the thorough-going destruction of East Indian property, and the fact that the security forces were in no case able to apprehend arsonists force us to conclude that the destruction was not ‘spontaneous’ but was organised, and well organised”.

The attacks were precipitated by the murder of an elderly African couple in Buxton on May 21. Also murdered were Richard Mohammad Khan, an 18-year-old Progressive Youth Organisation supporter from Georgetown visiting his family



Donald Ramoutar



Cheddi Jagan



David Granger

(of seven), and Paul Mirgin, owner of a general store in Wismar who operated a tug boat with his wife and four sons. Their families resided in Valley of Tears, now renamed Victory Valley.

Two Africans died, Byron Wharton (trapped in a burning building), and Gussie English, who was shot by police while “involved in looting”. The father of PPP Senator, Christina Ramjattan, was also killed on May 28th.

The COI allocated responsibility for the Wismar 1964 tragedy among several individuals: the PNC representative in Wismar (Robert Jordan), members of the BG Police Force and the BG Volunteer Force, Commissioner of Police, PPP Senator from Section C, Christianburg (Christina Ramjattan), Assistant District Commissioner (Patrick Bender), Chairman of the Local Authority (Festus Adams), Government Dispenser and Sub-Registrar of Births and Deaths in the area (Albert Jairam), a known criminal nicknamed “Banga Mary,” among others.

The unarmed Demba constabulary and the British Army (in Guyana since the 1962 Black Friday riots) patrolled the area after May 26, the day Indians were evacuated to the Ruimveldt Industrial Site by the Sproston-owned RH Carr.

Readers may contend that national traumas should remain buried in the archives because the politics of the 1960s still inflame primordial sentiments. Indeed, a 2008 UN-funded study conducted by *Help and Shelter* and *Red Thread* (with Alissa Trotz as lead investigator) interrogated residents from Wismar, and concluded that the “violence against Indian-Guyanese in Wismar, and specifically the sexual assault of women and girls appear to have been wiped clean from the memories of African-Guyanese, while for Indian-Guyanese they remain stark as an unforgivable assault on the whole community”. Those who argue that Wismar 1964 should be silenced must consider two observations.

First, former President David Granger was instrumental in erecting a memorial for the victims of *Son Chapman*. The epitaph etched on the *Son Chapman Monument* on the Wismar waterfront echoes Santayana’s warning: “Those who forget the lessons of history do so at our own peril”.

To date, nothing has ever been done in memory of the Wismar refugees, who left everything behind (including land). Yet, prominent speakers at the annual *Son Chapman* commemoration never mentioned the anti-Indian acts of May 1964, thereby contributing to the silence of atrocities committed against their fellow humanity.

Second, Wismar 1964 and *Son Chapman*, can potentially contribute to reconciliatory national dialogue. In a country where race politics persists and national dialogue is absent (including handshakes!), where politicians often eschew moral responsibility,

and in the face of an approaching election that will surely reveal our fractured society, a younger generation ought to not be held hostage to our historical aberrations.

Both Opposition Leader Aubrey Norton and Linden Mayor Sharma Solomon acknowledged that the events of May 1964 (and *Son Chapman*) can potentially contribute positively to a national dialogue, but object strongly to the word “massacre”.

Their thinking resonated with the narrative of the Commissioners, who noted that, “When one considers the number of East Indians evacuated, the large number of Africans in the area, and the negligible opposition which the attackers encountered, the number of fatalities was indeed very small”.

However, the level of violence, property destruction, and trauma directed at the minority Indian community cannot be reduced to casualties alone. As per the COI “more than 200 houses and business places” were destroyed, and “more than 3000” families became refugees. On May 25 alone, “there were 57 cases of assault, including rape” and “197 houses were destroyed” in addition to “cases of looting”.

As former President Donald Ramotar reminds us, Wismar 1964 is embedded in the divisive stain of colonialism. This reality imposes considerations that should guide any national discourse. One, references to Wismar 1964 should not be centered on victimhood. The COI noted that there was no record of Indian reprisals, but some Africans, at great risk to their own lives, provided shelter and safe passage to Indians during their moment of siege.

Two, reconciliatory dialogue, as with the South African experience, should not be about good versus evil. British Guiana was in the throes of a high stake competitive political struggle. Indians were also engaged in retributions outside of Wismar.

Three, reconciliatory dialogue should not be viewed as an occasion for establishing claims to moral superiority.

The “Dubai” of the Caribbean promises a bright future for our young people – but we ought to acknowledge our growing pains. The victims of Wismar deserve closure.

Baytoram Ramharack, New York, via email.

Examination between Guyana, TT East Indian populations shows disparity

Dear Editor,

East Indian leaders in Guyana have consistently pointed to the continual decline in the East Indian population, post-1980, and also noted a significant numeric decline of 13.9 percent (215,269 to 185,439) in the Hindu population between 2002 and 2012, and a corresponding decline of 7.0 percent for Muslims. The Pentecostal group increased its national numerical strength by 33 percent (from 128,007 in 2002 to 170,289 in 2012). The decline in the East Indian Hindu population post-1980 was due to out-migration, and to a lesser degree, religious conversion.

A good picture on population growth (or decline) of the East Indian population of Guyana is presented when a comparison is made with the East Indian population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Historically, the East Indian population size of Guyana continued to rise from 1946 to 1980, but began to decline from 1980 to 2012. The East Indian population of Trinidad and Tobago also continued its rise from 1946 to 1980 (at a faster rate than Guyana) but its rate of increase slowed down from 1980 to 2012.

Nevertheless, Trinidad and Tobago’s East Indian population in 2012 was 57.5 percent higher than the Guyana East Indian population, even though Guyana received a net (difference between those who remained and those who returned to India) of 48,930 more East Indian Indentured labourers than Trinidad and Tobago. To better understand the dynamics at work, two periods are identified: pre-1960 and post-1960.

Before the 1950 decade, the difference between the size of the

two East Indian populations was due to Natural Increase (NI) – (difference between births and deaths per 1,000 population). An extrapolation is made from the respective country’s general NI and applied to the East Indian population.

Data for Trinidad and Tobago in the 1950 decade show an average annual NI of 48.039 per 1,000 population, compared with 33.625 per 1,000 population for Guyana. This translates into an average annual NI of 4.8 percent for Trinidad and Tobago, compared with 3.4 percent for Guyana in the 1950s.

Thus, the higher East Indian population 34,106 (or 12.7 percent) of Trinidad and Tobago in the 1950s, compared with Guyana, was due to NI.

However, from 1960 onwards, the NI for Trinidad and Tobago had begun to decline continually. It fell from 28.303 per 1,000 in 1950 to an annual average of 7.174 per 1,000 in 2012. In Guyana, the NI from the 1950s onwards also began to decline continually from an annual average of 30.223 in the 1960s to 14.093 in 2012.

Thus, the higher NI for Guyana should have theoretically provided this country with a distinct population advantage over Trinidad and Tobago, but it did not. Trinidad and Tobago still had 171,031 East Indians more than Guyana as of 2012. Since this disparity could not be explained by the higher Guyana NI, the explanation must, therefore, lie in the other component of population change, migration.

While out-migration has played a key role in reshaping the demographic structure of many countries, this had not necessarily been the case with the East Indian populations of Guyana

and Trinidad and Tobago up to 1960.

There was intra-regional migration between 1870 and 1910 into Trinidad and Tobago, and later, there was the out-migration of the Windrush generation (post-1947), but East Indians’ role in those movements was minimal.

The strong Trinidad and Tobago economy (its per capita GDP in 1960 was 2.12 times that of Guyana; in 1980 it was 7.13 times; in 2000 it was 6.52 times and in 2012 although the gap had closed, it was still 3.5 times that of Guyana) neutralised “push” and “pull” factors and lowered the motivation of Trinidad and Tobago nationals, including East Indians, to out-migrate.

During the period 2000 and 2011 it was reported, for example, that 5,455 Trinidad and Tobago nationals out-migrated. For the comparable period in Guyana, the US alone granted 70,373 immigrant visas to Guyanese. About 42,000 of those visas were issued to East Indians.

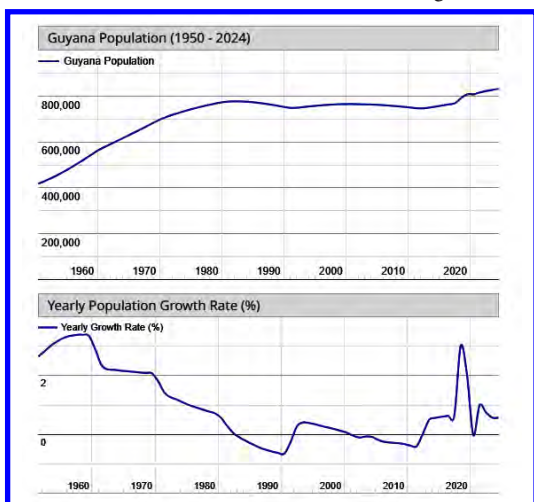
Guyanese out-migration was fuelled by those “pull” factors (liberalisation of the US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the Canadian Immigration Regulations of 1962-1986), as well as “push” factors at home (political/constitutional upheavals in the 1970s when 122,911 Guyanese out-migrated: **Ramraj: 2003**).

Out-migration gathered momentum, and it peaked in the 1980s with an implied out-migration of 185,559 (**T. Singh: 2024**) in response to the high level of political alienation and the downturn of the economy.

With the capture of state power by the PPP/Civic in 1992, the out-migration flow continued, but below the 1980s rate. Increasingly, from the 1990s onwards, family ties have begun to replace political alienation and economic woes as a key determinant in the out-migration stream.

Whether the disparity (N=171,031) between the East Indian populations of Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago would narrow or widen, the answer to this resides in the 2022 Census results.

Dr Tara Singh, New York, via email.



Worldometer Population Graph

Carter and Guyana's watershed moment

Jimmy Carter, the 39th President of the United States and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate celebrated for his relentless pursuit of peace, democracy, and human rights, passed away on December 29 at the age of 100.

His life was marked by an unwavering dedication to service, both as a leader of the free world and as a private citizen who left an indelible mark on the global stage.

Born on October 1, 1924, in Plains, Georgia, James Earl Carter Jr. was raised in a modest farming community. He graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1946, served as a naval officer, and later returned to Plains to manage the family peanut farm.

This grounding in rural America shaped his empathetic worldview and his resolve to uplift the under-served.

Carter's presidency from 1977 to 1981 was defined by his commitment to human rights, his brokering of the Camp David Accords, and his emphasis on energy conservation.

While his tenure faced challenges, it was his post-presidential life that cemented his legacy as one of America's greatest statesmen.

After leaving the White House, Carter founded the Carter Center in 1982 alongside his wife, Rosalynn. The organisation became a beacon of hope for countless communities, tackling issues such as disease eradication, conflict resolution, and election monitoring.

Carter's personal involvement in Habitat for Humanity further illustrated his hands-on approach to addressing poverty and housing inequality.

A cornerstone of his humanitarian efforts was his dedication to fostering democracy worldwide. The Carter Center monitored elections in over 80 countries, ensuring transparency and fairness.

Among these missions, his work in Guyana stands as a testament to his steadfast belief in the transformative power of democracy.

In 1990, Carter personally intervened in



Guyana's political crisis, urging then-President Desmond Hoyte to implement long-overdue electoral reforms.

The Carter Center's efforts culminated in the historic elections of October 5, 1992, mark-

ing the country's first free and fair elections in nearly three decades.

This moment was a watershed for Guyana, ending an era of political dictatorship and paving the way for democratic governance.

Carter's memoir recalls moments of tension, uncertainty, and danger

Guyana was poised at a critical juncture in its political history in October 1992, when the divided nation was about to complete its first contested democratic elections since gaining Independence.

Amidst mounting accusations of electoral fraud, the international community watched closely; former US President Jimmy Carter, through the Carter Center, was in Georgetown monitoring the electoral process.

The atmosphere following the vote was tense. Carter later described these critical moments in his memoir *Beyond the White House; Waging Peace, Fighting Disease, Building Hope* (2007), recalling how the escalating situation was also putting him and his team in grave personal danger.

Here are excerpts from his memoir about the tense situation, courtesy the Carter Center's website. As Carter wrote, "The most personal danger I have felt since leaving the White House was in Guyana in 1992. [Guyana] was then and still is the most completely divided that I know. About nine percent of its citizens are Amerindians living mostly in the vast forests, and another 80 percent are divided between descendants of Indentured servants from India and descendants of African slaves, both brought in by the British during colonial times. The major political parties are largely separated along these racial lines, as are many of the basic professions.

"The Indo-Guyanese hold a slight majority, but the Afro-Guyanese and their People's National Congress party were able to control the government from the time of national Independence in 1966, assisted by the government of Great Britain and the CIA, both of which considered [Dr Cheddi Jagan], leader of the opposition People's Progressive Party, to be a Marxist.

"In 1990, [Dr Jagan] came to The Carter Center, claimed that previous elections had been fraudulent, and asked us to help ensure that the next one would be honest and fair. We agreed, provided the ruling party would also



Desmond Hoyte (right) welcomes Carter to Guyana in 1990. Carter Center photo

accept our presence as observers.

"For several months, President Desmond Hoyte objected strongly, but public opinion became so greatly aroused that he finally agreed, just one month before the election was scheduled. Bob Pastor and his team developed a list of minimal election standards, and I went to Guyana to discuss them with the president and others. Three of the most important were to have an accurate voters' list, a politically balanced election commission, and votes counted at the polling places.

"These issues had been hotly debated for almost 30 years and were very difficult for the ruling party to accept. Finally, as I was preparing to leave the country and declare that we could not participate, President Hoyte accepted all our provisions. The election was delayed until October 1992, and government officials also invited observers of the British Commonwealth, with whom they had enjoyed a close and friendly relationship.

"As usual, we deployed our two-person

teams throughout the country before Election Day, and I went west along the coast toward the border with Venezuela to visit a few polling sites in a riverine area inhabited by Arawak Indians, traveling from one village to another in a small boat...

"When we arrived at the airport, our small plane was surrounded by members of the security forces, who informed me that riots had broken out all over Georgetown, and that I must go to the US Embassy, where I would be safe.

"Instead, I went to my hotel room and called President Hoyte, who assured me that the police were in charge and order would soon be restored. Bob Pastor informed me that the PNC were obviously losing the election, and that some of their supporters had been induced to disrupt the process.

"I decided that the election should continue if possible and sent word to our observers to monitor events and, after the polls closed, to go to their assigned places to gather quick

count results. Our senior observer, Jennifer McCoy, told me that the election center had come under attack by an angry mob, some of whom claimed to have been denied a ballot. She had visited the building and tried to work out a solution with the PNC party chief, but the riot continued.

"The election center was where all of the communication equipment and computers, on which election results would be tabulated, were located. It was a two-story wooden building with many windows, with the electronic equipment housed in an isolated central room on the second floor. When I arrived, accompanied by three Secret Service agents, the building was surrounded by several hundred rioters, who had already broken all the windows with clubs and stones. There was only one Guyanese police officer present, a woman wearing a uniform but without sidearms.

"We went upstairs and found that all the computers had been transferred to one of the more isolated hotels for safekeeping. I phoned the hotel manager, who told me that the computers could not be operated there unless 'a battalion of troops is sent to protect us against the mobs trying to stop the vote count'. I called the president again. I told him that I was in the unprotected building and that there was no way to complete the election unless the workers could return with their computers. Also, I told him that our Secret Service would contact the White House if I didn't receive immediate protection from the mob outside.

"Calm was restored after another hour, and the computers were tabulating returns by midnight. Our quick count showed that the ruling party would lose by about 14 percent, and early the next morning I went to visit both presidential candidates. They agreed to refrain from any public statements and to accept the final results, which were announced three days later.

"[Dr Cheddi Jagan] was sworn in as president after what was considered to be the country's first free and fair election since Independence."

'An immense loss to the US and entire free world' - Irfaan Ali

President of Guyana, Dr Irfaan Ali, paid the following tribute to Carter: "It is with profound sorrow and that I have learnt of the passing of a respected statesman, a benevolent humanitarian, and an indefatigable champion of democracy, former US President Jimmy Carter.

"...His departure represents an immense loss, not only to the US but to the entire free world that values and cherishes the principles of democracy and human rights.

"President Jimmy Carter stood as a central protagonist in the wave of democracy that swept across the world following the end of the Cold War. Acknowledging the vital role of embedding democracy, human rights, and

development within the evolving post-Cold War era, the Carter Center, founded by him, diligently laboured to secure free and fair elections, respect for human rights and the promotion of development, across many continents.

"His legacy is intertwined with the story of Guyana's journey towards democracy and development. Jimmy Carter's name will forever be linked to the electoral reforms that paved the way for free and fair elections in Guyana, breaking the shackles of nearly a quarter-century of political dictatorship. President Carter also understood that democracy's return had to be fortified by development. As such, after freedom had been restored in October 1992, he helped to support the crafting of a National

Development Strategy for Guyana and to mobilize resources for reconstruction.

"Guyana will forever remember and be grateful to President Carter for the election observer missions the Carter Centre undertook in Guyana. These missions acted as a watchdog of transparency, fairness, and credibility in the electoral process.

"My condolences, and that of the Government and people of Guyana, go out to President Carter's family and to the American people, whom he served with distinction and honour throughout his life.

"Jimmy Carter's place in history is secure, and his standing in the history of our own country, Guyana, is etched in gratitude and respect."



Irfaan Ali

Interesting year ahead for Guyana's economy, general elections

An interesting year lies ahead for Guyana. While economic growth is forecasted to remain strong on the back of rising oil production, potential political uncertainty resulting from general elections could prove to be disruptive.

General elections, which are due before the end of the year, will dominate the attention of the people and the government during the year.

To prevent electoral chaos, it is expected that preparations for the elections would be marked by a strong focus on transparency and upholding democratic principles to prevent a recurrence of the 2020 post-Elections debacle, which resulted in a five-month delay in announcing the elections results.

The government would actively engage international organisations, such as the Carter Center, the European Union, and the UNDP to oversee and strengthen the electoral process. These organisations are expected to provide technical support and conduct pre-assessments to address gaps in electoral management to ensure smoother and fairer elections, and prevent the controversies that surfaced in 2020.

The Guyana Elections Commission is expected to implement significant updates to the electoral framework, including a review of voter registration systems, and implement stricter measures to prevent tampering with the results.

Closer to the elections, campaigning would probably be marked by violence, protests, and arson, which have been hallmarks of previous elections. Racial tensions are expected to rise as opposition forces play the race card, which has always dominated past elections. This will be in spite of strenuous efforts to unite the people through the One Guyana initiative. The underlying truth is that elections have always stirred up racial emotions.

The key political parties, including the ruling PPP/Civic and the Opposition coalition APNU+AFC, have begun early campaigning, which will intensify closer to the elections. Parties would work to consolidate their bases, drawing lessons from the contentious 2020 elections, which were marred by accusations of fraud and a protracted results process.

Nonetheless, President Irfaan Ali would remain optimistic that the PPP/Civic would win the elections by a substantial margin. In late December, he told a group of journalists that more individuals and communities are embracing the party, even in spaces that may have traditionally been perceived as "resistant" to the PPP, highlighting that the "resistance is completely gone".

He noted that he was not being egotistical in any way because he is humbled by the love and support that the people across every community are giving him and the PPP/Civic.

In fact, the PPP/Civic is expected to intensify its electoral campaigning, which has already started. In a recent pitch to Lindenians who have not traditionally supported the party, Ali openly asked them to support the PPP/Civic as it seeks re-election this year, highlighting his administration's goal of advancing development through political responsibility.

He told the people of Linden that the PPP/Civic is not seeking power, but rather support to continue the rapid transformation and development of Region 10, and Guyana at large.

Said Ali: "We are a political entity, you have never given us the political responsibility here in Linden and Region 10; all we seek is not power, we seek your support so that we can win here and the political responsibility to show you what good, committed, selfless, political leadership can further bring to your region."

It is expected that this approach would be a dominant campaigning tactic for the PPP/Civic, while APNU+AFC would resort to attacking the perceived shortcomings of the PPP/Civic and the suffering of its own supporters due to PPP/Civic's policies.

Prior to heading into 2025, the government made substantial pre-election efforts to woo the population and gain its support. For instance, the one-off (G) \$100,000 cash grant to all citizens over 18; increases in public sector wages; free university education; forgiveness of student loans; \$10,000 health vouchers for children; and proposed changes to National Insurance Scheme payouts, are some of the people-friendly measures put in place. These measures complement the annual \$45,000

Because We Care cash grants to all students. On the economic front, oil would continue to dominate economic growth, while the non-oil sector is expected to remain strong on the back of improving confidence among private investors and continuing government support.

At a sectoral level, the mining and quarrying industry comprising sand, stone, diamonds and manganese, is expected to remain strong – supported by infrastructure and housing development.

The agriculture sector – the non-oil backbone of the economy – would continue to fare well on the back of investments in drainage and irrigation, farm-to-market roads, and the expansion of cultivated land.

It is expected that corn and soya production would continue to increase, though still below pre-planned targets. Rice production, on the other hand, is expected to remain strong. Last year, rice production reached a record level of 725,383 metric tonnes, benefitting from higher yielding varieties.

However, the sugar industry would continue to struggle in spite of efforts to bring it back to life. While the government continues to have high expectations for sugar, it would most likely be disappointed.

Last year, Ali was optimistic that Guyana would be able to fulfill the sugar needs of the Caribbean. However, production fell once again in 2024, way short of expectations.

Guysuco had initially estimated sugar production would be between 60,000 and 70,000 tons by the end of the year. However, only 47,000 tonnes were produced, representing a 21 percent shortfall.

It is anticipated that as a result of the continued poor performance of sugar, there will be a major management shake-up at Guysuco during the year.

The energy sector is expected to benefit from a \$526 million loan by the US Export-Import Bank to ExxonMobil and partners for the gas project in Guyana. This will advance work on the gas-to-shore project, which is already behind the initially scheduled completion date.

The simmering Guyana-Venezuela border conflict could raise its ugly head during 2025. While it appeared that tensions between the two countries had subsided, Venezuela's construction of a bridge that links its mainland to an illegal military base on the eastern



Dwarka Lakhan



Irfaan Ali



New varieties have seen a record rice yield in Guyana last year

side of Ankoko Island has aggravated tensions between the two countries. Ankoko is owned by both countries.

At the social level, crime will remain a major problem, while corruption and allegations of corruption will continue. The illegal drug trade and smuggling of gold would also continue unabated because there will still be too many foxes in the hen house.

In 2025, Guyana will be defined by the interplay between rapid economic transformation and the demands for inclusive governance. While the government has made strides in leveraging oil revenues for national development, concerns about transparency, equity, and political polarisation would continue to shape public discourse.

Ethnic divisions, a long-standing issue in Guyanese politics, would remain a challenge. Efforts to promote social cohesion would be met with mixed success, as economic dis-

parities and political partisanship will persist. The equitable distribution of the country's oil wealth would remain a central concern for fostering national unity.

President Ali adequately summed up his expectations in a year-end address to the nation, stating, "But beyond the plans and policies, what excites me most about 2025 is the prospect of democratic renewal – an imperative in any democracy. This is an Election Year – a time when each of you will have the power to shape the future of our democracy."

Dwarka Lakhan, 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. He can be reached at dlakhan@rogers.com.

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ICCA members with management at The Original Drupati's, Highway 27 and Finch. Russell Lutchman photo

Community responds to Dhal and Rice Food Drive

Toronto – The third annual Dhal and Rice: Indo-Caribbean Food Drive concluded last month with the community responding to the call for culturally appropriate food items for individuals and families in need in the GTA.

Coordinated by the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association, the initiative aimed to address growing food insecurity while ensuring Caribbean clients visiting local food banks had access to traditional foods during the holiday season.

Amid a growing food insecurity crisis in Canada, the Dhal and Rice Food Drive has become a vital community-led effort to meet the unique needs of ethnic communities. Food Bank Canada reported over two million visits to food banks in March 2024, with children and newcomers to Canada disproportionately affected.

Recognising this urgent need, the Dhal and Rice Food Drive emphasised to the community the importance of making culturally appropriate donations available at the food banks.

Over 30 drop-off locations were made available across the GTA. These sites included Caribbean grocery stores, Caribbean restaurants, mandirs, and small businesses.

Bright yellow donation boxes served as collection points for staples such as chow mein noodles, rice, chickpeas, black-eyed peas, red kidney beans, dhal, brown lentils, all-purpose flour, and other food items.

The initiative was spearheaded by Building Togetherness,

The Caribbean Network, Divine Designs by Natasha, and the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association, uniting volunteers and donors to address the pressing issue of growing food bank visits, and the need to have culturally appropriate foods available at these locations.

Following the campaign, donations were distributed through collaborations with Ajax Community Action and Brampton's Knight Table, ensuring the donated food products reached those in need.

Backgrounding the third annual donation drive were data indicating that 32 percent of food bank clients are newcomers who have lived in Canada for less than ten years.

Consequently, the Dhal and Rice Food Drive sought to provide these individuals, as well as members of the wider Caribbean community, with food products familiar to their tables and palates.

By delivering culturally relevant items, the initiative aimed to go beyond alleviating hunger in fostering a sense of belonging and dignity for food bank users.

Yet again, this year's Dhal and Rice Food Drive underscored the power of grassroots efforts to combat systemic challenges. As poverty continues to rise across Canada, which is one of the world's wealthiest nations, the Dhal and Rice Food Drive presented a model of how culturally specific food drives can address the diverse needs of our communities.



Dhal & Rice delivery at Ajax Community Action



Dhal & Rice delivery at Brampton's Knights Table



Drop-off location at the Hibiscus in Ajax

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Mia Mottley

Mottley emphasises regional unity, resilience

Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley, incoming Chair of Caricom, has charted a bold course for 2025, emphasising unity and resilience as the region's twin engines of progress amid global upheavals.

In her January 1 statement, Mottley painted a vivid picture of the Caribbean at a crossroads, grappling with challenges like climate change and economic marginalisation while poised to harness its collective strength for transformative opportunities.

Declaring that "the Caribbean is far more than a geographic space," Mottley underscored the urgency of realising the Caricom Single Market and Economy (CSME) as a vision of shared prosperity and championing reforms to secure fairness for small States on the global stage.

In her statement, Mottley said: "Today, we stand at the crossroads of immense challenges and extraordinary opportunities. How we act, united as a people, and as nations will define not only... 2025, but the legacy of our generation."

She added, "The Caribbean is far more than a geographic space. We know it. It is a living testament to the power of courage, creativity, and our collective strength. Ours is a history marked by resilience, a word that we will have to embrace more and more in our future. Time and again we have faced storms most natural and man-made and risen stronger, more determined than ever, united in shaping our destiny; especially [last year when] we saw the ravages of Hurricane Beryl make history not just for the history books, but regrettably, in the lives of too many families across our region..."

Mottley was also emphatic that the resumption of the full implementation of the CSME was central to the region's mission to advance regional unity and development.

As she stated, CSME "is not merely an economic agenda," but rather, "a vision of unity and opportunity for small states who know that we can achieve so much more together than we do so individually."

She added, "Full realisation of the CSME, including above all else... the free movement of our nationals, is essential for unlocking the true potential of our people and our economies. So is the necessity for us to attain and go beyond the target that we set ourselves for food and nutritional security, best exemplified by the *Vision 25 by 2025* agenda, which we set in 2021."

Mottley identified the global financial system as the underlying issues that continue to marginalise Small Island and Low-lying Developing States, and said that unjust blacklisting practices and insufficient access to concessional financing hinder Caricom sustainable development efforts.

As she noted, Caricom will "persist in advocating for reforms championed in the Bridgetown Initiative, and working with others, like the 73 vulnerable countries in the Climate Vulnerable Forum as we fight for a better financial landscape regionally and globally, within which we can build resilience, prosperity and yes, equity – fairness – for all our people."

Identifying resource access and availability, she urged the adoption and the laser-like refining of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) to secure critical resources for

the region's future, as "we face these crises that are often beyond our control to avoid, but for which we must strengthen our resilience to survive".

Additionally, "In so doing... we must urgently settle a floor of rights as a community for our people so that we agree on what must be the minimum protection and the opportunities that each and every Caribbean person must benefit from while we instill... in all of us the need for each to live our daily lives to do better by our family, our communities, our country, and... our region. Our home will only be as good in this region as we collectively make it."

Mottley called upon the regional body to deliver on the commitments of the recently concluded George-Bridge Declaration, which built on the regional symposium in Port-of-Spain that recognised crime and violence as a public health issue in the Caribbean.

This declaration, which was reached at in Georgetown, Guyana, under the chairmanship of Barbados, prioritises citizen security and safety by addressing it as a public health challenge, while innovating and strengthening the region's efforts nationally and regionally in law enforcement and the modernisation of Caricom's criminal justice systems.

"This is absolutely critical for the majority of our people who simply want to ensure that the zone of peace that we aspire to as a region for the Caribbean is a lived reality in each of our communities. We look forward to the meeting in Saint Kitts and Nevis this year, which will add to the meetings in Trinidad and Guyana on this most critical of issues that affects each and every Caribbean person," Mottley stated.

While welcoming the declaration of the second decade for people of African descent, which began on January 1, Mottley noted there was much "to be done in this area."

She said that the achievements for People of African Descent reflect the tireless advocacy of the region, and the strides made during the first decade, including global recognition of the ten point plan for reparatory Justice and the establishment of the United Nations Permanent Forum for People of African Descent.

Said Mottley: "We must continue to press the international community for a mature, face to face conversation at all levels, so that we may see them repair the damage from the exploitation through the immoral institutions of slavery and colonialism which our people suffered from... [and] urge the international community to provide resources necessary to improve the dignity, security and material conditions of African descended people worldwide."

As she declared, the spectacle of 600 million Africans without electricity in an age of AI "is in no way morally acceptable to us as a community, which is part of the African diaspora that is a sixth region of Africa".

She also pleaded with the region to seize the "boundless opportunities", and forewarned that the world is racing into a digital future, and the Caribbean must not be left behind.

"From green energy to artificial intelligence, we must lead with alacrity as innovators, not blindly, but responsibly, equipping our young people with the tools to drive change and to position our region as a hub for sustainable industries," she declared.



Ask Jay...

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Building wealth isn't just about making money – it's about how you think and act. Let us explore lessons from inspiring stories of people who embraced a wealth-building mindset and created lasting financial success.

A Tale of Two Siblings

Olivia and Aden each inherited \$50,000. Olivia bought a \$50,000 car outright because she disliked debt. On the other hand, Aden financed his vehicle at two percent interest and invested his inheritance in a second mortgage at 13 percent. The returns from Aden's investment covered his car payments and left him with extra cash. After five years, both siblings sold their cars for \$10,000. Olivia's net worth was \$10,000, while Aden's grew to \$60,000.

Dr Wayne Dyer once said, "If you change how you look at things, the things you look at change." Aden's approach shows how thinking differently can multiply wealth.

The Power of Strategic Lending

Bora, a banquet hall owner, used to lend money generously to friends and family, losing over \$200,000 over 20 years. Realising that people without money often struggle to repay, he shifted his approach. Now, Bora only lends to strangers at fair but high interest rates, securing loans with assets like jewelry or real estate.

This change didn't make him less generous – it made him smarter about managing risks.

Using Equity to Build Wealth

Mr. Singh, an 88-year-old millionaire, advises: "If you own a home, work hard to pay off your mortgage. Once you're mortgage-free, get another mortgage." Instead of relaxing, Singh used his home equity to invest in more properties, creating passive rental income streams.

Today, he earns \$1 million annually from rentals. His story illustrates how reinvesting equity can accelerate wealth growth.

Learn Before You Leap

Bill, a retired realtor, lost \$100,000 investing in stocks because he relied solely on a financial adviser. He later realised he knew real estate better and could have doubled his money there.

His lesson? "No one can invest your money better than you." Now, Bill researches thoroughly before making financial decisions.

The Tax Advantage

Mr Hunter, a successful property investor, turned his passive rental income into active income by hiring family members in his business. This strategy reduced his tax burden and ensured his children were prepared to inherit and manage the estate.

A good accountant, along with innovative tax planning, can significantly affect wealth accumulation.

Building Financial Strength

A South Korean immigrant, Bae built a business empire from humble beginnings. While his children were in university, he loaned them money at standard interest rates, teaching them financial discipline. Later, he returned the interest they paid through his "Bae Bank", giving them the foundation to manage family wealth.

His philosophy? "At the end of hardship comes happiness."

The Three Goals of Life

To live a balanced life, focus on these three goals:

1. Stay healthy;
2. Spend time with loved ones;
3. Build wealth.

Estate planning is essential. Transferring wealth while alive – through family trusts, shares, or joint property ownership – avoids probate fees and ensures harmony.

Simple Steps to Wealth

Dr Earl Nightingale wisely said, "Luck is when preparedness meets opportunity." Start by spending less and investing more. Over time, your wealth will grow exponentially.

When we look at many start-ups, such as Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft, we see a common trend: find a service or product people will need, such as clean, affordable rental accommodations, or lending a second mortgage at a slightly cheaper rate to homeowners.

The best way to build wealth is to have multiple income streams, especially passive ones. Spend your most productive hour every day thinking through your plans. When your body and mind are relaxed and in tune, thoughts will flow, but they are slippery like a fish, so remember to capture them in writing.

Good health, strong relationships, and financial freedom are the pillars of a fulfilling life. Embrace the millionaire mindset, and success will follow.

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End-of-Christmas-season Leewah has French roots

Toronto – In her encyclopaedic *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad and Tobago*, editor Lise Winer tells us about *Leewah*, also spelled *Lewah*, *Laywah*, and *Les Rois*. She goes on to note it is associated with *The Feast of the Epiphany*, which is marked on January 6 of the New Year; said date is also the traditional beginning for the making of Carnival's masquerade in Trinidad and Tobago.

As Winer indicates, *Leewah* is derived from the French, *les rois*, or 'the kings'. Citing published sources in the last century, Winer's research discovers that the build-up to *Leewah* has its antecedent in the celebratory singing of parang, which *Wikipedia* tells us is the popular Christmas folk music that originated in Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago.

Wikipedia further defines parang to be a combination of the Spanish words, *parranda*, meaning 'a spree', and *parar* meaning 'to stop'. The genre arrived in Trinidad and Tobago via Venezuelan migrants, who were primarily of Amerindian, Spanish, Mestizo, Pardo (in Brazil, a mix of African and European), and African heritage.

As Winer's research uncovers, parang filled the air in Trinidad and Tobago from November to December, with the celebratory singing continuing until *Reyes*, or *Les Rois*, which was the feast of the Epiphany on January 6, or even later to the feast of the Presentation in early February.

And as she further states, it was the French-Creole component of the multicultural Trinidad and Tobago population that changed the pronunciation of the French *les rois* into what we today pronounce as "Lee Wah".

Addressing the second annual celebratory *Leewah* gathering in Toronto on January 4, and the first at the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate General, Acting Consul General Tracey Ramsubagh-Mannette's remarks touched on parang as an aesthetic evocation, noting it was a "beautiful manifestation of our cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity".

At the same time, she also highlighted a cultural charac-



Leewah celebrations in Toronto at the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate General. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo - more photos on next page.

teristic that emerges in any landscape where the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora resides, which is "we never miss an opportunity to celebrate".

Said Ramsubagh-Mannette: "We celebrate the beginning of seasons; we celebrate hard during the season; and at the end of the season itself!"

The January 4 event was one part entertainment, with other component being an educational one.

Looking after the entertainment and education of attendees were presenters Tony Maestre from the *Maestre and Friends Parang Band*; Glen Cassar of the *Los Parajos Parang Group*; Garth Blackman of *Moka*; and Lindy Burgess of *La Petite Musicale*.

There were also live performances by *Los Ketchos Parrenderos*, with the event hosted by George Maharaj.

Among the presenters during the educational segment were Hazelyn Maria Partap, an original member of *Los Pajaros*. A report on her evocative presentation is published below.

Los Pajaros took parang to the skies and beyond

— *Woven into the tapestry that is Los Pajaros are enduring threads of cultural resilience and the unifying power of music. The band's journey, like the flight of its namesake, reminds us that even in migration, traditions can find new skies. Through their music Los Pajaros and the Partap family are keeping alive the spirit of Trinidad and Tobago, ensuring that the sweet sounds of parang continue to resonate across borders and generations.*

An Indo-Caribbean World Feature

A Local Journalism Initiative

— with files by *Hinano Beekhoo*

Toronto — "Growing up in an artistic family filled with the spirit of parang, dance, and music in my village of Morne Diablo, Trinidad, remains one of my most cherished memories," Hazelyn Maria Partap told attendees at the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate General in Toronto gathered for *Leewah*, a celebration marking the end of the parang season.

At the time, Partap was sharing her family's legacy as *parrenderos*, part of the educational component of the parang end-of-season festivity, *Leewah*, which was being celebrated here in Toronto.

It was from this family with its roots in a southern village in Trinidad that a musical tradition took wings, and which soared across borders and oceans to alight in our snow-dusted landscapes here in Canada.

Partap recalled that her family residence, which was steeped in the rich heritage of parang, turned their home into a sanctuary for music.

"From as early as I can remember – perhaps when I was just one or two years old – I would wake up late at night to the sounds of big parang bands outside our home," she recalled.

These nights were filled with the sounds of the *cuatro*, guitar, maracas, the box bass, and uplifting singing, as legendary bands gathered under her family's roof, their songs weaving together the threads of community and celebration.

And as the tradition goes, 'paranging' in Trinidad and Tobago is typically accompanied with copious refreshments for the musicians.

"My parents always ensured there was more than enough food prepared and drinks ready for unexpected guests and occasions like these," she shared.

This generosity of spirit became a cornerstone of the Partap family's musical journey, weaving bonds together within their community and beyond.

Partap also recalled visits by Trinidad and Tobago's renowned Queen of Parang herself, the late Daisy Voisin.

"Aunty Daisy, along with band after band, would come to parang at our house – week after week, night after night. I may not recall the names of those legendary bands from the 1960s, but I vividly remember the sweet, joyful, and exhilarating sound of the instruments and singing. It brought so much happiness to us and to the people of our village, who filled our home to join in the festivity," Partap told the attentive gathering.

She added, "...Aunty Daisy lived with my grandparents, the late Agnes Bethel and the late Ruben Mohan, for some time before moving to Venezuela and later returning to Trinidad. I can only imagine the fun times they must have had paranging!"

Voisin's influence was profound, her presence transforming their gatherings into symphonies of cultural memory, her voice resonating with the rhythms of shared heritage.

Music coursed through the Partap lineage, and was fed by tributaries of diverse traditions.



Ramsubagh-Mannette addressing the audience

"...Music ran deep in my family," Partap declared, adding, "My grandfather was a professional musician, and he passed on his musical skills to his children and to his first grandchild, my eldest brother, the late Basdeo Kenny Partap – whom we lovingly called Bass," she stated.

There was also significant maternal input, Partap said, adding, "My mother, the late Balvina (Sissen Bethel) Mohan, and her family kept our home alive with music, singing, and dancing all year round. We celebrated with parang, country music, soca, reggae, African drums, Latin rhythms, and Indian music – honouring our cultural blend. My father, the late Babwah (HB) Partap, came directly from India as the only child of his parents, with Hindi as his first language, so my siblings and I were primarily raised by my mother's parang-loving family."

Partap described the atmosphere at her home during the Christmas season as one that was electric and pulsating; one that was "parang, parang, and more parang, culminating [with] the grand *Leewah* parang lime".

It was Bass who would take this musical legacy across the seas, becoming a standard bearer for parang in our diaspora.

"When my brother Bass migrated to Canada in 1975, he carried this love of parang with him, connecting with family and friends to continue 'paranging' all year long," Partap reminisced.

Even amidst the chill of Toronto winters, Bass' house-to-house parang limes infused a 'Trinidadianesque' warmth into our new homeland.

"At Christmas, he would gather his wife, children, and anyone who could join him for house-to-house parang limes in Toronto, New York, and even Miami – driving through snowstorms just to keep the tradition alive."

Parang music, much like migrating birds, found new skies to traverse. At a Miami family reunion in 1993, a guest from Toronto experienced the Partap family's music, and invited them to perform at a parang show in Canada the following year.

The invitation and performance marked the beginning of a new direction abroad for the Partap family, with the formation of their parang group.



Hazelyn Maria Partap

"Inspired by the 'snowbird' lifestyle, we chose the name *Los Pajaros*, meaning "The Birds," Partap revealed. It was a name that captured the essence of their journey as a diaspora: flight, migration, and the uplifting resonances of their melodies.

"At its height, the band included over 15 family members," Partap revealed. She added, "...Bass had one [caveat] – any family member who had ever been part of our parang tradition was welcome, and anyone willing to learn was encouraged to join in the band practice."

And so, *Los Pajaros* became a living tapestry of generations, each voice and instrument adding depth to a family's shared love for song and music.

But as the band formalised, challenges emerged as politics crept in, she said.

"Bass, uninterested in such matters, began to step back, especially as he unknowingly started experiencing the early signs of Alzheimer's, which ultimately took him away from the band – and, sadly, from us," Partap shared.

With the poignancy drawn out of the depth of loss and reflection, Partap stated, "I deeply miss the sweetness of his mandolin, a sound that shaped my childhood, and a sound I seek out in parang music."

She added, "Bass' legacy lives on in our music, and the love he

See next page: Parang soars

Parang soars with Los Pajaros

From previous page

shared with us. He made it his mission to teach his next generation and everyone – young or old – whether they loved parang or not. If you were around Bass, you were going to learn to play a chord, shake or knock something, or sing a chorus. He always had extra instruments on hand to pass down his knowledge to the next generation.”

Today, Bass’ legacy endures in the instruments he left behind; the lessons he imparted; in the love he infused into every mandolin note he played; and in his teaching *Los Pajaros* to fly.

Los Pajaros is now under the stewardship of Glen Cassar, a family member by marriage. Also, the music tradition continues into the next generation with Bass’ grandson, Marc Mahabir, and Partap’s son, Nicholos Paul. It means the band continues to embody its ancestral, generational spirit of community, celebration, and of course, flight into the future.

“This is why *Los Pajaros* remains an authentic family parang band – a tradition passed down with love, joy, and togetherness. I am proud to have been part of my family’s parang journey,” Partap concluded.



Leewah celebrations in Toronto at the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate General on January 4. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo



The Trinidad and Tobago 50 Plus and Seniors Association of Canada held its annual Parang celebrations on December 9 at the Precious Blood Catholic Church in Toronto. Entertainment was provided by Los Amigos Parang Band, featuring pannist Trenyce Sweeney. Also featured was The Connector, who provided attendees with a variety of soca and soca-parang songs. Greetings were delivered by the current President of the organisation Shane Suepaul. Also in attendance were MP Shaun Chen, Dr Rita Cox, and other dignitaries. Members and guests were provided a sumptuous meal, and a great time was had by all. Photos by Herman Silochan, courtesy the Trinidad and Tobago 50 Plus and Seniors Association of Canada



Nations continue in pursuit of the elusive Gross Happiness Index

By Dhanpaul Narine

Imagine if Stabroek Market Square in Guyana is converted into big tent on Sundays. The traffic comes to a standstill and there are concerts, food, fashion and music that reflect the culture of the population.

Imagine the impact it would have on the sense of wellbeing if these Sunday celebrations were done throughout the country. How about relocating the Georgetown Prisons and use the space to build a Jagan-Burnham Park for all to enjoy? We could sit in the Walter Rodney Pavilion and celebrate the talents of the nation. Who needs a prison in the middle of a city?

Why stop in Guyana? Imagine further the difference it would make to our collective happiness if the public squares in other countries became a meeting place for a grand celebration. Music, food, dance, relaxation, sharing and spending time with each other may not cure poverty. But they may contribute to a renewal, a togetherness that is so desperately lacking in many societies.

The Constitutions of a number of countries state specifically that the happiness of its citizens is a desired objective. In the US Constitution, "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" are clearly enunciated as a strategy of good governance.

Since 2002, West Germany, the UK, Brazil, Belgium, South Korea, and Dubai have become outspoken about the need for happiness to be a plank of effective social and economic policy.

Money can't buy happiness. The US is a good example of a country that has become richer, but which has failed to make the top ten in the World Happiness index.

Norway replaced Denmark as the happiest country for 2017, and the others in the top ten for that year were Iceland, Switzerland, Finland, Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Sweden.

In 2019, the Scandinavian countries again topped the list of 156 countries, with Finland in the number one spot. The others in the ten include Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia.

In the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago was



Stabroek Market's icon clock tower against darkening clouds

39, while Jamaica was at 56. Guyana does not feature in the list. Meanwhile, India was 140, while Burundi was last.

What makes a country happy? Social planners argue that a happy nation will meet certain requirements.

People in happy countries will enjoy a high Gross Domestic Product, but this is only one of many other factors. They will have longer life expectancy rates – "live longer, healthier lives; have more social support, have freedom to make life choices, experience less corruption, and more equality of happiness".

Professor Jeffrey Sachs says that the US has focused more on economic growth and has neglected the happiness of the people. The US, he says, "is chasing money", while the social fabric and faith in government are deteriorating.

Costa Rica, a relatively poor Latin American country, is ahead of the US because it places emphasis on human and environmental health.

The International Day of Happiness was inspired by Bhutan, a country with a population of about 750,000 persons. It was Bhutan that came up with the idea of a Gross National Happiness index, in which material and spiritual development are integrated in a synergy to produce the wellbeing of its citizens. In the 2019 report, Bhutan ranks at 95.

There are four pillars of Gross National

Happiness as follows: good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental preservation.

According to travel writer John Wehrheim, Bhutan has managed to balance the material and spiritual needs of the people. He adds that Bhutan is a land where work and "worry are low priorities and Gross National Happiness wins over Gross National Product".

But the present seems to be encroaching on Bhutan in a hurry. Television was first introduced there in 1999, and the Internet in 2000. Violence has increased, and family values have become strained.

Nevertheless, the idea of an International Day of Happiness was powerful enough to persuade several nations to adopt a resolution at the United Nations to dedicate a day for it.

In 2012, a UN Conference on Happiness took place, and on March 20, 2013 the first

International Day of Happiness was celebrated. In the last four years, Scandinavian countries have topped the list as being among the happiest countries.

In 2016, it was Denmark; in 2017 it was Norway, and in 2019 it was Finland.

Why is it that these countries top the list even though they have a "long, cold, and dark winter?"

It is argued that the answer comes down to "neighbourly support between citizens and State support programs for those in need".

Do economists and statisticians take social capital into account when they look at wellbeing? When Denmark topped the list in 2016, it was found that social support in times of need was crucial to feelings of security and wellbeing.

According to one Danish economist, money was not as important as social life.

The freedom of the individual to make decisions, to participate in the political-making process, and to help each other in times of need are particularly striking in Denmark, and indeed, in Scandinavian countries.

While income tax is high, the social benefits are apparent. For example, maternity leave in the US is around ten weeks, but in Denmark families receive a total of 52 weeks of parental leave.

The children have access to free or low cost child care. This enables mothers to return to their previous jobs.

One Norwegian explains that his country is the happiest because "the schools, health care, police, all the bureaucracy treat people with respect and makes us happy, makes us trust each other, makes us feel a part of the whole community."

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Tales of identity, migration flourish in our thriving Caribbean literature

A Caribbean Community Feature Series Local Journalism Initiative

Our Caribbean's voice in global literature has always been distinct – melodic yet haunting, vibrant yet contemplative. In the past decades, this voice has gained a new resonance, heralding a literary renaissance that explores the complexity of Caribbean life and our diasporic experience.

From tales of identity and migration to poignant reflections on the colonial past, our Caribbean literature is not only preserving its rich legacy, but also offering new ways to understand our lives as Caribbean people, both in the homelands, and here abroad in places like the GTA.

In our ongoing literary journey, we are informing, educating, and inspiring our community here in the GTA and further afield to explore these stories – narratives that are deeply connected to our shared histories, yet relevant to our contemporary challenges and dreams.

Our Caribbean literature has long been a mirror reflecting the region's diverse cultures and histories. But in the last decade and more, this mirror has been transformed into a powerful tool for reclaiming our identities that were fragmented by colonialism. Today, writers like Saifya Sinclair, Nicole Sealey, and Monique Roffey are using their craft to navigate the intersections of history, heritage, and personal autonomy.

Sinclair's *How to Say Babylon* (2024), winner of the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, is a deeply lyrical memoir of resistance and reclamation. It takes readers into the heart of Sinclair's Rastafarian upbringing, revealing her struggles against patriarchal and cultural norms.

For anyone who has felt constrained by tradition or sought a path to self-discovery, this book resonates deeply, offering not just a story, but a guide for reclaiming the right to define one's identity.

Similarly, Sealey's *The Ferguson Report: An Erasure* transforms a stark bureaucratic document on systemic racism into a work of art. Through the poetic technique of erasure, Sealey reclaims narrative power, turning silence into a voice of resilience. It is a profound reminder of how Caribbean stories can reframe global conversations about justice and humanity.

Roffey's *The Mermaid of Black Conch*, winner of the Costa

Book of the Year in 2020, invites readers to journey with Aycayia, a mythical mermaid silenced and cursed by her people. The novel uses myth to explore themes of gender, silence, and survival, making it a poignant metaphor for Caribbean and Indigenous women reclaiming their narratives.

These works not only provide a lens into the authors' personal journeys, but also inspire us as readers to reflect on our own identities, about what it means to belong, resist, and reclaim.

Migration has shaped the Caribbean story for centuries, from the forced movements of the colonial past to the voluntary diasporas of the modern day that see us resident in new landscapes such as the GTA, New York, and London in the UK. The literature of our homelands captures these migrations, not just as geographical shifts but as emotional odysseys: journeys of longing, belonging, and transformation.

Marlon James' *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2015) is a gripping exploration of migration's dualities. Set against the backdrop of 1970s Jamaica, the novel follows characters as they navigate political turmoil and seek refuge in the diaspora. For readers with ties to migration, whether as participants or descendants, James' work offers an unflinching look at the resilience required to survive such shifts.

Kevin Jared Hosein's *Hungry Ghosts* (2024) takes a different angle, focusing on internal migration within Trinidad. Hosein's characters, living on the fringes of society, struggle with the tensions between their dreams and the realities of their circumstances. For us as Caribbean readers, this narrative feels close to home, capturing the familiar tensions of striving for a better life while rooted in one's homeland.

In *House of Lords and Commons* (2016), Ishion Hutchinson explores migration as a metaphysical journey. His poetry reflects the disorientation of displacement while celebrating the resilience of Caribbean culture. For our community navigating our own diasporic identities, Hutchinson's work is a lyrical companion, offering solace and solidarity.

Through these stories, migration is no longer just a movement of people, but a migration of hopes, fears, and aspirations, which is resonant as a theme that is deeply tied to our collective Caribbean experience.

The colonial past casts a long shadow over the Caribbean,

but its literature has become a space to resist, reclaim, and reimagine. Writers like Roffey, Sinclair, and Zahra Airall are leading this charge, creating works that confront the legacies of empire while imagining new futures.

Roffey's *Passiontide* delves into the lingering scars of colonialism, showing how its remnants shape contemporary Caribbean lives. Her characters wrestle with history, seeking renewal in the face of enduring constraints. The novel is a reminder that while the past informs our present, it does not have to define our future.

In *Cannibal* (2016), Sinclair dismantles the colonial gaze with defiant verse and vivid imagery, reclaiming Caribbean identity from its distortions. Her poetry invites readers to see the Caribbean not as a relic of colonial conquest, but as a site of vibrant self-determination.

On the stage, Airall uses theatre to confront colonial residues with humour, critique, and hope. Her plays, addressing themes of identity, migration, and post-coloniality, provide an interactive space for transformation and dialogue. For audiences, her work is not just a performance, but an invitation to reflect and act.

Our postcolonial Caribbean literature challenges readers to engage with the weight of history while imagining possibilities for renewal. It is a testament to the resilience of our people, and our capacity to transform pain into power.

These past decades have solidified the Caribbean as a literary force, with works that are not just relevant but essential. These texts invite us to reflect on who we are, where we come from, and where we are going. For Caribbean readers and our diaspora, these stories resonate deeply, bridging personal experiences with universal themes.

We encourage you to explore the works of Sinclair, Roffey, Hosein, James, Sealey, and others. Their narratives are more than stories; these stories are mirrors, maps, and messages for a people navigating identity, migration, and post-coloniality.

In the year ahead, let us celebrate our literary renaissance. At the same time, let us also celebrate the power of storytelling to connect us, heal us, and guide us forward. Visit your library, a bookstore, or explore these texts online – to become immersed in their worlds is to find ourselves reflected in their pages.

Charan's *The Village of One* testament to storytelling, connection to memory

For our Caribbean readers in the diaspora longing for a slice of home, Richard Charan's *The Village of One* is a masterful journey into the heart of Trinidad and Tobago's collective memory. Published by Ian Randle Publishers, this collection of 64 vignettes, originally featured in *The Trinidad Express*, offers more than nostalgia in its rediscovery of the soul of a nation through forgotten stories and overlooked histories.

Charan's work resonates with a theme familiar to every Caribbean migrant: the quest to connect with one's roots. In her analytical review of the book, Patricia Mohammed, Professor Emerita of the University of the West Indies, notes how Charan's titular story sets the tone for the entire text, prompting questions about community and individuality.

As she wonders, can a single person represent a village? Is this a village like the haunting solitude of an Edgar Allan Poe tale, where one remains to recount the past? And as she declares, through his poignant storytelling, Charan turns these musings into a metaphor for Trinidad and Tobago, making it into a mosaic of diverse lives and histories bound by shared space.

From the first story, Charan's narrative skill pulls readers into a world layered with cultural, social, and historical intrigue. Each vignette is a carefully crafted lens into the hidden corners of the islands, from the tombstone of Dragon Hill to the last rumshop in Princes Town. In these tales, Charan reclaims the past, humanising it in ways that resonate deeply with readers

who have experienced the tug of memory and identity.

In *The Last Rumshop Keeper*, for instance, Charan paints a vivid picture of a vanishing world. Through humour and precise detail, he captures the essence of Trinidad's iconic rumshops: their sparse décor, the raw masculinity that shaped them, and their resistance to modernity.

"Do not ask for a cocktail," he quips. "Drink your alco, beat a table, make your own [music]."

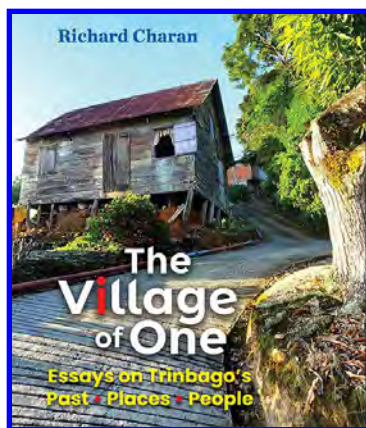
For diaspora readers, this is more than a memory; it is an invitation to revisit spaces that shaped Caribbean identity.

Charan's prose excels in its ability to bridge the personal and the collective. Stories of love are infused with emotion and humour. As Mohammed points out, other tales, such as *The Lady in the Attic* and *For the Love of Annie* read like Trinidadian soap operas, blending entertainment with poignant reflections on the human condition.

These narratives remind readers that, despite geographical distance, the heart of the Caribbean beats strong in its stories.

Much of our understanding of Charan's work has certainly been enriched by Mohammed's insightful celebration of *The Village of One*. Her analysis highlights the book's role in uncovering forgotten histories and its capacity to evoke nostalgia and pride for Caribbean readers.

In fact, her perspective deepens the appreciation of Charan's ability to make the past tangible, and her reflections provide a thoughtful backdrop to this review.



Rowley signals intention to step down as PM

Scarborough, Tobago – Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley announced on January 3 that he will step down as Prime Minister and retire from politics, bringing a 45-year career in public service to an end.

The announcement was made at the Central Administrative Services in Tobago, where Rowley confirmed he would not seek re-election as the People's National Movement's (PNM) candidate for Diego Martin West in the upcoming general election. He turns 76 on October 24.

Rowley delivered the announcement in a sombre tone, saying, "I will not be offering myself again to represent anyone, either in Trinidad or in Tobago."

He added, "Forty-five years is a long time, and I would like to say thank you appropriately to all those who have supported my efforts and benefited from what I hope were positive impacts on this country."

He clarified that his decision to step down was consistent with his earlier commitment made in 2020 after leading the PNM to victory in the general election. At the time, he signaled his intention not to seek another term. "I said to this country, I will not be doing that again, and I meant it," he recalled.

While he did not provide a specific date for his resignation, Rowley confirmed he would leave office "before the end of the legal limits of this term". Trinidad and Tobago's Parliament is set to dissolve by August 28, 2025, and elections must be held within 90 days. His early departure ensures a leadership transition before the next general election.

Born in Mason Hall, Tobago, Rowley's political career began in 1980, following his work as a volcanologist and secondary school teacher. Reflecting on his journey, he recalled, "My first job here was planting grass at Hope Estate for seven dollars a day. From those beginnings, I went on to teach in Tobago before entering politics."

He first entered Parliament in 1987 as a Senator, and later represented Diego Martin West in the House of Representatives from 1991 to the present. During his tenure, he served in various ministerial roles before becoming Prime Minister in 2015.

As Prime Minister, Rowley steered Trinidad and Tobago through significant challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic. He expressed relief upon receiving confirmation from the Pan American Health Organisation that recent concerns about a potential new virus outbreak in China were unfounded. "God knows we don't want another [Covid-19 pandemic]," he declared.

Rowley highlighted his efforts to foster young political talent

Analysts point to political uncertainty with Rowley move

Port-of-Spain – Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley's announcement of his impending departure from public life has sparked historic uncertainty, with political analysts Professor Hamid Ghany and Dr Indera Sagewan highlighting its unprecedented implications for governance and the leadership of the People's National Movement (PNM).

While Ghany underscored the urgent need for the PNM to resolve its leadership vacuum ahead of the general election, Sagewan emphasised the nation's shock at the prospect of a prime minister stepping down before term, raising critical questions about the country's political future.

Rowley is the Trinidad and Tobago's seventh prime minister. He was first elected on September 9, 2015 and again on August 10, 2020. He has led the PNM since May 2010, and was Leader of the Opposition from 2010 to 2015.

Ghany said the announcement means that there will now be a fight for the top spot in the PNM, as Rowley will have to step down as political leader going into the general election.

He said between the time of resignation and the election, the Prime Minister will be "a lame duck", and that is why internal election for leadership, due next year, must be held soon.

"They cannot go into a general election with the current political leader and current prime minister not being a candidate. That is not viable. So that someone has to emerge as the new leader. I don't know how long they want to prolong this, but carrying lame duck status for eight months is not viable," Ghany declared.

within the PNM.

"...I have brought into the political arena a number of young people who had served at that time, one term. Many of them are still in government about to complete their second term, experienced, some of them with nine or ten years approximately of service in the government," he said.

Additionally, "So the government and people of Trinidad and Tobago have a cadre of people, mainly young people, who came into public service, with all its warts, and are prepared to take this country forward."

He also acknowledged the sacrifices and challenges faced by those in public office. Speaking candidly, he noted the increasing hostility in public discourse, particularly on social media. Rowley said over the years he and many of his colleagues were the targets of "relentless attacks from particular people".

He added that many of their detractors have "never planted an ochro seed in this country, never sweep a foot of pavement, never plant a tree... but they are relentlessly attacking people who work in public life and who contribute to national development".

He also declared, "And they do it with hate and vitriol. Unfortunately, that's what it is."

He said, for him, this was not always the case; however, he observed that the attacks have become increasingly malicious.

"I could see a deterioration in the quality of our society fuelled by the availability of the mechanisms to spread your bile, absence of certain kinds of civilities, and, of course, more me than us."

As political leader of the PNM, Rowley indicated he will oversee nominations for the party's candidates, including for his Diego Martin West constituency, before stepping down. His departure opens the door for new leadership within the party and the government.

While he did not name a successor, Rowley's announcement has placed the question of succession at the forefront of political discussions. Last week sources told the media the elected MPs with a personal interest in the leadership succession race are Foster Cummings, Stuart Young, Penelope Beckles, and Faris Al-Rawi, all members of the House of Representatives.

Rowley's move is an unprecedented one for Trinidad and Tobago, with his decision to step down voluntarily contrasting with the patterns from previous government leaders, who either transitioned into Opposition, were voted out, or who died in office. In the region, his choice mirrors that of Jamaican Prime Minister P. J. Patterson, who retired in 2006 while still in office.

Meanwhile, Sagewan said Rowley "left the country reeling", and this raised many questions.

"Stepping down before the legal term from the office means that he will be stepping down as prime minister of the country. In that instance, a new prime minister will have to be put in place. We have never had this before, so he will have to be the one to appoint that next prime minister. That has nothing to do with the party – that has to do with the government which he leads."

She noted this is the first time where the prime minister will not be the political leader of the party, adding the main issue is that while relinquishing power as prime minister, Rowley will be maintaining power as political leader of the party.

Sagewan was also unsure whether the internal election will be called before the general elections.

Stated Sagewan: "If he doesn't step down as political leader, he was constitutionally voted in, his term comes to an end next year, what is the mechanism the party could possibly have that will force him to step down?"

Meanwhile, Ghany stressed the PNM must have a leader, and if it was not Rowley, then who would it be?

"The party needs to have a leader, an indisputable leader under section 76 of the Constitution. I have no idea who it is going to be. We are hearing the rumours all around the place, all kinds of rumours around, and I don't want to get into speculating about names. But if it is more than two persons, and it is three or four as the case may be, then the issue of a run-off, if it is more than two persons and no one gets more than 50 percent."



Persad Bissessar



Gary Griffith

Leaders respond to Rowley's decision to step down as PM

Port-of-Spain – Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar says Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley's decision to announce his retirement "is a clear admission of his failure to lead Trinidad and Tobago effectively".

However, National Transformation Alliance (NTA) leader Gary Griffith thanked Rowley for his service to country, adding the move was a politically mature one.

Meanwhile, former minister in the People's Partnership government, Dr Bhoe Tewarie, said it appears Rowley's move was a considered one.

Persad-Bissessar said "... (Rowley's) legacy is one of failure, division, and despair, leaving a nation in darkness. He should do the honourable thing and call the elections ..."

She added, "Prime Minister Rowley has announced his intention to retire again. While I acknowledge that many will celebrate the conclusion of his political career, I must also address the concerns about his penchant for political manoeuvring."

Also, "He and his PNM MPs, most of whom he has foisted on the population as candidates for the 2025 general election, have brutalised businesses and impoverished citizens, allowed a violent crime crisis and destroyed every independent institution in Trinidad and Tobago. Rowley and his Ministers have taken us to a failed state with a lame-duck Prime Minister and government. The government is in chaos."

She added, "Why make this announcement after calling a State of Emergency...? It is clear that this SoE was a political gimmick that has already failed spectacularly."

She claimed Rowley was "... engaging in a perverse, wicked soap opera within the PNM while T&T [is being] destroyed".

"He has crashed the country and abandoned the ship after raising his salary and pension. State security officers will not heed instructions from a lame-duck prime minister, local and foreign financial institutions and energy companies will hold on to most investments, credit access will be put on hold, and Trinidad and Tobago will move into financial stasis until the next election," she stated.

Additionally, she alleged, "I'm informed PNM MPs and financiers are dumping their Trinidad and Tobago dollar holdings as Trinidad and Tobago is on the IMF door, and financing from other agencies has dried up."

Griffith thanked Rowley for his 45 years of service to Trinidad and Tobago, saying, "I wish the Honourable Prime Minister the best in his future endeavours and I wish to thank him for his service to the country. There will be many people who will be pleased for what he has done. There will be people who will be disappointed, upset, or even hate him. That is what it is to be in public life. Not everybody could like you, not everybody could hate you."

Griffith continued, "I think that what he has done... shows political maturity. He has understood when it is time to move on, unlike others who may want to stay forever as they control a certain group, but it could cost their political party."

He added, "Some people leave at the top, others know when it is time to leave, and if it is that what we are looking at right now, it obviously will make a major spin in Trinidad and Tobago's politics, as it may be the first time, if I could recall, that someone who's serving as a Prime Minister is deciding to demit office whilst still serving. On most occasions, prime ministers have been removed from office or died whilst in office."

Admitting that he and Rowley shared a mixed relationship, he said, "The two of us are two very headstrong individuals, but I wish him the best. This has been a difficult period for him as he has lost two brothers this year alone."

Meanwhile, Tewarie said it was clear Rowley's move was being considered for some time.

"It is important for a leader to know when it is time, and he has been thinking for some time now that it might be time, and he has brought the matter to resolution. The challenge is now for his party, in the multiple quests for leadership, for the Opposition, who must address a different scenario, and for Trinidad and Tobago, which has to determine what kind of country it wants and who would best be able to create the kind of future that people envisage."



Keith Rowley



Indera Sagewan



Rowley (centre) with government ministers in Tobago last weekend

Rowley steps down, Stuart Young named successor

From Page 1

was declared based on information provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Following the introduction of the SoE, in his New Year's message, Rowley told nationals he hoped they would enter 2025 "energised, with clearer insights, and that we are more open to new perspectives on the challenges that face our nation".

It was in this context that he was asking the country to consider the SoE, which he said was targeting "criminal elements in our society who have engaged in open warfare against each other, and who were executing plans to make this unacceptable state of affairs the norm in Trinidad and Tobago".

Rowley added, "Much as we treasure our fundamental rights and freedoms, when murder, home invasion, kidnappings and extortion become the choice of commercial activity and sustenance of persons who threaten the peace and security of the national population, the State must then act decisively to restore a balance between the fundamental rights of all citizens and the protection from the dangerous excesses carried out by a lawless few."

And then, days later, in what was an historic first for Trinidad and Tobago, Rowley announced his imminent early retirement from the office of Prime Minister. At the time, he was speaking from his Tobago hometown, hours before the start of a two-day parliamentary retreat.

In the run-up to his bombshell statement, Rowley first dealt with his parliamentary position as Diego Martin West MP, telling reporters he would not offer himself "again to represent anyone either in Trinidad or in Tobago".

He added, "Forty-five years is a long time, and I would like at this time to say thank you appropriately along the way to all those who have supported my effort, and to [those who I] have benefited from; I hope I have positively impacted this country in some way..."

He then spoke to his position as political leader, saying: "As we settle Tobago's screenings... I continue to be the political leader of the PNM. We will call for nominations in the other seats where I represent the people of Diego Martin West, who

have supported me resolutely from 1991 to now. And I will thank them appropriately and ensure that they are not left adrift. But I will not be offering myself, as I just said."

He then spoke about the office of Prime Minister, saying, "I will say something else. Before the end of the legal limits of this term, I will resign this office and go off to my family."

After these politically dramatic disclosures, Rowley abruptly ended the news conference, saying: "Thank you all very much and see you again sometime soon."

Days later, following the Tobago parliamentary retreat, Rowley named Young as his successor, citing his leadership abilities and readiness to steer the nation.

Speaking during a media conference after the caucus at the Tobago Plantations, Rowley offered a glowing endorsement of Young's qualifications and experience, saying it positioned him as the natural choice to take over the leadership of the party and government.

"Minister Young came out with the majority of support," Rowley said.

He added, "[Young] has been in government now for almost ten years, operating out of the Office of the Prime Minister, where he would have seen the government close up and participated in it. I have seen him at work on many very detailed and technical assignments, and he has not only done the job, but has distinguished himself."

Young has served in several high-profile roles, including Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Minister of National Security, and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, and has been a leading player in the Rowley administration.

Rowley also shared his confidence in Young's ability to lead Trinidad and Tobago through the challenges ahead, referencing his track record of handling sensitive and complex issues, including national security, energy, and foreign affairs.

"I have no doubt that Minister Young's experience, his dedication, and his commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, will ensure that during the period he has the responsibility for being prime minister, he will continue to put the people of Trinidad and Tobago's interests first."

Analysts say political winds shifting within the PNM with latest development

Port-of-Spain – Political analysts indicated earlier this week that the political winds are shifting within the PNM following the endorsement by the parliamentary caucus of Stuart Young to serve as Prime Minister.

Speaking with the media following the announcement, Dr Winford James said Young had checked all the boxes for Rowley in his succession strategy, which led to the decision to place him at the helm.

"...Young certainly seems to have a lot of knowledge. He is articulate on the agenda of the PNM as personified by Rowley. He has joined Rowley in making Point Lisas the gateway for Venezuelan gas. He is articulate on the issues that have arisen, and he is as capable as anyone else. The question is whether the general body of the PNM is going to support that?"

James said he suspects the move would come with some rumblings, adding, "There is going to be some ethnic trouble, I believe."

Meanwhile, political scientist Dr Hamid Ghany labelled Rowley's decision to step aside and pave the way for Young as

an "interesting and risky" strategy. He also warned it could work against the PNM in the upcoming general election.

Said Ghany, "At this stage of the game, the PNM is going to be weakened by the fact that it is going to have a double-headed

approach to the election. The Prime Minister who is not the party leader and the party leader who is not the Prime Minister – that is an unprecedented situation, and they are going to have to work out the messaging around that since Rowley is very clear about his impending departure, and he is very clear that he is not seeking re-election as an MP"

Dr Indira Rampersad also questioned the consequences Young's elevation would have on the country. However, she said it did not come as a surprise.

Said Rampersad: "The big question is how does the PNM base feel about this? I expect the UNC base is not going to be happy – nor the Opposition Leader, and the Opposition MPs. But they don't count so much as the PNM base going into a general election with Young at the helm. I don't think that will be well-received by PNM supporters, I don't think in this case they will blindly



Indira Rampersad

Business sector optimistic

Port-of-Spain – The business community has expressed optimism regarding the selection of Stuart Young, Member of Parliament for Port-of-Spain North and St Ann's West, as Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister-in-waiting.

Come the end of February, Young will succeed Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley, and lead the People's National Movement into this year's general elections. Rowley made the announcement in Tobago on Monday, stating that the entire PNM caucus had thrown its support behind Young.

Speaking with the media following the announcement, Kiran Maharaj, president of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, congratulated Young on his appointment.

Said Maharaj: "We have worked with him in the past. We found when we did work with him in another portfolio that he was very willing to collaborate and very open to discussions, and there were some positive results in that regard. So, from a private sector perspective we will continue ...to work collaboratively."

She added, "We also know that he does have a task before him given the current state of affairs of our country, but we feel that he does have the interest of Trinidad at heart from everything we have seen, and we wish him well, because we know there are several issues facing the country at this time."

Arima Business Association president Christian Rampersad said Young's appointment was "not a surprise".

"He has been groomed into the position; he was the minister of everything. We'll see what happens, and the Constitution states that if he does not do well, he can be replaced."

Rampersad also took the opportunity to stress he has not seen much done under the State of Emergency.

"I am not seeing much on the SoE front, but the consensus is that it is to gather intelligence – so we will see what they find, and then we can criticise," he said.

President of the Downtown Owners and Merchants Association Gregory Aboud stated that while the association does not comment on elections, they had extensive experience with Young in his role as Minister of National Security, including substantial interactions from the downtown city centre.

Aboud said during that time "we determined that Young was quite passionate in his approach to the issue of safety in the city, and generally speaking with respect to all of National Security."

He added, "Probably his most noticeable characteristic was his passion for the job. If he was to bring that into his new role, I think it will do the country well. I think the country is looking for passion in the management of the country's affairs, and certainly we're looking forward to that with Young in his new role."

President of the Fyzabad Chamber of Commerce Angie Jairam stated that "any substantial expectations from Young in an election year will be unfair to him, as his tenure will be a few months. As a southern business chamber, we look forward to any efforts geared toward development and improving the business communities."

President of the Chaguanas Chamber of Commerce Baldath Maharaj noted that Young has consistently demonstrated strong leadership capabilities, "particularly in his management of critical portfolios such as Energy and National Security".

Maharaj added that Young has extensive experience in the oil and gas sector, which positions him as a strategic choice for this role "given that the energy sector remains the backbone of Trinidad and Tobago's economy".

He added, "[Young's] deep understanding of this industry, coupled with his ability to navigate complex negotiations, could provide the stability and expertise needed to steer the country through ongoing economic challenges."

support the leader."

Political scientist Dr Bishnu Ragoonath also noted that the move could shake the PNM's rank and file, despite receiving party support.

"I expected they were going to announce something by the end of the caucus because it was not to talk about parliamentary matters, but rather PNM matters. The party will have to make a decision in selecting their political leader. Whether the political leader will be hand-picked by an outgoing executive, or whether the membership should be given the opportunity to select their political leader."

Meanwhile, former PNM Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Mariano Browne, slammed the decision by Rowley, saying it sets "a very unsettling precedent".

Said Browne: "The Office of the Prime Minister is not owned by the Prime Minister. It is not his to give or bestow on a person of his choosing. Nor can he say he is resigning but not be clear on when that is. It makes a mockery of the Parliamentary process and of the people of Trinidad and Tobago."

He added, "Further, a parliamentary caucus has no authority to determine who should lead the party. While the constitution may allow the caucus to vote for one of their choosing, that diminishes the party and its constitutional mechanisms."



Aishwarya Rai Bachchan



Freida Pinto



Priyanka Chopra Jonas



Shabana Azmi

Now beyond Bollywood, actresses working to transform lives

— As trailblazers, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Freida Pinto, Shabana Azmi, and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan have extended their careers beyond Bollywood, even as they pair cinematic excellence with advocacy to transcend borders, connect cultures, and inspire meaningful change

An Indo-Caribbean World Community Series A Local Journalism Initiative

From the melodramatic folds of Bollywood's song-and-dance routines to the sharp edges of Hollywood action, Indian actresses have made a stunning leap – not just across continents but also out of restrictive roles that once bound them. Their journeys illuminate not only their cinematic evolution but also their ability to use art as a tool for advocacy and representation.

Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Freida Pinto, Shabana Azmi, and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, among others, exemplify this transformation, breaking through cultural, gender, and industry barriers to redefine what it means to be an Indian actress on the global stage.

Jonas' journey from Bollywood stardom to Hollywood success is a testament to her talent and resilience. After being crowned Miss World in 2000, she established herself in Bollywood with films that showcased her versatility.

Her performance in *Fashion* (2008) earned her critical acclaim, where she portrayed a supermodel grappling with the highs and lows of fame. In *Barfi!* (2012), she took on the challenging role of an autistic woman, delivering a nuanced and heartfelt performance. Her work in *Bajirao Mastani* (2015) as the dignified and emotionally complex Kashibai further cemented her reputation as a leading actress.

Chopra's Hollywood breakthrough came with the ABC series *Quantico* (2015-2018), where she played FBI agent Alex Parrish. As the first South Asian actress to headline an American network drama, Chopra broke stereotypes and paved the way for greater representation of Indian talent in global entertainment.

Her role as the glamorous antagonist Victoria Leeds in *Baywatch* (2017) showcased her ability to bring depth to unconventional roles. With upcoming projects like *Citadel* and *Heads of State*, Chopra continues to expand her global presence.

Beyond her cinematic achievements, Chopra has become a powerful advocate for children's rights and gender equality. As a UNICEF global Goodwill Ambassador, she has championed

education and healthcare for underprivileged children through The Priyanka Chopra Foundation for Health and Education, personally funding the education and medical care of 70 children in India.

Her hands-on involvement, such as visiting Ukrainian refugees in 2022, underscores her commitment to creating meaningful change.

Pinto's rise to fame began with her role in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), the Academy Award-winning film that became a global phenomenon. As Latika, Pinto symbolised hope and resilience, earning her the Breakthrough Performance Award at the Palm Springs International Film Festival and a Screen Actors Guild Award as part of the ensemble cast.

While *Slumdog Millionaire* brought her international acclaim, Pinto deliberately avoided being typecast in stereotypical roles, opting for projects that explored complex narratives.

In *Trishna* (2011), a modern retelling of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Pinto delivered a poignant performance as a woman navigating societal and class struggles in rural India. Her role in *Love Sonia* (2018), a harrowing tale of human trafficking, highlighted her ability to shine a light on urgent social issues. Pinto's cinematic choices reflect her commitment to meaningful storytelling.

Off-screen, Pinto is a passionate advocate for gender equality and education. As a global ambassador for Plan International's *Because I Am a Girl* campaign, she has worked to lift girls out of poverty through education and economic empowerment.

She has also partnered with Gucci's *Chime for Change* initiative, and spoken at international summits to address harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation. Pinto's activism demonstrates how she has turned her platform into a powerful force for change.

Azmi's career reflects her unparalleled ability to merge art with activism. Her debut in *Ankur* (1974) marked the beginning of India's parallel cinema movement, where she played a Dalit woman grappling with caste inequities and gender-based exploitation. The film's stark realism earned her critical acclaim and a National Film Award for Best Actress.

Azmi continued to challenge societal taboos in films like *Fire* (1996), which explored same-sex relationships, and *City of Joy* (1992), where she portrayed the struggles of Kolkata's impoverished with dignity and depth.

Her global work includes her roles in *Madame Sousatzka* (1988) and *Midnight's Children* (2012), where she brought Indian narratives to international audiences.

Azmi's performances transcend cultural boundaries, connecting with viewers through their universal themes of resilience and justice. Beyond the screen, Azmi leads the Mijwan Welfare Society, transforming a rural village into a global model for women's empowerment. Under her leadership, Mijwan's women artisans have brought *chikankari* embroidery to international prominence, collaborating with leading designers.

Azmi's advocacy extends to public health, gender equality, and rural development, making her a beacon of social change.

Bachchan's global appeal is rooted in her ability to blend tradition with modernity.

After winning Miss World in 1994, she became one of Bollywood's most iconic actresses with films like *Devdas* (2002), where she portrayed the tragic Paro with grace and intensity. Her role in *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) showcased her as a powerful and regal figure, while *Dhoom 2* (2006) highlighted her versatility as an action star.

Bachchan's Hollywood journey began with *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), a Bollywood-inspired adaptation of Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, and continued with *The Pink Panther 2* (2009), where she charmed audiences with her elegance.

Her presence at the Cannes Film Festival as a *L'Oréal* ambassador has further cemented her status as a global cultural icon.

Her advocacy work is as impactful as her cinematic contributions. As a goodwill ambassador for *Smile Train*, she has facilitated life-changing cleft lip and palate surgeries for children, restoring their ability to smile with confidence. Her work with the Eye Bank Association of India and her campaigns for gender equality and child welfare underscore her dedication to creating a better world.

The stories of Jonas, Pinto, Azmi, and Bachchan highlight not just their individual achievements, but also their collective impact on redefining Indian cinema and global storytelling. These women have not only pushed artistic boundaries but also used their platforms to advocate for social justice, equity, and representation. Their ability to navigate multiple worlds – culturally and cinematically – has set a new standard for Indian talent on the global stage.

Bollywood actresses blend cinematic excellence with global humanitarian outreach

Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Freida Pinto, Shabana Azmi, and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan represent a powerful confluence of cinematic excellence and humanitarian action. Through their work on-screen and off, they have redefined what it means to be global icons. Their stories reflect resilience, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to making the world a better place.

Through their outreach, they have redefined cinema as not just being about entertainment, but are also making it a platform for the transformation of lives beyond the movie house.

Jonas' career is a masterclass in balancing cinematic excellence with impactful philanthropy.

Beyond her cinematic success, she has become a leading advocate for children's rights and gender equality. A global Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF since 2016, she has traveled extensively to disadvantaged communities, using her platform to highlight issues of equity and opportunity.

Through The Priyanka Chopra Foundation for Health and Education, she funds educational and medical support for 70 children in India, 50 of whom are girls, and donates ten percent of her earnings to the foundation's operations.

Her advocacy extends to campaigns against female infanticide and foeticide, reflecting her commitment to gender equality. A United Nations *Foundation Girl Up Champion*, she continues to inspire young women globally.

Pinto's influence also extends far beyond her cinematic achievements, and has deployed her success to advocate for underprivileged children and gender equality.

Her philanthropy includes her role as a global ambassador for Plan International's *Because I Am a Girl* campaign, which focuses on lifting girls out of poverty through education and economic empowerment. She has also partnered with Gucci's *Chime for Change* initiative to raise awareness about women's rights issues, and has spoken at the London Girls' Rights Summit, advocating for an end to female genital mutilation and child marriage.

Pinto's activism includes her involvement with *We Do It Together*, a non-profit organisation financing films and media projects that empower women. Her work reflects a belief that storytelling can amplify marginalised voices and create change.

Pinto once stated that she draws inspiration from figures like Angelina Jolie and Malala Yousafzai, aligning her advocacy with a global movement for justice and equality.

Azmi's illustrious career in cinema and activism has made her an icon of meaningful storytelling and social reform. She leads the Mijwan Welfare Society, an NGO focused on empowering girls in rural India through education, healthcare, and skill development.

Under her guidance, the craft of *chikankari*, which is traditional hand embroidery by the women of Mijwan, has been

brought to global prominence, thanks in part to collaborations with Bollywood designer Manish Malhotra.

Azmi's leadership has made Mijwan a model village recognised worldwide for its replicable impact, while her work with the UN and public health initiatives demonstrates her commitment to fostering a better future.

Bachchan's global appeal extends beyond her celebrated acting career that sees her consistently bridging cultural divides with elegance and poise. Her achievements have earned her the *Padma Shri*, India's fourth-highest civilian award.

Her philanthropic journey began with work as a brand ambassador for the Eye Bank Association of India, inspired by her father's battle with lymphoma and subsequent loss of eyesight.

Through campaigns like *Light a Lamp*, she has provided free eye surgeries and increased awareness about eye donation. As a goodwill ambassador for *Smile Train* since 2009, she has helped facilitate free cleft lip and palate surgeries for children, transforming countless young lives.

Bachchan is also an advocate for women's empowerment, collaborating with *The Hunger Project* to support gender equality in rural India.

Her role as a UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador has further amplified awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, emphasising her holistic approach to advocacy.

Filmmaker Shyam Benegal

December 14, 1934 -
December 23, 2024



A life dedicated to illuminating the human condition

— *The passing of Shyam Benegal means his films are now timeless, their narratives uplifted as legacies of truth, empathy, and portrayals of the lives of ordinary people explored at extraordinary depths*

Shyam Benegal, the visionary filmmaker who revolutionised Indian cinema, passed away on December 23, 2024, at Wockhardt Hospital in Mumbai. He was 90. A pioneer of the Indian New Wave, Benegal's work challenged conventions, shedding light on the realities of Indian society with an unflinching lens.

His death, following years of battling chronic kidney disease, marks the end of an era in Indian cinema, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire filmmakers and audiences alike.

Born on December 14, 1934, in Tirumalagiri, Hyderabad, Benegal's journey into storytelling began at an early age. Though he earned a degree in Economics from Osmania University, his heart lay elsewhere. He founded the Hyderabad Film Society, an early testament to his enduring passion for cinema.

This passion soon took him into advertising, where he directed over 900 sponsored documentaries and ad films, a staggering body of work that equipped him with a meticulous eye for detail and a sensitivity to the human condition.

Benegal's filmmaking career blossomed in the 1970s, an era that saw the birth of parallel cinema, a socially conscious Indian film movement emphasising realism, artistry, and societal issues.

With *Ankur* (1974), (1975), *Manthan* (1976), and *Bhumika* (1977), Benegal redefined the cinematic landscape. These films were not mere entertainment; they were mirrors held up to society.

In his *Ankur*, Benegal laid bare the feudal divides in rural India, depicting the oppression of the underprivileged with poignant realism. *Nishant* explored the abuse of power and the resilience of human spirit, while *Manthan*, which was funded by contributions from farmers, celebrated India's cooperative dairy movement while reflecting the aspirations of rural communities.

Meanwhile, *Bhumika* delved into the personal and professional struggles of a famous actress, addressing themes of identity, gender expectations, and fame.

Actor Manoj Bajpayee aptly described Benegal as "a visionary who redefined storytelling and inspired generations". His films resonated because they were, in the words of filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt, "raw and real, about the struggles of ordinary people".

Benegal's commitment to storytelling extended beyond the silver screen. His seminal television series *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1988), based on Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*, brought the nation's rich cultural heritage into millions of homes.

Chronicling India's journey from ancient times to moder-

nity, the 53-episode series reflected Benegal's deep respect for India's past and his hope for its future.

As a mentor and educator, Benegal left an indelible mark on Indian cinema. Serving as chairman of the Film and Television Institute of India for two terms, he nurtured a generation of filmmakers and actors, including Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Om Puri, and Pankaj Kapur.

Shah's poignant tribute captures the depth of this mentorship: "I have lost my foster father, a man to whom I owe more than I can say," he stated.

Beyond feature films, Benegal was a prolific documentary filmmaker, beginning with *A Child of the Streets* (1967), a moving exploration of the plight of street children. Over the years, he directed more than 70 documentaries and short films, addressing issues ranging from rural struggles to urban complexities.

His children's film *Charandas Chor* (1975) remains a benchmark in Indian cinema, blending folk traditions with universal themes.

Benegal's humanity shone through in every project he undertook.

He once said, "One has to be as objective as possible. Sympathy is necessary. When I say sympathy, I mean empathy so you can be one with the subject."

This philosophy infused his work with an authenticity and compassion that transcended politics and resonated with audiences across hierarchies and divides.

Despite health challenges in his later years, Benegal remained

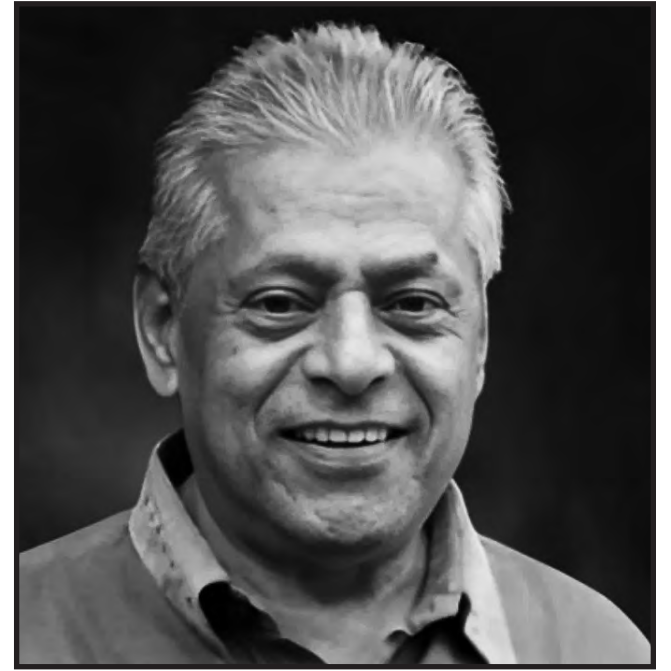
dedicated to his craft. In 2023, he completed *Mujib: The Making of a Nation*, a biopic on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh. The project underscored his lifelong commitment to telling stories of resilience and transformation.

His contributions earned him India's highest honours, including the *Padma Shri* (1976), *Padma Bhushan* (1991), and the *Dadasaheb Phalke Award* (2005). Yet, accolades were never the driving force behind his work. Instead, he was motivated by a profound belief in cinema as a tool for social change.

Benegal's death elicited tributes from across the globe. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences, stating, "Deeply saddened by the passing of Shyam Benegal, whose storytelling had a profound impact on Indian cinema. His works will continue to be admired by people from different walks of life."

Social media were flooded with messages of gratitude and remembrance, reflecting the widespread admiration for his artistry and vision.

Benegal is survived by his wife, Nira, and daughter, Pia. Cremated with full state honours on December 24, 2024, his final farewell was a poignant reminder of a life dedicated to illuminating the human condition.



Delhi Ganesh

Tamil cinema loses Delhi Ganesh

— *Delhi Ganesh's passing is a loss to Tamil cinema and Indian culture. His ability to inhabit roles with authenticity and his dedication to his craft have left an enduring legacy*

Delhi Ganesh, one of Tamil cinema's most revered actors, passed away on November 9, 2024, at the age of 80, at his home in Ramapuram, Chennai. The veteran actor, known for his extraordinary versatility, succumbed to age-related ailments, leaving behind an indelible legacy in Indian cinema.

His son, Maahdevan Ganesh, announced the news with deep sorrow, stating, "We deeply regret to inform that our father Mr. Delhi Ganesh has passed away on 9th November 2024 at around 11 pm."

Ganesh's cinematic journey began with K. Balachander's *Pattina Pravesam* in 1976, and from there, he went on to star in over 400 films across a career spanning nearly five decades.

A close friend and frequent collaborator of Kamal Haasan, Delhi Ganesh's performances in *Apoorva Sagodharargal*, Michael Madana Kama Rajan, and *Avvai Shanmughi* are cherished for their depth and subtlety.

Haasan fondly described him as "a rare character actor who could handle comedy with subtlety", and called him "irreplaceable". Reflecting on their shared moments, Haasan added, "The moments I spent with him were sweet; memorable."

Born with a passion for the stage, Ganesh was introduced to Tamil audiences through his work with the Delhi-based *Dakshina Bharata Nataka Sabha*, which inspired his stage name, Delhi Ganesh. Before entering films, he served in the Indian Air Force from 1964 to 1974, exemplifying a blend of artistic talent and patriotism.

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan paid tribute, saying, "His prior service in the Indian Air Force demonstrates his passion and patriotism to the country."

Delhi Ganesh's range as an actor was unmatched, effortlessly transitioning between roles in comedy, drama, and villainy.

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin praised his contributions, noting, "Be it character, comedy or villain, he left his mark in all his roles." Kamal Haasan echoed similar sentiments, celebrating his ability to create memorable performances across genres.

The actor's work extended beyond the big screen to television and theatre, showcasing his talent in multiple media. BJP leader Dr. Tamilsai Soundararajan highlighted Ganesh's philanthropy and dedication to social welfare, describing him as "a great philanthropist who spoke for social welfare like Gurukulam beyond cinema and stage drama".

Delhi Ganesh's final appearances include Kamal Haasan's *Indian 2*, released shortly before his passing, as well as a Hindi web series and a film with Sasikumar, both awaiting release. Director Suresh Krissna, who worked with Ganesh on several projects, remarked, "He was both a phenomenal actor and a dear friend. He'll forever live on in my films and in the legacy of our cinema."

Tributes from colleagues and fans poured in across social media, reflecting the profound loss felt by the Tamil film industry and beyond.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences, writing, "Deeply saddened by the passing of the illustrious film personality, Thiru Delhi Ganesh Ji. He will be fondly remembered for the depth he brought to each role and for his ability to connect with viewers across generations."

Tamil superstar Rajinikanth called Ganesh "a wonderful man and an amazing actor", while actors Vijay Sethupathi, Karthi, and Sriraman honoured his contributions to Tamil cinema. Sethupathi noted, "The void he leaves behind will be hard to fill," while Karthi praised his "iconic roles" that "will forever be etched in the history of Tamil cinema".

Sir Clive incensed over ICC's 2-Tier Test plan

Legendary former West Indies cricket captain Clive Lloyd did not mince his words as he responded to a media report out of Australia earlier this week that talks are being planned to split Test-playing teams into two divisions, stating unequivocally, "I'm very disturbed about this...It must be stopped now."

According to a report in the Sydney Morning Herald, it has been suggested that Australia, England, India and the International Cricket Council's new chairman Jay Shah are in talks to split Test cricket into two divisions so the big three nations can play each other more often in series.

The report noted that the concept of two tiers in Test cricket was previously floated at ICC level in 2016, with a model where seven nations would compete in the top division and five in the second rank.

It added that any plan for a move to two divisions in Test cricket would kick in after the end of the current Future Tours Programme in 2027.

However, Lloyd does not see West Indies, currently ranked eighth out of 12 Test teams, recovering if they were confined to a tier two.

"We cannot sustain the system with the money that we are acquiring at the moment," Sir Clive told members of the regional and international media.

He added, "We are in a very vulnerable situation. And now you are making us even poorer by what you are doing."

Lloyd led the Caribbean team in 125 Tests to become the unofficial world champions, and in 87 One-Day Internationals

and back-to-back World Cup titles in 1975 and 1979.

The West Indies deserves special consideration, Sir Clive stated.

Said Sir Clive: "We need special dispensation. We were the cash cows for a lot of countries over the years, and think it is obvious that people must recognise this."

He added that the West Indies' historical contribution to world cricket should count for something.

He added, "We've been in the ICC for nearly 100 years. We have probably been the most successful Test team over the years... We worked hard for what we achieved over the period and we only have five million people... We have a great history, and now you going to tell us because of a monetary situation... we're in this situation..."

He also noted that West Indies aside, a two tier system would be bad for all smaller Test nations.

"It will be terrible for all those countries who worked so hard to get to Test match

status, and now they'll be playing among themselves in the lower section," he said.

He also wondered how these teams would make it to the top.

He also questioned the great financial imbalance in how the world governing body distributes its funds.

"Nobody has been able to tell me yet, why (out of) ten Test teams, three are getting \$180 million, and seven are getting \$80 million... When we were in the ascendancy, we didn't get any more money," he stated.

Additionally, "[All Test nations] should have the same set of funds how often this money is shared."



Sir Clive Lloyd



Amir Jango

Amir Jango gets Test call-up

The West Indies Cricket Board has unveiled its squad for the upcoming two-match Test series against Pakistan, with promising left-handed batter Amir Jango earning his maiden Test call-up. The series, which marks the final engagement of the current World Test Championship cycle, will commence on January 16, 2025, with Multan hosting both matches.

Jango's inclusion comes as no surprise to keen followers of West Indies cricket. The Trinidadian batter, fresh off a sensational century on his ODI debut against Bangladesh, has been a standout performer in regional cricket. Known for his deft handling of spin, his selection is a significant step in what promises to be a flourishing career.

Another key development is the recall of spinner Gudakesh Motie, who bolsters the West Indies' spin department for the crucial series. Motie, an adept left-arm spinner, returns to the Test fold after a spell on the sidelines, bringing experience and control to the bowling attack.

Meanwhile, pacer Shamar Joseph will miss the series as he continues his rehabilitation from injury. Adding to the pace attack's woes, Alzarri Joseph was unavailable for selection, leaving a gap that the team will need to strategically address.



Photos courtesy PMCF

Cricket for a good cause – Time to team up to beat cancer

For our Caribbean community, cricket has always been a force that transcends boundaries as a shared legacy of skill, patience, and camaraderie that is passed from generation to generation. Now, our beloved game is taking on a new purpose in a drive to deliver hope and progress.

Come May 31, 2025, the inaugural **Cricket to Conquer Cancer** will assemble Canada's largest street cricket fundraiser, rallying teams across Canada to support world-class cancer research at The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. The target is to raise one million dollars, making it a cause that is asking us to take the run-up and to deliver.

The May 31 format is as sharp and engaging as the game itself. Played in the dynamic T5 style of five overs per side, the tournament demands disciplined strike rates and quick-fire decisions.

Teams of six to eight players will bowl, bat, and field, not just for the thrill of competition, but for something far greater: every dollar raised is a run scored for the fight against cancer. The fund-raising campaign begins at sign-up, where each team sets its sights on a target of \$6,000, ensuring both steady momentum and a powerful finish.

On the day itself, over 100 teams will vie for honours in an unforgettable celebration of the game, while top fundraisers earn a unique opportunity to recruit celebrity talent and cricket luminaries to strengthen their line-up. The action will be non-stop, with bowlers delivering at a good length, fielders patrolling every position, and batters driving the cause forward.

Yet the true contest will unfold beyond the pitch, where donations translate into life-saving breakthroughs and hope for patients and families affected by cancer.

At its core, **Cricket to Conquer Cancer** reminds us of

cricket's greatest lesson, which is in the power of collective effort. Like a strong team building pressure through tight spells, our community has always shown resilience, discipline, and heart in rising to challenges. The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation, Canada's leading cancer charity, has long embodied these qualities, accelerating advancements that ripple across the globe.

Now is the moment to show up with purpose, with the same reverence we give to our cricket heroes, the same patience we

show in a tight chase, and the same pride we feel when a good innings is played for a worthy cause. Whether as players, donors, or supporters from the boundary, every role is vital, and every contribution counts.

To step up, form your team, and join this thrilling match to conquer cancer, visit cricket2conquer.ca. Let us stand up and bat together as a cricketing community, turning every over, every run, and every partnership into a victory that echoes far beyond the pitch.



UK urges ICC action on Afghan women's rights

— As England's February 26 Champions Trophy match against Afghanistan approaches, a debate has emerged that underscores the tension with using sport as a platform for advocacy and the risks of alienating those who see cricket as a rare source of unity and hope in Afghanistan.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has urged the International Cricket Council to "deliver on their own rules" concerning women's rights in Afghanistan, intensifying the ongoing debate over England's scheduled Champions Trophy match against Afghanistan next month. The match, set to take place in Lahore on February 26, has sparked controversy over Afghanistan's human rights record, particularly the Taliban regime's repression of women and girls.

The England and Wales Cricket Board has faced mounting pressure after receiving a letter from Labour MP Tonia Antoniazzi, signed by more than 160 cross-party politicians, including Jeremy Corbyn, Lord Kinnock, and Nigel Farage. The letter condemned the "insidious dystopia" and "sex apartheid" in Afghanistan, where women's sports have been effectively banned since the Taliban returned to power in 2021.

"We strongly urge the England men's team players and officials to speak out against the horrific treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan under the Taliban," the letter stated. It also called for the ECB to boycott the match, asserting, "We must stand against sex apartheid, and we implore the ECB to deliver a firm message of solidarity and hope to Afghan women and girls that their suffering has not been overlooked."

In response, ECB Chief Executive Richard Gould rejected calls for a boycott, arguing that meaningful action requires a "co-ordinated, ICC-led response" rather than unilateral measures. Gould emphasised the ECB's firm stance against the Taliban regime's treatment of women, stating, "The ECB strongly condemns the treatment of women and girls in

Afghanistan under the Taliban regime." Highlighting the governing body's constitutional obligations, he noted, "The ICC constitution mandates that all member nations are committed to the growth and development of women's cricket. In line with this commitment, the ECB has maintained its position of not scheduling any bilateral cricket matches against Afghanistan."

Gould also acknowledged the complexity of the situation, expressing concerns about the unintended consequences of a boycott.

"We understand the concerns raised by those who believe a boycott of men's cricket could inadvertently support the Taliban's efforts to suppress freedoms and isolate Afghan society. It's crucial to recognise the importance of cricket as a source of hope and positivity for many Afghans, including those displaced from the country," he stated.

The ECB pledged to continue advocating for international measures through the ICC, with Gould affirming, "We will continue to engage in constructive dialogue with the UK government, other stakeholders, the ICC, and other international cricket boards to explore all possible avenues for meaningful change."

The UK government has since backed the ECB's approach, with a spokesperson for Prime Minister Starmer stating, "The ICC should clearly deliver on their own rules and make sure that they're supporting women's cricket as the ECB do."

The spokesperson added, "That's why we support the fact that the ECB are making representations to the ICC on this issue. The erosion of women's and girls' rights by the Taliban is clearly appalling."

The controversy has drawn parallels with England's boycott dilemma during the 2003 World Cup, when the team opted out of a match against Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe's regime, a decision that ultimately led to their elimination from the tournament.



Keir Starmer



Richard Gould



Nahida Akter



Nigar Sultana

Bangladesh Women on historic Caribbean tour

The Bangladesh Cricket Board has announced its women's cricket team lineup for their inaugural tour of the West Indies, marking an historic milestone in the team's journey. The much-anticipated tour will feature three One-Day Internationals and three Twenty20 Internationals against the West Indies Women, with all six matches hosted at the iconic Warner Park in Basseterre, St Kitts.

The ODIs, part of the ICC Women's Championship, hold critical importance for both teams as they vie for qualification in the upcoming Women's Cricket World Cup.

Bangladesh's squad, led by captain Nigar Sultana, promises a blend of experience and youthful energy. Known for her aggressive batting and strategic leadership, Sultana has been instrumental in elevating the team's performance, particularly in T20 cricket.

Young all-rounders Fahima Khatun and Fariha Islam bring versatility to the team, providing both batting depth and additional bowling options.

Meanwhile, spinners Nahida Akter and Rabeya Khan are expected to leverage the slow Caribbean pitches to their advantage, bolstering the team's chances in the white-ball series.

The selection strategy also emphasises adaptability, with players like Sharmin Akter and Murshida Khatun capable of contributing in multiple roles. Their ability to bat in the

middle order and offer part-time bowling adds flexibility to the squad, equipping the team to handle diverse match scenarios.

For the West Indies, the ODI series is pivotal in their quest to secure a spot in the 2025 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup. The points at stake in the ICC Women's Championship could determine whether they qualify directly, or need to contest a separate qualifying tournament.

"This series against Bangladesh is crucial for us as we continue our campaign in the 2025 ICC 50-over Women's Championship," said Cricket West Indies Director of Cricket Miles Bascombe.

Additionally, "The ODI series carries significant weight for our World Cup qualification hopes, while the T20I matches will provide valuable preparation as we continue to build depth in our squad."

Set against the picturesque backdrop of St Kitts, this tour is a significant opportunity for both teams to fine-tune their strategies and enhance their preparations for future international competitions.

With six matches on the calendar, fans can expect competitive cricket and a showcase of emerging talent as Bangladesh Women embark on this landmark tour, and the West Indies Women aim to strengthen their standing on the international stage.

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