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The Book of Condolence for the late Basdeo Panday at the Trinidad & Tobago Consulate General in Toronto was visited by many members of the diaspora, along with officials from the Caribbean Consular offices; among the officials were Barbados' Consul General in Toronto, Sonia Marville-Carter (photo at left), and Honorary Consul at the Guyana Consulate General in Toronto, Mani Singh (photo at right); in photo at centre are Grenada's Consul General in Toronto, Gerry Hopkins, with Acting Consul General Tracey Ramsubaghamnette (at right) from the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate General office here in Toronto. *Grenada and Guyana CG photos*

'Blaze of glory' send-off for Panday

By Romeo Kaseram
LJI Reporter

In his final political address before general elections were held in Trinidad and Tobago in 2007, then-Prime Minister Basdeo Panday had said, "I remember my struggle to unite this country... I have no regrets. As I come to the end of a very long journey, I ask you to send me off in a blaze of glory."

It appears that Trinidad's Shore of Peace cremation site was also a fitting "blaze of glory" send-off for Panday.

As the chosen site for his final stop on January 9, Panday's life appears to have come into confluence at its end with the energies emanating of out many metaphorical fires.

In fact, tributes in Trinidad and Tobago described Panday as blazing a trail like few others had done before.

The Shore of Peace was also a significant choice, with the cremation site connecting historically to Panday's ancestry as a final destination for Hindus since East Indian Indentureship ended over a century ago in Trinidad.

And it was also noted last week that Panday's final, funeral trip to the Shore of Peace itself was yet another trailblazer in Trinidad and Tobago's history, since the ceremony was



Mikela Panday gets set to light her father's pyre after the funeral service was held in Trinidad on January 9. Photo courtesy Vishyan Photography

performed according to Hindu rites, a first as a State funeral for a former prime minister.

There were thousands of nationals awaiting the funeral cortege's arrival at the Shore of Peace. As the media in Trinidad reported afterwards, they came to celebrate, and to mourn a leader who changed the course of Trinidad and Tobago's history, their lives, and that of the generations to

See Page 19: Panday recalled as trailblazer

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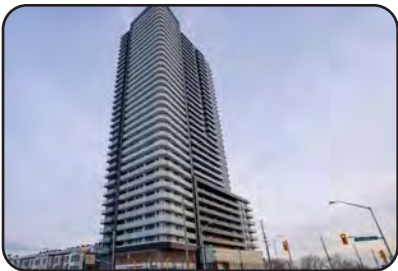
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10 life-saving surgeries in 2023 by TCCF, GOLLI

Ten life-saving surgeries were performed in Guyana last year by **The Caribbean Children Foundation** working in cooperation with the **Gift of Life International** program.

GOLLI is financially supported by TCCF, and is actively engaged in ongoing training visits to Guyana. The trip to Guyana in March 2023 came after a three-year delay that was triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic, said Dr Rodrigo Soto.

He is a paediatric cardiac surgeon, and a clinical consultant with GOLLI. Heading the visiting team, he noted that “the current patients waiting for surgery were very sick, and, therefore, facing a higher risk”. Ten life-saving surgeries were performed during that visit. While the sessions were mostly successful, sadly, one child with tetralogy of Fallot (TOF) was lost.

As the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention notes, TOF is a birth defect that affects normal blood flow through the heart. It happens when a baby’s heart does not form correctly during growth and development in the womb during pregnancy.

However, there was also good news out of GOLLI’s medical intervention that saw two other youngsters with TOF issues responding well to treatment. The good news is both children are now at home with their families, and are enjoying renewed lives.

With ongoing support from TCCF, GOLLI has three trips planned for this year from April 6 to April 16; August 3 to August 13; and December 7 to December 17.

Soto also noted that GOLLI’s interaction with the local medical team at Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation was excellent. He also declared confidence that the visiting training team would be able to accomplish great things in Guyana in the years to come.

Said Soto: “Thanks a lot for the support TCCF is giving to these precious children. For GOLLI, it is an honour to partner with TCCF”

GOLLI delivers hope to children with heart disease, and to their families, by empowering doctors and nurses with the required tools, training, funding, and support to treat children in their country of birth. It also helps to develop sustainable pediatric cardiac programs in emerging countries through strategic guidance.



Baby’s curiosity is noticeable while being held in mom’s embrace after life-saving surgery

The organisation also seeks to expand its global reach through partnerships with like-minded organisations, such as TCCF, to maximise its international impact.

TCCF is a Canadian-based charity, with its mandate to enable poor and critically-ill Caribbean children get needed and specialised medical care as quickly as possible. Its vision is to remove all barriers, notably financial ones, between a critically-ill Caribbean child and access to proper medical treatment and care.

Absolutely no one is paid a salary or wages at TCCF. It is managed and run entirely by volunteers, with all donations going directly into fulfilling its humanitarian mandate.

TCCF welcomes the community’s support. The latest and upcoming fund-raiser is its annual Valentine’s Dinner and Dance, which will be held on February 10 at the Woodbine Banquet Hall in Rexdale. [See display ad on Page 4.](#)

Make, move, be inspired this winter at AGO!

Toronto – The **Art Gallery of Ontario** is extending the invitation this winter to families to come together to make, move, and be inspired! It has also sent out the reminder that admission to the museum is always free for children and youths.

Among the notable and special exhibitions now on at the AGO are **KAWS: FAMILY, Building Icons: Arnold Newman’s Magazine World, 1938-2000;** and **Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art, 1950s – Now.**

Also, families should plan ahead for the free drop-in Family Day weekend and March Break programs.

“Bring your friends and family to the AGO to experience the exciting 2024 winter season programming,” said Neil Lumsden, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

He adds, “The AGO’s extensive collection of art, along with special activities for Family Day and March Break, appeals to audiences of all ages, reinforcing Ontario’s reputation as an international destination for arts and culture.”

Weekends are for families at the AGO, where admission is always free for AGO Members, Annual Pass holders, Indigenous Peoples, and visitors ages 25 and under.

At the Dr Mariano Elia Hands-On Centre, children under six can explore art-making activities, stories, and play-based learning. No registration is needed.

In Walker Court, AGO Art Carts provide visitors of all ages with free materials to make and do between 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. The AGO is open late every Friday until 9 p.m., and every Saturday and Sunday between 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

“Our family programs create accessible, joyful and thought-provoking opportunities for families to spend time together at the museum,” said Audrey Hudson, the AGO’s Richard & Elizabeth Currie Chief, Education & Programming.

Additionally, “Our Family Day and March Break drop-in programs aim to spark excitement in visitors of all ages – with

artmaking, scavenger hunts, tours, dance workshops, karaoke, and relaxed visits for neurodivergent audiences. Creativity is good for everyone, and we take pride in offering so many inter-generational programs year-round.”

For the Family Day Weekend from February 17 to February 19, the AGO will be serving up three days of Family Day fun.

Families are welcomed for free drop-in programs including guided tours of **Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art, 1950s – Now;** artmaking; storytelling with Yolanda T. Marshall; and then there is dance performances and workshops courtesy Jade’s Hip Hop Academy.

The Family Day events run daily between 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. All programs are included in General Admission.

[Click here for more information on the Family Day events.](#)

March Break at the AGO, which will take place from March 9-17, will see nine days where creativity rules at the AGO.

Pick up a free AGO PLAY activity booklet, which is available at the entrance, before heading out to explore art-making challenges, scavenger hunts, discussion prompts, and games.

From 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily, families can discover art-making activities across the building, and each afternoon Walker Court comes alive with karaoke.

As with Family Day, all programs are included in General Admission.

And then there is upcoming Summer Art Camp 2024 Registration, with AGO’s art camp returning this year to offer eight weeks of artful adventures for children and youth ages five to 13.

With the Summer Art Camp blending studio art, museum tours and fun and games, a dynamic youth leadership training program

is new this year. A complete list of available camps is now online. [Click here for more details and how to register.](#)



Audrey Hudson



Neil Lumsden

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Analyses find 2023 was planet's warmest on record; leave scientists stunned

Last year was the planet's warmest on record, according to an analysis by scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Centers for Environmental Information. With the historic heat, it was also noted that during last year Antarctic sea ice coverage dropped to a record low, NOAA further indicated.

"After seeing the 2023 climate analysis, I have to pause and say that the findings are astounding," said NOAA Chief Scientist Dr Sarah Kapnick.

She added, "Not only was 2023 the warmest year in NOAA's 174-year climate record – it was the warmest by far. A warming planet means we need to be prepared for the impacts of climate change that are happening here and now, like extreme weather events that become both more frequent and severe."

For this year, Kapnick noted that records will continue to be broken, and extreme events will grow until emissions go to zero.

"Government policy can address both emissions, but also actions to reduce climate impacts by building resilience," she stated.

The world's media also reported on the record-breaking heat, with the *Guardian* stating that 2023 was the hottest by a blistering margin. It left scientists and researchers struggling to account for the severity of the heat, and what it portends for the unfolding climate crisis, the publication stated earlier this month.

Reporting on NOAA's findings, the *Guardian* found that 2023 was the world's hottest in the records that stretch back to 1850, according to analyses released concurrently by NASA and NOAA. Also cited were the record high in ocean temperatures, and the new low in Antarctic sea ice extent.

As the *Guardian* reported, NOAA calcu-

lated that last year's global temperature was 1.35 degrees Celsius hotter, on average, than the pre-industrial era, which is slightly less than the 1.48 Celsius increase that EU scientists came up with due to slightly different methodologies. However, while there was a marginal variation in their temperature finding, the EU scientists also concluded that 2023 was the hottest on record.



Sarah Kapnick

And in a separate analysis of 2023 by Berkeley Earth, it put last year at 1.54 Celsius above pre-industrial times, which is above the 1.5 Celsius warming limit that countries have agreed to keep to in order to avoid disastrous global heating impacts.

However, the 1.5 Celsius guardrail will need to be broken on a consistent basis, rather than only in one year, to be considered fully breached.

Factors that drove this year's extraordinary warmth were ongoing burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, which follow a string of hotter-than-average years in recent decades.

As NOAA pointed out, each decade over the past 40 years has been warmer than the last. It also noted that the most recent ten years have contributed to making this the hottest decade ever recorded.

Last year's record heat was further spurred by El Niño, a periodic climatic event that heats up parts of the Pacific Ocean and heightens global temperatures.

However, even with these known factors scientists were left stunned at the severity of 2023, which was initially following the expected long-term warming pattern before seeing record after record obliterated in the second half of the year.

Last year beat the previous temperature record, set in 2016, by 0.15 Celsius, NOAA

Other notable climate findings and events by NOAA

Global ocean heat content set a new record high: The 2023 upper ocean heat content, which addresses the amount of heat stored in the upper 2,000 metres of the ocean, was the highest on record. Ocean heat content is a key climate indicator because the ocean stores 90 percent of the excess heat in the Earth system. The indicator has been tracked globally since 1958, and there has been a steady upward trend since approximately 1970. The five highest values have all occurred in the last five years.

Polar sea ice was scant: The 2023 annual Antarctic sea ice extent (coverage) averaged 3.79 million square miles in 2023, the lowest on record. The maximum extent in September was 6.55 million square miles, which was the lowest by a record margin. The minimum extent in February was 690,000 square miles, which set a record low for the second consecutive year. Arctic sea ice coverage averaged 4.05 million square miles in 2023, ranking among the ten lowest years on record. The maximum extent in March was 5.64 million square miles, which ranked fifth lowest, while the minimum extent in September was 1.63 million square miles, which ranked sixth lowest.

December 2023 set records: Global surface temperature in December 2023 was 1.43 degrees Celsius above the 20th-century average – the warmest December on record. For the ninth consecutive month, the global ocean surface temperature was also record warm. Looking regionally, North America and South America both had their warmest December on record.

stated. It added this temperature rise is a huge margin in climate terms.

"What we've seen with 2023 is off the charts," said Gavin Schmidt, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

"We are having a real hard time explaining why 2023 was as warm as it was. What happened last year was unprecedented, and it's a concern. This is the first year I've been doing this where I'm far less sanguine about my ability to explain what's happening," he said.

Schmidt said that further research, and the outcome of following years, will need to be assessed to see if there are other major factors at play.

However, he added that the uncertainty was disconcerting.

"I am discomfited by the findings beyond just, 'Oh my gosh, another warm year,'" he said.

He added that 2024 has a "50-50" chance of being the hottest on record, due to a peaking El Niño, and that the likelihood of staying within 1.5 Celsius warming, which scientists have said is important to avoid catastrophic heatwaves, floods, droughts and other calamities "has shrunk to almost nothing".

Said Schmidt: "We are making the kind of geological mark on the planet that perhaps only cyanobacteria have managed before. That's a big deal. The biggest driver that has changed our climate is the emissions of greenhouse gases, and it's very important to realise the long-term trends are caused by our activities."

25 remarkable, inspiring contributors receive Order of Ontario

Toronto – Twenty-five new appointments to the Order of Ontario for 2023 have been announced by The Honourable Edith Dumont, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, and Chancellor of the Order of Ontario.

“Our province gratefully acknowledges their remarkable contributions, which inspire us all to be leaders and change-makers,” Dumont said during the January 1 announcement.

She added, “As Chancellor of the Order of Ontario, it is my privilege to congratulate the Order’s appointees for 2023. These Ontarians have demonstrated the highest levels of merit, excellence, and dedication in their respective disciplines, and they have made significant impacts here at home, and around the world.”

As the province’s highest honour, the Order of Ontario recognises outstanding people who have made exceptional contributions to help build a stronger province, nation, and world. Members of the Order of Ontario come from all walks of life, and represent various sectors of society including public service, business, journalism, and health care.

“I am proud of the incredible breadth and depth of talent we have here in Ontario. Each one of these exceptional Ontarians are leaders and trailblazers who exemplify the best of our province,” said Michael Ford, Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

He added, “Their achievements, dedication, and leadership have contributed to building a stronger Ontario, and a better world for all. On behalf of a grateful province, congratulations to all the appointees being recognised.”

Among the 2023 appointees are Gervan



Bhavana Varma

Varma. He is former President and Vice-Chancellor at Brock University, Brandon University, and is currently President of George Brown College.

As the Order of Ontario’s citation notes, “Fearon has a vision for equity, inclusion, and community empowerment. A veteran educator, he leads efforts to provide transformative education opportunities that benefit learners, industry, and the greater community. His influential contributions to the white paper, *Towards a Vision for the Black Community*, pioneered ideas for positive change.”

Also among the appointees for 2023 was Bhavana Varma. As her citation noted, Bhavana brought a new vision to solving complex social issues as President and CEO of United Way of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox, and Addington.

It noted, “To address homelessness and challenges facing youth, Bhavana broke down silos, connecting the right people who could effect change. That effort attracted significant new sources of revenue in support of critical human-service programs in the region. In her



Gervan Fearon

24 years of stewardship, the organisation has become one of Canada’s top charitable groups, helping more people live with hope, dignity, and a sense of belonging.”

Also appointed to the Order of Ontario was Florence Ngenzebuhoro, CEO of the Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto.

As was noted, “...Ngenzebuhoro is helping tens of thousands of Francophone immigrants annually. She arrived in 1994 as a refugee from Burundi, and had to navigate support services in a foreign language. This sparked a desire to help others, and a fearless commitment to ensure all newcomers are treated with compassion and dignity.”

Ngenzebuhoro has been recognised as one of Canada’s most influential minority rights advocates, whose efforts have helped Ontario become a more inclusive and welcoming place, the citation stated.

Toronto’s Hazelle Palmer was also appointed to the Order of Ontario. A senior executive with more than 30 years of experience in the non-profit sector, Hazelle has fought to advance minority rights throughout her career.



Florence Ngenzebuhoro

As the citation noted, “Her vision of a more just society is enabling others to thrive. As the current President and CEO of Sherbourne Health, Hazelle dramatically expanded services for Toronto’s under-served populations. As the former Managing Editor of *Healthsharing Magazine* in the 1990s, she championed stories tackling difficult issues. As the former Executive Director of the Planned Parenthood Toronto and then the AIDS Committee of Toronto, she used her platform to improve social conditions.”

Performer and poet Dwayne Morgan from Ajax was also recognised for his good work with the Order of Ontario. As was noted, when he discovered a love of writing in high school, the “spoken-word” genre did not exist.

“As a Black teenager from Scarborough, few doors opened, and he launched *Up From The Roots Entertainment*, producing opportunities for other racialised artists. He lobbied the League of Canadian Poets to include performance poets, produced North America’s two largest spoken-word events, and has performed globally. His words – and actions – inspire.”

Also appointed to the Order was Herbert Ho Ping Kong from Toronto, a pioneer in medical education. His text, *The Art of Medicine: Healing and the Limits of Technology*, is a must-read for students around the world.

As it was noted, “He has been the go-to source of diagnostic expertise, with an uncanny ability to ferret out the underlying causes of illnesses that have mystified other experts. Known as a true ‘renaissance man’, he walks with great humility, a calm and quiet demeanor and genuine care for everyone.”

Ontario govt invests \$15M in LTC homes

Ottawa – The Ontario government is investing an additional \$15 million this year through the Local Priorities Fund for a total of \$35 million in 2023-2024 to help long-term care homes support residents with complex needs like dementia and bariatric care.

The funding will ensure residents can connect to the right care in the right place, and help reduce avoidable emergency department visits and hospital stays.

“Our government is continuing to take action to ensure long-term care residents across Ontario get the right care in the right place,” said Stan Cho, Minister of Long-Term Care.

Cho added, “This funding will expand specialised staffing, equipment, and other services at homes across the province so that long-term care residents with complex needs can get the care they need, when and where they need it.”

Launched in 2022, the Local Priorities Fund invested \$20 million in 2022-2023 to help long-term care homes purchase specialised equipment, and train staff to provide more specialised care so more homes can welcome residents with complex needs, but who no longer require acute care in hospital.

The fund also helped current residents avoid hospital admissions who have new, or increasingly complex medical or specialised equipment needs that could not be previously accommodated in their long-term care home.

Some examples of the 173 successful projects invested in last year include:

- 15 long-term care homes in central Ontario purchased bladder scanners to quickly assess and treat residents, avoiding unnecessary trips to the hospital;

- In Toronto, \$1.3 million was used to create four new nurse-led outreach teams and expand three existing teams to provide staff

training and time-sensitive medical supports to help reduce avoidable emergency department transfers;

- A \$1.7 million investment in Royal Ottawa Place to hire specially trained staff that can connect residents to mental health and behavioural care;

- In the North East and North West regions, close to \$3 million supported a range of projects, including training staff on dementia, wound care, and how to use specialised equipment such as bariatric lifts and bladder scanners. Long-term care residents also received support from a speech language pathologist, personal support workers and a Cree translator/interpreter.

The ministry is currently working with Ontario Health to review this year’s proposals, and successful applicants will begin to be notified and receive their additional funding in the coming weeks.

“Through the Local Priorities Fund, our government is continuing to ensure that Ontarians, at every stage of life, have access to the care and support they need, when they need it,” said Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

She added, “This investment builds on the historic work our government is doing to provide Ontarians with the right care, in the settings that are most convenient to them, whether that be in their community or in their home.”

The Local Priorities Fund is part of a broader investment of over \$120 million in 2022-2023, and complements the recently launched Equipment and Training Fund, which helps long-term care homes purchase more diagnostic equipment and train staff to better manage and treat residents’ conditions that often lead to preventable hospital visits, such as urinary tract infections, falls, pneumonia, and congestive heart failure.



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Editorial

Health concern

As our community makes preparations to visit the Caribbean this year, especially with many in our diaspora getting ready to holiday in Trinidad and Tobago for the upcoming annual celebrations of Carnival next month, it is wise to note that care and vigilance be taken against contracting severe illnesses while abroad.

For our diaspora traveling to the Caribbean, it must be noted earlier this month that the Pan American Health Organisation issued its concerns in an update over the circulation of SARS-CoV-2, and other respiratory viruses, that are now impacting the region of the Americas, including the Caribbean.

As the *Caribbean Media Corporation* reported last week, PAHO noted that its epidemiological update provides “recommendations for maintaining surveillance of these viruses and strengthening health systems response, particularly given the current outbreaks of other communicable diseases”.

Last year PAHO said that elevated levels of acute respiratory disease were recorded in the region, and this was driven by the circulation of SARS-CoV-2, Influenza, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus.

As many of us here in Canada are quite aware, this winter in the Northern Hemisphere we are currently experiencing epidemics of all three viruses. Meanwhile, as PAHO further noted, nations in Southern Hemisphere are also experiencing incidences that are higher than expected for the season due to the circulation of SARS-CoV-2.

PAHO went on to recommend that its member states keep up surveillance of respiratory viruses “to detect any changes in circulation or severity of disease”.

Also, that nations make preparations to respond to a possible increase in cases and hospitalisations, and to continue efforts to increase vaccination against influenza and Covid-19. And that particular attention be paid to vulnerable and high-risk populations.

PAHO also urged regional countries to “keep healthcare systems prepared and alert at all levels in order to respond to a possible increase in outpatient cases and hospitalisations, especially coinciding with the epidemic period for other communicable diseases with high demand for care”.

PAHO urging regional governments is also a message to our diasporic community here in Canada, and especially for those among us who are making plans to visit our homelands in the near future, and in the coming months.

It must be noted that increased Covid-19 cases and deaths, along with the onset of the influenza season in Trinidad and Tobago, saw its Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh this week encouraging the population to wear face masks, especially by the vulnerable, with Carnival 2024 around the corner.

Earlier this week, Deyalsingh revealed that nine nationals were currently hospitalised, and five had died from Covid-19 since the Health Ministry’s last update on December 26, 2023.

He also revealed that Trinidad and Tobago currently has no vaccines on hand; as he stated, 795,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine had to be destroyed after expiring last September.

Deyalsingh was speaking at one of his ministry’s mass vaccination sites while encouraging nationals to become vaccinated.

His recommendation to nationals in Trinidad and Tobago echoes similar calls that are being made here in Canada. As our community medical experts and government health officials are recommending, taking both the flu shot and the latest Covid-19 vaccination is part of the vigilance that we need to enable to protect ourselves.

It is also worth repeating that enabling protective measures as part of our health diligence and preparations are even more important when making plans to travel abroad. It is such that some nations in the Caribbean may not have medication available; may be experiencing similar epidemics; or may already be facing growing and challenging viral pathologies.

Travelling to our homelands is always rejuvenating; however, do make preparations, and please be vigilant.

Seeking tap root in India turns to encounters with nodes

Next month I’ll be going to India to teach about the plantation and climate change. This upcoming trip has me thinking about my very first visit to India, over 15 years ago. Prior to that initial visit, I prepared by travelling to Guyana’s National Archives to find my great-grandmother’s emigration pass (these are held in the former plantation colonies, not in the National Archives in London, which houses the archives of colonial governance and policy).

The pass distilled the bureaucratic categories such as caste, bodily scars, occupation, destination, and place of origin into a neat line. It told me that her journey started in the city of Ajmer, in Rajasthan. From there, I imagined an *arkati* put her on a train to Calcutta, where she was held at the Garden Reach Depot, before boarding a ship for Guyana.

I promised my father that I would breathe life into the invisible lines among these categories of emigration. I would visit this ancient and holy city of Ajmer to try and find our roots.

We were both naïve, not thinking of the challenges of trying to find continuity in an ever-changing large, urban area.

Once I arrived in Ajmer, I visited the municipal archives, thinking perhaps I could find a clue in their records, but the papers from that time period were written in a Persian script, which no one reads anymore.

As my great-grandmother was Muslim, I thought I would try the Dargah, to see if there were any marriage documents, but because I was female, I was not allowed to speak to the Imam.

I was out of ideas, so instead I spent my days in the city taking pictures of typical tourist sites to send to my father (for example, Akbar’s Fort, Madar Gate, and the site where Emperor Jahangir granted an audience to Thomas Roe, the ambassador of King James I).

These histories were neither personal, nor familial. They felt more like historical commodities that I consumed passively, as a stop on my way to the camel fair in Pushkar. No doubt these were sites that connected Ajmer inextricably to a larger cultural, political, and imperial world, but I did not see a connection to my world, except maybe in the latter, where a plaque marked the beginning of an end, an unraveling of entwined problems, complexities, and issues that still haunt us.

Nonetheless, many Indo-Caribbeans have a strong desire to know their roots. Gaiutra Bahadur’s book *Coolie Woman*



Nalini Mohabir

traces her efforts to locate her great-grandmother’s roots (which eludes her), unlike Shundell Prasad, who finds her roots in Bihar, in her 2006 film *Once More Removed*.

Rajiv Mohabir (no relation) is also fascinated by his grandmother, and her stories told in Caribbean Bhojpuri, which give him a link to the past.

Several have made a business of this roots tourism, helping Indo-Caribbean people to find their ancestral village or long-lost distant cousins gleaned through the information on the emigration pass. As the late Brij Lal (Indo-Fijian scholar) said, the emigration pass is probably the ultimate proof of authenticity that you once had kith and kin in India.

After my failure to find my Rajasthani roots, I traveled to other states in India, where I would often be told that I looked like I was from Bihar, or Tamil Nadu, or whatever State I happened to be in. After several generations removed, I guess I look like a mix of things, not purely one thing.

When we visit India, it is not simply as a tourist, at least not like those who seek enlightenment, or are struck by India’s poverty, or caught up in the dualistic opposition between West and East, modernity versus tradition.

While we, as a people, are not immune from those views, there is something deeper going on when we visit India. What does it mean to seek heritage or roots as a tourist? Is it a search for the “resting place of our imagination”? Perhaps a struggle to come to terms with the losses stemming from Indentureship? Or a desire to understand both the ruptures and continuities of the past?

For Naipaul, his first trip to India was “frightening” and “monotonous”. He had “an urge to escape”. He too was haunted. The Trinidadian writer Dionne Brand points to Naipaul’s anxiety and alienation as his response to re-crossing the *kala pani*. For whatever psychological reasons, Naipaul was not interested in reconnecting to his roots; at least as he recounted.

While I am interested in the hopes and fears that accompanied my great-grandmother on her voyage across the *kala pani*, I cannot rely on a paper trail to tell me that. Therefore, when I visit India now, I am less interested in blood ties of family/race/nation, or the desire for origins.

Rather I live in that in-between space of surprising encounters, both past and present.

When a shake of the matriarch’s head spoke volumes

Some days I think that were my grandmother still alive, and just to push my imagination into the threshold of the weird and put a smart phone into her cramping hands, I suspect Ma would have taken to the small pond of its screen with the webbed feet of a newly-hatched duckling; but with some reservations.

Of course, it is certain that Ma would have harassed me to abandon the safety of my ergonomic keyboard, where each day I plug away at trying to write the rungs of this misaligned world.

Ma would have said, “Beta? How to post this photo for your Ajee?”; or, “Little Rajah, come and read this email-bmail for me that your Mamu now-now press and send with such tiny writing.”

“Little Rajah” – now here is an endearment I have not heard spoken in my direction in many more decades than there are grey strands left on my receding hairline.

Now there was a time when Ma deployed “Little King” with affection, delivering it lovingly with the last crisp of *jalebi* into my hands after an archaeology of day’s dirt was vigorously scraped off using the back of the hem on her skirt; or after rapidly rolling into a cooling ball toasted sesame seeds in hardening, caramelised sugar, and presenting it on an open palm to His Majesty, her one and only grandson at that time.

But then I began to shoot skyward like a stalk of sugar cane from the ratoon staked into the black earth of the cane fields that surrounded our village. The rapid growth took my head up into the clouds, and then like the mythological Icarus, brought my wings too close to the sun.

In Ma’s words, I became “harden” and “own-way”.

And so it was that “Little Rajah” now exited from Ma’s frustrated mouth carrying additional payloads, delivered with nuances and inflections of satire, veiled threats, and during the growing episodes of her world weariness, like a pet dog when warning an idle tormenter – with a growl accompanied with a soft but sharp nip of sarcasm.

It happened recently that crisps of *jalebi* shook in its box, the hollowness within amplifying the sound, its sugared aesthetic now musical like a maracas. Responding to the query on whether to toss the box out with its golden filings, my youngest son said with a chin pointed in my direction, “Give it to the Little Rajah”.

Right away the inherent archaeology trapped in the directive connected with my boyhood down the decades, zipping past the

contemporary hair loss, peeling away the layers of years, and landing me *braad-da-daaps!* at the front door of my childhood.

And there was Ma, shaking her head with disapproval at how helter-skelter her world had become, with many other grandchildren arriving by the handfuls right after my heralded and majestic entrance.

In my moment of entry from the future, there she was just overcoming her bewilderment with dawning comprehension and a show of pursed, vexed lips, that why her skirt had fallen in an untidy heap at her ankles was due to the missing array of safety pins holding it together at the waist.

Her eldest grandson, namely yours truly, had purloined not one pin for yet another fishing expedition, but all of them that were holding up the firmament of the waist of her skirt, and which were generously shared out to the eager hands among my growing bandwagon of cousins.

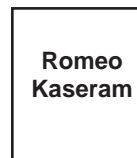
It is the shaking of Ma’s head with disapproval that resonated in that moment of my recall. Now it was always a source of humour, nudges, and hand-over-mouth giggling for the cousins to peek at Ma chatting with her visiting siblings. They all did the head bobble, sometimes moving in unison, in an accompanying choreography that attended to their close-knit camaraderie.

There were similar shaking of heads with her cohort at the mandir, the usual gang of suspects, with whom she chatted after *puja*, a few of her peers forgetting time, place, and the setting of the sanctuary with unwholesome gesticulations and gestures; and of course, there was an articulate bobbing of their heads, which was the unspoken body language among them.

By then Ma was two generations removed from the ship that brought our ancestors from India; as such, she was already losing the head bobble, which we noted she now only used with her siblings and her raucous band of pious peers.

But that shake of disapproval after her eyeball of a grandson had committed yet another capital offence was far from the conversation enhancement of accompanying body language. Instead, it was articulate and replete with foreboding, a promise of the heavy hand of matriarchal justice soon to descend.

Coming to think of it, I wonder how Ma would manage with a cellphone in hand and the acronyms of modern-day social media messaging. For certain, the ‘SMH’ acronym for ‘Shaking My Head’ would be too mild for conveyance of the dire depths within her furrowed brow, and for the fury she unleashed after securing her skirt at the waist with a length of rope.



Romeo Kaseram

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INDO-CARIBBEAN WORLD



Panday (right) with A.N.R. Robinson in 1987

Panday never gave up on multi-racial politics despite the challenges in TT

Dear Editor,

Following his passing on January 1, Trinidad and Tobago's media noted that this nation's fifth Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, was the first Indian and first Hindu to earn that honour.

Therein lies the challenge in the Caribbean for individuals from groups other than descendants of enslaved Africans to represent, or be represented, in the governance of the countries where their forbears arrived as indentured labourers: they are still regarded as "exceptions", and frequently as a "problem".

The challenge becomes acute in the southern Caribbean where People of Indian Origin form a plurality in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname.

By the time Basdeo Panday returned as a lawyer from England in 1965, Dr Eric Williams had already removed Trinidad and Tobago from the West Indian Federation. There, the DLP, representing Trinidadian PIOs, had been well-represented, but not in the majoritarian-elected Trinidad and Tobago government, where the PNM had been victorious since 1956.

Williams dubbed Indians a "recalcitrant minority". Significantly, Panday did not join the DLP, but the new, leftist, multiracial Workers and Farmers Party launched by C.L.R. James (who had broken away from Williams); ex-DLP Leader Stephen Maharaj and the Oilfields Workers Trade Union leader, George Weekes.

Unsuccessful in the 1966 elections, the WFP dissolved, and in 1975 Panday launched the United Labour Front, with army mutineer Raffique Shah and George Weekes - determined to unite the mainly African oilfield workers with the Indian sugar workers, whose union he led.

Even though the ULF won ten of 36 seats, and became the official opposition to Williams' PNM, most of the votes came from Indian-dominated constituencies. Against Panday's determined efforts, the ethnic cleavage in the society asserted itself to have, in effect, the ULF replace the old DLP.

But Panday did not give up on multi-racial politics. In the 1981 elections, his ULF joined the Tobago-based DAC of A.N.R. Robinson and Lloyd Best's Tapia House to form the National Alliance, which did worse than the ULF on its own.

For the 1986 elections, he spearheaded the National Alliance's coalition with the Organisation for National Reconstruction's PNM-dissident, Karl Hudson Phillips, to form the National Alliance for Reconstruction, which won the elections.

It was in that year that the political grouping

of which I was part in NYC raised funds for the NAR, and when I met Panday.

In discussions, he was convinced that Trinidad "was not ready" for an Indian PM. He deferred to Robinson to become PM, even though DAC only brought in two seats to the ULF's eight.

Panday was made Minister of External Affairs, but soon reacted against Robinson with the ULF's constituency being peripheralised.

Panday was expelled from the coalition and government in 1988, along with several other Indian members, who then formed the UNC in April 1989.

In that year, I was part of a team that travelled to the Caribbean to invite leaders in the Indian communities to participate in the launch of GOPIO in NYC.

Panday and Dr Cheddi Jagan both spoke at the *Conference on Political Participation* that I co-chaired, and both analysed

the challenges of political mobilisation in plural societies.

They also participated in a breakout session that I also chaired, where they were more specific in their comments. They helped to draft resolutions for presentation to the UN for free and fair elections in Guyana, and action against violence directed predominantly against the Indian community in Trinidad. Both were introduced to members of the US administration who had attended the Conference.

Jagan's PPP went on to win the 1992 elections in Guyana, and Panday's UNC, having tied with 17 seats with the PNM in the 1995 elections, coalesced with the Robinson's NAR (two seats) and became prime minister.

He again led the party to victory in 2000, but internal wrangling led to snap elections in 2001 that saw his UNC in a tie with the PNM, each party acquiring 18 seats each.

Panday offered a coalition to Patrick Manning, who refused. By then, the NAR's Robinson was president, after being nominated by Panday, but he chose the PNM's Manning as PM, even though the PNM had less popular votes.

But Panday never gave up on multiracial politics, even though many stubbornly dubbed him an "Indian leader".

One incident illustrates his magnanimous national vision. Back in 1969, Williams had banned Trinidad-born Black Power advocate Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) long before the April 1970 Black Power rebellion.

However, when Panday became PM, he awarded a monthly grant to pay for Ture's treatment for prostate cancer.

Ravi Dev, Guyana, via email.



Ravi Dev

Now Guyana must spend on defence

Dear Editor,

It is an enormous and eminently retrograde step when a fledgling developing country such as Guyana, which is now riding the crest of a petro-bonanza-generated wave, has to divert and spend an enormous portion of the new windfall on guns instead of food for its poverty-stricken people.

Guyana's President Irfaan Ali recently announced a host of measures to beef up the capability of the Guyana Defence Force.

This external military-related stimulus emanates from another developing nation, namely expansionist Venezuela, when in the post-Cold War era, both countries would have supported the UN disarmament agenda to allow deprived, still-developing countries to focus on allocating financial resources on social, economic, and infrastructural development.

Now, Guyana is compelled to beef up its security capability to protect its claim to the vast 83,000-square-mile Essequibo region, especially as Venezuela casts coveting eyes from across the border.

Guyana also has to defend its 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone, which is the current source of its huge GDP growth of 62 percent, thanks to the vast newfound reserves of crude oil and natural gas.

The EEZ is also claimed, quite unwittingly and erroneously, by the imperialist Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which is not a party to the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention simply because Caracas objected to the method of maritime-boundary delimitation provided for therein.

Now Venezuela's government is quot-

ing chapter and verse from the very 1982 Convention it turned its back on by refusing to host the final convention-adopting session in Caracas.

The primary beneficiaries of this Guyanese shopping spree/splurge for modern electronic defensive weaponry will be the US, UK, and Israel. The US and UK will also derive benefits from training and development of Guyanese military to man this new-era weaponry.

Australia, China, and North Korea will make a killing in supplying new maritime vessels for the GDF with capability to reach 200 miles offshore.

This is what the illegal, wholly outlandish, and indefensible Venezuelan claim over the Essequibo has spawned in the region.

I have no doubt the International Court of Justice will throw out the fictitious Venezuelan claim over Essequibo, but Guyana has to

arm itself for now to repel any insane attack/annexation by Venezuela that can foment instability and strife on the South American continent.


Brazil has already beefed up its military presence on the borders it shares with Guyana and Venezuela lest the latter invades Brazilian territory in order to easily cross over into the Essequibo.

Venezuela is not only interfering in the internal domestic affairs of Guyana, but also in the conduct of its foreign policies, both of which violate the tenets of international law and the UN Charter that incorporates the mores and principles of customary law.

Stephen Kangal, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.



Irfaan Ali



GUYANA PROPERTY MATTERS

Property Values Rising in Guyana

By Kal Juman-Yassin

Overseas property owners are taking a renewed interest in the Guyana property market. Their real estate assets are likely worth more today and could be excellent long term investment assets, providing income and equity growth. The question is whether to invest and modernise, or whether to cash out at today's record high values.

The growing demand for land and the shortage of residential housing supply have pushed property values to record levels. Agricultural lands are being rezoned into housing with some landowners reaping significant windfalls. The economic hyper-growth is challenging the current infrastructure which is barely adequate as is. Construction is already on the way for new highways on the east coast, east bank, and west coast, which will open up many new areas for development.

Guyana's Real Estate Association has noted the sharp rise of rentals where the cost of a two bedroom apartment rental is triple the price in 2010. Rates for a modern two bedroom apartment in Georgetown can easily fetch (US) \$2,500 per month with updated detached homes in better neighbourhoods going for more than (US) \$4,000 per month.

The sharp rise in building materials costs, coupled with a shortage of skilled workers, have pushed construction costs higher. Inflation has seen aggregate costs rise from (US) \$40 to (US) \$55 per ton, and average building costs up from (US) \$60 per square foot to over (US) \$125 per square foot or more. Building in Guyana to North American standards will likely cost 10-20 percent more, since the majority of materials are imported.

Georgetown properties now range from (US) \$250,000 to (US) \$1M-plus depending on location, size of the lot, and condition of the building. Property values may be rising, and owners need to have realistic expectations. Estimating a property's potential value requires understanding several factors including the current condition of the building and the dynamics of the surrounding neighbourhood.

For investors interested in the Guyanese property market, there are many opportunities with higher yields than available in the US or Canadian market.

RE/Guyana is a property services company dedicated to making it easier for overseas property owners to administer, divest, acquire, and develop their real estate assets in Guyana. [Click here to visit RE/Guyana's website.](#)

Democracy and how Green observed its principles during his years in govt

Dear Editor,

The divisiveness in Guyana's politics commenced in the years leading up to the 1964 general elections with the machinations to prevent Dr Cheddi Jagan from leading the country into Independence.

At the time, US and British officials foresaw the longterm consequences of their decision on the race problem in the country, but were more concerned about what the US felt was in its best interest: "Guiana under Forbes Burnham would cause fewer problems to the United States administration than an independent British Guiana under Cheddi Jagan" Arthur Schlesinger advised US President John F. Kennedy.

The 28 years of PNC rule from 1964 to 1992 then exacerbated the situation. With no acknowledgement ever by the PNC leadership of the consequences of four consecutive rigged national elections that silenced the collective voice of the largest segment of the population, violation of the basic human rights of opponents, and making the country the second poorest in the hemisphere, yet demonstrating belligerence after each election win by the PPP since 1992, the divisiveness has only widened.

In his letter, headlined *Consultation by our government has become a farce*, published in the December 31, 2023 edition of *Stabroek News*, Hamilton Green lists a number of elements of a democracy, and offers the view that the current PPP government has violated these principles, and its action is undemocratic, and even dictatorial.

Now, in all his letters in the press that I have seen over the years, despite insurmountable evidence that all the general elections in Guyana during the 28 years of PNC rule when Green held positions of Senior Minister, Vice President, and Prime Minister, there was never any mention of the PNC violation of the most fundamental tenet of a democracy, that is, the holding of free and fair elections, nor of violation of its opponents' basic human rights.

In this article, I look at the principles of democracy stated by Green to determine how they were observed during his years in government.

In his letter, Green writes, "A viable democracy ensures, by mechanisms provided, that the views and voices of all citizens are neither ignored nor trivialised".

I agree with this principle. Now let us review what the PNC did when Green was in office.

Documentation locally and internationally have confirmed that General Elections in 1968, 1973, 1980, and 1985, were rigged in favour of the PNC. Consequently, the voices of citizens in electing the government of their choice were ignored.

And in relation to the media, under the headlined, *Guyana's Officials Trying to Curb Catholic Paper*, the *Washington Post* of May 8, 1981 reports "The *Catholic Standard* of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Georgetown, Guyana, is a Catholic paper unlike any other... The Catholic Church in Guyana views this unusual style of religious journalism as a needed ministry in a country where the daily press and radio stations – there is no television – are government owned, and 'serve as organs of the ruling party' of Prime Minister Linden Forbes Burnham, according to a February human rights report from the US State Department..."

It adds, "Three years ago, the government owned printing plant refused to print the *Standard* any longer. More recently, Morrison (priest and editor of the *Catholic Standard*) said, in a charge corroborated by the US State Department report, the



Hamilton Green



Cheddi Jagan



Desmond Hoyte

after the APNU+AFC coalition came into government in 2015, writes, "This was a principle introduced by Burnham in 1973, whereby the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government and all organisations and institutions in the country were made subordinate to the PNC."

Also, it included merger of the General Secretary of the PNC with the Ministry of National Development, thereby allowing for direct access of the ruling party to government funds. And, in the earlier mentioned article by Thomas, he reports on "Flying of the PNC flag over the Court of Appeal in order to assert its 'paramountcy' over all state institutions".

government cut off the paper's legal access to newsprint."

Like the *Catholic Standard*, the *Mirror* newspaper published by the PPP, and the *Dayclean* news-sheet, published by the WPA were also deprived legal access to newsprint.

Green's letter continues, "Our Constitution refers to the importance of local democracy and the role that Trade Unions must play. Yet, wherever local authorities or Trade Unions have members that are not perceived to be PPP supporters, they are marginalised, pulverised, and punished".



Harry Hergash

In a 1982 article titled *The Current Crisis in Guyana in the UCLA Journal of African Studies*, Dr Clive Thomas gives a comprehensive report on the PNC rule in the late 1970s. In a section of the article, he discusses *Attack on Industrial Relations Systems*, noting "workers discontent and rebellion are everywhere" over "retrenchment, subsidies removal, tax increases, shortages and discriminatory distribution of commodities".

In addition, Thomas states that government manipulates and controls the executives of various unions and the Guyana Trade Union Council, and use the doctrine of "political strike"

against workers.

He states "once a strike is deemed political, it becomes subversive and the full use of the State's repressive apparatus is justified in order to crush such strikes, including use of military personnel to physically restrain strikers, with teargassing and violence being routine repressive measures".

The plight of workers was noted also in a **US document** that implicates Green in anti-union activity.

It reports, "On the labour front the Afro-Guyanese bauxite workers rallied trade union solidarity such as had not been seen since the pre-1964 era when the largely East Indian sugar workers and their union the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union joined the walkout. By the end of August trade union solidarity was capped by the addition of support from the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union, the National Association of Agricultural Commercial Industrial Employees, and the University of Guyana Staff Association."

Additionally, "All of these events occurred amid increasing violence and stepped up beatings by police openly operating with House of Israel elements. In one of the most vicious attacks on CCWU strikers Hamilton Green personally led the fray".

Further, Green writes in his December 31 letter, "A democracy ensures the clear separation of powers between the Judiciary, the Parliament and the Executive".

In 1973 the government declared the doctrine of "paramountcy" of the party (PNC). In an article titled *Political change, democracy, and human rights in Guyana (Third World Quarterly, Vol 18, No 2, 1997)*, Professor Ivelaw Griffith, who was appointed Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana

In addition, excerpts from the book, *A Brief History of the Guyana Defence Force 1965-2005* by former President David Granger (published in Chapter 6 of the *Report of the Rodney Commission of Inquiry*) are informative: "The increasing involvement of the Defence Force in party politics, a marked departure from the apparent non-partisan stance taken in the immediate post-Independence period, raised public concern about the direction being taken by civil-military relations."

After the Sophia Declaration came into effect in 1974, "political participation was positively promoted and many officers and soldiers were encouraged to become members of the PNC in the ensuing period... and in 1977, the Chief of Staff, Clarence (Price), appeared in military uniform before the PNC's 2nd Biennial Congress and pledged publicly '...our loyalty and dedication to the Comrade Leader of the People's National Congress and Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham...'"

Additionally, "It was not felt that there was need to install civilian political agents in military units as it was thought that there was already significant support for the PNC party in the Force. This interest was fostered by the attitude of the Prime Minister who, as Minister responsible for defence, started to appear regularly at official military functions, dressed in uniform... The significance of this symbolism was not lost on the public or the troops."

Green's letter continues, "A democracy ensures that our Police and Law Enforcement Agencies are outside the direct control and interference of the political management of the State. Anyone living in Guyana must know that we have fallen short of this ideal of democracy".

After Guyana's independence in 1966, a number of senior police officers were sidelined for promotion, or were forced to resign. Increasingly, loyalty to the governing party, the PNC, was a requirement for advancement.

For a number of reasons, documentation of this is either sparse, or buried in old newspapers in Guyana, and are not easily accessible. However anecdotal evidence exists.

It is not surprising that senior police officers at the time Dr Walter Rodney was assassinated in June 1980 claimed memory failure in response to critical questions by the Commissioners at the Rodney Commission of Inquiry in 2014.

Interestingly, in a June 4, 1999 *Stabroek News* article headlined *Pity the poor police*, then weekly columnist A.A. Fenty, a self-acknowledged PNC activist from the Burnham years in government, writes in his inimitable fashion, "Remember past President Desmond Hoyte boldly referring to the police force as 'kith and kin'? Well sure, don't dis Dessie for what is, generally, a truth".

In my view, failure to acknowledge the past objectively and truthfully will not aid in promoting national unity, and a near perfect democracy in Guyana is likely to remain a distant dream.

Harry Hergash, Toronto, via email.

Leaders and nationals, let us work together to make T&T a better place

Dear Editor,

It is like a recurring decimal – it never fails.

Once the general election bell is rung, we begin to see our politicians in our faces regularly. With a listening ear, some with pen and paper, they want to know all your concerns. They promise that once they get into office, for sure, your concerns will be on the agenda.

How many of us have been voting for decades? The election comes, but our concerns and our politicians' promises are nowhere to be seen.

For decades, citizens have been begging for a regular supply of tap-borne water and better roads, but I am still dodging potholes all over Trinidad and Tobago after all these years.

If there is one thing we're used to from politicians, it is empty promises. It seems the only time politicians truly communicate with the electorate is before general elections.

Then there are the town hall meetings – the avenue for the public to voice their concerns and vent their feelings. But it

is only a talk show, to say that they are listening, when at the end of the day life goes on as usual, our leaders doing their own thing.

If people have elected you into power, it is crucial that you consistently listen to them, and are not always seeking avenues to justify your actions. While many in elected positions may not see things this way, the fact remains that they are really employed by the people.

To our leaders elected into public office: it is the population's tax dollars that pay your salaries and perks. We deserve to be well-informed about all national matters, which to me is being fair, honest, and accountable.

I am sick and tired seeing the electorate being treated with scant courtesy, having to protest and beg for basic needs, with constant burning of tires, and so on.

What really touches my heart is when children are also protesting because of problems at their schools that have needed fixing for years.

That, to me, cannot be right.

I appeal to our leaders: you are not all-knowing, and no man is an island. Those on the ground must be treated with respect and dignity at all times.

Remember, if it were not for them, you would not have been elected into office. Serve them properly.

A leader who fails to listen to others is seen as a dictator in today's environment; wise, sensible people will not cherish that type of person.

"Of all the skills of leadership, listening is the most valuable – and one of the least understood. Most captains of industry listen only sometimes, and they remain ordinary leaders. But a few, the great ones, never stop listening. That's how they get word before anyone else of unseen problems and opportunities" – Peter Nulty, *Fortune* magazine.

Let us do it together, making Trinidad and Tobago a better place for all.

Arnold Gopeesingh, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

Budget 2024: 'Staying the course, building prosperity for all'

Themed "Staying the course, building prosperity for all", Guyana's \$1.146 trillion 2024 budget aims to "improve the lives of each and every single Guyanese citizen." It "addresses today's priorities but also blatantly sets the stage for tomorrow," stated Dr Ashni Singh, Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance in the Office of the President.

The budget, which was tabled in the National Assembly on January 15, was 46.6 percent larger than the previous year's, and did not deviate from the 'people-centric' and infrastructure development initiatives that dominated budgets of the past three years.

The budget was fully financed, and did not contain any new taxes, largely the result of strong economic growth and surging oil revenues.

The overall economy is projected to grow by 34.3 percent in 2024, fuelled by the oil and gas sub-sector which is expected to expand by some 44.7 percent. On the other hand,

the non-oil economy is expected to grow by a healthy 11.9 percent, fuelled by the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sector, which is projected to grow by 10.4 percent. Sugar is expected to rebound by 66.1 percent, buoyed by mechanisation and value-added initiatives.

The mining and quarrying sector is projected to expand by 43.6 percent on the back of a recovery in gold and bauxite production. Manufacturing and construction are also forecasted to perform well, growing by 23.4 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

The budget announced a \$7 billion allocation to ease the cost of living, which includes increasing the income tax threshold

to \$100,000, up from \$85,000, meaning that workers who earn \$100,000 or less will no longer be required to pay income taxes.

It was also announced that the old-age pension will be increased to \$36,000 per month, benefitting 76,000 pensioners, while public assistance payments to vulnerable persons will be increased to \$19,000 per month, benefitting 35,000 persons.

The Because We Care Cash Grant, which is provided to all school-aged children, will be increased to \$45,000. In addition, a variety of benefits will be provided to various segments of the population.

A \$3,000 voucher for eye tests will be provided to over 205,000 school children and for 76,000 pensioners. For those who require spectacles, a \$15,000 voucher will be provided.

Additionally, the government will provide an \$8,000 voucher to women aged 21 to 65 to help meet the cost of cervical cancer testing.

The minimum National Insurance Scheme pension will be increased from \$35,000 monthly to \$43,075. The survivor's pension, which is payable to the deceased of an insured person, would also be increased from \$17,500 to \$21,537.

Public infrastructure received an allocation of \$204 billion – the largest. Most of it will be spent on building community roads across the country, and continuing massive bridge and road projects, including commencement of the Corentyne River bridge.

The budget allocated \$90.6 billion to the security sector, up from \$72.6 billion last year, including \$30.3 billion for the Guyana Police

Force, and \$6.5 billion to the Guyana Fire Service and the Guyana Prison Service.

To further complement the existing fleet, and to aid in the force's crime-fighting capabilities, an additional \$1 billion was provided to further expand the Force's land and water fleet with the purchase of additional vehicles, boats, and engines.

In addition, \$129.8 billion was allocated to continue the transformation of the health sector, while \$135.2 billion is aimed to upgrade the education sector.

Agriculture development will benefit from an allocation of \$97.6 billion. Out of this amount, \$6 billion will go to the Guyana Sugar Corporation; \$1.3 billion to the rice sub-sector; \$78 million to the coconut sub-sector; \$2.6 billion to advance the production other crops including high-value produce like broccoli, cauliflower, bell peppers, and lettuce' and \$967.8 million to further develop the Tacama facility, where corn and soya are being produced.

However, the bulk of the allocation – \$72.3 billion, will go to the maintenance and upgrading of the national drainage and irrigation network to improve flood control.

The government will also continue to focus on small businesses. The budget allocated \$450 million for the replenishment of the Small Business Development Fund, and \$331 million



Dwarka Lakhan



Measures that benefit the population

- Anyone working \$100,000 or less will pay no income tax
- The student loans of UG graduates will be wiped out
- Every child in public or private school will now get \$45,000
- Stable fuel prices will remain with zero tax on importation
- Shipping charges will remain below pre-pandemic levels
- More than 20,000 citizens will take home \$40,000 from a part-time work programme
- Old Age pension to increase to \$36,000
- Minimum NIS pension to increase to \$45,075

Key Budgetary Allocations

	G\$ billion
Education	135.2
Health	129.8
Agriculture	97.60
Security	90.60
Housing	78.00
Social Services	48.30

allocated for the Small Business Bureau.

According to Singh, "These monies will support initiatives that grow small and micro business developments and the promotion of entrepreneurship."

The energy sector will benefit from an allocation of \$95.7 billion, which will help the government to meet short-term energy needs, and invest in doubling its generating capacity for the medium term and advance the transition towards cleaner and more renewable energy.

A total of \$80 billion is budgeted separately to advance the flagship 300 MW gas to energy project.

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.

Transformational agenda ongoing

Georgetown – Following the presentation of Guyana's largest fiscal package of \$1.146 trillion on Monday, President Dr Irfaan Ali said his government will continue with its transformation agenda with the budget outlining several initiatives to provide disposable income to citizens.

"All of these measures are aimed at increasing disposable income, putting more money in the pockets of people, bolstering income for vulnerable groups, and of course, improving the system of services, governance, and the provision of services for our country," Ali said.

He also stated that approximately \$100 billion will be put back into the pockets of people and into the economy.

"This will stimulate spending, bolster income, and improve living conditions, addressing issues of cost of living," he noted.

The government will also continue to keep the taxes on fuel at zero, he said.

"Forty billion dollars of taxes that should have been collected will now be placed back into the pockets of people and into the economy. This measure will save our people, our country, the ordinary man on the streets, and the private sector \$40 billion," he said.

Since the government assumed office in 2020, measures have been implemented to reduce the taxes on fuel to zero, a saving of \$75 billion for consumers, Ali stated.

In 2023, the government employed about 15,000 persons through its part-time job pro-

gramme. For this year, \$10 billion has been allocated for this project.

"We will be expanding household and community disposable income by \$10 billion. What this means is that \$10 billion that was not [there] the year before is now available in communities across the country to be spent in the markets, in the local shop, and a person who has a low-income house, who now goes on this programme and gets \$40,000 every month, can repay the low-income loan, and still have \$12,000 in their pocket every month. That is the impact of this policy," Ali said.

Meanwhile, \$7 billion have been set aside to target specific groups in cost-of-living adjustment measures.

"Whilst we have been able to contain our inflation because of the measures we have implemented in 2023, global and regional inflation is creating havoc, and we will be importing a lot of that inflation into our country... So, \$7 billion are set aside to directly address and cushion the impact of costs of living as we analyse what is taking place globally," he stated.

Meanwhile, to support the further growth of the sports sector, all VAT and duties on sports equipment will be removed.

Aside from this, all VAT and duty on essential cellphone accessories such as chargers, charging cables, headphones, along with every component for phone repairs will be removed as well.



Irfaan Ali

Mani Singh

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Digitisation the answer for preserving our Indentureship records

By Dr Lake Singh
 Special to Indo-Caribbean World
Guyana is sadly lagging behind other countries where digitisation of Indentureship records is concerned. If we do not act swiftly to digitise these valuable documents, it will not only lead to erasure, but also inability to connect to our roots. That in turn means the ultimate loss of one's identity which is "worse than death", claimed Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj – the 20th century spiritual master and founder of the internationally acclaimed Bharat Sevashram Sangha.

In this the day and age of technology, we have to keep up with the times and go paperless. If we do not preserve these vital statistics, their days are surely numbered. We have to quickly implement an efficient Record Management System to save, store and protect these priceless documents.

Here are the benefits of scanning and archiving these critical data:

- It will eventually save us valuable time and money trying to retrieve these documents. With the click of a mouse, you can access them without having to leave the comfort of your home.
- You will have in place a better Data Security System where there is absolutely no chance of losing or misplacing files.
- It will lead to overall better document management.
- This will free up vital physical storage space and eliminate paper clutter.
- It will improve Disaster Recovery in cases of fires, floods, and other natural calamities. Digital images can be backed-up to tape and hard-drive or be safeguarded electronically.



Tracing one's ancestry or bloodline is a sacred act as far as majority of us are concerned. This is one of our birthrights, which must not be denied under any circumstances. Knowing our past can evoke pride and inspiration.

Here's a true story: I belong to Bharat Sevashram Sangha and saw what one of its pioneers had done in Guyana. He is no other than the Indian saint Swami Purnananda. Wanting to remind Guyanese Hindus of their glorious heritage, he brought about a spiritual awakening and revival by just reminding them of their lineage – the fact that the blood of the enlightened rishis and sages still course through their veins.

It is with this in mind that he introduced usage of the generic word "Hindu". That is how he also came up with the name "Hindu College" for his famous high school and the popularly known "Hindu-tvam" – a textbook considered the "Hindi Bible",

which literally means, *Thou art a Hindu*.

To make my point, here is a famous story often told in mystic India. There was this infant prince who got lost in the forest. However, he was later discovered by a tribe among whom he grew up, thinking, acting, and behaving as they do.

One day, one of the king's men who was passing by grew suspicious of the lad. Recognising him to be the lost prince, he straight-away approached and disclosed everything to him – the fact that he was of a royal descent.

The prince did not believe at first, but then glimpses of his former life slowly began to seep into his memory. Finally, awakening to his true identity, he went back to his kingdom and was ultimately crowned king.

Here are two world-renowned Guyanese whose lives were touched by the great Guru Swami

Purnananda. They are no other than the legendary cricketer Shivnarine Chanderpaul, and former president of Guyana Dr Bharrat Jagdeo.

Thousands of other highly educated Guyanese have benefitted (myself included) from this wonderful Hindu crusader. They are making a mark not only in Guyana, but the world over.

Lastly, I know of two Caribbean Heads of States who have successfully traced their roots in India.

They are Dr Jagdeo, and the former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar. These are two privileged individuals who had no problem using their influence to have their ancestral history traced back to its genealogical roots.

What about others who do not have such clout, nor can afford the money or time to do so? Yes, digitisation is the answer.

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Papier-mâché map disinformation over; now focus on the dispute

By Sir Ronald Sanders

The New Year broke over Guyana with Guyanese everywhere deeply worried about the intentions of the Nicolás Maduro government in Venezuela, which through various communiques and public statements and action, appeared to be gearing up to seize the Essequibo region of Guyana.

A meeting on December 14, 2023, in which Maduro and Guyana's President Irfaan Ali participated in St Vincent under the auspices of the Prime Minister of that country Dr Ralph Gonsalves, eased fears of an imminent Venezuelan invasion, but it did not quell the sense of deep disquiet among the Guyanese people.

Into this scenario of anxiety and uncertainty, on January 3 a Venezuelan group posted a photograph on Facebook that was rapidly shared on social media networks. The photograph prompted swift condemnation of Gonsalves from many Guyanese. It showed the Prime Minister and his Foreign Minister Keisal Peters standing at the two ends of a line with two Venezuelans, who were holding for the camera in front of them a *papier-mâché* map of Venezuela that depicted Essequibo as Venezuelan territory. Behind Gonsalves was a statue of Simon Bolivar.

The photograph was described by the Venezuelans who posted it as, "Very emblematic image of the PM of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines paying homage to the liberator Simon Bolivar with a map of Venezuela that includes our Essequibo."

As happens when emotions are high and anxiety pervasive, none of those who commented on the Facebook post checked either the age of the photograph, or the circumstances in which it was taken.

There appeared to be a general assumption that the photograph was taken after the St Vincent meeting of December 14, which issued *The Joint Declaration of Argyle for Dialogue and Peace between Guyana and Venezuela*.

In this connection, the comments on Facebook and on social media accused Gonsalves of acting in support of the Venezuelans by appearing in the company of Venezuelans with a map showing Essequibo as part of Venezuela.

I was never persuaded that the Facebook post and the image it offered of Gonsalves, seeming to endorse Essequibo as a part



Gonsalves (left) in the controversial Facebook photo of Venezuela, represented the truth of the situation.

I immediately posted on the Facebook page, the following observation: "I have known and highly regarded Dr Ralph Gonsalves for over 40 years. I cannot be convinced that when he stood behind the artwork map showing the Essequibo incorporated into Venezuela, he was made aware of the image being displayed. The Ralph Gonsalves I know and respect would not consciously do such a one-sided thing, while the world awaits a decision on the Guyana-Venezuela controversy from the International Court of Justice; and while he, himself, is playing the role of CELAC's honest broker"



Sir Ronald Sanders

In order to write this commentary, I called Gonsalves to learn his side of this story. He told me what he subsequently included in a letter to Presidents Ali and Maduro concerning this incident. He explained that he was not aware of the photograph, but confirmed that it was taken at a ceremony commemorating Bolivar in St Vincent on the grounds of the Venezuelan Embassy in December 2022.

He went on to say in his letter, as he had told me: "While the photographs were being taken, I am advised that someone attached to the Venezuelan Embassy placed the *papier-mâché* depiction of the said map in front of us. I did not look at what the depiction was. I assumed that it was about Simon Bolivar."

As all leaders know – politicians and otherwise – persons

take photographs in which they appear, but have little knowledge of anything or anyone that is not within their vision. Gonsalves was behind the map, and photographs are taken within seconds. That situation could have happened to anyone; and indeed, they frequently do.

He described the incident as "an innocent inadvertence on his part", and he regarded it as "unfortunate" that it "has been used by some to drum up, unnecessarily, antipathy of one kind or another".

He also understood "all the emotions attendant on this controversial issue"; and recognised that, as happened on this occasion, "from time to time there will be flare-ups".

Gonsalves then said to both Ali and Maduro, "[We] as leaders must maintain a patience and a calm knowing that sun brightens stone, even as the river burns". For those who do not recognise those words, they are taken from one of the iconic poems of Guyana's Poet Laureate, the late Martin Carter, *Death of a Slave*.

Gonsalves went on to urge that "about this matter of the *papier-mâché* depiction, hopefully it has been laid to rest, where it ought properly to reside among the assorted ghosts from the past, which ought never to rule us from the grave".

None should forget that in the long months of 2020 as Guyana's democracy was being sorely tested, and the free will of the people, as expressed at the ballot box, was being jeopardised, Gonsalves stood in solidarity with all the people of Guyana, seeking peace, stability, and democratic rights.

Like every man, Gonsalves, is not infallible; but one thing is for certain, he is a Caribbean man, and he cares deeply about our one Caribbean region.

Undoubtedly, he has a friendship with Maduro, and he is seeking as best he can to promote acceptance of a lasting solution to the Guyana-Venezuela controversy. That is Gonsalves' nature. But he is no enemy of Guyana, and none should wrongly try to make him so.

He has explained himself fully and satisfactorily. As he has asked, the matter should be laid to rest.

Of the greatest importance now is that Guyana and its Caricom partners must move forward, focusing on the legal and diplomatic efforts necessary to end the Venezuela controversy.

Sir Ronald is Antigua and Barbuda's Ambassador to the US and the Organisation of American States

Venezuela's Essequibo claim raises historical issues on territory acquisitions

By Trevor Sudama

Venezuela's attempt to annex the Essequibo region, which currently constitutes about three-quarters of Guyana's land area, raises a number of issues of historical and current significance.

One may question how far back in history is it legitimate or feasible to go to claim that an injustice has been perpetrated against a territory and its people, and to seek redress. Venezuela maintains that the 1899 arbitration agreement that settled the boundary between then British Guiana and Venezuela a century and a quarter ago was obtained against the interests of Venezuela.

Two centuries ago, Trinidad was part of the captaincy of Venezuela, and was forcibly taken over from the Spanish Empire by the British. Therefore, should representations be made today for Trinidad to be returned to the jurisdiction of Venezuela?

Over three centuries ago, Spanish soldiers invaded the territory of Venezuela and brutally killed and decimated the majority of the Indigenous tribes in their own ancestral land, and claimed the territory for the Spanish Crown.

Therefore, should the current descendants of these Indigenous tribes lay claim to Venezuela as belonging to them, as their ancestors were massacred or exiled by the marauding Spaniards – the far distant ancestors of the current Venezuelan population of Spanish origin?

The 1899 arbitration agreement, followed by the Treaty of 1905, were endorsed by the then-government of Venezuela. Is it legitimate for a current government to repudiate an agreement acceded to by a predecessor? If so, how much will such a precedent create international disorder, distrust, animosity, and conflict?

Then there is the question of the validity in international law to annex land under the jurisdiction of another State on the basis of the approval of such a venture by an internal referendum.

If international law is rejected as a means of settling disputes between countries, then the alternative is to resort to force, which appears to be the intent of the Nicolás Maduro government, as recently indicated by military exercises close to the Guyana border. Venezuela has flatly rejected the application of international law and the jurisdiction of the International



The territory (in red bars) in dispute. Wiki Commons photo

Court of Justice in resolving the current dispute.

The insistence by Venezuela on bilateral negotiations with Guyana can only have one objective, and that is that Guyana cedes all or a significant part of the Essequibo to Venezuela. It is inconceivable that bilateral negotiations would be intended by Venezuela to confirm the existing borders.

Furthermore, such negotiations, if agreed to, will be conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, where one party has a far larger population, economy, and military than the other, and has confirmed its aggressive intentions.

The Argyle Declaration, though perhaps well-intentioned by its promoters, is as much a public relations exercise as anything else. Maduro wants to be seen as reasonable and conciliatory, but behind this gesture is an ominous intent.

If the declaration is intended to promote peace and non-aggression, then the organisers may have asked Maduro, as an act of good faith, to withdraw or even suspend his decree to appoint a governor for the Essequibo who happens to be a general, to build military infrastructure there, to direct



Trevor Sudama

Venezuelan oil companies to conduct exploration and drilling in the disputed territory, to issue ultimatums to oil companies currently engaged in the maritime areas of Essequibo to leave, and to grant Venezuelan residency to the current inhabitants of Essequibo as if their preferences for State allegiance are of no

significance.

None of the above has been conceded by Maduro.

Guyanese people do not have pleasant memories of the attitude of Commonwealth Caribbean countries to them. The majority of the latter turned a blind eye, or even supported the suffocating dictatorship and open vote-rigging of Forbes Burnham. Guyanese fleeing from this oppression were treated with disdain and contempt by the immigration authorities in many Caribbean countries.

Now there is equivocation with respect to Venezuela's aggression towards Guyana as many of these countries are mindful of their self-interest in obtaining natural gas from Venezuela, or oil imports at concessionary prices.

Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Keith Rowley, has approvingly invoked the doctrine espoused by Henry Kissinger that countries do not have friends, but interests. This echoes Winston Churchill's dictum

many decades ago that countries do not have permanent friends or permanent enemies, but permanent interests. Adherence to principle is not a concern.

In light of the above stance, it would be advisable for Guyana not to rely too much on the support of Caricom 'friends'. Guyana may have better luck with the unequivocal backing of the 'imperialists' of North America and Western Europe.

Then, there is the phenomenon of unrequited greed. Venezuela possesses the largest oil reserves in the world, which it is unable to exploit for the benefit of its people for numerous reasons.

Then there was the indiscriminate nationalisation of foreign oil companies. The exodus of professional and skilled workers became a flood. The country experienced extreme lawlessness, lack of democracy, oppression of the majority, pervasive mismanagement and corruption, and the alleged enrichment of government officials from the narcotics trade.

Venezuela was regarded as a corrupt, mismanaged, narco-state long before US sanctions were imposed. The situation forced an estimated 25 percent to 30 percent of its population to flee the country.

Yet Maduro wants possession and control over more oil and gas deposits in Essequibo and its maritime area. How will these be exploited and for whose benefit is another question.

Trevor Sudama is a former Member of Parliament, and a former board member of the Central Bank in Trinidad and Tobago



Usain Bolt

Bolt 'firm' year after missing \$12M

Kingston – One year after the uncovering of massive fraud that saw over (US) \$12 million missing from his investments, Jamaican sprint legend Usain Bolt has said he continues “fighting the fight”, and “still a hold firm”, the *Jamaica Observer* reported.

Bolt made the remarks in a cryptic post on social media on January 11, a year after discovery of the biggest fraud in Jamaica’s history. It involved private securities dealer Stocks and Securities Limited, and has made headlines across the globe.

In the video posted to *Instagram*, a sombre Bolt said, “Yo peeps, it’s been one year now... Just want you to know that mi deh here... Still a fight the fight, still a stay strong.”

Bolt also thanked everyone who supported him throughout the ordeal. He titled the video, “One year ago today but just know still a hold firm.”

The multi-billion dollar scandal impacted over 200 clients, including Bolt, who has lost over (US) \$12 million (J\$2B).

He appears to be the SSL client who was hit the hardest – out of the \$12.7 million invested, only \$12,000 remains in his account.

Total investor losses are estimated at (US) \$30 million (J\$4B). Many of the victims are either domiciled in Jamaica, or living overseas, as reported by Jamaica’s Financial Investigation Division.

At this time, the investigation involves Jamaica’s FID and its Fraud Squad. Also aiding in the investigation are US Federal Bureau of Investigations, a UK-based forensic firm, along with other agencies.

So far, one individual, former wealth advisor Jean-Ann Panton, has been charged.

Panton has since confessed to stealing from clients’ accounts, and has been charged with three counts of larceny as a servant, five counts of forgery, five counts of uttering forged documents, three counts of engaging in transactions involving criminal property, and three counts

of breaching the Cybercrimes Act.

Her case is currently before the Home Circuit Court.

As reported last year, a former SSL CEO, Zachary Harding told the *Jamaica Observer* that during the nearly three years of his tenure at SSL, he was never advised that Bolt was a client with investments in the company. Part of his role included ensuring the funds were kept safe, the *Jamaica Observer* reported.

Panton was an SSL employee for 25 years. As reported by *Nationwide* news and other Jamaican media outlets, she told FSC and police in an affidavit she stole around \$900,000 to \$1 million from SSL accounts.

As a client relationship manager, Panton said she interacted with customers, and assisted with their deposits and payments.

As the affidavit stated, said she started borrowing money from clients’ accounts in 2010, when her father was diagnosed with cancer. She needed the money to pay medical expenses, and when he died three years later, she also took money from the accounts to cover her father’s funeral expenses.

Panton said she had no way of repaying the money, but it was the only solution she saw at the time. Later, she stole funds to pay for her brother to be committed to a facility after he attempted to kill her mother, she said.

She also continued to steal for various reasons amid financial hardship during the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is unclear whether Panton dipped into Bolt’s portfolio. Harding told the *Jamaica Observer* she managed his accounts.

“My understanding is that [Bolt] only ever dealt with one person with his account, and that was Jean-Ann Panton,” said Harding.

“So as to what Jean-Ann Panton could have been doing, or saying, or showing him, nobody would know except for her, because she was the only person that they dealt with,” he said. Harding has since resigned from SSL.

Dominica accords Etienne official funeral

Roseau – Dominica’s government held an official funeral on January 10 for former Director of the Pan American Health Organisation, Dr Carissa Etienne. She died in the US on December 1, the *Caribbean Media Corporation* reported earlier this month.

According to a statement from Dominica’s Cabinet Secretariat, the government accorded the 71-year-old Etienne the official funeral “in honour of her outstanding contribution to public health administration in Dominica, and as Director of the PAHO from 2013-2023”.

Etienne retired from PAHO, and was declared Director-Emeritus on September 30, 2022 during the 30th Pan American Sanitary Conference.

As she stated during the ceremony, “From a little girl in Massacre, Dominica, walking barefoot, going to school, being as every other

child was: if that child can rise to become director of PAHO, then there is hope for every child that walks the streets of the Americas (including the Caribbean).”

PAHO also paid tribute to Etienne, noting that she was “credited for leading PAHO’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the region of the Americas, as well as for efforts to control the Zika and chikungunya epidemics and cholera and yellow fever outbreaks in Haiti and Brazil.”

She was Assistant Director General of the WHO from 2008-2013; PAHO assistant director from 2003-2008, and director of Primary Health Care Services in Dominica 1989-2001.

Dominica’s President Sylvanie Burton, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit, and other government ministers attended the funeral service.



Ask Jay...

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LIEN ABUSE SURGES IN ONTARIO

Think of a lien like a sticky note on your stuff, saying, “I lent money, and this is the collateral”. It’s like pawning your favourite guitar for some quick cash. If you don’t pay back the money with a little extra interest on time, the lender can sell your guitar to get their money back.

Mortgages are like the official version – your house is the collateral for the home loan. And in Ontario, if you provide a service or materials for a project, you can slap a lien on the property, kind of like a “You owe me” note that is called a Notice of Security Interest (NOSI).

Lien abuse is a severe issue in Ontario – last year the province saw a whopping 38,000 of liens filed! Many of these liens come from companies handling home-related services like furnaces and AC units. The catch is that homeowners often discover these liens only when they’re ready to refinance or sell their place. It becomes a nail-biting race because they must clear the lien ASAP before sealing the deal, and the disputed amount can be ridiculously high! Homeowners usually pay the ransom to sell or refinance their homes. These companies target seniors, new immigrants, families on a tight budget, and those who aren’t fluent in English.

Imagine this: Laurie thought she bought a furnace and AC for \$7,335 with a sweet zero percent interest deal. Plot twist – it was a rental agreement, and what was the actual cost? A whopping \$20,000 over the equipment’s life! But Laurie fought back in small claims court, scoring \$10,000 in punitive damages. Talk about a victory!

Laurie’s story isn’t a lone ranger. Thousands are in the same boat, but most homeowners don’t dive into legal battles. They usually end up signing a rental contract with a tiny chance to buy the gear.

In March 2018, Ontario banned door-to-door HVAC system sales, and recently made moves by tweaking the Consumer Protection Act. Now, homeowners can swiftly ditch these troublesome liens. It’s high time all similar contracts get the green light from homeowners’ solicitors before anything gets installed. Let’s bring clarity to the contracts and protect homeowners!

Todd McCarthy, Ontario’s Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery, dropped some truth bombs about NOSIs. According to him, these things don’t serve any legitimate commercial interest – they’re just deadweight now. His bold idea? Instead of making it easier for folks to kick these liens off their title, let’s make sure they can’t be slapped on there in the first place. Genius, right?

Here’s the lowdown on keeping your home and wallet safe: find a reliable contractor recommended by your inner circle to keep your current gear in top-notch shape. Are you changing things up? Get three written quotes, and weigh all your options before diving in.

Buying beats renting when it comes to equipment. However, if you’re keen on renting, be smart about it – have someone in the know check out those contracts. And if selling is on your horizon, snag that equipment instead of renting. Buyers love a home with an owned HVAC system; it might just sweeten the deal. Safety and savings, all in one!

If you’re dishing out rent for your HVAC system, dive into that contract ASAP. Call a real estate pro to scope out your property title – look out for sneaky NOSIs. And if one pops up, don’t wait – deal with it pronto. These rental companies love keeping you in the dark, so it’s time to flip the switch and take control of your home game!

Welcome to the era of artificial intelligence taking the spotlight in our lives. But hold on tight – scam artists are gearing up with high-tech tricks to drain your wallet. The trick? Resist temptation, and here’s the golden rule: never sign a contract you don’t fully get. Bring in the professionals to decode the fine print before you dive in. It’s the savvy move to keep your financial blood where it belongs – safe and sound.

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Narendra Bhairo powering his way up with a lift

'True grit, and dhal and rice'

Narendra Bhairo

March 20, 1946 - September 20, 2023

A true son of Guyana, Narendra Bhairo always claimed his immense strength as a bodybuilder came from his consumption of dhal and rice.

And despite his small frame, he still made his way in the world, going on to become a champion, world class power-lifter.

His physique, stamina, and endurance were not aided by enhancement drugs. Whenever asked what was energising his endurance, he would reply, "No drugs; no steroids; just true grit, and dhal and rice, man!"

Bhairo was born in 1946 in Cornelia Ida, West Coast Demerara, Guyana. A small-framed, frail boy, and an asthmatic, his father, a pharmacist in Leonora, recommended bodybuilding. The advice was not without precedence – Bhairo's uncle had followed the same path, and had competed as part of the British Guiana power-lifting team from 1910 to 1915.

But there was not much real estate to work with given the young Bhairo's small frame. Later, as he recalled for *Stabroek News* in 2001, "I was only small; not a giant, just 98 pounds – seven stone."

Then the family moved to England in 1964, Bhairo making the trip with his six brothers and sisters. The move to England also saw a pivot in his weightlifting from bodybuilding to power-lifting. Bhairo was now following in the path of his power-lifting uncle back in the second decade of the 1900s.

A year after he made the change to power-lifting in London, the young Bhairo entered and won the British flyweight championship. He then moved on to successful competition in Europe, but was then sidelined with a back injury.

He returned to Guyana to recuperate.



English newspapers report Bhairo's successes; above, on the weights



Training resumed afterwards in England. In 1975, Bhairo again won the British championship. Competing abroad with the British team in Australia, he placed second in the world championship in 1979. This was followed by third place in the world championship games in Ohio.

In 1980, Bhairo came third in Arlington, Texas; finally, in 1981, he took the world championship in Calcutta.

Aware of his Indo-Caribbean roots, Bhairo noted the significance, and confluence, of his "dhal and rice" diasporic origins with his victory in Calcutta, India.

When the confluences of history, personal success, and his ancestral origin were pointed out to his British team-mates, the moment went completely over their heads.

Their response was, "You're here representing Britain!"

All the same, the victory was a moment to be savoured. And it all came as a consequence of Bhairo's grit and determination; and also, no doubt, from his ancestral, dietary infusions of "dhal and rice".

As Bhairo told *Stabroek News* in 2001, he achieved his successes, and the many records, while working full time, training via a regimen of commitment and dedication, and paying his own way.

Indeed, it was true grit that power-lifted him upwards to the pinnacle of success.

He stopped competing professionally in the mid-1980s, going into business in the garment industry.

Bhairo won 75 trophies in a career that spanned nearly 30 years in power-lifting; he took 12 British championships, five European wins, and made the *Guinness Book of Records* for lifting eight times his tiny body weight, a record that he held from 1982 to 1990.



Ramphal played a pivotal role in Guyana's security, administration

By Brian Ramphal

Our Dad was a man of his time, shaped by a history that often demanded more than it gave. In the discipline of his ways, often harsh, he played an important part in our upbringing in newly independent Guyana.

As for me, upon my departure for Canada in 1979, Dad showed me an article in the local newspaper on computers. He encouraged me to study computers when I arrived in Canada.

I started university with the intent of becoming a lawyer to fulfil Dad's own dream. However, I pivoted to computer science, and today, I'm a Technology Entrepreneur. All because of Dad's advice 44 years ago.

In April last year Sham and I embarked on a 12-day trek to Mount Everest Base Camp. It was a pilgrimage to experience firsthand Lord Shiva's and the ancient Rishis' path in the majestic Himalayan mountains. Throughout the challenging and strenuous trek, I found moments to offer silent prayers to the Hindu Gods for Dad.

Our Dad's life was marked by a series of remarkable achievements, each reflecting his diverse interests and capabilities.

Among Dad's accomplishments are:

- He successfully completed training programs at the esteemed Police Academy in Great Britain, showcasing his dedication to law enforcement.

- As the former Chief Immigration Officer, and member of the elite Special Branch unit in Guyana, he played a pivotal role in the coun-

try's national security and administration.

- Notably, in the height of the Cuban missile crisis, he had the unique opportunity to meet the late Fidel Castro during the Cuban leader's visit to Guyana in the 1960s, a testament to his significant role in government affairs.

- He was the lead investigator in the Jonestown Massacre, a critical and challenging moment in Guyana's and the US' history.

- In recognition of his exceptional service during the Jonestown Massacre, he received a commendation from the US FBI Agency, a rare and prestigious honour.

- Beyond his professional life, he was a dedicated farmer, cultivating the land in both Guyana and the US with the same passion he brought to his official duties.

- An avid reader, he nurtured a lifelong love for learning, regularly subscribing to *National Geographic* magazine, reflecting his broad range of interests and endless curiosity.

Upon learning of Dad's passing, his colleague in London Victor Yacoob said, "Your dad was indeed a distinguished gentleman; he commands respect and exudes excellence!"

He was well-mannered, well informed, well-dressed, and well-established as a public figure".

Upon learning of Dad's passing the distinguished professor, historian, author, and my friend Dr Clem Seecharan stated, "I do hope it's a consolation that many Guyanese know he served his country with distinction – and that he has left a legacy both to the land of his birth as well as to your own family".

Well done, Dad!



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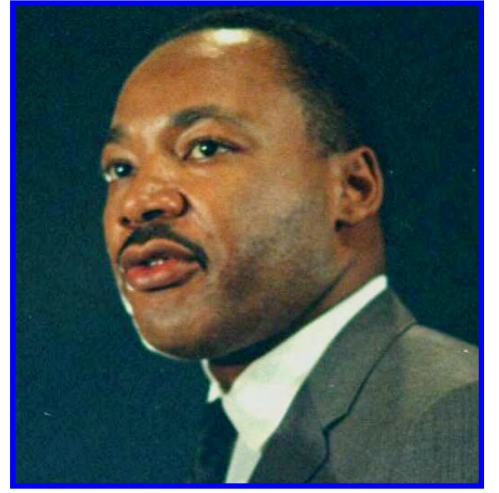
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How 'content of character' has played out since 'Dream Speech'

By Dhanpaul Narine

We may have come in different ways, but we are in the same boat now. We can fight each other and sink, or work together and safely reach the shore.

In 1963, an attempt was made to redeem the soul of America, to open a dialogue on its destiny. How cogent was it, and 60 years later is the dream still in good shape?

When Martin Luther King stood at the Monument in Washington and delivered his famous speech, many felt that it was a landmark and a turning point in the civil rights movement in the US. As King outlined his vision for America, he put aside part of his prepared text and reaffirmed the values for which this nation stood.

King's call for mutual tolerance and respect was passionate. He spoke about the need for equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the pillars on which our doctrine was built. They sounded good on paper, but in practice these values were sadly lacking.

King's imprint on the national ethos and character is best summed up in his speech on August 28, 1963.

He said, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

Two decades earlier another peacemaker said, "All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family."

He was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who became an inspiration for Martin Luther King.

In the years since the 'Dream Speech', there have been fundamental changes in the US. What are these changes, and if King were to visit again, what would the children say to him?

In short, how is the 'content of character' played out in the cities, in the suburbs, and the boardrooms of America?

The pictures from segregation are harrowing. It was in 1954 that the Supreme Court upheld the case in *Brown vs the Board of Education*. This meant that the classrooms were opened up to children of all races. Thurgood Marshall took on the case, and he later went on to become the first Black judge in the US Supreme Court.

But even though the classrooms were desegregated there was discrimination in other places. In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested after she refused to give her seat to a white passenger in the bus. This took place in Montgomery, Alabama.

A year later, the Federal government was forced to send in the troops to escort Black students to a school in Little Rock, Arkansas.

In North Carolina, there was sit-in at Woolworth's led by Black students to protest discrimination. The dreaded Ku Klux Klan also made their hooded presence felt by attacking Blacks.

These, and other incidents, catapulted Martin Luther King into the public eye, and his calls for non-violence struck a chord on the national conscience.

While non-violence formed the central philosophy of King's mission, he was keenly aware of the plight of Blacks, and he addressed it publicly.

King wanted a redistribution of wealth in the US. He felt that the system had given Blacks a 'bad check'. But as King said, Blacks have refused to accept the fact that "there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation".

King went on to make an economic case for the mobility of Blacks when he said that they lived "in a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity".

King's position is that there can be no achieving of social equality unless there is economic equality.

The point is that while we link arms and sing boisterously, "We shall overcome", little progress will be made in real terms if the playing field is not level.

If people live in societies that are fractured by inequality,



Martin Luther King

then all the rhetoric in the world will fail to redress the situation.

There is no doubt that King was fighting an entrenched establishment, in the same manner that Gandhi did in South Africa and India. But the remedy as both peacemakers saw it was to fight hatred with love, and violence with peace.

If King were to revisit America, he would be pleased with many changes that are for the better. The schools are fully integrated, and many children have made good use of education and have moved on to high-paying jobs, even running corporations.

College enrolment records show that both Blacks and whites earn about the same for comparable qualifications. Blacks hold dearly the right to vote, and for the most part they take that right seriously.

Some of them have become Governors and Mayors, and the Jim Crow laws are a thing of the past.

King would be happy to see a Black President in Barack Obama, something that he could only dream about in 1963, when he was holding "these truths to be self-evident". The election of a Black President has engendered pride among Blacks, and a desire by many children to do well in school.

One positive aspect of the Obama campaign is that he was able to cross the racial divide, and to pick up white votes even more than John Kerry did in 2004.

America has come a long way when voters chose a Black candidate Deval Patrick to be the Governor of Massachusetts. Deval was re-elected as Governor for a second term in 2010.

In terms of race relations there is no more segregation in parks, in sports, the armed forces, or in other public places.

But there is a more fundamental analysis to segregation. America has realised that discrimination should be outlawed, both in word and deed.

Today, there are several ways of reporting discrimination, and those that are found to break the law can be taken to the courts. A guilty verdict can lead to hefty fines and a loss of consumer support in the business sector.

At the international level, King would be pleased to know that apartheid in South Africa was outlawed, and that his movement inspired the Bristol Omnibus Company in England to integrate its riders, as was the case in Montgomery, Alabama.

While these are positive achievements, there is cause for worry, and King would have been the first to make his views known about it.

Don Lemon the former CNN anchor, said that the number one problem affecting the Blacks is out-of-wedlock-births. This is destroying the Black community, he says.

According to Lemon, "Just because you can have a baby, it doesn't mean you should, especially without planning for one or getting married first. More than 72 percent of children in the African-American community are born out of wedlock. That means absent fathers. And the studies show that the lack of a role model is an express train to prison, and the cycle continues." In 1963, only 25 percent of Black children were born out of wedlock, and this was seen as a crisis at the time.

One can argue whether the 2013 figure is really 72 percent, or slightly lower, but this is irrelevant. The structure of Black families is disintegrating, and it is causing a crisis. The fact is that each family will do well to have responsible parents, and this means being involved in the welfare of the children.

King had argued more needed to be done to address the economic inequities that existed between whites and Blacks. He would be disappointed to learn that in 2009 the median net worth among whites was 20 times more than blacks.

Then there is education. There is more that can be done to improve literacy, and to get Black students to pass the standardised tests.

In a good many cases, funding is lacking in Black school districts when compared to affluent white neighbourhoods. Poverty, drugs, Black-on-Black crimes, drop-outs from school, and a justice system that treats Blacks unfairly at times have combined to undermine the structure of Black families.

The American Civil Liberties Union states that, "Blacks are more often likely than whites to be arrested for the same crime and in some places their arrest is over eight times more likely".

King would be horrified to see sagging pants, the use of the N-word that seems to be ingrained in the vocabulary, and low self-esteem among young adults.

There is the view that the destiny of Blacks lies in their own hands. According to one publication, "Americans who finish high school, work full-time and wait until they are 21 and married before they have children have only a two percent chance of being poor."

If Blacks meet these three conditions, then the dream of Martin Luther King will be realised.



Rosa Parks



Pandita Indrani (second from left) with the other three female scholars in a class of 40 students in the Master of Arts Hindu Studies program



Pandita Indrani (fourth from left, front row) with members of her cohort; third from left is Professor Sadashiv Dwivedi, coordinator of the Bharat Adhyayan Kendra

Pandita Indrani Rampersad continues her lifelong journey of learning

By Romeo Kaseram
LJI Reporter

Her latest academic achievement is even further evidence that the energy driving Pandita Dr Indrani Rampersad is yet to diminish in her pioneering journey of scholarship, teaching, women's activism, and journalism, which she undertook just over five decades ago.

Now into her seventh decade, last month Trinidad and Tobago's first State-certified female pundit, Pandita Indrani, stood at her convocation ceremony in Varnasi, India, towering with confidence among her more youthful academic cohort, a proud graduate in the Master of Arts program for Hindu Studies at the Banaras Hindu University.

"I am still studying; knowledge and sharing knowledge are so important," she told the *Trinidad Express* in an interview early last month.

She added, "Because of what I have studied over the past two years, I now have a better understanding of my traditions. And the more I learn, the more I realise how little I know."

At the same time, Pandita Indrani reiterated her lifelong credo, from which she continues to practice, teach, and guide others in Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean region, and further abroad, stating, "I wish to motivate people to never stop learning; never surrender your mind with blind faith to any ideology handed down to you without thinking freely and critically. Be open to learning from all quarters."

As she advises, so she practices. For her many achievements, Pandita Indrani is well-respected at home, and by the diaspora abroad, for her knowledge, her courage in overcoming systemic obstacles, and for the pioneering work she has done as Trinidad and Tobago's first State-certified female pundit.

She is also renowned for her knowledge about Hinduism, the many traditions, and about the lives of the diaspora in the Caribbean and abroad, which is encyclopaedic.

Graduate and post-graduate studies are also significant components that contribute to Pandita Indrani's vast repository of knowledge.

Earlier in her life, she completed a graduate course at New York University on Indian performance. This led to a research fellowship at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, where she became the first academic in Trinidad and Tobago to conduct an intensive study into the history and traditions of Ramleela.

Extending her Ramleela research globally, Pandita Indrani made trips to India, Guyana, Suriname, Mauritius, and Fiji. The outcome was a pioneering and respectable text, *Ram Lilas in North India and Mauritius*, which was published by the Ayodhya Research Institute in India.

Today, she is a trustee at the Ayodhya Research Institute, the appointment emerging as a consequence of her extensive knowledge of Ramleela and the Indentured Hindu diaspora.

While her research and pursuit of graduate and post-graduate studies have since contributed to her later, formative, and now vintage decades, Pandita Indrani acknowledged that before she started out on her pioneering journey to learn more about the traditions of the Indian diaspora, she was already on another lifelong quest. It was to study Hinduism.

"I always had a curiosity about my ancestral traditions. I knew of these traditions because having lived it, I wanted to know more from a scholarly angle. I was also doing yoga, which motivated me to go a bit deeper," she told the *Trinidad Express*.

Pandita Indrani was a young lady, early into her second decade, when she travelled to India to study Hinduism. However, there were no courses available; just a few on Indian philosophy.

Here was a bewildering discovery of a significant lacunae;



Pandita Indrani Rampersad



Pandita Indrani (second from right) with Anil Yadav (left to right), Deepak Gupta, and Abhishek Chaubey from the Hindu Studies program

universities in the US and UK offered further academic education on Hinduism. What an irony it was that India, the birthplace of Hinduism, offered no courses that were specific to Hindu studies.

As she noted, since gaining Independence in 1947, India has remained on a modernisation track based on the then-European leftist, socialist ideology. Such an ideology marginalised and demonised what was traditional, particularly the ancient civilisation of Hinduism.

Then, in 2021, over five decades later after that trip to India, Banaras Hindu University began offering its first ever Master of Arts programme in Hindu Studies. It was an opportunity that could not be ignored, Pandita Indrani stated.

She discovered on her first day of classes that she was the eldest scholar in her cohort; neither did it bother her that Banaras' Vice Chancellor, and all of her professors, were younger.

Instead, she remained focused on what was yet another stage of her pioneering journey of self-discovery, and the pursuit and acquisition of deeper knowledge, Pandita Indrani told *Indo-Caribbean World* last week.

Here was an opportunity at a more academic and scholarly level to fulfil her life-long desire to explore her roots, traditions, and to discover her place in the universe as a member of the Indian diaspora; here was *carpe diem*, and she had to seize the moment.

Said Pandita Indrani: "The Bharat Adhyayan Kendra of Banaras Hindu University is where India's first MA Hindu Studies started. One could get degrees in other religious traditions, but not in Hinduism. This is a first, and I was delighted to be part of this change."

As she declared, doing so brought her into an orbit of knowledge that was central to her identity as a fourth generation-born descendant of Indian origin, especially in the Indentured Indian diaspora.

"The Bharat Adhyayan Kendra is under the visionary leadership of Professor Sadashiv Dwivedi. He and his colleagues went out of their way to provide me with course materials in English," she stated.

The immersion left her in "awe at the rich sources of India's grand heritage contained in the Master of Arts Hindu studies course", she stated.

Additionally, "It made me better appreciate my Indentured Indian background, and the power of village life. I am not the same having graduated from these studies. I feel so much more empowered by the knowledge that I gained."

Thanks to her teachers, Pandita Indrani graduated with Distinction, and was fourth on the Merit list.

Said Pandita Indrani: "It is only because of [India's Prime Minister] Narendra Modi that this course now exists; left to those people who call themselves 'secular', there would be no recognition of Hinduism."

She added, "Modi's government has resisted this, and is determined to meet the needs of all its peoples, including the majority – more than 80 percent of India's population are Hindus."

In the pioneering footsteps of Banaras Hindu University, today more of India's universities are now offering courses in Hindu studies, Pandita Indrani revealed. As she noted, among the programs studied were Hinduism and Brahmanism; Hindu of Foreign Origin; The Antiquity and Meaning of the term Hindu; the Vedas, Mahabharata, Puranas, and many more.

As Pandita Indrani told the *Trinidad Express*, she came to appreciate the nuances, power, and the beauty in the folk traditions that she noted were sacrificed on the altar of modernism over the passage of the decades since India gained Independence in 1947.

And closer and more relevant to her world in the Caribbean, Pandita Indrani said her studies also focused on how the historical and indomitable colonial powers impacted negatively on the inheritances, legacies, and the traditions of the people they oppressed.

Consequently, she will continue to resist Sanskritisation, where the lower castes adopt the cultural patterns of the higher castes in order to climb up the hierarchical order.

As she declared, moving forward, there must be more activism and resistance to colonial mindsets and 'woke' mentalities that disrespect Hinduism's humanising and civilisational values, among others.

It is also her hope that more members of the diaspora would take a page from her book, enable their learning, and similarly break new ground.

Pandita Indrani also revealed a profound and futuristic desire, stating that she also envisions a world where respect grows for our rich cultural diversity, and for a time of elevation, when disrespect for the knowledge systems of our ancient civilisations is no more.

Goodbye Bay a gripping story with room for surprise, humour, tragedy

The final and posthumously published novel *Goodbye Bay* by celebrated Trinidad and Tobago author Jennifer Rahim was officially launched last week by the NGC Bocas Lit Fest, in partnership with the Faculty of Humanities and Education and the Department of Literary, Cultural and Communication Studies of The University of the West Indies, St Augustine. The event was hosted at The UWI's School of Education Auditorium in St Augustine in east Trinidad.

Rahim died unexpectedly in March 2023 at the age of 60. She was an author and poet, literary scholar, and lecturer at The UWI.

Her early writing career is best known for her poetry, and she was recognised for winning a Casa de las Américas Prize for her book *Approaching Sabbaths* in 2010.

Her *Curfew Chronicles*, a novel-length sequence of linked stories, which was published in 2017, won the 2018 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature.

Goodbye Bay was completed and scheduled for publication by *Peepal Tree Press* at the time of Rahim's death. Set in the fictional village of Macaima in 1963, a year after Trinidad and Tobago's Independence, the novel tells the interwoven stories of an individual – the narrator, Anna Bridgemohan, seeking respite from the pressures of her life in what she thinks will be a simpler place, and a community.

As *Peepal Tree* notes on its website, "*Goodbye Bay* is simply among the very best Caribbean novels to have been written, and not just in recent years. It tells a gripping story with room for surprise, humour, tragedy and redemption. It offers us half a dozen brilliant characters, each drawn with exceptional psychological subtlety."

It also notes that the protagonist, Anna, is "herself... flawed, a little prickly and sometimes too ready to jump to conclusions".

At the same time, Anna remains "a complex narrator whom we ultimately trust and care for, but who is created in such a way as to offer space for the reader's perceptions."

An historical novel, *Goodbye Bay* asks probing questions about the nature of the means and ends of the project of Independence, and its failures with respect to race, class, gender, and sexuality, *Peepal Tree* also states.



Jennifer Rahim

It adds, "In the characters of Anna and Sam/Samantha, it offers a profoundly sensitive treatment of the fluidities of sexual identity. It is written in a seamless mix of sharply observed realism with moments of rich humour, an undercurrent of the kind of supernatural that flourishes in such a place as Macaima, and passages of numinous poetic intensity that cannot fail to bring prickles to the spine."

Rahim's earlier book, *Curfew Chronicles* was described by Lorna Goodison "as one of the most ambitious books ever attempted by a Caribbean writer". However, *Goodbye Bay* "takes that ambition another stage further," *Peepal Tree* declares.

Additionally, "It dramatises its narrator's dissatisfaction with organised religion, but also explores the possibilities of transcendence through art and the experience of the numinous that can arise in the relationships between humans and the natural world, and between each other."

Peepal Tree's Jeremy Poynting noted of *Goodbye Bay* that "it asks probing questions about the nature of the means and ends of the project of Independence, and its failures with respect to race, class, gender and sexuality... It tells a gripping story with room for surprise, humour, tragedy, and redemption".

Rahim's untimely passing last year was a shock to Trinidad and Tobago's literary community, and a great loss to Caribbean readers, said Nicholas Laughlin, festival and programme director of the Bocas Lit Fest.

He added it remains painful to think about the books Rahim could have written were she not so untimely called away. However, there remains consolation in the books that she did write, he declared.

Rahim was an award winning writer of poetry, fiction, and literary criticism. Her books of fiction include *Curfew*

Chronicles: A Fiction (2017), which won the 2018 overall OCM Bocas prize for Caribbean Literature; and *Songster and Other Stories* (2007).

She also wrote collections of poetry. *Approaching Sabbaths* (2009) was awarded a Casa de las Américas Prize in 2010; *Redemption Rain: Poems* was published in 2011; and *Ground Level: Poems* appeared in 2014. *Sanctuaries of Invention* (2021) was her last poetry collection.

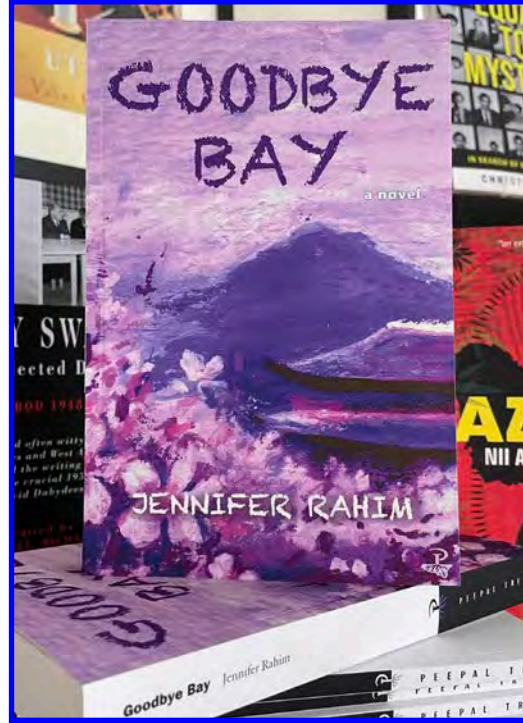
Her poems have appeared in several Caribbean and international journals and anthologies, among them: *The Caribbean Writer*, *Small Axe*, *The Trinidad and Tobago Review*, *The Graham House Review*, *Mangrove*, *The Malahat Review*, *Crossing Water*, *Creation Fire*, *The Sisters of Caliban*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and the *Atlanta Review*.

Her short stories appeared in *The New Voices*, *The Caribbean Writer*, and *Caribbean Voices I*.

Rahim also won many awards, among them The Gulf Insurance Writers Scholarship (1996) to attend the Caribbean Writers Summer Institute, University of Miami; *The New Voices* Award of Merit (1993)

for outstanding contributions to *The New Voices* journal; The Writers Union of Trinidad and Tobago Writer of the Year Award (1992) for the publication, *Mothers Are Not The Only Linguists*; the Casa de las Américas Prize 2010, where the jury said *Approaching Sabbaths* "captures a sense of the complexities of historical, social, and cultural aspects of contemporary Caribbean".

She also won the 2018 OCM BOCAS prize for Caribbean Literature for *Curfew Chronicles*. Her revisions of the text of *Goodbye Bay*, her final novel, were delivered shortly before her sudden and unexpected death in on March 13, 2023.



The clang of the metal door echoed through the hallway. After ten years of appeals and failed parole board hearings, Jamie's heart sank lower with each footfall of the retreating guards and the squeaky wheels of the wheelchair that they had used to bring him from the medical centre. The dead silence that followed weighed heavy on his chest and suffocated him.

He eased his discomfort from his claustrophobia by turning on his side to face the cell wall with his back to the door. He closed his eyes and hugged his knees. For the 1,000th time, he chuckled at his predicament and reflected on his short journey through a life of wrong turns and bad choices. A tear squeezed out from under each eyelid.

He was tried and convicted on the opinions of the press and their readers before he had stepped one foot into the courtroom. The legal aid lawyer showed little or no interest in defending him. After all, he was an impoverished kid raised by a single mother from the poorer part of town, who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. It worried him that the perpetrator was still free to walk among society, emboldened by escape from justice, and likely to tempt fate by repeating his murderous act on another unsuspecting victim.

His mom's tearful heart-wrenching pleadings to God throughout the trial did not rescue him from the prejudice he endured at the hands of overzealous police, who sought a conviction at all costs, including planting evidence to frame the 17-year-old. Jamie was not without his fair share of legal troubles during his teens. As a minor, he and his friends got into frequent trouble with the law for petty crimes and gang memberships.

He was tried as an adult for the capital crime of murder. The trial focused on his criminal record to show that he was an undesirable illegal alien who preyed on honest hardworking people. The prosecutor presented a rap sheet to the court that was twice Jamie's height with convictions that were more than his age. By the age of 17, he was a veteran of juvenile halls.

Jamie's crimes belied his heart. He was neither mean, nor vengeful. Half of his thefts were for the benefit of others. The proceeds from the other half went to his mother, who had suffered a work injury that paralysed her lower body.

As an illegal alien working in a factory for less than



The Supernatural The Revisionist

Kamil
Ali



and sold drugs.

His mom never gave up on him. Whenever Jamie was incarcerated, his mother would visit him every Sunday to hold his hand while she closed her eyes and pleaded to the supreme being to release her child from the tragedy that had befallen him. The wrongfully accused Jamie humoured her by mirroring her actions. He did not want to hurt his mother with his skepticism of her faith in some unseen benefactor that always seemed to place the odds against them.

He did not tell her that he was in the later stages of congestive heart failure, which he believed that he had inherited from his father's side of the family, since his mother, in her mid-40s, had never been diagnosed with the disease.

Jamie's mom told him that they had to escape his abusive father who threatened to kill them if he ever tracked them down. He was three years old at the time his mother was rescued by other families who had entered the country unlawfully. Jamie was unable to attend school because of his illegal status.

With no education or skills, Jamie was caught in a vicious cycle of the underprivileged. In his desperation for survival, he was condemned to live a life of crime. Even though it was a little too late for him to become a productive member of society through education, Death Row did not diminish his determination to feel better about himself.

He used the prison's library to earn his high school diploma. Knowing that his life was at an end, the non-religious Jamie read every religious book in the library to find spiritual comfort. He started to pray from deep within his soul for the first time in his life.

Jamie's appointment with death arrived. He was wheeled to the electric chair in preparation for his final moment. To everyone's dismay, five minutes before they strapped him in and pulled the switch, Jamie suffered a heart attack and died.

Since Jamie only stole for the sake of others, *The Revisionist* grabbed his soul and reversed his life to the point of conception. He was born to loving parents who showered him with love and affection. He had no recollection of his previous human existence, but he followed in his parents' footsteps to share their wealth with the less fortunate. They were a match made in heaven.

Future generations will recall Panday as a champion of working class issues

By Jerome Teelucksingh

In the aftermath of the passing of Basdeo Panday, there have been a plethora of articles on the work and achievements of the former prime minister and trade unionist.

Few persons would remember his early political involvement. Panday was affiliated with the Democratic Labour Party during the 1950s and 1960s. The young Panday was also briefly involved in the Workers and Farmers Party (1965-1966), and subsequently suffered defeat in the 1966 General Elections.

Despite this minor setback, it would be the platform that would launch his stable, political career in the United Labour Front. Also many citizens cannot recall the support of Panday in the Black Power movement in 1970.

Panday has always been against religious and racial discrimination. For instance, on October 2, 1993 he highlighted this social blight at the launch of the publication of the *Proceedings of the Conference of the East Indian Diaspora Committee*.

He revealed the mistrust in the society, "Generally speaking, the Indian has been so cowed that the African feels no sense of shame or double standards in condemning white racism in South Africa with all his might while in the same breath calling the Indian a racist for daring to raise the question of African racism against Indians. In the past the Indian has always been on the defensive on the issue of racism against him in Trinidad and Tobago. There were many who felt inferior, physically, if not mentally."

Similarly, on April 7, 1994, Panday in an interview at Rienzi Complex, candidly confessed, "You know there is a strong perception in the society that you cannot trust an Indian to run the country. You cannot allow him to become Prime Minister."

In March 2020, the theme of the annual History Fest (at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine) was *The Many Shades of Resistance*. One of the events, held at the Alma Jordan Library was a panel discussion to commemorate the 45th anniversary of a labour protest known as Bloody Tuesday, which occurred in 1975 in San Fernando.

Panday was one of the prominent protesters of Bloody Tuesday, and I decided to invite him to the panel discussion. He agreed, and as

expected, 'stole the show' with his reflections. His captivating talk and interactions with those in attendance were highly appreciated.

After chatting and posing for photographs, I escorted him to his car. During the short walk, he briefly discussed a decision he had made (in his youthful days) to reject an offer to pursue a PhD in India, and opted instead to stay in Trinidad and become involved in politics.

Before he departed, one of the questions he jokingly asked, "Would you get in trouble for inviting me to campus?"

Many of us have stories of meeting, greeting, or hearing the charismatic 'Silver Fox'. Some met him for a few moments, while others boast of longer friendships.

Among those who bravely ventured into the world of party politics, Panday became one of the finest orators in the post-Independence era. His speeches were always entertaining, humorous, and sometimes controversial.

Panday was a patriot who knew the responsibility of leadership in the trade union and political spheres. Those who betrayed and mocked him paid a heavy price from a man whose sarcasm and vitriol were inescapable in the history of the island's party politics.

Future generations will remember Panday as a champion of working class issues, passionate about assisting the poor, underprivileged, and those who faced discrimination. His opponents will not have fond memories, and will blame him for issues for which he was not fully responsible.

One of Panday's biggest faults was that he trusted persons who claimed to be his friends and supporters of his political ideology. His defeats, then rise, and his fall within politics are lessons for those venturing into the murky political waters.

It seems that when one remains in the political battlefield too long, there are disastrous consequences. One day, the political gladiators will let down their guard, and they will be killed by the young warriors they once admired and trained.

Dr Jerome Teelucksingh is a senior lecturer at The UWI. His focus, among others, is on trade unionism in Trinidad and Tobago, with research in masculinity and religion. He is also an activist and a commentator on social issues.



Jerome Teelucksingh



Photos of mourners courtesy Vishyan Photography



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Kamla Persad-Bissessar at right



Mikela Panday lights her father's pyre



President Kangeloo delivers her tribute

Panday recalled as a trailblazer, one who set the landscape on fire

From Page 1
come.

Also, thousands of nationals waited patiently for hours to sign the Books of Condolence that were made available in the cities of Port-of-Spain and San Fernando.

Similarly, many in the diaspora here in Toronto also made the trip to the Consulate General's office at 185 Sheppard Avenue, entering the building to Trinidad and Tobago's national flag lowered outside as a mark of mourning and respect, to sign the Book of Condolence that had been set up abroad.

As they waited in Trinidad, and at diasporic sites across the globe, mourners exchanged stories on how Panday had changed their lives. They spoke to attending his campaign meetings, marching with his labour union, and recalled how his ascension to become the first East Indian prime minister had uplifted Indo-Trinidadians.

They reminisced on how Panday's intervention through his work in the trade union movement gave sugar workers a better wage that improved the quality of their lives; and in so doing, positively impacted on the lives of generations to come.

Panday's uniqueness, his pioneering work, and his tenacity were elements of his legacy that were also woven into the fabric of many tributes that were paid after his death on January 1.

When President Christine Kangeloo spoke to Panday's legacy, she too invoked the metaphor of fire, noting the nation had lost a man who blazed a trail like few others had done before.

She made the statement while delivering her address at the State funeral, which was held at the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts in San Fernando early last week.

The nation had lost one of the biggest and most colourful figures in the modern history of the Caribbean, she said.

"We lost a man who blazed a trail like few others before him ever had, and like few others ever will again. We lost a feisty fighter who faced every battle head-on, winning some and losing some along the way, at times hurting his opponents, at times hurting himself," Kangeloo declared.

Additionally, "We lost a man who yielded no ground during his 90 years. We lost a man who lived his life to the full and who, in the course of doing so, set the national landscape on fire."

Panday fascinated Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean with his charm, and enthralled the nation with his wit, she stated. Also, she recalled he had a devastatingly caustic side, which she witnessed when she sat opposite him in Parliament between 2007 and 2010.

"During that period, in what turned out to be the sunset years of his political career, he would, on occasion when he was

not waxing lyrical in the course of a contribution, often sit with his head buried in a book, never looking up, almost daring those on the opposite side to interfere with his peace. Woe betide the unsuspecting soul who dared to do so. We all learned early on not to trouble the lion when he was at rest," she recalled.

Kangeloo said Panday had enough critics during his lifetime, and in yet another reference to fire, likened him to a meteor blazing its trail across the sky, burning everything in its path. As the nation's brightest meteor, she said it would not be surprising if, in his wake, he burned bridges as well.

However, she also recalled Panday's empathy and generosity, noting that during his career as a barrister, he ensured his legal services were affordable.

"His fees were always significantly lower than other counsel," Kangeloo revealed, adding he believed that nationals with lesser means should not be deprived of legal representation.

She also shared their conversation during her presidential inauguration in March last year.

"With the charm for which he had by then become legendary, he locked his eyes with mine, and disarmed me completely with the words, 'Congratulations, that was an excellent speech.' Having got me where he wanted me, he then said, 'I'm afraid to tell you, though, that you will get nothing done... without constitutional reform,'" she revealed.

Additionally, "If there was one thing about Basdeo Panday - it is that he was dogged. Where constitutional reform is concerned, he was like a boa constrictor with its prey in its grip," she quipped.

Panday was an example of grit and determination, she declared.

"May his example inspire us all to rise beyond our circumstances, and to defeat any obstacle in the way of our path to a better tomorrow," she concluded.

And in what was yet another trailblazing event at Panday's funeral, when it came to the final cremation ritual with setting the body alight, the next generation, namely Panday's daughters stepped up to the fire, each taking a lit torch. Traditionally, that final moment with the flame is performed by a male relative.

At Shore of Peace, each of Panday's daughters took a lit torch, and with tears, determination, and stoicism, touched the flame to their father's body.

The gesture of solidarity and duty moved many at the cremation site as his daughters solemnly circled the pyre, inserting the flames within that burned on the end of green bamboo poles.

Many wept in that final moment, their voices an accompaniment of consuming grief during the rendering of the final

bhajan.

"I couldn't stop crying. And I cannot explain why," said Kelly Mohammed. He recalled meeting Panday over four decades ago.

Supporters from the 1970s Frank Deonarine, Rajbally Sadaphal, and Kishore Ramdhin, were also profoundly touched in that moment.

As the trio told the media, they had struggled with Panday in his fight for higher wages for sugar workers. The three men also supported Panday's political campaign in 1976, when he was first elected as the MP for Couva North, and when he was leader of the United Labour Front, roles that later catapulted him into the corridors of power and national leadership.

"The man will always be the greatest," said another supporter Dolan Persad-Gunness.

Also adding his comment was Selwyn Chatoor, "[If] he didn't take children out of the cane fields... years ago, and made sure they got an education, where would they be now?"

At 17 years old, Joshua Seetaram was present at the Shore of Peace. As he stated, his future plan is to study to become a doctor, while noting Panday's life was his inspiration.

In her eulogy, Mickela Panday spoke about a father who supported his four daughters in all their choices without being judgemental. She also noted that while he was not always physically present during their childhood, he was always there when they needed him.

With her sisters Niala, Nicola, and Vastala, Mickela recalled her father as a forward-thinking visionary who always found solutions to problems. Even until his end, he was energised when engaged in political, social, and economic issues, always willing to listen, and to advise when asked.

She described him as a pioneer who genuinely believed in equality and non-discrimination.

"Dad never spoke the language of race, publicly or privately. He was equal in his treatment of everyone in both his public and private lives. He was a genuine patriot who believed in equality for all," Mickela stated.

Speaking with the media following the funeral, Foreign and Caricom Affairs Minister Dr Amery Browne said it was an honour and a privilege to work with Panday's family, and other stakeholders, to ensure the proceedings were conducted with quality. He also noted it was Trinidad and Tobago's first State funeral under Hindu rites.

"It was important that we got it right. I really believe there was a sense of solemnity and formality, and there were some other very touching moments... all with great respect and regard for the Panday family, and his life of service," Browne concluded.



Photos courtesy Vishyan Photography



The Golden Years of Indian Cinema

Indian cinema's Golden Age: Superhits and songs from the early years

By Vidur Dindayal

The golden age of Indian cinema is said to be the 1940s through to the 1960s. A glance at output of films in 1953 and 1954 is truly breathtaking, with names of movies I can never forget. There were *Anarkali*, *Do Bigha Zamin*, *Boot Polish*, *Nagin*, *Nastik*, and more. Here are bits of the movies, the stories, and the music that made them part of the Golden Age.

Anarkali, starred Bina Rai, Pradeep Kumar, and Kuldeep Kaur. Bina Rai was superb in her role of Anarkali, being the target for suffering and humiliation – all with dignity. The movie has captivating songs, especially *Jaag Dard Jaag Dard*. I heard this song before I saw the movie. I learnt to sing this song, and liked it very much.

Do Bigha Zamin based on the Bengali poem by Rabindranath Tagore, starred Balraj Sahni, Nirupa Roy, Rattan Kumar, Murad, Jagdeep, Nana Palsikar, and Meena Kumari. The film marks Meena Kumari's maiden guest appearance in her 33-year-long career. Music was by Salil Choudhury, with lyrics by Shailendra.

Shambhu (Balraj Sahni) and his small family live on 1.5 acres, a small piece of land. He cannot make both ends meet. He sometimes borrows money from the local landlord to see his way. He goes to the city, Calcutta, to look for work. Away for three months, his wife Parvati (Nirupa Roy) goes to a neighbour, Meena Kumari, for help to write a letter to Shambhu.

Meena asked her to whom should the letter be addressed. Nirupa said, "Bachwa ka Bapu." Meena said that is not enough: "I want his name". Parvati is embarrassed. She covers her face. She would not say her husband's name.

The landlord wants to build a mill, and sees Shambhu's land as an ideal spot. He offered to buy the land. But Shambhu refused to sell. Shambhu says the land is like my Mother. How can I sell my Mother? The landlord is angry, and orders Shambhu to pay off his debt. Shambhu has no money – the reason why he went to Calcutta to get work.

In Calcutta, life was hard for Shambhu. He worked as a labourer and rickshawallah. He got into accident, and encountered other problems.

Back in the village, his land is sold to the landlord since Shambhu could not pay off his debt. Shambhu and his family returned to the village to see a factory being built on what was once his land. He tries to get a handful of earth from his land, but is stopped by a security guard. Shambhu and his family sadly walk away from their former land.

It is a painful story. *Do Bigha Zamin* won many Awards: 1st Filmfare Awards (1954), Winner – Best Film; Winner – Best Director – Bimal Roy; first National Film Awards (India) Winner – All India Certificate of Merit for Best Feature Film; seventh Cannes Film Festival (1954) Winner – Prix International (International Prize); Nominated – Grand Prize (Best Film), and Karlovy Vary International Film Festival – Winner – Prize for Social Progress.

Aah stars Nargis and Raj Kapoor in lead roles. Music is by Shankar Jaikishan, with lyrics by Shailendra and Hasrat Jaipuri. Produced by Raj Kapoor, the movie had some of Shankar-Jaikishan's loveliest music. Among its ten songs are hits like *Raja Ki Aayegi Baaraat*, *Aaja Re Ab Mera Dil Pukara*, *Yeh Shaam Ki Tanhaiyan*, and *Jaane Na Nazar*. The song *Chhoti Si Yeh Zindagani* was sung by Mukesh, who also acted as the driver of the horse carriage carrying the sick Raj Kapoor to Nargis.

Ladki, with Kishore Kumar, Vijayanthimala and Bharat Bhushan, was most entertaining, particularly the beautiful dances by young Vijayanthimala.

Footpath with Dilip Kumar & Meena Kumari has a memorable song *Shaam-E-Gham Ki*. It is sung by Dilip Kumar.

Parineeta, starring Ashok Kumar and Meena Kumari, was produced by Ashok Kumar Productions. Meena Kumari won the 1954 Filmfare Best Actress Award for her performance, and Bimal Roy won Filmfare Best Director Award.

Jhamela with Geeta Bali and Bhagwan, music by C. Ramchandra, followed the success of *Albela*.

The above were highest grossing movies of 1953.

Talat Mehmood is one of my favourite playback singers, ever since I saw the movie *Dil-E-Nadaan* at the Olympic Cinema in Georgetown, Guyana, in 1955. Talat starred and sang many lovely songs in the movie, which also starred Shyama. The Music Director was Ghulam Mohammad, with lyrics by Shakeel Badayuni. The most memorable song *Zindagi Denewale Sun*, I learnt and sang it everywhere, with another non-film song, *Tasveer Teri Dil Mera*.



The movie *Waris* starring Suraiya, Talat Mehmood, Achala Sachdev, and Nadira, is a classic. It is a special treat to see and hear two greats Suraiya and Talat both singing and playing lead roles, with music by legendary Anil Biswas, and lyrics by Majrooh Sultanpuri. Four songs were duets by both stars: *Rahi Matwale*, *Kabhi Hai Gham Kabhi Khushiyan*, *Ghar Tera Apna Ghar Laage*, and *Dur Hote Nahi*.

Nagin, the most successful movie produced in 1954, starring Vijayanthimala and Pradeep Kumar, was a hit musical. Music director Hemant Kumar excelled with lyrics by Rajendra Krishan. Including in its 13 songs is *Man Dole Mera Tan Dole*, with the Bain music performed by Kalyanji and by Ravi. They both once worked under Hemant Kumar, and later became independent music directors. This film was partly produced in Technicolor.

Nagin was the highest-grossing film of the year. It established Vijayanthimala's career. She danced in almost every song. The last dances were spectacular.

The story is of two tribes Nagi & Ragi in conflict. The Nagi chief's daughter Mala (Vijayanthimala) vows to kill the Ragi chief's son Sanatan (Pradeep Kumar). In the enemy territory, she is mesmerised by the music of a flute. Coming closer, she finds out that the player is Sanatan. They fall in love.

Thanks to *YouTube*, I can enjoy watching old movies and listen to old movie songs, and thanks to *Wikipedia*, I can look at details of most old movies.

Nastik starring Nalini Jaywant, Ajit, and Ulhas, was produced by Filmistan, with C. Ramchandra as music director; its lyricist was the poet Kavi Pradeep, renowned for his patriotic and inspirational lyrics. He wrote the song *Dekh Tere Sansar Ki Haalat Kya Ho Gayi Bhagwan – See What Your World Has Come To, Lord*. He is the singer, and it remains everlastingly popular. Playback singers were Pradeep, Lata Mangeshkar, Hemant Kumar, and C. Ramchandra.

The movie is set against the back drop of Partition, with its riots and violence. Anil (Ajit) loses faith in God when he sees his parents killed in front of him during the violence, and flees with his sister Kamla and young brother Munna. When Munna falls sick, Anil goes to the priest Tulsiram (Ulhas) for help. The priest refused help. Anil is angry, and attacks the priest, who calls the police. Anil is arrested. His belief in God is lost. He derides god and priests.

Anil meets Rama (Nalini Jaywant), Tulsiram's daughter. She falls in love with Anil, and marries him. They met through an accident, and Rama presumes that Anil is dead. A son is born to her, and when he falls sick she takes him to a holy man, Babaji, who is none other than Anil pretending. Once Anil discovers Rama and his ill son, he changes with the recovery of his son. His belief is restored.

Taxi Driver starred Dev Anand, Kalpana Kartik, and Johnny Walker, with all songs music by S.D. Burman. The popular song is *Jaaya To Jaaye Kaha*. It is sung by Talat Mahmood.

Mirza Ghalib stars Suraiya and Bharat Bhushan. This biographical film is based on the life of well-known poet Mirza Ghalib. The film won the President's Gold Medal for the All India Best Feature Film, and the President's Silver Medal for Best Feature Film in Hindi in the second National Film Awards for 1954.

Depicting an episode in the life of famous poet Mirza Ghalib during the time of last Mogul King Bahadur Shah Zafar, the story revolves around the love and admiration of Moti Begum, named Chaudhvin (Moon), which is played by Suraiya, for Mirza Ghalib (Bharat Bhushan), and its end in the tragic death of Chaudhvin.

This superhit movie's music was composed by Ghulam Mohammed. The lyrics were penned by Mirza Ghalib and Shakeel Badayuni. Enjoy listening to this compilation. Each of its 12 songs was entertaining, including *Dil-E-Nadan Tujhe*, *Yeh Na Thi Hamari Kismat*, *Phir Mujhe Deeda-E-Tar*, *Ishq Mujhko Nahi*, and *Ganga Ki Reti Pe*, a dance number.

Aar Paar is a comedy directed by Guru Dutt, with music by O.P. Nayyar, and lyrics by Majrooh Sultanpuri. *Aar Paar* stars Guru Dutt, Shyama, Shakila, Johnny Walker, Tun Tun, and Jagdeep.

The story is about Kalu, a migrant taxi-driver in Bombay. Two women love him and would like to marry him, but Kalu first wants to establish himself and become rich before he can even think of marriage.

The music by O.P. Nayyar was simply fabulous. He has a special way to make every song catchy, lively, and rhythmic. Here are the songs: *Mohabbat Kar Lo*; singers: Mohammed Rafi,

Geeta Dutt, and Lata Mangeshkar. *Na Na Na, Tauba Tauba*, and *Sun Sun Zalima*; singers: Mohammed Rafi and Geeta Dutt.

Ja Ja Ja Bewafa, Babuji Dheere Chalna, Ye Lo Main Haari Piya, Hoon Abhi Main Jawan – singer for all four songs is Geeta Dutt. *Kabhi Aar, Kabhi Paar*; singer, Shamshad Begum.

O.P. Nayyar's album of the film was ranked Number 34 in the list of Best Bollywood Albums of all time by Film Companion. It was also named the Best Album of Golden Era for the year 1954 in the seventh Mirchi Music Awards, 2014.

Boot Polish is a Hindi comedy drama produced by Raj Kapoor. R.K. Films is the studio that produced the other successful film *Awaara*. *Boot Polish* has won many Awards: Best Film award at the Filmfare Awards in 1955; David Abraham was awarded the 1955 Filmfare Best Supporting Actor; Best Cinematographer – Tara Dutt; at Cannes Film Festival, 1954, child actor Naaz won the Special Distinction Prize.

Amar is a romantic drama produced and directed by Mehboob Khan. Starring Dilip Kumar, Madhubala, Nimmi, Jayant, Ulhas, Mukri, and Murad. The story revolves around the upper-class lawyer (Dilip Kumar), his feminist *fiancé*, the social worker Anju Roy (Madhubala), and Sonia (Nimmi), a poor milkmaid. Music director was Naushad, with lyrics by Shakeel Badayuni.

Chitragupta, the music director, is a new name for me. But ever since I heard his music, I have enjoyed it. It has some lift, some pep, and energy. He has done music for movie *Toote Khilone*, and has three great playback singers: Shamshad Begum, Geeta Dutt, and Asha Bhonsle.

All the songs are lovely, especially *Melody Queen* – Shamshad's & Trilok Kapoor's *Saal Mubarak Aaya Ho, Jeo More Raja – Happy New Year*, most appropriate! Shamshad and Chitragupta sing *Tere Pyar Mein Hue Badnaam*, a rare, funny duet; and Geeta Dutt sings *Kise Maloom Tha, Ae Roothi Hui Taqdeer Bata*, a great melody.

Naag Panchami with Chitragupta's music was another hit. It starred a very young Nirupa Roy, Manhar Desai, Bipin Gupta, B.M. Vyas, Durga Khote, and Heera Sawant. It was mythological, with the *nag* (cobra) at the heart of the story.

Other most notable movies produced in 1953 and 1954 were *Laila Majnu* with lead stars Shammi Kapoor, Nutan, Begum Para, Ulhas, with music by Ghulam Mohammed, lyrics by Shakeel Badayuni.

Biraj Bahu with stars Kamini Kaushal, Abhi Bhattacharya, Pran, Manorama, and Iftekhar. It received Filmfare Awards for Best Direction – Bimal Roy, Best Actress – Kamini Kaushal; and the Certificate of Merit for Best Feature Film.

Jagruti starring Abhi Bhattacharya, Mumtaz Begum, and Rattan Kumar received the Filmfare Award for Best Movie and the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Hindi. The Certificate of Merit was awarded to Music Director Hemant Kumar. Lyrics were by Kavi Pradeep.

Prem Adib, known for his religious roles, starred in *Hanuman Janma* and *Ramayan*, in which were Shobhna Samarth and Durga Khote, from the famous *Bharat Milap*.

Mahatma Kabir the devotional, starred Surendra, Sulochana Chatterjee, Amirbai Karnataki, and Shashi Kapoor. Music director was Anil Biswas, with lyrics by Chandra Shekhar Pandey, and others.

Hamlet in Hindi, produced and directed by Kishore Sahu, was an adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy. Sahu played Hamlet; he also wrote the screenplay. Done by a production company started by Sahu in 1944, it also starred Mala Sinha. Sahu's *Hamlet* remained as close as possible to the film of Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*.

Nanda takes lead as Bollywood's next generation stars emerge

The face of Agastya Nanda is now becoming more familiar with his Hindi film industry debut as the titular character in Zoya Akhtar's period coming-of-age movie *The Archies*, which is being streamed on *Netflix India*.

But who is Agastya Nanda? Many in India and abroad do not know he is the maternal grandson of Amitabh Bachchan.

As Nanda revealed recently in an interview with *Film Companion*, and which was published in the *Hindustan Times*, the young actor indicated no one knew him before he signed up for his debut movie.

He also revealed a hilarious incident when he was actively meeting filmmakers to explore opportunities before getting a break with *The Archies*.

"I had gone to another office where the security guard was like, 'Idhar aa, idhar aa [Come here]'. He said, 'Naam likh, bata [Package delivery time]. Write down your name and the delivery time of package,'" Nanda recalled.

He added, "I said I have not come here to deliver the package, I have come here to meet the director. Then he said, 'Nahi nahi, jhooth mat bol [No, no, don't lie]'. This happens quite a lot. The disadvantages of not having social media."

Nanda also revealed another incident where he had an appointment with a filmmaker at the office. He went in and waited inside for 45 minutes before he overheard two people saying he was not present. He then informed them he was there.

Nanda attributed his lack of recognition, despite being Bachchan's maternal grandson, to growing up away from the limelight in Delhi with his father, who is a businessman.

Nanda finally joined *Instagram* a few weeks ago. His first post was an upload of a photo where he is seen in a brown T-shirt and a pair of white pants.

Following the post, family and friends from the industry left comments, welcoming him to social media. Also, his rumoured girlfriend and Shah Rukh Khan's daughter Suhana Khan commented, writing, "Welcome", and inserting the smiling face with the heart-eyes emoji. Gauri Khan also reacted to his *Instagram* debut, saying, "Big hug".

Mamu [maternal uncle], Abhishek Bachchan also dropped a smiley emoji, with accompanying text, "Welcome Aggy Boy!!!" Sister Navya Naveli Nanda also responded, as did



Nanda (above); with sister Navya below



actor Arjun Kapoor, who dropped a "Welcome".

Appearing on *ZOOM TV*, with the interview later published on the website *News18*, Nanda revealed he was not interested in

a career in acting at the start. Neither mom, Shweta Nanda, nor his sister, Navya, are actors.

As he noted, he was initially keen on business, and working with his father, Nikhil Nanda.

"Acting wasn't my first career choice; business was. I was planning on working with my father, but after months of internships, and looking around for different job possibilities, I found my heart in acting," he said.

In January 2021 he was approached for an audition for *The Archies*, he said.

"After three rounds, I was locked into September 2021. I took my mother and father's blessing, and told them I would work very hard to make them proud." He also sought out the blessings from grandparents Amitabh and Jaya.

Nanda's mother is the daughter of the Bachchan's. Nanda is also related to the Kapoor family. His father is Nikhil Nanda, who is the son of Ritu Nanda, daughter of actor Raj Kapoor.

Working in *The Archies* gave a "new beginning" to his life", Nanda told *Zoom TV*.

"I think rather than using the word 'change', I would love to say it's given a 'new beginning' to my life, because everything is different. I'm in a new city, with new people, doing something that I truly enjoy," he said

Released on December 7, *The Archies* is currently streaming on *Netflix India*. It is an Indian adaptation of the American comic book series set in the fictional town of Riverdale, and brings the characters of Archie, Veronica, Betty, Reggie, Dilton, Jughead, and Big Ethel to life in a 1960s hill town.

The character Archie Andrews is a heartthrob and Casanova of Riverdale. Speaking to the publication *Firstpost* about his role, Nanda said, "I wouldn't call myself a Casanova. Something that we do share in common is our love for music, because it helps you deal with a lot of emotions, and that's where we are kind of similar, and yes, I am definitely not a Casanova."

The Archies is directed by Zoya Akhtar and produced by Reema Kagti. In the movie, Suhana Khan plays Veronica Lodge, with Khushi Kapoor as Betty Cooper.

Nanda will next be seen in the lead, with actor Dharmendra, in *Ekkis*. It is being directed by Sriram Raghavan, and will be released on January 10 next year.



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Mix of experienced, uncapped WI players take on Australia

West Indies are eager to succeed in the tour of Australia that started yesterday, head coach Andre Coley has told the media. The team is now Down Under playing the first of two Tests matches.

There are seven uncapped players in the squad including Zachary McCaskie, wicket-keeper Tevin Imlach, Justin Greaves, Kavem Hodge, Kevin Sinclair, Akeem Jordan, and Shamar Joseph.

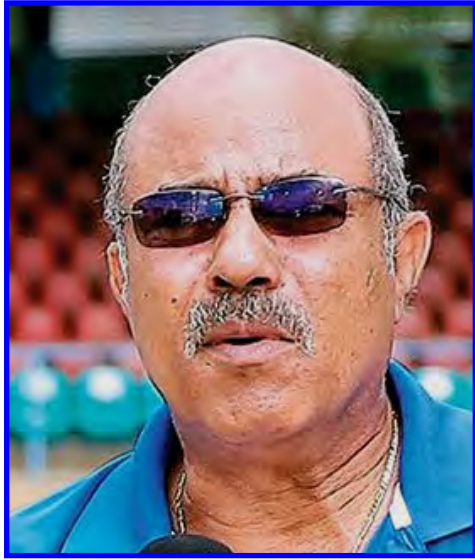
Test captain Kraigg Brathwaite is one of only five members of the 15-member squad returning to Australia for the second men's Test tour in a little under a year.

The others are long-standing pacer Kemar Roach, fellow fast bowler and vice-captain Alzarri Joseph, wicketkeeper-batsman Joshua Da Silva, and opener Tagenarine Chanderpaul.

Two notable absentees are compatriot all-rounders Jason Holder and Kyle Mayers. Both players indicated unavailability, declaring that they preferred to play in franchise Twenty20 leagues during the period of the two Tests. Emerging fast bowler Jayden Seales was sidelined due to a shoulder injury.

The composition of the team with so many inexperienced players at the Test level drew criticism from former West Indies wicketkeeper-batsman Jeffrey Dujon.

Dujon told the *Jamaica Gleaner*, "It's a bit



Jeffrey Dujon

of an embarrassment because Australia doesn't suffer from the same situation as us. Maybe their players are more patriotic, but this is like sending lambs to the slaughter."

He added, "It would have been better if we had sent a young team like this to play a weaker nation, but I don't think there's a whole lot to be gained sending a team with seven *debutants* against a team so experienced, established, and powerful."



Andre Coley

Also missing from the squad are the experienced vice-captain Jermaine Blackwood, fellow batsmen Nkrumah Bonner, and Shamar Brooks, compatriot all-rounders Roston Chase and Raymon Reifer, pacer Anderson Phillip, and suspended wicketkeeper-batsman Devon Thomas.

Captain Brathwaite, fast bowlers Roach and Alzarri Joseph and wicket-keeper Da Silva are the more experienced players on the squad.

Commenting on their engagement, Coley said, "Watching them take leadership [has been commendable]. I think Alzarri and Kemar have been very good in terms of how they have engaged the younger players and given insights around their experiences, so that has been good to watch as well outside of the obvious leadership from myself and Kraigg."

Coley also commented on Da Silva's intervention, saying, "Most definitely [Da Silva will guide others]. Most of the senior players, if not all, form part of that leadership group, and we have discussions around how we want to play, and everybody is keen on giving input and some guidance. Everybody wants to do well here, whether it is you had experience here in the past or not."

He added, "When you think about Test cricket, it is really important that you are able to bat a day to be able to set up the game from a batting standpoint, and then the flip side of that... If you could get the opposition out before the end of a day's play."

West Indies must execute their plans to hit that target, Coley declared.

"How we go about it as a batting and bowling group is where it becomes more specific as it relates to the role and different skill sets that each person brings to the team, but we are looking to keep it really simple," he stated.

Australia pick strong squad against WI; Smith likely new opener

Australia have named a strong 13-man squad for their two-match Test series against the visiting West Indies, with former captain Steve Smith likely to replace the retired David Warner in the vacant spot at the top the Australian batting order.

Smith expressed a willingness to slot into the opening batsman role after Australia wrapped up a 3-0 Test series win against Pakistan earlier this month.

"I am actually happy to go up the top (of the order)," Smith told the media following the announcement.

He added, "I am pretty keen [to open in Tests], if that is what they want to do. I am sure the selectors, coach Ron [Andrew McDonald] and Patty [Pat Cummins] will have a chat... but... I am certainly interested for sure."

Chairman of selectors, George Bailey, said he admired Smith's willingness to embrace a new role at this stage of his career.

"It is selfless that someone who has had so much success in one position or a couple of positions in the middle order is open and willing and hungry to have a crack at something new and something different," Bailey said.

He added, "I believe Smith is keen for this to be a significant chapter of his career. We do not look too far ahead, but for all intents and purposes, this is where Steve wants to stay."

With the exception of a retired Warner, Australia have retained the ten players who featured in the last Test against Pakistan.

Skipper Pat Cummins, who was adjudged as the Player of the Series against Pakistan, will lead a strong Australian bowling attack which

includes Josh Hazlewood, and Mitchell Starc; also in the line-up is off-spinner Nathan Lyon, who hit the 500 Test wickets milestone in the first Test against Pakistan.

The two teams will compete for the Frank Worrell Trophy, starting with the first Test at the Adelaide Oval, which started yesterday, and ends on January 21.

The second Test will be a pink-ball day/night contest taking place at the Gabba in Brisbane, and which will be played from January 25 to January 29.

Australia Test squad: Pat Cummins (captain), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head (vice-captain), Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Marsh, Matthew Renshaw, Steve Smith, and Mitchell Starc.



Steve Smith

Situation grave at Yorkshire with return of former chairman: Rafiq

Plans to return Colin Graves as Yorkshire's chairman "empowers" racists, former player Azeem Rafiq told the *British Broadcasting Corporation* earlier this month.

Rafiq's comment came in the wake of Yorkshire's board approving a takeover deal from a consortium, which is being led by Graves.

It is highly likely that board members will vote in favour of the takeover on February 2.

Graves' previous role as Yorkshire chairman was part of the period when the club was fined for failing to address the systemic use of discriminatory or racist language.

Rafiq was unequivocal in his response to the latest Yorkshire move, telling the *BBC* and the English media, "I'm broken; I'm struggling to understand how we've got here. It's a mix of emotions – a lot of anger and frustration."

It was Rafiq's detailed allegations of racism during his two spells at Headingley in 2020 that led to investigations by the club, and the England and Wales Cricket Board.

Earlier this month Yorkshire chief executive Stephen Vaughan told the *BBC Sport* the club had to accept the Graves-led offer because of its "dire financial situation".

This was also part of ensuring that its work on improving equality, diversion, and inclusion could continue, he said.

Graves was chair of Yorkshire between 2012 and 2015. He will return to the role if his takeover is approved.

He has previously denied knowledge of

any racist behaviour during his time at the club. Meanwhile, earlier this month he apologised "personally and unreservedly" for the Yorkshire racism scandal.

Following the development, Rafiq told the *BBC*, "I've woken up this morning to a barrage of abuse – racist, Islamophobic: this is what [Graves' return] empowers. It empowers those idiots out there who feel they can be openly racist."

Rafiq also called on the club's sponsors to oppose Graves' return to Yorkshire.

"The abuse is incredibly triggering, I've taken a lot over the last three years, and continue to take it," he said.

He also indicated he was not hopeful that Yorkshire's members would vote against Graves' takeover.

"Yorkshire members and Colin Graves are a match made in heaven. I hope they enjoy themselves," he said.

Yorkshire are in a perilous financial position, with debts of £17M scheduled to be repaid by October. Last year the county revealed it needed to repay £14.9M to the family trust owned by Graves following a bailout in 2002.

The club lost sponsors over its handling of the racism scandal, and also had to agree compensation packages with sacked staff who won claims for unfair dismissal.

Graves will advance an unsecured loan of £1m to Yorkshire if the takeover goes through, and arrange further funding of up to £4M if certain appointments to the new board are approved.

Rafiq said that may get Yorkshire through financial difficulties in the short term, but questioned the longer term impact Graves' return will have on cricket.

"It sends the message loud and clear to South Asians that cricket is not a welcoming and safe place for us," he said.

Earlier this month Graves apologised for the Yorkshire racism scandal, saying, "The mistakes must be acknowledged and acted upon."

In a statement, he added, "I apologise personally and unreservedly to anyone who experienced any form of racism at Yorkshire County Cricket Club. Discrimination, or abuse based on race, ethnicity, or any other



Azeem Rafiq



Hayley Matthews

Matthews on ICC Women's T20 top 2023 shortlist

West Indies captain Hayley Matthews is on the shortlist for the International Cricket Council's Women's Twenty20 International Cricketer-of-the-Year award. Also on the short list with Matthews for the top honour are Sri Lankan all-rounder Chamari Athapaththu, England left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone, and Australian fast bowling all-rounder Ellyse Perry.

Matthews proved one of the most dominant all-rounders in the shortest format last year, scoring 700 runs from 14 innings, while averaging 63 with the bat and taking 19 wickets.

The stylish right-hander headlined her side's three-match series against Australia last October with 310 runs at an average of 155. She smashed a career-best 132 from 64 balls as West Indies chased down a record 213 in North Sydney.

She also topped her side bowling with five wickets at 17 runs apiece.

Matthews made her international debut as a teenager, and was appointed captain last year June, replacing veteran Stafanie Taylor.

Zimbabwe tour prep for T20 World Cup - Delany

Ireland's upcoming eight-match tour of Zimbabwe will be ideal preparation for the Twenty20 World Cup qualifiers in Abu Dhabi in April and May, the team's captain Laura Delany said earlier this month.

The Irish face the hosts in the first of three ODIs starting tomorrow in advance of the five T20 contests.

"I don't think a series could have come at a better time," Delany said.

She is set to extend her Ireland women's caps record of 191 during the white-ball contests in Harare. She became Ireland's caps record holder by making her 185th appearance in a game against the Netherlands in August.

"We've a very big year ahead, and to have three ODIs and five T20s in an away series, different conditions, and different challenges is brilliant," she declared.

In particular, the five T20 games will form crucial preparation for the T20 World Cup qualifiers in the United Arab Emirates, where Sri Lanka will go in as the tournament's top-ranked side, with only the two finalists securing spots in Bangladesh in September and October.

"In the qualifiers, every game is like a cup final. If you lose, you either lose points, or you are out of the tournament," Delany stated.

She added, "To play with that expectation is a great mindset for us to have heading into this series, and to have five T20s after the ODIs makes sure we have plenty of opportunity to go out and put into practice what we are doing in training."

With conditions in Zimbabwe set to be completely different from winter's temperatures in Ireland, the squad have been put through sauna sessions in an attempt to acclimatise to the expected Harare humidity.

"We've had sauna sessions in which we sit there for 30 minutes, which might sound relaxing, but it's definitely not... [It] to prepare us for how much we are likely to sweat," she stated.

The Zimbabwe games will be the Irish side's first competitive

Meanwhile, the 33-year-old Athapaththu averaged 31 with the bat and picked up eight wickets from 16 matches. At 24 years of age, Ecclestone finished the calendar year with 23 wickets at an average of ten.

The 33-year-old Perry is a two-time former winner of the ICC Women's Cricketer-of-the-Year honour. She averaged 45 with the bat from 14 outings, while picking up six wickets at nine runs apiece.

The winner of the award will be announced later this month.

Eight of the top T20I cricket players of 2023 have been named to the International Cricket Council's shortlists for the ICC Awards: Chamari Athapaththu (Sri Lanka), Sophie Ecclestone (England), Hayley Matthews (West Indies), and Ellyse Perry (Australia) are on the shortlist for the ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year.

For the men's shortlist, Mark Chapman (New Zealand), Alpesh Ramjani (Uganda), Sikandar Raza (Zimbabwe), and Suryakumar Yadav (India) have been selected for the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year shortlist.

action since beating Scotland 3-2 in a five-match white-ball series in Spain in late October.

With the Ireland players now contracted, the squad trained four times a week prior to the Christmas break, which concluded when sessions resumed on January 2.

Delany said the introduction of contracts, which in many cases are full-time, has been a big boost to Ireland women's cricket.

"Having more players on contracts you can see that the younger players are playing with a huge amount of freedom, and have so much ability and talent. Someone like Orla Prendergast and Amy Hunter as well, who are two very young players, but within our squad are considered senior players, and have big roles at the top of the batting order," Delany noted.

She added, "They have done incredibly well over the 12 months, and if they get off to a great start, it gives our playing eleven a great opportunity to go out and win that game. Georgina Dempsey, who put in a brilliant bowling spell against Australia [last summer], is another player who is getting better and better although she probably goes under the radar a little."

Despite managing a slight injury recently, Delany said she hopes to be able to take a full part in the series. If she plays in all eight games, it will bring up her caps haul to 199, with her 200 appearance then set to come in April.

"That would be an amazing moment for myself and my family if it does happen; [however], is probably not something I'm focusing on. I've been struggling a little with a niggle, so trying to get back out there on the pitch fit and to be able to contribute both on and off the pitch in terms of my skills, but also with my leadership, is definitely where my focus is at," she said.

The Ireland women had a busy 2023, which included earning a shock win over Australia in a warm-up game prior to the World Cup in South Africa. The team also produced creditable displays despite losing all their games to Pakistan, India, England, and West Indies.



Laura Delany

Cricket Schedule

(Matches ALL TIMES LOCAL)

Wednesday January 17, 2024

Afghanistan tour of India, 2024
India vs Afghanistan, 3rd T20I, M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru, 7:00 PM
Pakistan tour of New Zealand, 2024
New Zealand vs Pakistan, 3rd T20I, University Oval, Dunedin, 1:00 PM

West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 1, Adelaide Oval, Adelaide, 10:00 AM

Thursday January 18, 2024

Zimbabwe tour of Sri Lanka 2024
Sri Lanka vs Zimbabwe, 3rd T20I, R. Premadasa Stadium, Colombo, 7:00 PM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 2, Adelaide Oval, Adelaide, 10:00 AM. Friday

Friday January 19, 2024

Pakistan tour of New Zealand, 2024
New Zealand vs Pakistan, 4th T20I, Hagley Oval, Christchurch, 7:10 PM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 3, Adelaide Oval, Adelaide, 10:00 AM

Saturday January 20, 2024

West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 4, Adelaide Oval, Adelaide, 10:00 AM

Sunday January 21, 2024

Pakistan tour of New Zealand, 2024
New Zealand vs Pakistan, 5th T20I, Hagley Oval, Christchurch, 1:00 PM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 5, Adelaide Oval, Adelaide, 10:00 AM

Thursday January 25, 2024

England tour of India, 2024
India vs England, 1st Test, Day 1, Rajiv Gandhi Int. Stadium, Hyderabad, 9:30 AM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 2nd Test, Day 1, The Gabba, Brisbane, 2:00 PM

Friday January 26, 2024

England tour of India, 2024
India vs England, 1st Test, Day 2, Rajiv Gandhi Int. Stadium, Hyderabad, 9:30 AM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 2nd Test, Day 2, The Gabba, Brisbane, 2:00 PM

Saturday January 27, 2024

England tour of India, 2024
India vs England, 1st Test, Day 3, Rajiv Gandhi Int. Stadium, Hyderabad, 9:30 AM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 2nd Test, Day 3, The Gabba, Brisbane, 2:00 PM

Sunday January 28, 2024

England tour of India, 2024
India vs England, 1st Test, Day 4, Rajiv Gandhi Int. Stadium, Hyderabad, 9:30 AM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 2nd Test, Day 4, The Gabba, Brisbane, 2:00 PM

Monday January 29, 2024

England tour of India, 2024
India vs England, 1st Test, Day 5, Rajiv Gandhi Int. Stadium, Hyderabad, 9:30 AM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 2nd Test, Day 5, The Gabba, Brisbane, 2:00 PM

Friday February 2, 2024

Afghanistan tour of Sri Lanka, 2024
Sri Lanka vs Afghanistan, Only Test, Day 1, Sinhalese Sports Club, Colombo, 10:00 AM
England tour of India, 2024

India vs England, 2nd Test, Day 1, Dr. Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium, Visakhapatnam, 9:30 AM
West Indies tour of Australia, 2024
Australia vs West Indies, 1st ODI, Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, 2:30 PM

Saturday February 3, 2024

Afghanistan tour of Sri Lanka, 2024
Sri Lanka vs Afghanistan, Only Test, Day 2, Sinhalese Sports Club, Colombo, 10:00 AM



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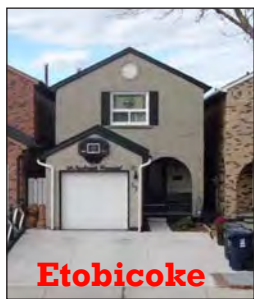
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