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Guyana's President Dr Irfaan Ali receives the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award from the President of India, Droupadi Murmu; looking on at left is India's Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. Government of Guyana photo

Caribbean leaders receive top non-resident award from India

Three Caribbean leaders were recipients earlier this month of India's prestigious Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, the highest honour conferred by this nation on overseas Indians. They were Guyana's President Dr Irfaan Ali, Suriname's President Chandrikapersad Santohi, and Trinidad and Tobago's Justice Frank Arthur Seepersad.

The three leaders were among 24 other non-resident Indians recognised by the government of India for outstanding achievements, both in India and abroad.

The PBSA was conferred by India's President Droupadi Murmu, and was part of the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Convention, which was held in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, from January 8 to January 10.

This year the PBDC's theme was 'Diaspora: Reliable Partners for India's Progress in Amrit Kaal', which Murmu said reflected India's desire to make its diaspora a partner in the achievement of its national

developmental goals.

Apart from the three Caribbean leaders, the PBSA was also given to honorees from the US, Brazil, Australia, Ethiopia, Germany, Israel, Japan, Poland, the Republic of Congo, Singapore, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, the UAE, the UK, and Uzbekistan.

Also among the recipients were US-based businessman Darshan Singh Dhaliwal, the Southeast Asia DBS Bank CEO Piyush Gupta, and the Poland-based businessman Amit Kailash Chandra Lath.

FedEx Corporation's CEO Rajesh Subramaniam, Indian-Australian physician Chennupati Jagadish, and Associate Professor at Ethiopia-based Wollega University, Kannam Ambalam, were also honoured.

In her address at the valedictory session on January 10, Murmu declared that the Indian diaspora had grown into an important, unique, and global force. She

See Page 19: India honours

Flu cases peak as data point to spike in Covid-19 cases

Toronto – While the reports are indicating that the worse of the flu season appears to be over in Ontario, emergent data are now pointing to a spike in Covid-19 cases, the media reported this week, citing statistics from Toronto Public Health and other government sources.

As CBC News reported, earlier this week Toronto's Medical Officer of Health Dr Eileen de Villa revealed through the latest data as of January 10 that the flu season seemed to have peaked, even as Covid-19 indicators were showing coronavirus infections now on the rise. At the time, de Villa was addressing Toronto's Board of Health.

Said de Villa: "In recent weeks, [Covid-19] case activity has steadily increased while flu case activity has significantly decreased."

Also a report in the Toronto Star noted that as of today, "about one in five Covid-19 cases in Ontario will be caused by the XBB.1.5 Omicron subvariant".

The publication further noted that the increase in infections by XBB.1.5 represents what the experts are saying is "the beginning of a surge in Canada... of what the World Health Organisation has called the 'most transmissible' subvariant to date".

Also, a new genomic surveillance report from Public Health Ontario, which was released yesterday, indicated that XBB.1.5 will be responsible for 22.2 percent of all new Covid-19 cases in Ontario before the end of this week.

Three weeks ago, XBB.1.5 was responsible for just two percent of Ontario's cases, the Toronto Star reported.

The January uptick in Covid-19 activity appears to be in keeping with what was predicted in December last year by Ontario's Medical Officer of Health Dr Kieran Moore, CBC News stated.



Eileen de Villa



Vlvian Rambihar

Last month, Moore predicted there would be a rise in Covid-19 cases in early to mid-January. At the same time, he recommended "layers of protection" to help prevent infection.

He also encouraged Ontarians to acquire boosters doses, noting that immunisation from Covid-19 vaccines fades after around six months.

Speaking with Indo-Caribbean World earlier this week, cardiologist and community worker, Dr Vivian Rambihar, said that Covid-19 was still among us, and there was need for caution, vigilance, and prevention.

Said Rambihar: "The pandemic is not over. Three years after Covid-19 started, it remains active, and we still have to be careful. It is different in different parts of the world, and a new variant Covid-19 XBB.1.5, called Kraken, is spreading across the world, which could become the dominant strain of Covid-19, and will likely affect us the same as other variants."

He added, "In Canada, we are fortunate that the numbers of people getting Covid-19, and becoming seriously ill or dying remain mostly flat and not spiking. In some countries, it is the opposite, with high and increasing rates of Covid-19 infection, illness, and death."

Rambihar is noted for his pioneering work in diversity and health, and for studies in immigrant health, particularly in the South Asian community.

Consequently, he also issued the reminder that subgroups in our community were at higher risk of serious illness if infected with Covid-19. Within these subgroups are older individuals, those with other illnesses, and those with impaired immunity, he said.

See Page 9: Covid-19 pandemic still here

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Metro All Fours League continued last Sunday with its ongoing competition games, which are taking place at the Timheri Restaurant at McCowan & Sheppard Avenue East. The sessions are progressing towards a grand finish in the second week of May. In photos, at top, JB Gamblers take on United Youths; in bottom photo, the Black Eagles are in full flight against the Untouchables. For more information about the All Fours' league, contact Russell at 416-428-6894. Photos by Russell Lutchman



How to get aid from the Community Services Recovery Fund

Ottawa – Funding is now available from the Community Services Recovery Fund to support charities and non-profits as they focus on how to adapt their organisations for post-pandemic recovery.

The Recovery Fund is a \$400 million investment from the Federal government of Canada.

It will enable charities and non-profits to invest in their own organisational capacity to adapt the way they deliver services to support the needs of their staff and volunteers, and also for the purchase of equipment such as computers and software.

The funding is also available for the creation of new ways of working, such as developing new fundraising approaches; to provide support for staff and volunteers, such as staff training, supports for mental health, and well being; and to develop plans to receive funding from diverse sources.

The Federal government has selected Canadian Red Cross, Community Foundations of Canada, and United Way Centraide Canada as the National Funders to distribute the Community Services Recovery Fund.

Applications for funding are now being accepted, with the last day to apply being February 21. For more information visit the [National Funders' CSRF](#) website.

Also, Federal government funding is available to celebrate

heritage events and other festivals, such as National Hindu Heritage Month, which takes place in November.

It should be noted that this funding is not available for religious festivals; instead, it is focused and limited to arts and heritage.

Funding up to 100 percent to a maximum of \$200,000 is available for recurring festivals that present the work of local artists, artisans, or heritage performers.

To qualify, organisations must have successfully organised a prior edition of the festival within the last two years.

Deadline for applications is January 31 for festivals that are held between September 1-December 31, 2023. The deadline is April 30 for festivals starting between January 1-June 30, 2024. And the deadline is October 15 for festivals starting between July 1-August 31, 2024.

Organisers who held festivals in the last two years can apply for funding for this year's event. If plans are underway to hold a festival this year, an application can be submitted for funding for the next year's event.

For full details, and to apply, [please click here](#).

Note that the evaluation of applications for funding under this program is quite stringent. Read the guidelines carefully before developing and submitting your proposal.

Canada passes 2021's record-breaking immigration target

Ottawa – Canada exceeded a record-breaking target for admissions of permanent residents in 2022, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada announced earlier this month.

According to a news release, the immigration plan was to welcome 431,645 new permanent residents in 2022.

On January 3, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Sean Fraser announced that Canada had met the 2022 target, and in so doing, had surpassed the previous record from 2021.

Said Fraser "[It] marks an important milestone for Canada, setting a new record for newcomers welcomed in a single year. It

is a testament to the strength and resilience of our country and its people. Newcomers play an essential role in filling labour shortages, bringing new perspectives and talents to our communities, and enriching our society as a whole. I am excited to see what the future holds and look forward to another historic year in 2023 as we continue to welcome newcomers."

As the release noted, "[The total] represents the largest number of people ever welcomed in a year, in Canadian history. Prior to setting a new record for admissions in 2021, the last time Canada welcomed such a large number of newcomers was in 1913."

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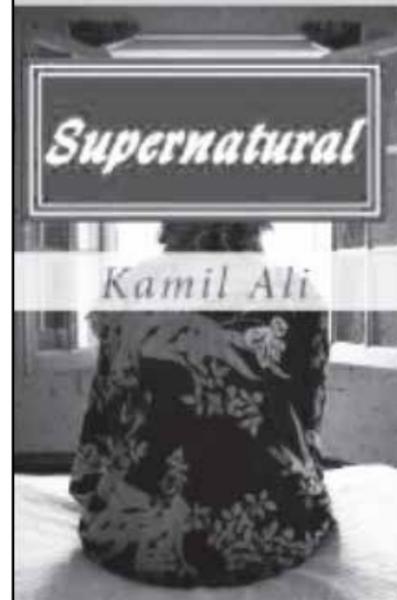
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Brazil's President Lula vows to undo destruction, begin healing the Amazon

On January 2, one day after his inauguration, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva moved to protect the Amazon and Indigenous people, issuing six decrees that revoked or altered the measures that had been imposed by the administration of former President Jair Bolsonaro.

As Karla Mendes reported earlier this month on the online news service *Mongabay*, among Lula's moves were the annulment of a decree that encouraged mining in Indigenous lands and protected areas, and the resumption of plans to combat deforestation in the Amazon and Cerrado biomes.

Mongabay is a non-profit environmental science and conservation news platform.

Also on January 2, Lula resumed the Amazon Fund, a funding pool provided to Brazil by developed nations to finance a variety of programs aimed at halting deforestation in the Amazon. It had been stalled during the Bolsonaro regime.

As was reported by Karl Matheisen in *Politico* earlier this month, Lula's return as Brazil's leader saw his commitment to turning back a tide of destruction that continues to engulf the Amazon rainforest.

As Matheisen noted, Lula promised to reverse and eventually end deforestation of the Amazon, which had been accelerated by Bolsonaro. Almost two-thirds of the rainforest, which helps to regulate the global climate, lie within Brazil's borders.

As was noted by *Politico*, Bolsonaro's tenure saw him stripping back enforcement, attacking Indigenous landowners, and encouraging industry in the Amazon. It led to a 60 percent surge in deforestation during his term, compared to the previous four years. And as *Politico* declared, parts of the forest became sources of carbon emissions, rather than CO2 sponges.

In response to Bolsonaro's practices, the European Union held up the conclusion of a provisional 2019 trade deal with the Mercosur bloc of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

However, Lula's return to power has since seen that deal put back on the table. As Matheisen indicated, the incoming Swedish presidency of the Council of the EU has since indicated it wants the accord done in the next six months.



Following his swearing in on January 1, President Lula (centre) is accompanied to the Planalto Palace by a group that is representative of the diverse segments of Brazil's population. Photo Tânia Rego - Agência Brasil (Wikipedia)

Lula's January 2 moves were in line with his vow to undo the harm caused by the previous administration. As he has said, Bolsonaro and his administration left "terrible ruins" among Brazil's institutions, among which was destruction of "the protection of the environment".

Said Lula at his swearing on January 1 before Brazil's National Congress: "Our goal is to achieve zero deforestation in the Amazon and zero emission of greenhouse gases in the electricity matrix, in addition to stimulating the reuse of degraded pastureland. Brazil does not need to deforest in order to maintain and expand its strategic agricultural frontier."

He added, "We will not tolerate violence against minorities, deforestation and environmental degradation, which have already done so much harm to the country."

Also, "The world expects Brazil to once again become a leader in facing the climate crisis, and an example of a socially and environmentally responsible country."

Following publication of Lula's January 2 decrees in Brazil's official gazette, Norway announced the immediate release of already available funding for new projects.

In a January 2 Twitter post, Espen Barth Eide, Norway's Minister of Climate and Environment, announced the following: "On Day 1, President Lula confirmed his ambitions to reduce deforestation and reinstated the governance structure of the Amazon Fund. Today, I confirmed to Marina Silva Norway's understanding that this allows for an immediate re-activation of the Fund."

As Mendes noted, Silva is Brazil's Minister of Environment and Climate change. Notably, in what was yet another indicator of Lula's commitment to the environment, "Climate Change" was added to Silva's Environment Ministry.

So far, both Norway and Germany have made available a total of 3.3 billion reais [\$607 million] to Brazil. The figure was revealed by a member of Lula's transition team, Tasso Azevedo, and which was posted on Twitter.

Azevedo also indicated that another presidential decree has begun to re-organise the environmental sanctioning process, which was "undermined" over the last four years during the Bolsonaro regime.

Said Azevedo, "This prevents 18 billion reais [\$3.3 billion] in fines from expiring," he also posted on Twitter.

And in what Mendes noted was unprecedented act in Brazil's history, Lula also created the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, in fulfilment of his promise to Native people who supported his presidential bid.

Said Lula during his inauguration speech: "The Indigenous peoples need to have their lands demarcated and free from the threats of illegal and predatory economic activities. They need to have their culture preserved, their dignity respected, and their sustainability guaranteed."

Additionally, Lula declared, "They are not obstacles to development - they are guardians of our rivers and forests, and a fundamental part of our greatness as a nation. That is why we are creating the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, to combat 500 years of inequality."

Sônia Guajajara now heads the new Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, with a mandate to oversee policies that range from land demarcation to health care.

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Ontario eliminating backlogs, reducing wait times for surgeries & procedures

Toronto – The Ontario government is making it easier and faster for people to access the publicly-funded surgeries and procedures by further leveraging community surgical and diagnostic centres to eliminate surgical backlogs and reduce wait times.

As the government significantly expands the number of surgeries being done through community surgical and diagnostic centres, it will do so with measures in place to protect the stability of health human resources at public hospitals, including requiring new facilities to provide detailed staffing plans as part of their application, and requiring a number of physicians at these centres to have active privileges at their local hospital.

Said Premier Doug Ford: “When it comes to your health, the status quo is no longer acceptable. Our government is taking bold action to reduce wait times for surgeries, all while ensuring Ontarians use their OHIP card to get the care they need, never their credit card.”

Community surgical and diagnostic centres have been valuable partners in responding to the pandemic and addressing the pandemic-related backlog in surgeries. Increasing community delivery of surgeries has proven to increase patient and provider satisfaction, and reduces the risk of a rescheduled appointment. Surgeries performed at these centres will be publicly-funded.

Ontario has a three-step plan that better integrates and uses these state-of-the-art facilities to speed up how quickly people are able to get surgeries and procedures using their health card.

Step One: Ontario is urgently tackling the existing backlog for cataract surgeries, which has one of the longest waits for procedures. New partnerships with community surgical and diagnostic centres in Windsor, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Ottawa will add 14,000 addi-



Doug Ford

tional cataract surgeries that will be performed each year.

This number represents up to 25 percent of the province’s current cataract waitlist, and accounts for the estimated Covid-related backlog of cataract surgeries. These centres will perform the 14,000 additional surgeries with existing health human resources.

Ontario is also investing more than \$18 million in existing centres to cover care for thousands of patients, including more than 49,000 hours of MRI and CT scans, 4,800 cataract surgeries, 900 other ophthalmic surgeries, 1,000 minimally invasive gynecological surgeries, and 2,845 plastic surgeries such as hand soft tissue repair.

Surgical wait lists are anticipated to return to pre-pandemic levels by March 2023, barring operational issues.

Step Two: To further reduce wait times, Ontario is expanding the scope of community surgical and diagnostic centres to address regional needs with a continued focus on

Too many details missing in plan: Shamji

Queen’s Park – After years of short-changing our public healthcare system and using Bill 124 to manufacture a staffing crisis in our hospitals, the Conservatives have pressed ahead with a plan to “fix” their Ford-fabricated problem by expanding for-profit healthcare in Ontario.

Said John Fraser, Interim Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party: “Doug Ford claims that families won’t have to pay out of pocket for care, but we know that families are already having to use their credit cards to access basic services. We can’t forget, this is the same Doug Ford that



Adil Shamji

promised, unequivocally, he wouldn’t touch the Greenbelt, so how can Ontarians take his word on healthcare?”

In 2021, the Auditor General of Ontario produced a report on outpatient surgeries, identifying major issues with extra fees, upselling and inappropriate charges, particularly for cataract procedures. This Conservative government has taken no action to address these concerns, and today, they offered no

NDP: Ontarians will pay out-of-pocket

Queen’s Park – Incoming Ontario NDP Leader Marit Stiles and NDP Health critic France Gélinas released the following statement in response to Doug Ford’s announcement of funding private, for-profit clinics and surgeries:

“This was Doug Ford’s plan all along. He has spent years starving our health care system of resources, demoralising health care workers with his wage-capping Bill 124, and leaving Ontarians desperate for care and frustrated by his games.

“We want to be clear – he will not get away with this. People will end up paying out of

assurances that they would protect against profiteering in healthcare.

“Doug Ford and Sylvia Jones refused to detail how they will fund these clinics, or give assurances on how their plan will deliver actual value for our healthcare system,” said Dr Adil Shamji, MPP for Don Valley East and Ontario Liberal Health critic.

Shamji added, “There are too many details missing in this announcement, and the government’s track record inspires zero confidence for the delivery of safe, equitable, fair, and cost-free healthcare to Ontario’s patients.”

Instead of pushing for privatised healthcare that will lead to worse patient outcomes, the Conservatives must act on the advice of our healthcare professionals: ensure all Independent Health Facilities are not-for-profit; link IHFs with hospitals that can oversee their operations; ensure the compensation provided to IHFs for procedures is identical to those paid in public hospitals; and implement protections against profiteering and upselling.

pocket and face longer wait times in our hospitals, as his plan drives healthcare workers from our public system. At every turn, he proves that he doesn’t care about ordinary Ontarians – just making profits for his donors and friends.

“The Ontario NDP will use every tool available to protect our publicly-funded healthcare system. We want to live in a province where everyone has access to affordable mental and physical health care. We want Ontario to be a province for everyone to live, work, and feel supported by a system that works for them, not against them. We want to work together for a province we’re proud of.”



Sylvia Jones

cataracts, as well as MRI and CT imaging, and colonoscopy and endoscopy procedures. To start as early as 2023, these procedures will be non-urgent, low-risk and minimally invasive, and in addition to shortening wait times, will allow hospitals to focus their efforts and resources on more complex and high-risk surgeries.

Step Three: Early detection and diagnosis of a health issue has an immense benefit on a patient’s quality of life, prognosis, and treatment path. As a next step, the government will introduce legislation in February that will, if passed, allow existing community diagnostic centres to conduct more MRI and CT scanning so that people can access publicly-funded diagnostic services faster and closer to home. Starting in 2024, this next step will also expand surgeries for hip and knee replacements.

Legislative changes will also, if passed, strengthen oversight of community surgical settings so that patients can continue to expect to receive the world class care they know and

deserve, and provide the province with more flexibility to continue to expand access to more surgeries and further reduce wait times.

As the province expands the role of community surgical and diagnostic centres, Ontario Health and the Ministry of Health will continue to work with system partners and clinical experts to put in place the highest standards for quality and safety.

Said Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health: “Timely and convenient access to surgery and diagnostic imaging is critical to keeping people healthy. This plan will boost the availability of publicly funded health services in Ontario, ensuring that Ontarians currently waiting for specialised surgeries will have greater access to the world class care they need, where and when they need it.”

As the government shortens wait times using community surgical and diagnostic centres, Ontario Health will ensure that these centres are included in regional health system planning.

Funding agreements with new community surgical and diagnostic centres will require these facilities to work with local public hospitals to ensure health system integration and linkages, including connection and reporting into the province’s wait times information system and participation in regional central intakes, where available.

Community surgical and diagnostic centres will also coordinate with local public hospitals to accept patients that are being referred, ensuring people get the surgery they need as quickly as possible.

There are currently 206,000 people estimated to be waiting for surgical procedures. For reference, last fall, there were approximately 209,000 patients waiting for a hospital operating room-based surgical procedure in Ontario, and about 200,000 before the pandemic.

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Editorial

Covid-19 caution

First the good news. As the data are indicating, it appears that flu infections have now spiked in Ontario, and that the worst of the influenza season seems to be over.

Then there is the not-so-good news. As our national media are reporting, the emergent data are pointing to a spike in Covid-19 cases in Ontario. It should also be noted that the data are grounded in statistics from Toronto Public Health, and other authentic government sources.

As we highlight in this edition, earlier this week Toronto's Medical Officer of Health Dr Eileen de Villa indicated the latest data as of January 10 are indicating that the flu season may have peaked; however, at the same time, the Covid-19 indicators are showing a spike in infections.

Also, in another national media report, it seems that the XBB.1.5 Omicron subvariant is surpassing its other variant "cousins" for infectivity, and will this week become a notable strain in about one in five Covid-19 cases.

The statistics driving the latest forecasting for another landfall of Covid-19 infections are even more revealing – as has been reported, a genomic surveillance report from Public Health Ontario released earlier this week has indicated that the XBB.1.5 Omicron subvariant will be responsible for 22.2 percent of all new Covid-19 cases in Ontario before the end of this week.

It is worthwhile, and disconcerting to note, that comparatively, three weeks ago XBB.1.5 was responsible for two percent of Ontario's cases.

It is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic is not yet over, in the words of cardiologist, and a pioneer in researching diversity and community health, Dr Vivian Rambihar.

As he notes in this edition, "...Three years after Covid-19 started, it remains active, and we still have to be careful"; additionally, that XBB.1.5, also known as Kraken, is spreading across the world, and which could become "the dominant strain of Covid-19, and will likely affect us the same as other variants".

It is worthwhile to also be attentive to Rambihar's reminder that subgroups in the community are at higher risk of serious illness if infected with Covid-19. As he notes, these subgroups are older individuals, those with other illnesses, and those with impaired immunity.

"Some vulnerable communities also remain at increased risk, such as those living in crowded households, [are socio-economically] disadvantaged, nursing home inhabitants, and some ethnic groups, due to a combination of factors, and with exceptions," he adds.

Rightly and wisely so, Rambihar has called on our community to display caution, vigilance, and prevention.

His call is also in keeping with the messaging from Ontario's Medical Officer of Health Dr Kieran Moore.

Back in December, Moore said the projection was forecasting a rise in Covid-19 cases in early to mid-January, which is now appearing to be evident. At the same time, he recommended the deployment of "layers of protection" to help prevent infection.

Rambihar also similarly advises that we continue to follow Public Health Guidelines where we live, "since Covid-19 is different in different locations".

As the health guidelines on Covid-19 prevention tell us, personal intervention, diligence, and vigilance are required. That it is in our best interest to keep up-to-date on, and to acquire vaccinations and its boosters; we are to also avoid high risk situations, and if required, make a judgement call on wearing a mask; also, that if we are ill, or are displaying Covid-19 symptoms, then we are to not have contact with others.

It is noteworthy that we are not alone in Ontario, and in Canada, as we prepare for what is appearing to be an oncoming infection spike. A similar trajectory of growing infections has already been noted in nations as the US, the UK, and in our Caribbean homelands.

Last week the government of Trinidad and Tobago said it would not intervene with restrictions. Instead, it emphasised personal vigilance and individual protective measures, which should be noted by the many of us here in the GTHA who are planning to visit for Carnival celebrations.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of this publication.
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Ancestral legacy the reason why we cannot fail

Volunteering one's time to any community organisation can be truly rewarding. However, creating and managing an organisation dedicated to your own cultural identity is a complete vocation. Establishing the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association was a blessing that I could have never predicted, and I am beyond grateful for the personal journey I have experienced in doing this work.

In late December 2020, the world (or mostly just Ontario) was back in the most severe of Covid-19 lockdowns: social gatherings were not permitted, with no in-person contact, and the limited socialisation allowed that summer was once again halted.

Facetime via our phones with family and friends helped to ensure survival, so we were not completely isolated during the holidays.

In a conversation with a cousin of mine, Sabrina, more of a Dee Dee (elder sister) to me, we got into an engaging and revealing discussion about the complexities of being "Indo-Caribbean" in Canada. Many of our peers were beginning to realise the intricacies in our heritage, but its complexities led to even more questions about self-identity, and where we belong. This is what Sabrina and I delved into.

Caribbean spaces were not always designed to focus on, or purposely include the Indo experience; and similarly, South Asian spaces were not inviting to those outside the traditional diaspora.

Indo-Caribbean people often struggle to find a place where they belong, so they may attach themselves to multiple groups in the hope of finding community. This dilemma is a contributing factor to why Canada's Indo-Caribbean community is not properly identified, and why services some of us may need are not adequately provided.

Around the same time that Sabrina and I were having these conversations, an elected official, who is from the Black community, asked me with regards to the census and other surveys, "Which box do you check, Ryan?"

This question was the catalyst for me to not only learn more about my ancestry, but to ensure that I share it with others.

I have always enjoyed learning about other cultures, so learning more about my own was going to be a natural fit. Canada's Indo-Caribbeans have so much to offer, but despite being a sizable community, there was still a lack of cohesion, as well as a mainstream voice to speak about who we are.

As we built ICCA, it was shocking how much history there was to uncover about the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. Growing



Ryan Singh

up in Canada, and learning only a Eurocentric view on history, I was never taught about the indentureship of South Asians by the British Empire, and the manifestations of enslavement of many people (including my ancestors) who laboured in colonised lands.

As we dove deeper into the history, and as ICCA grew, I learned more about the struggle, challenges, and determination of my ancestors. These sentiments are what fuel and drive my work each and every day.

ICCA has received its fair share of praise for the work we are doing, and for what we have achieved in such a short time, especially our community work.

Initially, our intent was to be a social media platform that would share Indo-Caribbean culture and heritage. In less than two years, we have transformed into a robust organisation that is continuously giving back to the community.

In 2022, we sent six barrels of books to Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. We also participated in a food drive to encourage more Caribbean foods to supply local food banks.

However, the reason why we continue to do this at ICCA, despite the adversity and challenges we may face, is because this opportunity was provided to us by our ancestors.

Women, men, and children, who boarded ships in India 185 years ago, did not necessarily know whether or not their lives would be made better. Regardless, they remained in their new home, and many did so but not by choice. Their perseverance and hard work built a path to success for future generations.

Similarly, as the son of Guyanese immigrants, my parents moved from their warm tropical home to a cold and frigid country, in the hopes of establishing a better life for their children. The ambition of my ancestors is the reason why we cannot fail. Their hope was that future generations would have a better life than they did.

The opportunity that we have here is to build on the foundation of our ancestors. The sacrifices and hardships they faced should not be in vain.

In fact, as the ancestors of future generations, we are responsible for reinforcing that foundation they built while honouring their legacy.

This is why we continue to do the work at ICCA, and why it is the duty of our generation to keep alive the story of our foreparents.

Ryan Singh is Chair of the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association

Stick in the ground casts lengthy shadow on the past

My nemesis Davey arrived and shook our front gate late one afternoon. It was still siesta time, so my parents were asleep despite the heaving of the blades of the rickety tower fan as it shuddered with herculean effort to circulate the soup-thick, humid air.

These memories are among the stacks in my inventory of early recall, incidents that occurred during my boyhood back in the homeland. Of course, Davey's visits stand out for always getting me into trouble later with my parents.

Rattle! Rattle! Come and walk in stinging nettle! His shaking of the gate was insistent: it meant he had breaking news, typically delivered from the point of view of his child's admiring eyes, after his father had performed yet another miraculous feat.

There was that time when his father discovered a sea-horse, which had been inadvertently caught in their fishing net. It became a social event that day, with villagers arriving continuously to gaze at the dead alien that Davey's father had mightily dragged out of the ocean.

In Davey's elevation of his father's courage, prowess, and history of encounters with the unknown, his excitement over the sea-horse re-drew the finger-length creature with each telling. By the time news of the catch-of-the-day arrived at the end of our village, and had leapt across the synapse of bamboos and tall water-grass into the other, the story was that our street had been invaded, and was being terrorised by an alien from outer space.

"I hear it was over six feet tall and had teeth like two alligator," said a villager who had walked several kilometres to witness the strange being that was on display inside its match-box coffin, and was as lifeless as a bent nail. "But this thing with the horse-face no bigger than my little toe!"

I recall reporting the villagers' disappointment to my incredulous parents, only to encounter a punitive response, since in my excitement I had not sought their permission to scamper up the street to participate in the spectacle.

"How did you pay the entrance fee that was being charged?" It was a warning shot from my old man, fired across the bow of my fast-traveling narrative, and likely one of the sources for the cynicism I later acquired, but exchanged quickly for obedient silence one day after nuptials.

Punitive measures from my parents for acts of disobedience,

or for not thinking ahead about the consequences for foolhardy action, had in my early years quickly evolved into onerous and additional chores around the house. They had learned quickly that sending me off to do extra schoolwork was a treat, and defeated the purpose of parental instruction by punishment.

So, it came to pass that any breaking news breathlessly delivered at the front gate by Davey about his father's shenanigans always saw me being punished by my parents. Consequently, Davey became my nemesis; and as such, his visits filled me both with dread and curiosity whenever he excitedly shook our rusted iron front gate.

Now coming to think of it, Davey's father was perhaps quite idle, and so was deemed not an inspiring role model for his children. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why my parents discouraged interaction with the family.

No doubt about it, Davey was a master kite-builder, an expert top spinner, and had the eye of a killer marksman, pitching marbles so skillfully that he had an enviable collection of aggies, cat's eyes, and a handful of deadly smashers, those lethal iron balls.

In hindsight, it must be admitted that the lives of Davey, and his rag-tag brood of siblings, were certainly made more interesting and entertaining by a father with whom the other parents, including my own, shook hands with in politeness, but pursed critical lips at in the negative when sitting by kitchen tables.

"Those children will turn out to be no-good vagabonds and ragamuffins," they whispered among themselves across the neighbourhood telegraph system that was the connected string of backyard fences.

Said Davey this time around, breathlessly, of course: "My father plant a stick in the ground, and it telling the time!"

With the fan groaning like a propeller on an aircraft's overheating engine above the old man's labouring snores, I slipped through the iron gate and headed to the site of this latest marvel.

A stick, planted in the ground, was casting a shadow inside a circle drawn in the dust. The circle was cut into as many pieces of a pie as the numbers on a clock. Remarkably, the shadow on the ground was correct at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Informed about this amazing scientific breakthrough, my weary old man said, "Son, please fetch a long stick for me"

Too late, I realised in mid-stride the sun had long gone down, and that it was unlikely he was going to make our own sundial.



Romeo Kaseram

Withdraw move to expel schoolkids for violence by parents

Dear Editor,

I was stunned to read the news article: "Immediate Expulsion for Children whose Parents Abuse Teachers" in the January 13, issue of the **Guyana Chronicle**, especially as this proclamation managed to make it from the Chief Education Officer, past the Minister of Education, and the editor of the state newspaper. Did the reality of this proclamation not cause pause for reason?

No one would disagree that our nation's teachers have difficult circumstances, and they deserve better, especially safe workplaces. Assaulting a teacher is a criminal offence. We already have a penal system for addressing this offence, one based on natural justice, which punishes the perpetrator of the crime and not a third party, and presumably one in which the penalty is proportional to the crime.

It is unfair and unjust to hold children responsible for the actions of their parents. Children are not capable of understanding or controlling their parent's actions and should not be held accountable for them. Additionally, punishing a child in this way can cause emotional and psychological harm, and can negatively impact their development. Instead, it is important to address the root causes of violent behaviour and focus on rehabilitation and education, rather than punishment.

Teachers have been assaulted at various schools for years now. It would be helpful to see a rigorous effort by the Ministry of Education to educate the public and parents on Grievance Procedures, or any public education programme aimed at helping parents understand what to do and not to do in addressing grievances.

What protocols are in place to prevent teacher on student abuse, or student on student abuse? What are the procedures for a parent to bring a complaint and time frame in which it would be resolved? Is the system fair and consistent? Does it involve independent review? Is there a transparent, timely, and

accountable appeals process? How are the procedures communicated to parents, and to the public at large to reach parents who may have work hours that prevent attendance at school meetings?

At a more fundamental level, one must wonder why the Ministry of Education and Chief Education Officer feel so entitled to parents choosing non-violent ways of resolving conflicts, when it is our very education system that has inculcated brute force as the means of communicating and forcing our will on other people. One does not have to look far from the schooling system to help explain why Guyana is plagued with senseless interpersonal violence every day.

The Ministry of Education, through teachers, has for decades been teaching skills of violence to citizens. Teachers continue to physically assault our children in classrooms. This state sponsored violence is labelled "corporal punishment", a term that conceptually distances and shades what this truly is: physical assault.

We justify physical assault by claiming that it is necessary for achieving 'discipline' in children. If one cannot achieve discipline in children through reasoning, then the problem is not with the children. In any case, physical assault may achieve compliance, and compliance is not discipline.

Beating children is a terrible form of miseducation. I remember how much time my parents had to invest in helping me to unlearn what I learned in school from teachers hitting us – in teaching me that lashing out and hitting was not a way to com-



Teachers at the Grahams Hall Primary School in East Coast Demerara protest last week following an assault on a colleague

municate or to achieve a goal.

Today, many parents are struggling and working inordinate hours under stressful and denigrating circumstances just to put food on the table for their children. They are under chronic stress. How many parents have the time to invest in corrective education for their children? Many may not even know how to do so given that they have themselves been childhood victims of school beatings and have internalised physical domination as a means of navigating life's challenges.

State-sponsored child assault must end in schools. We must instead invest heavily in training our teachers, children, and parents in conflict resolution and communication skills in school settings, and in public informal education for citizens at large. This casually cruel proclamation that the Ministry of Education will punish children with expulsion for their parent's behaviour must be withdrawn.

Simone Mangal-Joly, Guyana, via email.

Has T&T taken a wrong road?

Dear Editor,

I am uncertain of the year, but I recall it was either the late 1990s or during the early 2000s.

An engineer by the name of Neville Walcott was brought from Canada to do a survey of the roads of Trinidad. He took core samples of all the roads and showed them to the then Minister of Transport, and made his recommendations.

When his work was done, he was invited to spend a weekend in Toco. Along the way he saw repairs being done to the road and asked the driver to return him to his hotel, and from there he went to Piarco and boarded a plane back to Canada.

His report showed that only two roads stood the test of time. The North Coast Road to Maracas and the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway. Those two roads, built in the 1940s by the Americans, are still strong today. The other roads were all built on weak foundations.

Today, some 20 or so years later, the truth has been revealed. The road in Gran Couva, the road in Brazil and the Manzanilla stretch are glaring examples. They consist of about four-six inches of asphalt laid on a bed of sand or some other loose soil. Many other roads were simply built on old cart tracks.

Today we have vehicles weighing between 20 to 30 and more tonnes on these roads.

I do not know about anyone else, but looking back over the last 77 years, all I see is regression, and no advancement in either infrastructure, education, tourism, agriculture, or commerce.

Richard Deane, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

Good news on climate change

Dear Editor,

During his inauguration Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made comments that are truly heartening for those of us following the question of climate change.

The world has been looking on at the destruction of the Amazon forest for some time now. With the threat to the climate from such rapid and unchecked activity, often in the name of sovereignty, Lula's promise to stop it is welcome news.

He is quoted as saying there is no need to destroy the forest for agriculture. Brazil could never be short of land for agriculture.

Lula has also advised, to some extent, that his policy is to turn Brazil into "a super green country".

His pledge is noble as he goes beyond his national borders and supports what could be called "the sovereignty of the world".

As such, his pledge to work for the benefit of other countries is also welcome news.

Following November's COP 27 in Egypt, where we discussed the effects of climate change on our world, and especially small states like ours in the Caribbean, this is to be seen as purely positive.

We will, all the same, have to await implementation. For now, we do hope for Lula's follow-up actions.

Lennox Sirjuesingh, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.



Pro-Bolsonaro protesters at the National Congress building in Brasilia on January 8

Democracy must always be basis for governance

Dear Editor,

The January 8 attempt in Brazil to storm the presidential palace and other government buildings mere days after the historic inauguration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva bears striking resemblance to what took place at Capitol Hill two years ago in the US.

This is a worrying development. It speaks to the fragility of democracy in some of the more advanced countries in the world.

Actions such as these have no place in the civilised societies, and can only serve to undermine constitutional democracy and the rule of law.

Fortunately, the actions, supposedly by far-right elements loyal to former President Jair Bolsonaro, were thwarted, but they do set a dangerous precedent of ignoring the will of the majority and trying to obtain power by illegal and unconstitutional means.

In Guyana, a similar attempt was made by the political oppo-

sition to retain power by way of subversion of the democratic process following the March 2020 General and Regional elections.

The situation in Latin America, and for that matter the Americas as a whole, is cause for concern.

Only recently the President of Peru, Pedro Castillo, was removed from power, in what can be regarded as a "constitutional *coup d'état*", which resulted in protest actions by supporters of the ousted President.

A similar situation took place in Bolivia a few years ago when its leader, Evo Morales, was removed from power before the end of his term in office.

Democracy must at all times be the basis for governance. Any departure from such norms is fraught with

all manner of danger, and must be condemned by all those who cherish the ideals of democracy and constitutional governance.

Hydar Ally, Guyana, via email.

Global democracy under threat

Dear Editor,

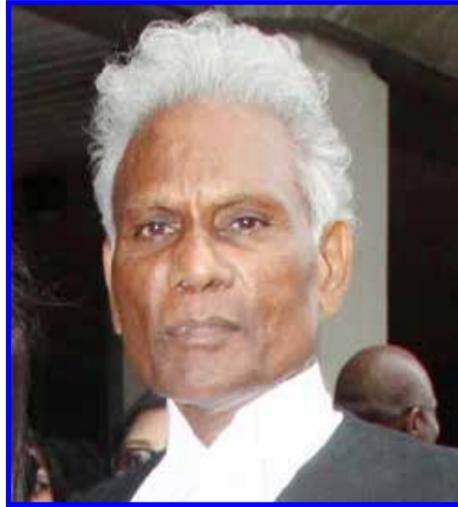
Another storming and wanton destruction to government buildings places democracy under threat, as supporters now refuse to accept the election reality in Brazil. The recent acts of vandalism to key offices in Brazil, including its Supreme Court, by rampaging, rioting, and die-hard supporters of the former president Jair Bolsonaro, following the example set by the other storming, that of the US Capitol building on January 6, must be condemned in the strongest terms.

The attacks, coming as it did on the heels of the inauguration of new president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, tells of a country torn apart and democracy in perceived tatters. This must change; the narrative must change. Healing of the nation must begin. It is hoped the new government would be able to overcome these challenges and setbacks as it crafts a vision for the future and the entire country.

Shamshun Mohamed, Guyana, via email.



Paula-Mae Weekes



Israel Khan



Christine Kangeloo



Keith Rowley

Kangeloo appointment for president a partisan govt move

Dear Editor,

In a bold move that is clearly partisan, Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley has announced that the President of the Senate, Christine Kangeloo, is his choice to become the next President of Trinidad and Tobago.

Kangeloo will become the second woman president of the country, following President Paula-Mae Weekes (whose five-year term officially ends on March 20, 2023), as Trinidad and Tobago's seventh president.

The Keith Rowley-led government obviously has the majority in the House of Representatives, so they will have their say as to who will be the next President to replace President Weekes when the Electoral College meets on January 20.

It has become obvious that the Prime

Minister does not care to have a perceived non-political person in the post; he just wants what he wants.

This behaviour is bordering on dictatorship, and looks like another way to control who the next Commissioner of Police would be, as one of Kangeloo's first duties as the next President would be to be presented with a new merit list for the appointment of CoP.

After the last controversy with this appointment, I just cannot understand the thinking to control it again.

That fiasco led to the resignation of many of the Police Service Commission members at the time, and the country is in a difficult position still not having a substantive top cop up to today.

This government continues to demonstrate

that they do care about the essence of the Constitution. The Rowley-led government just wants ultimate control of every aspect of government – from directing who should be investigated by the police, to controlling who the next police commissioner will be, to dictating what and who the Integrity Commission should target, and who should be our next President.

Although Kangeloo has previously been a senator under the PNM, she was appointed Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Social Delivery in 2002; and even between 2005 and 2007, she was the Minister of Legal Affairs.

It doesn't matter to the Prime Minister. He is just pushing through his choice. How can a person closely interwoven from within the bowels of the PNM be a neutral and unbiased President?

This nomination is basically a foregone conclusion, as the PNM party has the majority of votes to ensure she is appointed. It looks like

a 'pappyshow' to the public.

This shows Rowley's main purpose is to hold on to the reins of power by any means necessary.

Kangeloo is an active politician, and has carried this torch under the PNM for many decades. This move will further divide the country and cause more disunity.

To use your dictatorial powers so callously shows the Constitution must change, as we can't continue like this with one single person who can wield so much power.

His perception is uncaring and hard-hearted, and he is unable to see what is fair, neutral, and unbiased in his decision-making.

The real losers are the whole population. The increasing number of suffering citizens grows every day – and we have seen no change in his governance during his tenure, as he continues to do nothing of any significance to help our citizens.

Neil Gosine, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

Need by T&T govt to rethink Kangeloo presidential choice

Dear Editor,

Trinidad and Tobago's Electoral College, consisting of the members of both Houses of Parliament, meets on January 20 to elect a new president. Nominations are in by both the ruling PNM and the Opposition UNC.

The PNM has nominated Senate President Christine Kangeloo to be the next president of the Republic, while the UNC has nominated Israel Khan SC having objected to the PNM's nominee. Both political leaders have indicated the need for consensus in selecting an individual for president. I am not too sure how much they mean what they say.

The UNC has rejected Kangeloo as this country's seventh president and has put forward compelling reasons for the rejection. These reasons are as follows:

- Kangeloo and her family are deeply entrenched within the PNM;
- Kangeloo contested a seat for the PNM some years ago;
- She was an opposition senator;
- She was a minister in a PNM government.

Dr Rowley's justification for nominating Kangeloo are as follows:

- She is eminently qualified for the position of president;
- As Senate President she acted for the President when the President was not available;
- She has long service as a public officer.

My own view, even as an ordinary member of the PNM, one with no collective responsibility, is that the UNC's objection of Kangeloo is more convincing. The reasons put forward for the rejection are enthralling.

I expect that Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley will be magnanimous, and in so doing create history by leaving a legacy in reconsidering his pick for president. I expect he will go back to his Cabinet and instruct all his MPs to vote for the Opposition pick, Israel Khan.

I endorse the view that Khan has a fiercely

independent track record, that he has significant experience within the legal fraternity and that he has made a dynamic contribution to our national development. I am of the view that he is a much more suitable candidate for this distinguished office than Kangeloo.

While Kangeloo would have given her consent to be nominated, now that she has heard the nominee coming from the UNC she would, in all good graces, say to herself, "Israel Khan fits the bill for president more than myself", and she would say to the Prime Minister in all humility, "I thank you for considering me, but I kindly give way to Israel Khan who is more eminently qualified than I am and he is much more suitable, having less baggage than me."

I am certain that if Kangeloo shows that selfless, unselfish and altruistic state of mind, the country will embrace her. But more than that, the electorate will now surely take the gospel of the PNM and spread it all over with that kind of magnanimity.

I close by stating the views of two political analysts. Dr Bishnu Ragoonath said that Kangeloo's ability to be impartial is a legitimate concern, and Dr Indira Rampersad opines that Kangeloo's ties to the ruling PNM make her unsuitable for the presidency.

Cuthbert Sandy, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.



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Guyana's Budget 2023 focuses on support for broader growth

Part 1 of 2

Aptly themed *Improving lives today; building prosperity for tomorrow*, Guyana's Finance Minister, Dr Ashni Singh, presented a massive (G) \$781.9 million budget that focuses on supporting the traditional, new, and emergent non-oil pillars of the economy to help ensure stronger and more broad-based growth.

The budget, which is 41.4 percent greater than last year's budget of \$552.9 billion, contains no new taxes; raises the income tax threshold; and outlines a number of incentives to alleviate the living standard of the people.

The budget will be partially financed by Guyana's first carbon sale, which amounts to some \$1.3 billion. In addition, approximately \$208.9 billion will be used from the country's Natural Resource Fund.

Last year, the government used \$126 billion from the NRF to prop up the 2022 budget.

The budget announced that the individual income tax threshold will be increased to \$85,000 per month, up from \$75,000 last year, and \$65,000 in the previous year. The increase in the tax threshold will result in more than 12,000 persons being removed from the tax net, and places an additional \$3.3 billion of disposal income in the hands of beneficiaries.

The old age pension will be increased to \$33,000 per month, up from \$28,000, benefitting some 73,000 old age pensioners. The budget also provides for an increase in Public Assistance from \$14,000 per month to \$16,000 per month, benefitting 29,000 individuals.

Parents of school-aged children will benefit from a 40 percent increase in the 'Because We Care Cash Grant', which was hiked to \$35,000, up from \$25,000 per child last year. Children would also receive an annual uniform allowance of \$5,000. This increase would benefit 214,000 school children in government and privately-owned schools, resulting in \$2.1 billion in additional disposable income to parents.

Singh also stated that adjustments will be made to the salary scales for nurses, healthcare workers, and members of the Joint Services. The adjustments will result in these workers benefitting from an increase in disposable income of \$3 billion.

And to reduce the cost of home ownership, it was announced that the 14 percent Value Added Tax on residential properties would be scrapped. In addition, the low-income ceiling for loans for the housing sector will increase from \$15 million to \$20 million, enhancing the ability to borrow at lower interest costs.

Singh also announced that zero excise taxes on fuel will be maintained to absorb the impact

of the volatile fuel prices. The government will forego \$17 billion of revenue that would have been otherwise paid by the people.

In addition, the government has budgeted an additional \$5 billion to cushion any unforeseen increases in cost-of-living that may arise during the year.

The budget was presented against a backdrop of better-than-expected economic growth of 62.3 percent in 2022. The oil sector, which expanded by 124 percent, exceeded growth expectations. The non-oil economy also experienced strong growth of 11.5 percent. The economy is forecasted to grow by 25.1 percent in 2023.

Looking ahead, the budget is optimistic about growth across all sectors. The agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector is expected to expand by 7.2 percent in 2023, driven by growth across all subsectors.

Last year, the fishing industry contracted by 4.8 percent, with shrimp and fish production falling by 7.1 percent and 0.7 percent, respectively.

The forestry sector, on the other hand, is estimated to have expanded by 13.4 percent last year, largely on account of growing demand from the construction sector.

The other crops subsector is expected to expand by 5.8 percent in 2023, down from 15.3 percent last year, when expansions were observed across all crop categories.

Singh said significant growth was recorded in the production of crops such as eddoes, coconuts, sweet potatoes, plantains, lettuce, and sweet peppers. The contributing factors to higher output include increases in acreage cultivated and increased yield.

The livestock industry is estimated to have expanded by nine percent in 2022. It is estimated that the production of pork, poultry meat, mutton, and beef grew by 15.8 percent, 12 percent, 10.1 percent and 1.8 percent, respectively, in 2022. On the downside, the production of eggs and milk declined by 37.5 percent and 10.8 percent, respectively.

Sugar, which has been struggling, is projected to recover and expand by 29.3 percent, with Guysuco anticipating higher performance from the existing estates. Last year, the sugar sector is estimated to have declined by 18.9 percent, largely as a result of the lingering effects of the 2021 floods, which caused lower yields per hectare and reduced cane quality, as well as technical challenges encountered in the first half of 2022.

In the meantime, rice is forecasted to grow by 8.3 percent, with total production of 652,103 metric tonnes. The increase in production



Dwarka Lakhan



Finance Minister Dr Ashni Singh delivering Guyana's 2023 Budget last week

reflects continued research and development efforts driving the adoption and cultivation of new, high-yielding varieties, as well as increased acreage under cultivation this year.

The expansion in the construction sector is estimated to continue in 2023, with growth projected at 17 percent. Last year, the construction sector grew by 26.3 percent, supported by intensified activity in the public and private sectors, in combination with government investment in new and improved roads and bridges, housing developments, educational and health facilities, and agriculture infrastructure.

Singh also noted that private sector investment in the oil and gas and hospitality industries continues to boost growth in construction.

On the downside, Singh said the gold mining industry is estimated to have contracted by 2.5 percent in 2022, stemming from lower output from the small and medium scale producers. He said overall declaration of gold fell marginally from 499,054 ounces in 2021 to 486,415 ounces in 2022.

The mining and quarrying sector is forecasted to grow by 34.1 percent in 2023, with expansions projected for all four subsectors – oil and gas, gold, bauxite and other mining and quarrying. The bauxite subsector which recovered in 2022, is projected to grow by 9.8 percent. Last year, output from the other mining and quarrying sector, which comprises diamond, sand and stone mining, continued its upward trajectory, resulting in the sector expanding by an estimated 38.5 percent.

Diamond declarations are estimated to have grown by 85.6 percent to 83,720 metric carats last year. Furthermore, sand extraction and stone production are estimated to have grown by 35.6 percent and 18.6 percent, respectively,

supported by the heavy emphasis of construction activity in government's Public Sector Investment Programme, as well as rapid expansion in private sector construction activity.

Notably, for the first time in the last five decades, 255,081 tonnes of manganese were produced in 2022.

The manufacturing sector is estimated to have expanded by 3.9 percent in 2022. While sugar manufacturing is estimated to have contracted by 18.9 percent, the rice manufacturing and other manufacturing subsectors are estimated to have grown by 11.7 percent and 2.8 percent, respectively.

However, on the downside, there was a 33 percent contraction in the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals, and a nine percent contraction in the manufacturing of chemicals, particularly oxygen, amid lower Covid-19 related hospitalisations in 2022.

The services sector it is estimated to have expanded by nine percent in 2022. While growth was recorded across all service industries, Singh said the overall 2022 performance is mainly attributed to growth in wholesale and retail trade and repairs, administrative and support services, financial and insurance activities, real estate activities, and transport and storage.

These industries he said grew by 15.6 percent, 11.8 percent, 6.7 percent, 4.1 percent, and 8.9 percent, respectively.

Dwarka Lakhan, BA, MBA, FCSI, FICB is a Member of the Canadian Association of Journalists, and an accomplished financial writer. His recently published 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.

Covid-19 pandemic still here - remain vigilant & use layers of protection

From Page 1

He added, "Some vulnerable communities also remain at increased risk, such as those living in crowded households, [are socio-economically] disadvantaged, nursing home inhabitants, and some ethnic groups, due to a combination of factors, and with exceptions."

Rambihar also noted that many tend to manage well with the milder form of Covid-19. However, he maintained "we should all still try to avoid contracting Covid-19 or re-infection, since it can progress to serious illness, or have long term consequences".

A major long-term consequence was Long Covid, which he said can see accompanying symptoms such as tiredness, an inability to function well, and which impacts on various parts of the body.

He also advised following "Public Health Guidelines where you live, since Covid-19 is different in different locations".

"The usual simple precautions still work – keep up-to-date with vaccinations, get your flu

shot, avoid high risk situations, if needed, wear a mask to protect yourself and others, and if ill or have symptoms, avoid contact with others," he advised.

Said Rambihar: "We are at a turning point in this pandemic, where we have to be particularly careful. There is a lot of misinformation about vaccines and about Covid-19, so obtain your information and advice from reliable sources, like your local Public Health Association and Covid-19 clinics."

He added, "We are in a phase of the pandemic now where we seem to downplay it, with things stable, no major spike in numbers, and less media attention. Despite this, Covid-19 remains a major problem, with high numbers of excess preventable death and illness requiring our continued attention and vigilance."

Rambihar also commented on another turning point, which he noted was people "developing pandemic fatigue and letting their guard down".

"It has been a long three years, and we are

much better off now than anytime before, safer and doing much more than we used to. However, we need to be patient a little longer, follow current advice as the pandemic changes, and do our part to help ensure a brighter tomorrow as we return closer and closer to the normal we all wish for."

Meanwhile, the trajectory of spiking Covid-19 infections has similarly been noted in the Caribbean, with the government of Trinidad and Tobago declaring last week it had no plans to introduce additional restrictions on population mobility and on the gathering of nationals.

At this time, Trinidad and Tobago is preparing for the celebration of what is being described as the "Mother of all Carnivals". The annual event was first canceled, then later scaled down, during the pandemic years.

The reassurance there would be no government intervention came from Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley. However, at the same time, he called for greater responsibility among the population, citing the need for personal vigi-

lance, and adherence to protection practices against infection.

Last week it was revealed by The University of the West Indies that the XBB.1.5 Omicron variant is now in circulation in the country.

And as Rowley indicated, daily infection cases were forecasted to reach in the "high hundreds" within the next two weeks, given the current trajectory of infections.

Rowley also justified his government's decision to continue with Carnival plans despite the rising number of infections.

"We do not believe the situation warrants us to not have Carnival, but we believe that it warrants us taking personal decisions about your exposure to minimise instances for requirement of healthcare delivery to you," he said.

He added it meant increased personal vigilance, along with adherence to prevention practices, such as observing public health protocols, and getting vaccinated or booster shots. Personal vigilance was especially critical for those with comorbidities, he added.

Unforgettable, courageous, & philanthropic Dr & Mrs KD & Rachel Ray

By Sheila & Monica Ray

Special to Indo-Caribbean World

Forty years after Dr and Mrs Ray left the Annapolis Valley to retire and pursue their dreams of world travel and writing about the history of their birthplace, Valley folk still remember the unforgettable Dr Ray – his life-saving surgical skill, his extraordinary courage, his exemplary kindness and compassion, his impressive general knowledge, his enthusiasm for history, his culinary skills, his cheerful and caring nature, his infectious smile and sense of humour, and genuine interest in the welfare of others.

They remember the patient warm-hearted and hospitable Mrs Ray, her unique laugh, a former nurse and midwife, always there to lend a hand during evening office hours. Every time we visit our old friends in the Valley, we are still introduced as “Dr Ray’s daughters”, and reminded of how fondly they are remembered.

“Dr Ray’s grandson,” who returned to live in the Valley, is regularly quizzed about his grandparents, “Where did the Rays go? What happened to the Rays?” They get the short answer. What follows is the longer one.

Soon after Dr and Mrs Ray retired, they moved to Halifax, where they lived in the South End, enjoyed long walks by the ocean and Point Pleasant Park, took in the arts and culture of the city, and continued their memorable and gracious hospitality. They travelled all over the world, setting sail for eight Grand World Voyages.

Dr Ray’s voyages inspired the title of his first book, *India: A Journey Through the Ages*. The book related each part of the journey through India’s history to key historical turning points in the history of Europe and the rest of the world. He wanted western readers to feel some connection between his beloved birthplace and their own history.

His vivid and humorous description of the character, personality, and medical condition of India’s rulers, military heroes, invaders, colonisers, and game changers appealed to his readers, one of whom submitted his book to the Trinity College Library Committee of Cambridge University, who found it to be of suf-



In photos, Dr & Mrs K.D. & Rachel Ray

ficient merit to be included in their library.

His already acclaimed generosity as a party host and benefactor of worthwhile causes once again became evident, when he was persuaded to donate copies of his book to public libraries.

Dr and Mrs Ray moved from Halifax to Toronto, where their two daughters had found careers in Toronto and Ohio. One look at the face of their first grandchild triggered the desire to be closer by.

They maintained their generosity as philanthropists, donating to a multiplicity of worthwhile causes, including medical research, university scholarship funds, literacy programs in India for women, and child survivors of war. Their decision to do so was influenced by earlier experiences in their life.

They had both witnessed the harm caused by war more than once earlier in their lives, and provided medical care to the war wounded. They lost a daughter to a fatal infectious disease.

They had also experienced racial discrimination, which they successfully overcame.

For these reasons, and to memorialise the name of their deceased third daughter, they founded the Ava Ray Memorial Foundation, which remains self sustaining today, and regularly provides grants to support infectious disease research at Dalhousie Medical School, the Indigenous Black Mi’kmaq Program at the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie, and rehabilitation programs for child soldiers and survivors of war.

Dr and Mrs Ray raised two successful children, both trail-blazing professionals, who also married and raised families.

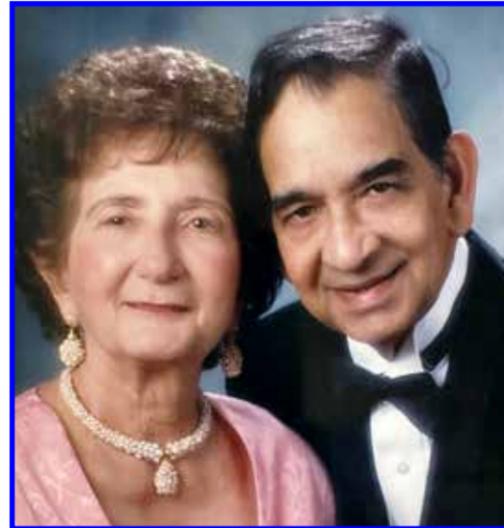
The inevitable has also happened. Dr Ray passed away eight years ago at the age of 92. One month before we lost him, he left his final message to us at his 60th wedding anniversary. His message was that “learning never stops”, and until his last breath, he set precisely this example.

He had mentored promising young medical students, and inspired young people to pursue educational opportunities and achieve their potential. As long as he could still speak, during his last days in hospital at the Cleveland Clinic, he was visited by medical students seeking to hear his story and soak up his wisdom. It was an honour to be part of the medical team who cared for him, one of them told us.

We lost Mrs Ray of blessed memory at the age of 91, five years after we lost Dr Ray. The couple has left an impressive legacy. They are survived by loved ones, who try to follow their example.

Sheila Ray is a Judge of the Ontario Court of Justice, and a PhD student at Queen’s Law School in Ontario.

She teaches and writes professionally, and participates in public legal education and refugee resettlement initiatives. Monica Ray is a Professor Emeritus and clinical gastroenterologist at the Cleveland Clinic. She is an accomplished gardener and talented artist, musician, and chef.



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Reflections on ancestry, legacies, & remembrance of times past

By Vidur Dindayal

I reflect on my young days living in the colony of British Guiana. Its name after Independence is now Guyana. British Guiana. It is the largest of three 'Guanas' located on the north coast of South America.



On its East side is Suriname, formerly Dutch Guiana. Further East is French Guiana. North West is the rain-forest area of Venezuela. On the South and South West is the huge rainforest of Brazil.

We in British Guiana had very little communication with people of Brazil and Venezuela. I believe this was because we were a Colony.

Apart from minimal social contact, due to the forests and differences in language, in the British Colony we were brought up to look to, and look up only to Britain for virtually everything: from government, to law and order, our economic livelihood, education, music, art, and culture.

We know about the horrors of colonialism, the dehumanising and excesses of brutality meted out to colonial subjects everywhere. Colonialism took on a human face in its later life before its demise. Perhaps my experience of it was of its "better" side.

I was 16 years old when India, the "jewel in the crown" of the British Empire, became Independent. Virtually every year of those formative years was steeped in the glories of Indian freedom fighters – the greatest of all Mahatma Gandhi, and many other celebrated names.

My education and awareness of the British were enriched during those early years. Long before India's Independence, the British had a great positive and creative influence in India and Indian life. Many notable Indians studied and became professionals in Britain. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru studied and became lawyers in Britain.

The Indian National Congress, which became the leading party fighting for Indian Independence was founded by the efforts of an Englishman, A.O. Hume, in 1885.

The first woman president was an English woman. She was the celebrated Annie Besant, who was elected in 1917. I knew her name around the same time I knew Nehru's. I thought until recently that she was an Indian person. She actually came from England, was a campaigner for Indian self-rule, was a woman rights' activist, orator, and educationist. She was from Clapham, in London.

During my childhood, and during those years when India was under colonial rule, I became aware of India, its religions and culture, and Indian leaders. My father was a deeply religious person, and he was well up on that side of Indian life. He would often refer to this or that Indian religious leader, Swami, or Yogi. Among the names were Shankaracharya, Paramhansa Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, and others.

Dad also had great reverence for India and Indian leaders. Gandhi, Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose, Acharya J.B. Kirpilani, Rajagopalacharya, and many others. The name Rabindranath Tagore in our home was like that of Shakespeare.

During my childhood in the colonial period India was the beacon of achievement and prosperity. I learnt afterwards that colonial rule had done much damage to Indian business and industry. That was not the India we wanted to see.

India to us was rich and prosperous. It was the country to see, and to be in. That is how we saw India. We Indians in British Guiana had continuous links with India. Indian produce in all its variety was imported – from food grain, daal, channa, to spices, geera, masala, to cooking ware, carahai to incences, religious books,

and so on.

Religious missionaries from India visited our country over the years. The Indian film industry – 'Bombay Talkies' films churned out hit over hit of movies with singing and dancing as main features.

Well known singers K.C. Dey, K.L. Saigal, Pankaj Mallick, and others were big names during the colonial period.

During my childhood days, we saw ourselves as Indians first. It was not an issue.

After all my parents' parents had come from India, and their way of life and thinking were all like India's. Slowly over the years, in adapting to their non-Indian environment, the sari for women gave way to skirts and dresses, and speaking the Indian language gave way in two generations to English. Apart from that, my parents and their kind generally looked to India as the Mother country.

What this says to me is that during that colonial period, things Indian that enriched my life ever since, were alive and well. I work out this was so because the colonial rulers ignored Indian religions and culture as simply sub-standard. I think they saw their job being only to manage the colony for the benefit of Britain, its wealth, and economic power.

There was indifference generally to other aspects of Indian life, provided it did not interfere with, or undermine, the main job of ruling for Britain. In a way that suited India.

All I learnt from my parents and other Indian leaders, put simply is this: the high point of Indianness is its focus on the spiritual; whereas, that of the colonial power and the West is materialism.

One says, "If you steal my purse you steal trash. My wealth is not of this world". The other says, "Happy to have your purse. I'll have more." That seemed an ideal no-conflict partnership.

That was about the British as colonial rulers. In time, however, I learnt a great deal about the better side of the British. Society today everywhere rejects inequality. Not so long ago everywhere in the world society operated by a class system. In Britain there was the ruling class and the others – the ruled. Ruling the colonies was a remit of the ruling class in Britain. Responsibility for the evils of colonialism should rightly be placed at the door of that ruling class.

The British that I look up to, respect, and admire are symbolised in those ordinary people who warmly embraced Gandhi, flocked to meet and greet him when he visited England in connection with talks for Indian Independence.

The British I honour and respect are those in the company of whom the Indian V.K. Krishna Menon fought an election to be a Councillor in a London local authority. The British I honour are the likes of Prime Minister Clement Atlee and Sir Stafford Cripps, under whose leadership India was made Independent.

Throughout my early life in the colonial period, I became aware of the richness of India, its ancient history, religions, and cultural life. This has all enriched my life, and that too, of my parents before me – during the colonial period. Indeed, I feel that British people and Indian people, through their history, some of it shared, are blessed intellectually with a high set of values for living as civilised human beings.



Mahatma Gandhi

Colonialism: This is bad and wrong, and evil things have been done in the name of colonialism. It is a system in our history that should remain in our history, and never rear its head again. It is not acceptable in today's world. Whatever structures exist in which the inequalities and wrongs of the colonialism system persist must be removed.

Attitudes and the culture in some people in favour of the colonial system still exist, and only in time and with experience will this give way to today's order of equality and respect for one another as equals of the human race.

Evolution is, I believe, a most significant process in the way we live as human beings. We take it for granted today that generally everywhere, we as humans have the right to equal treatment, and that discrimination is unacceptable. It is not so still in some places, and certainly it was not so, not so long ago. Even in the early part of my lifetime, discrimination, class hierarchy, and racism were the order of the day.

We might forget that slavery, master and slave, were aspects of society that existed for social and economic reasons, over centuries. We know that in ancient times, right up to virtually modern times, that slavery existed. It is how society functioned. The notion of treating people who are different to you as equals was not popular, to say the least. Therefore, the differences between people on whatever grounds, be

it appearance, money, colour, or whatever, were the basis on which social hierarchy and slavery came into being.

We have advanced as human beings, and moved to the position where for reasons that are not economic, but human, intellectual, even spiritual, we now reject the erstwhile order of class, social hierarchy, or anything that comes in the way of seeing and treating one another as equal human beings.

In life, and in the way we treat one another, we are not perfect. Differences exist. That is nature. Two apple trees look alike, but we know, they are not identical. No two leaves are identical. That is nature. We human beings are alike in that we are made up of the same parts. But we are never identical; even twins. Yet we know how to live in harmony, and with respect for one another. There is no other way. The animals in the forest have lived side by side for millennia.

We humans are still evolving – learning and bettering how we live with least friction with one another. Many differences make us wonder: Are we meant to live in harmony? The answer is certainly, "Yes". Many spiritual leaders have found the answer. What I learnt was that the spiritual leaders, all say, "Go with the tide; don't fight it". Accept what you see. Don't try to change it to what you want to see.

There is a huge lesson in what we see of nature. The earth, the sphere, goes around every 24 hours. It has done so, and will continue to do so for a very long time, quietly, and without fuss. So the whole universe, that which we know about, and can see something of – the planets, Venus, and so on.

Every bit works in a certain way, and the whole seem to work well, and with accord, for want of a better word. There are no clashes.

Yet, we, human beings, specks in the vast universe, find lots of reasons to clash over and fight and destroy. I think we can do better and thankfully, and happily, most of us are doing so.

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SCAN ME



Netherlands' PM Rutte apologising for slavery

Healing must now have reparations

By David Comissiong

On December 19, 2022, Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the entire Dutch government, issued a formal apology for the role the government of the Netherlands played in the enslavement of African people and in the so-called slave trade that supported that system of human oppression.

Now, properly understood and interpreted, Prime Minister Rutte's statement constituted not only an apology, but also an "admission of liability" for the damage the centuries of Dutch governmental criminality caused to enslaved Africans and to their present-day descendants.

Here, then, are some of the most critical admissions made by Prime Minister Rutte in his said statement:

- "We who live in today's world must acknowledge the evils of slavery in the clearest possible terms, and condemn it as a crime against humanity – as a criminal system which caused untold numbers of people untold suffering – suffering that continues in the lives of people today."
- "By 1814, more than 600,000 enslaved African women, men and children had been shipped to the American continent in deplorable conditions, by Dutch slave traders. Most were taken to Suriname, but others were sent to Curacao, St Eustatius and other locations. They were wrenched from their families and stripped of their humanity. They were transported and treated like cattle – often under the governmental authority of the Dutch West India Company."
- "The Dutch State, in all its manifestations through history, bears responsibility for the terrible suffering inflicted on enslaved people and their descendants. So we cannot ignore the effects of the past on the present."
- "Today, on behalf of the Dutch government, I apologise for the past actions of the Dutch State: enslaved people in the past, everywhere in the world, who suffered a consequence of those actions, as well as to their daughters and sons, and to all descendants, up to the present day."
- "During the year of commemoration, all facets of the history of slavery and its effects up to the present day will be brought to light... We will also set up a fund for social initiatives throughout the Kingdom and in Suriname, so that the impact of the history of slavery is given the visibility, attention, and action that is needed. The healing process must start now, and we will write the programme for that process together."
- "We cannot change the past, but we can face up to it. What the government fervently hopes, and what I personally fervently hope, is that this moment, this day, will help us throughout the Kingdom and together with Suriname and other countries to fill the empty pages that lie ahead with dialogue, acknowledgement, and healing."

Prime Minister Rutte should be commended for making this historic apology/admission of liability.

Indeed, both he and the government that he leads have come a long way from the position they adopted back in December 2016, when in response to Caricom's letter of January 25, 2016, informing Rutte that Caricom considered the Netherlands had a reparations case to answer for the genocide of the native people and for the enslavement of our African ancestors, Prime Minister Rutte was only able to manage an expression of profound regret for the suffering of innocent people caused by the horrors of slavery.

And so, we in Caricom should congratulate Rutte and his administration for the admirable progressive development in their thinking on this issue over the past six years.

Caricom should also carefully explain to Prime Minister Rutte that when he commits himself and his government to a process of "healing" the injury the past criminal actions of the Dutch government caused to the sons and daughters of Africa and to their present-day descendants, that this can only mean a process of "repair" or of "reparations", along the lines of the demands contained in Caricom's Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice.

Indeed, there can be no process of meaningful healing that is not based on the Dutch government – in consultation with the affected populations and their governments or political leaders – instituting and financing concrete developmental initiatives and programmes that are designed to rectify educational, health, technological, human welfare, economic and cultural deficits, and that also support a substantive "repatriation" programme for relevant African descendants who wish to return to the African mother continent from which Dutch slave traders brutally removed their ancestors. All of this needs to be made very clear to Prime Minister Rutte.

And yet another thing that needs to be made clear to the prime minister is that Dutch involvement in, and responsibility for, the evil consequences of enslavement and slave trading is not restricted to countries or territories that were directly colonised by Holland!

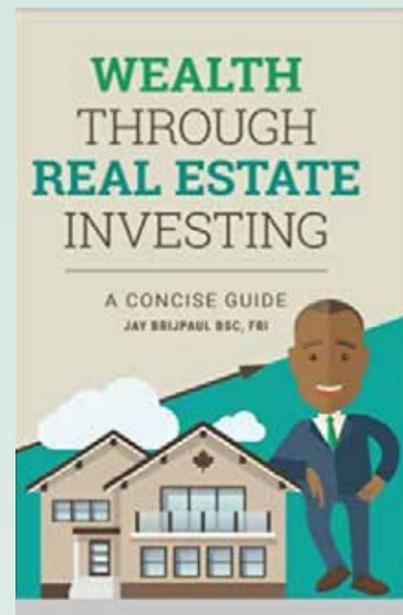
Rather, Dutch merchants, bankers, slave traders, sugar technologists, industrialists and government officials played critical roles in establishing, financing and otherwise supporting slavery and slavery-based production in many non-Dutch territories, particularly in the Caribbean.

It is now up to the Caricom Reparations Commission to inform Prime Minister Rutte the time has come for a conversation about the role his government must now play in healing the injuries that still exist, not only in the Dutch-speaking Caricom member state of Suriname, but also in Guyana (a former Dutch colonial possession), and in Barbados and all other relevant Caricom nations.

David Comissiong is Barbados' Ambassador to Caricom

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By Dr Mohan Ragbeer

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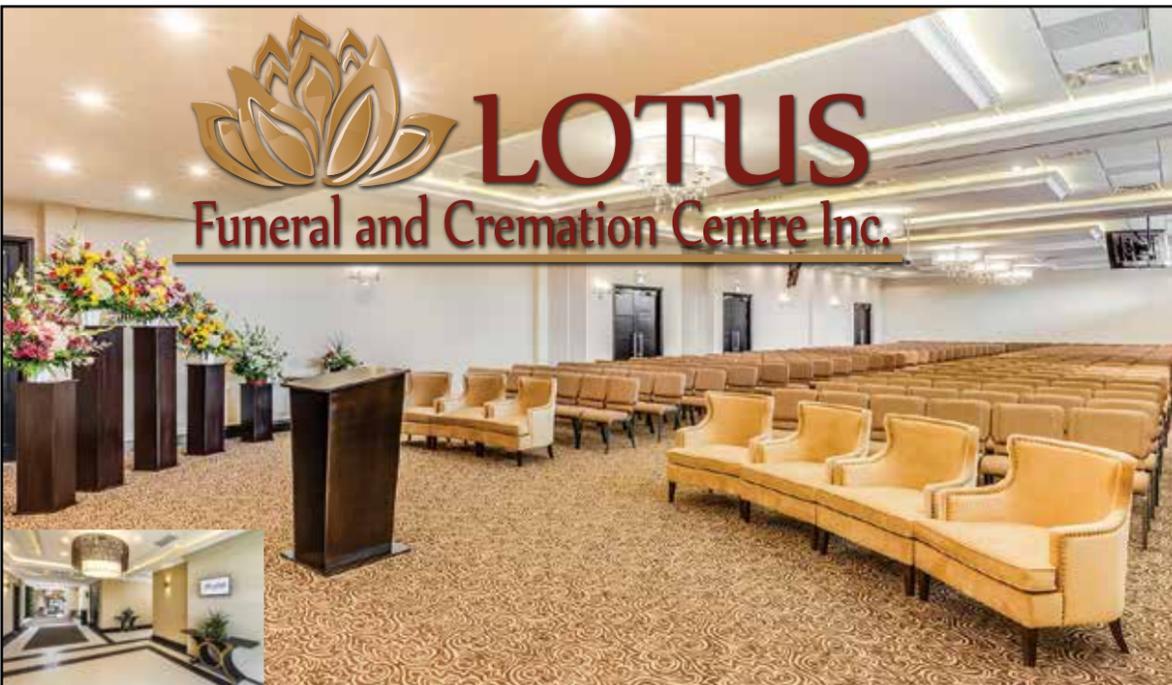
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A tale of sacrifice, love for family, & passion for outreach

By Romeo Kaseram
LJI Reporter

A Trinidad-born scientist and researcher, along with his family-run research & development company, are today making a positive impact on the health and quality of life in Canada and abroad via homegrown natural products and with its customised solutions.

Dr Deryck Persaud, and spouse, Dr Alma Barranco-Mendoza, are the guiding lights behind **Infogenetica Solutions Ltd**, a company based in Coquitlam, BC.

One of their company's key roles is to assist individuals and families understand and then develop strategies to better manage complex lifestyle-altering conditions.

Among these challenging conditions are autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, diabetes, high blood pressure, eczema, among others.

How Infogenetica has been climbing upwards with its growing success is through individualised guidance on diet planning, assistance in understanding prescriptions and dietary supplements, knowledge translation of the latest research, and providing information on the latest educational plans and supportive technologies.

However, what is foundational to Infogenetica's ongoing uplift is its own homegrown NeuroActiv® Oil, a patented formulation that is the product of Persaud's R&D, along with his industry, scientific knowledge, and unwavering commitment to a quality life for his family. The product was approved eight years ago by Health Canada as a natural health supplement to support mental and cardiovascular health, and for maintenance of general health and wellness.

NeuroActiv® Oil is also a formulation borne out of Persaud's lived experience. It is a distillation of his sacrifice and commitment in ensuring that his family maintains and improves personal health, and the quality of life. This outcome emerged after the intervention of a complex, lifestyle-altering event in the couple's lives following the birth of their twin sons.

How Persaud arrived at his ground-breaking formulation, to then co-found Infogenetica with Alma, and to make a difference in the betterment of health and the quality of lives across the globe, is inspiring as much as it is a narrative about individual resilience, courage, and sacrifice in the face of a life-altering and complicated challenge.

Persaud was born in central Trinidad to parents Lloyd, a school teacher; and mother, Sheila, a dedicated and inspiring homemaker. He was educated at Presentation College, in central Trinidad, where he streamed early into the sciences by taking courses to propel him into a career in medicine.

"Mom wanted me to be a doctor," Persaud says.

Meanwhile, "Dad instilled in us the value of a good education; also, he taught us to always pursue whatever we did with our best attitude and drive. He wasn't exactly interested in what I did; but he did insist that I do the best I can – that I give it my best effort. And also, to be a good person."

Persaud has six other siblings. Religiosity and faith are also among early life's lessons that were inculcated in the family by his parents. Consequently, Persaud's strong faith and grounding in the Presbyterian life endures today, he says.

And as he notes, during his early years of schooling, he began to understand there was an incipient and insistent drive within to make a difference in the lives around him.

"I felt the growing urge to contribute; to make a difference with community outreach," he says.

His hard work, dedication, and aptitude at Presentation College saw a remarkable outcome: he was offered full scholarships to study medicine, in Trinidad with The University of the West Indies, and abroad at Trent University in Peterborough, Canada.

He chose to come to Canada in 1989.

"I thought I could do more in Canada with research; also, to accomplish more for humanity," Persaud says.

He adds, "I felt I could influence more people with biochemistry. Coming to Canada also offered more opportunities to accomplish this call within. The openings were there for me to expand my horizons."

Persaud notes that while he focused on his studies, at the same time his desire for community outreach kept growing. He also wanted to learn more about Canadian and international cultures. As a result, he volunteered with the Trent International Program.

It was during one of his volunteer roles with the program's



In photos (top left clockwise) Deryck; with Alma & the NeuroActiv® Oil; with sons as high school grads; & Deryck's late parents Lloyd & Sheila. Alma's phone is 604-992-4365; Email: alma@infogenetica.com

greeting party, which welcomed arriving international students, when he met his wife-to-be, Alma.

Following his undergraduate studies, he signed up with the University of Guelph to continue with a master's degree.

"The Master's saw my focus undergoing a shift," Persaud says. He adds, "And it was this shift that became a main pillar in what was to later become Infogenetica. It was here where I began studying an aspect of food chemistry, where I started working on lipids. My thesis was on the structure of a protein at a cellular interface."

While his BSc Hons was in Biochemistry from Trent, his MSc was from Guelph in Food Science. Persaud completed his PhD in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry at Simon Fraser University in BC. He defended his doctoral thesis in 2002.

This time his area of study was on a cell membrane receptor in an insect, and dealt with fatty acids and protein structure. It would prove to be pivotal for the significant and life-altering events that would soon unfold in both his career path, and in his emergent family life.

It soon emerged that Persaud's early upbringing, his inherent "calling" to perform community outreach, and the shifting research specificities on his educational path, were all destined to come into confluence, primarily for what was a series of life-changing complexities in family life for himself and Alma.

"Back then, one of my dreams was that when I was taking the graduation walk to accept my doctorate that I would be doing so holding my son in my arms," Persaud said. It was 2002, the year when he completed his PhD; it was also when their twins arrived.

"They were born premature. We were forewarned by the doctors: it was a difficult pregnancy, with the potential for possible disabilities."

Persaud spent a year at home closely bonding with their newborns, then joining the BC Genome Sciences Centre as a post-doctoral fellow doing cancer research.

"I was doing research on sequencing genomic DNA. One of the areas was identifying sequences that cause cancer," Persaud says. Additionally, "This path would have taken me even further, such as with a pharmaceutical company; and perhaps onwards to developing medicines. I never lost sight of my calling to make a difference in the lives of people."

However, in the first year, Persaud and Alma began noticing all was not well with one of their sons.

As Infogenetica's website notes, among other signs, "He never made eye contact, and was always uneasy. He was overly sensitive to sound, light, scents, and textures. He did not respond to people talking to him, and would get over-fixated on specific items. In spite of very early interventions with paediatricians and occupational, behavioural, and speech therapists, things kept getting worse as time went by."

At four years old their son was officially diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, severe Sensory Processing Disorder, developmental delays, and metopic and sagittal craniosynostosis – the premature fusion of the skull sutures that was compressing his brain, causing injury.

The prognosis was as dire as it was disheartening for the

young parents: their son would never be able to take care of himself, even for the most basic of needs; neither would he talk, nor have typical social interactions.

It was a pivotal moment in his life as a scientist and a young father, Persaud says.

"It galvanised me into action. I did not want this to come to pass for our child," he says. In what was a glimpse into a future now unfolding, Persaud said the negative prognosis for his son triggered the epiphanic realisation that he should shift gears; that he should devote his scientific knowledge, ability as a researcher, and his time into finding a solution to help his son have a better quality of life.

"At the time, there were no scientific data, no good research on how best to help those diagnosed with these conditions to have a better quality of life. Our son's prognosis was so negative. We were told he would have a difficult life; that he would be better off in an institution."

It was a challenging crossroad.

"As a scientist, I could go on with my job and do a lot of research, which could be published as scientific papers. However, I also had to live with my son not having a fulfilling life. I felt, instead, that I could put my research to helping him. So, I did what I had to do."

Persaud quit his job. He then began developing, and eventually finalised and optimised a fatty acid composition made up of 100 percent natural ingredients, minus Genetically Modified Organisms, artificial flavours, or preservatives. The result was NeuroActiv® Oil, which emerged after several years of Persaud's research and optimisation.

NeuroActiv® Oil serves as a natural food supplement to provide nutrients that may not be present in one's diet; it delivers to membrane sites a proper ratio and balance of these absent nutrients, Persaud explains.

As he notes, his initial research focused on existing scientific literature, from which he assessed comparatives on fatty acids in the structure of membranes between both healthy and diseased individuals. There were identifiable and verifiable discrepancies between both, he says.

"If there was a lack, then it needed to be supplemented," Persaud adds.

Deployment of his formulation began taking a noticeable, notable effect on his son, Persaud says.

"We started seeing [he] had better sleep patterns; also, the ticks and twitching were pretty much gone. It worked well with a restricted diet," Persaud says.

He adds, "It took about two months to see significant changes. However, the difference was noticeable in his ability to focus. Also, he was being monitored by specialists at the University of British Columbia, who also noticed the changes in his health."

Persaud further notes, "Our son moved from very low-functioning to high-functioning. He now takes care of himself; he can take trips on his own. He still needs our direction, but not as much."

Persaud adds that today his son has finished high school, is a college graduate, and is now completing online courses with a college in Edmonton, Alberta.

However, even as his son has progressed from being "a child who was totally helpless, who had no voice, to expressing himself today, knowing how to interact with others," Persaud says his work has only just begun; and that his drive for community outreach has never wavered.

"I am someone who always pushes myself even harder. I am one to push the envelope," he says, adding that he recalls his father's philosophy of doing one's best; and then some more.

Persaud notes that other parents facing similar, life-altering complexities began noticing their son's improvement.

"We felt we needed to get [the product] out to help these families; for them to have a better quality of life," he says.

And so Infogenetica emerged, growing out of the localised distribution of its NeuroActiv® Oil, into what is now an international outreach, and a fitting articulation of Persaud's passionate drive to also make a difference in the world.

Says Persaud: "The beauty of the product is it is also viable for general good health; also, we are finding it is beneficial to the seniors who are using it."

Persaud says he will always remain committed to making our world into a better place, adding, "I gave [my son] a light, and now it's a beam."

It is this light that he is now shining on humanity.

Shelved during Covid-19, Queens Book Club now back in circulation

By Dhanpaul Narine
 The Queens Book Fair Inc was founded five years ago. The purpose was to promote literacy in the community. The response to the Book Fair has been overwhelming, particularly among the young people in the Queens area in New York. The meetings are held at the Richmond Hill Branch of Queens Library in Hillside Avenue, and admission is free.

The Book Fair resumed its meetings last October, after a break due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There were four speakers at that event, and the moderator was popular personality Aminta Kilawan-Narine, the director of the South Queens Women's March.

Ashook Ramsaran from the Indian Diaspora Council spoke of the dynamism of the Indo-immigrant community. He traced the origins of the migration and highlighted the achievements of some of the prominent Indians around.

He was followed by Dr Terrence Blackman, a Professor of Mathematics at Medger-Evers College, City University of New York. Blackman examined the impact of oil and gas in Guyana, and recommended that the effects on the environment should be considered. He further suggested that there should be transparency and accountability in the negotiations to keep all abreast of the plans.

There can be no denying that Covid-19 took a great toll on the community. In 2020, at the height of the epidemic, the New York area was hard hit hard by illness and deaths. Queens, in particular, became the epicenter of the epicenter.

Dr Sharla Khargi, a member of the IDC, looked at the impact of Covid-19 on the Indo-Caribbean community. She pointed out that a number of factors contributed to the high mortality rate in the Indo-Caribbean community, including lack of information about the wearing of masks, population density, and basic education about the virus. Everyone should take precaution and learn more about prevention.

Yuvraj Ramsaroop captivated the audience with his display of Guyana's old coins. These coins dated from the days of the Dutch occupation in Guyana to the present day. It was a riveting presentation, and the audience left with a sense of appreciation of the history of Guyana.

One of the highlights of the Book Fair was the presentations by students reading their poems and speeches.

Also, Tafazool Baksh was on hand to play classical pieces from Ravel and Mozart on his mandolin.

The December offering was equally absorbing. It featured Rusat Ramgopal as presenter and moderator, Principal Mala



Members of the Queens Book Fair celebrating literacy



The importance of reading & technology was the main focus of the presentations

Panday, and computer expert, Claudette Harris-Stoute.

Ramgopal brought impressive scholarship credentials to the gathering. He is a graduate with law degrees from Kings College, London, and Georgetown University.

Panday is the Principal of the School for Women's Leadership in Queens, New York, while Harris-Stoute is a computer technician at a local hospital in Manhattan, New York.

The discussion focused on the role of education among young people and the challenges that lie ahead. Ramgopal argued that politics is all around us, and that the youths should get involved in understanding how it works. The schools are a good place to research politics and to see it in action.

Panday is one of the great educators of New York City. She has been a principal for over seven years at a top school for girls. Her graduates articulate to Ivy League schools. It was indeed a privilege to have her on the panel. She advised students to stay on track, and not to allow distractions to enter their studies. She accepted the fact that there would be challenges, including peer pressure.

Panday advised all parents, "to believe in the children, to watch them and coach them, and have high expectations for them". She acknowledged that minorities would have to work hard to close a historical gap, but with hard work it can level the playing field, and bring about equity.

Harris-Stoute is an award-winning founder, self-professed techie, teen mentor, and entrepreneur who believes that girls are great role models from whom people can draw inspiration.

In 2012, she created Guyanese Girls Rock, an online platform with the purpose of highlighting the accomplishments of Guyanese women across the globe. In her presentation, she traced her rise in the field of technology, and encouraged

more girls to get involved in technology as a career.

Harris-Stoute is an IT Manager at one of the city's leading hospitals. Is a career in technology right for girls? She argues in the affirmative, saying there are "lots of opportunities".

She adds, "Technology is all around us. Girls should think about the future prospects, as one can rise very fast in the tech field."

She also notes that technology offers scope for movement, and for one to use initiative to make innovation. She explored career options starting as a technical support person, and there is coding, programming, and web designer, or developer. Another option is an

analyst that collects data and analyses it. There is also cybersecurity that polices the system, while the network engineers upgrade the system.

Her presentation was appreciated by the audience and a number of persons expressed interest in the tech field.

There were contributions from other members that included Arya Reena Jewnandan, Ariana Narine, Anjali Mohan, Darren Singh, Akash Mohan, Bipasha Singh, Brianna Singh, Rohana Chetram, Amorita Davidson, and Maya Hardowar.

Chetram spoke beautifully about the need for literature, Sharon Carter read a Robert Frost poem, *The Road Not Taken*, and Ammar dedicated a poem to her uncle Phillip. It was great to have new members Hiram Rampersaud, Radica Olarte, and Sherry Williams. The vote of thanks was given by Shanaz Hussain.

Queens Book Fair is grateful to the parents, as well as Indi Mohan, Farzana Resally, James Narine, and Sophie Narine for their help.

Ramsaran did an amazing job with the program design, and Rebecca Alibatya from Queens Library, Richmond Hill Branch, was outstanding.

The next program of the Queens Book Fair Inc will take place on February 25 at the Queens Library in Hillside Avenue, in observance of Black History Month.

For further information email doclse007@aol.com.

United Adult Day Care for seniors makes positive impact in the community

By Dhanpaul Narine
 It is always a privilege to visit the United Adult Day Care in Richmond Hill, Queens, New York. The Day Care caters for a number of seniors in Queens, and it resides in the heart of the immigrant community.

The United Adult Day Care was established in 2012 and it has made a positive impact in the community. The director of the Day Care, Stanley Cao, and his hard-working staff, work



Stanley Cao is Executive Director of the United Adult Day Care

round the clock to meet the needs of the seniors.

In his message Stanley thanked everyone for their support, particularly the seniors and his staff. He encouraged the seniors to come to the senior centre since staying at home does not have the same benefits as meeting with others and sharing experiences.

The Adult Day Care Center was packed to capacity and the mood was festive. Gopal Mangalram, Rasheed Azim, and Lalchan "Rafi" Singh were on hand to bring live entertainment to the audience. The seniors took to the floor and celebrated in style.

One of the speakers at the event was this writer. He thanked Stanley and the staff for their hard work, and congratulated the seniors for their support. He also paid tribute to all who left us over the years, including many seniors.

Thanks are extended to performers such as Seeta Panday, Mohamed Salim, and Cliff Joseph, who were regular at the Center.

The Center is truly international. The seniors hailed from a number of countries, including Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, India, the US, and other countries.

Stanley is a product of Brooklyn Tech as well as Binghamton University. The Center provides free door-to-door transportation, two free meals, bhajan singing, exercise and health programs, arts and crafts, games, and parties for



Lalchan "Rafi" Singh from Trinidad & Tobago entertains the seniors



The seniors are having a great time welcoming the New Year 2023

holidays and other occasions, trips and outings, and assistance with Medicaid, food stamps, and housing.

The 2022 New Year's Eve program was a great success, with Stanley thanking all for their support. He wants all to know that the 2023 Medicaid limit has increased. What this means is that if you did not qualify for Medicaid because of extra income, now you can. The limit has increased to (US) \$1,564 for single income, and \$2,106 for a couple.

Call Stanley at 917-662-8913 for more information.

The United Adult Day Care Center is located at 113-44 121 Street Richmond Hill, NY 11419. The telephone number is 917-662-8913.

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How Britain drained India of its wealth, & other disturbing narratives

By Romeo Kaseram
LJI Reporter

The growing inventory of texts chronicling the evils of British imperialism today contains many notable works of scholarship, research, and incontrovertible evidence on colonialism's depredations in what was, and will always resonate, as an unwholesome era of domination, enslavement, and rapacious wealth extraction in places such as the Caribbean, Africa, and India.

Among these texts, along with others, are Caroline Elkin's *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire*; Jon Wilson's *India Conquered: Britain's Raj and the Chaos of Empire*; and Shashi Tharoor's, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India*.



Shashi Tharoor

Interestingly as an aside, Tharoor's book was formerly titled *An Era of Darkness*. However, this is no longer so, the title perhaps being too playful, or even painful – depending on whether you smile at its cleverness, or wince over its thorniness, since the play on words puts it alongside V.S. Naipaul's unsettling

1964 travelogue on India, *An Area of Darkness*.

Meanwhile, this growing inventory of texts is becoming more and more important for its corrective burns in an emergent trajectory of whitewashed counter-postcolonial narratives, a few of which the reviewers of Tharoor's *Inglorious Empire* have noted.

One of the commentators is the Irish historian, Diarmaid Ferriter, who in reviewing *Inglorious Empire* in *The Irish Times*, declares that it is now an imperative to chronicle "the evils of British imperialism" given its deleterious impact and legacy. Also, he cites the emergence of what he describes as "dishonest narratives and selective nostalgia".

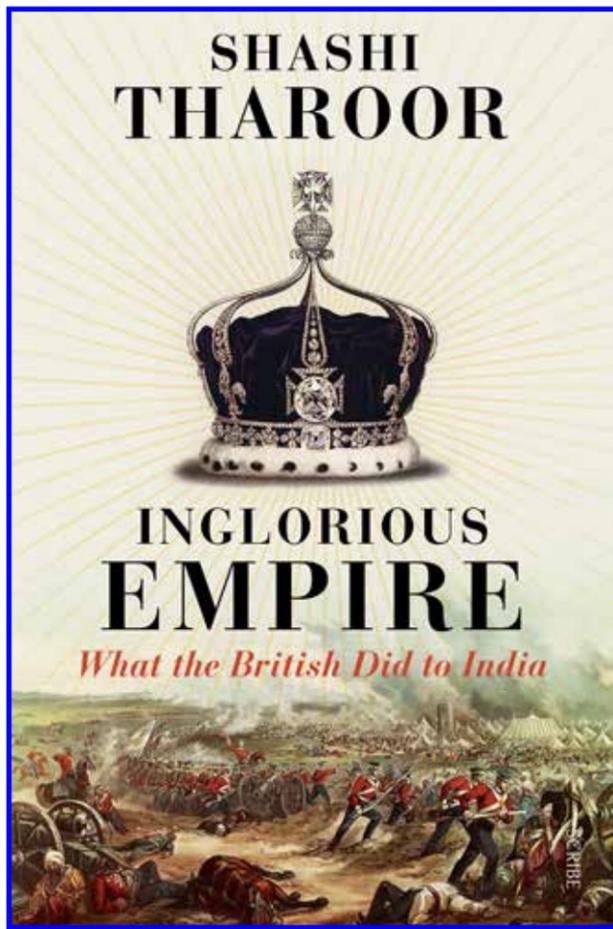
The Old Hygue is said to be an old woman with long hair, whose sole food is blood. She sucks blood through the skin of babies while they sleep at night to satisfy her craving. She is a nocturnal creature.

According to folklore, she seeks isolation in her darkened house with the shades pulled during daylight hours. Exposure to the sun will burn her body. She will shriek in extreme agony when she collapses in a heap on the floor, and smolder until she turns to ashes and blows away in the wind to disappear forever without a trace that she ever existed on Earth. Hollow screams trail behind her as she makes her invisible way to Hell to face the wrath of her master for being careless.

However, if she wishes to exit her home during daylight, she must use one of the human skins that she stores in covered and sealed pails. She obtains the skins from the graves of freshly buried bodies. Her long boney fingers and claw-like fingernails are used as her excavation tools at midnight to exhume the bodies on the night of their burial before they start to decay. Once she peels the skins off the corpses, she returns the cadavers to the gravesites and covers them once again with the newly dug earth, leaving no clues to arouse suspicion.

For daytime expeditions, she must leave her own skin in a pail while she wears the skin of a victim from her graveyard robberies. She covers herself from head to toe to avoid exposing any skin blemishes or birthmarks that could help relatives identify her selected skin.

The Old Hygue travels at night as a ball of fire streaking across the sky toward her prey. Once she arrives at her victim's home, she must take off her skin and leave it outside the door



Ferriter also mentions the lack of exposure to the ills of imperialism, which has led to "downright ignorance" about the era. And he cites a romantic weave of re-interpretation in yet another deflection of the coloniser's evils, stating that *Inglorious Empire* is a timely reminder of the need "to start teaching unromanticised colonial history in British schools"; this must be so, he declares, since the British public "is woefully ignorant of the realities of the British empire".

The evidence is quite disturbing on why there is a need to stack the inventories in libraries with works by authors such as

Elkin, Wilson, Tharoor, and other writers.

Both Ferriter, and *The Guardian's* reviewer of *Inglorious Empire*, J.D. Smith, cite a 2014 British YouGov poll, which is remarkable for its disconcerting outcome that revealed almost 60 percent of Britons were proud of the British Empire. Also, that almost 50 percent of Britons thought the British Empire had made the ex-colonies better off for having been colonised.

Writing in the open access journal, *Reviews in History*, Dr Ross Nelson notes that Tharoor's text emerged from a speech he gave in May 2015 at the Oxford Union. There he spoke on the motion, 'Britain Owes Reparations to Her Former Colonies', his address focusing on the exploitation of India.

The Union later uploaded the speech to social media, following which Tharoor posted its link on his Twitter account. His followers then made the post go viral.

As Nelson notes, the voluminous social media response saw Tharoor being encouraged to write *Inglorious Empire*. While his speech had a narrower target on reparations from Britain (Tharoor recommended an annual payment of £1 a year), *Inglorious Empire* spreads its message with a broader blast.

As Nelson writes, Tharoor is unequivocal in maintaining that "in almost all respects British rule in India was profoundly damaging to the sub-continent's population and economy".

Nelson also notes disturbing, angry, and unforgiving tonality in passages, such as: "[The] British state in India was ... a totally amoral, rapacious imperialist machine bent on the subjugation of Indians for the purpose of profit, not merely a neutrally efficient system indifferent to human rights. And its subjugation resulted in the expropriation of Indian wealth to Britain, draining the society of the resources that would normally have propelled its natural growth and economic development."

Smith has similar a takeaway on tonality, noting how Tharoor inexorably calls out Britain for its greed, and for "systematically" looting India "for some 200 years".

And as he writes, Tharoor's documentation of the rapacity and greed is grounded in research, where it is noted that India's share of the world economy at the start of the 18th century was 23 percent. However, when Britain left it was around three percent. Such was the drain on India, that by the end of the 19th century, it had become Britain's biggest source of revenue.

[Tharoor's *Inglorious Empire* is available on Amazon.](#)

The Supernatural

Old Hygue

to squeeze through the tiny space under the door or through the keyhole.

After entering the house, the blood-sucking woman moves stealthily to her food source and uses her lips like a vacuum to suck the baby's blood through the skin, which leaves black and blue blotches around the infant's body. If she hurts her victim and the baby starts to cry, she scampers back out of the house in the same way she entered to don her skin and zoom herself as a fireball a short distance from her home. She does not go directly to her house to avoid being traced.

Villagers with infants raise the alarm whenever dark circular marks appear on their babies who start to lose energy and become anemic from loss of blood.

Time causes the Old Hygue the greatest stress. She must finish her feeding and get to the safety of her house before the earliest light of dawn. Villagers know this fact and use it to impede her progress. They use chalk to draw several lines outside the doors

of every household with a newborn. The Old Hygue must use her hair to erase the chalk lines before she can cross them and enter the house. They also use lines of rice, which she must count with her eyelashes and sweep out of the way to cross the threshold. These delaying tactics result in her having to flee back to her house before sunrise, angry and hungry.

Villagers sometimes lie in wait for the Old Hygue to strike, knowing that she will revisit each victim until the child dies from extreme blood loss. They would hide and wait at the

home of a newborn for the crone to arrive and discard her skin. They pounce on the skin when they see her enter the home and douse it with pepper sauce and salt then hide again. The Old Hygue senses the tampering of her skin and rushes to throw it on and escape. She screams in agony as the salt and pepper ignite her into a ball of orange flames that evoke excruciating tormented screeches before she becomes charred and blows away as a dark cloud of ashes in the wind.

If an old woman living by herself is suspected of being an Old Hygue, villagers will lay in wait in the surrounding bushes for her to make a daytime trip out of the house. They would break down her doors or break her windows to gain access to her home, knowing that she would have to leave her own skin at home. Once the skin is located, they would sprinkle kerosene on it and set it on fire before scurrying back out of the house to lay in wait for her inevitable rush back to the house.

By the time she enters her house, the licking flames would spread and set fire to her bed and flooring. When they hear her screams and watch the house on fire, they wait to see the dark smoke in the shape of her old bent body rise out of the conflagration before they would leave, satisfied that they had accomplished their mission.

Once the house is burnt to the ground, the villagers will stay off the premises, and warn their children to do the same. The Old Hygue remains locked down in her master's den in Hell, but the portal on the premises where her house once sat stays open for her return through the curious minds of children, which she has the power to manipulate.

If the church does not seal the portal and a child wanders onto the property and stumbles upon the portal, the Old Hygue will dart through Hell's doorway and inhabit the child's body. She remains dormant, living on the child's nutrients like a parasite until she can jump into the frame of an old woman to hijack her body. This deception allows her to reappear in a faraway village as a harmless and feeble old woman.

The Old Hygue can live forever if she is never caught, or she can rebirth herself throughout the ages.

Kamil Ali





Minister of Energy & Energy Industries Stuart Young (left to right), with Chief Medical Officer Dr Roshan Parasram, Minister of National Security Fitzgerald Hinds, & Dr Maryam Abdool-Richards at the Covid-19 media conference

No govt plan for restrictions with Covid-19 cases climbing in T&T

Port-of-Spain – With Covid-19 infections and deaths on the rise, there are no plans to introduce additional restrictions during celebrations of what is being described as the “Mother of all Carnivals”, the government of Trinidad and Tobago said last week.

Carnival festivities are now underway, and will culminate on February 20 and February 21 this year.

The reassurance that there would be no government intervention at this time was given last week by Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley. However, at the same time he called for greater responsibility among the population, given that the the new XBB.1.5 sub-variant is now in circulation.

Additionally, Rowley indicated that daily cases were forecasted to reach in the “high hundreds” within the next two weeks given the current trajectory of infections.

Rowley also justified the government’s decision to continue with Carnival plans despite the rising number of infections.

“We do not believe the situation warrants us to not have Carnival, but we believe that it warrants us taking personal decisions about your exposure to minimise instances for requirement of healthcare delivery to you,” he said.

It meant increased personal vigilance and adherence to practices now well known to everyone, which was observing the public health protocols, and getting vaccinated or boosted. The vigilance was especially critical for those with comorbidities, he added.

Rowley indicated that what led to the government deciding to continue with Carnival festivities was the comparatively milder infectivity of Covid-19 variants that are now circulating, along with a higher level of immunity in Trinidad and Tobago’s population.

“As of now, given the nature of the population, given the immune response that we’ve had, given the suppressing effect of the vaccine programme and the natural immunity that we have built up, we are now facing a situation where we can continue to operate without the level of fear and distancing that we did before, which caused us to close our border, shut down our schools, and so on. Those things are not necessary at this time,” Rowley said.

It was also not necessary to introduce border restrictions for international travellers since the global variants are already circulating in Trinidad and Tobago, Rowley said.

“That is not a necessary response at this time. Our response has to be to suppress the spread of what we have amongst us,” he said.

It was reported last week that six cases of the XBB.1.5 sub-variant have been detected in Trinidad and Tobago.

Minister of Health Terrence Deyalsingh also said the ministry conducted a seroprevalence study last year to determine the level of immunity among the population. It returned favourable results, he revealed.

According to Deyalsingh, 961 samples were selected from both vaccinated and unvaccinated people, with 949 being of use. From these samples, he said 50 did not have detectable levels of antibodies against Covid-19.

It meant 94.73 percent of the samples had antibodies present through vaccination, and which were naturally acquired through infection.

“This is again scientific evidence, quantitative evidence that there is a high level of immunity in the public,” Deyalsingh said.

He added, “So, when we say we are comfortable with the level of immunity, this is the evidence that we rely on.”

Geneticist Dr Nicole Ramlachan also agreed with the government’s decision to continue with plans for Carnival, noting that with the current outlook, Covid-19 variants will continue to emerge, causing various surges and lulls in the number of cases.

Said Ramlachan: “[At] this point in time, we have to learn how to live with this thing. We can’t depend on our government... to be able to halt and stop the spread. The only way that it stops is us taking the vaccines, taking precautions, and trying to protect the elderly and immunocompromised. [We have to be] our brother’s keepers.”

Internal medicine specialist Dr Joel Teelucksingh also agreed that government intervention was not necessary for nationals to protect themselves.

“You don’t need a mandate to wear a high-quality mask like N95 in a risky indoor public setting. Your choice of mask matters – cloth masks won’t be as effective,” he said.

Covid-19 cases have been slowly increasing since December last year, but then took a sharper upward trajectory at the start of 2023.

According to the Ministry of Health’s Epidemiology Division’s Technical Director, Dr Avery Hinds, the projections are that this rate will be surpassed by the end of the month.

Said Hinds: “What we did see when we looked at the projections moving forward is an increase – a fairly rapid increase in the expected sort of average number of cases per day”, as January and February progresses.

Relief from businesses over govt move

Port-of-Spain – Business owners in Trinidad and Tobago indicated their relief last week following the announcement by Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley that the government would neither implement restrictions, nor introduce strict measures despite Covid-19 cases continuing to trend upwards.

Business person Ryan Chin told the media he was pleased after Rowley revealed the government’s plan for non-intervention. Chin is director at Dachin Group of Companies, which includes Texas de Brazil, Rizzoni’s Ristorante Italiano, and Jaxx International Grill.

He said his restaurants never stopped providing hand sanitisers for guests, and this practice will continue.

“A lot of the measures that we implemented during the pandemic have remained, and a lot of our staff still wear the mask at their own will. Keeping most of the protocols is just good practice for the restaurants,” Chin said.

Passage to Asia restaurant owner Dipchand Persad was certain Rowley and his government had no plans to again lock the nation down, not with the ‘Mother of All Carnivals’ around the corner.

Said Persad: “What has to happen is the population needs to take care of [itself], and ensure [that] the protocols put in place to curb the spread continues... We are glad no restrictions on businesses were given like the last time, so everyone must do their part.”

MovieTowne owner Derek Chin said the cinema industry certainly could not take another lockdown, and commended Rowley and the administration for not taking that road once more.

“Most businesses are still recovering from the lockdowns, and while movie-goers are coming out, it is not like it was before, as some persons are still scared to interact, and also the

crime situation. The government should also embark on a PR campaign calling on citizens to be more responsible,” Chin said.

Chaguanas Chamber of Industry and Commerce head Richie Sookhai said Trinidad and Tobago needed to work together to fight the ongoing battle against Covid-19.

“Measures must be put in place to protect citizens of this country. For the past two years,

we have seen our economy endure adversity from loss of lives to increasing unemployment, trade disruptions, decimation of the tourism industry, and even business closure. With a spike in cases once again, we do not want to find ourselves in the same situation,” Sookhai said.

He added that the efficacy of proper community mask-wearing substantially reduces

the transmission of Covid-19 by up to 70 percent.

Said Sookhai: “With such empirical evidence, we can safely say that mask-wearing should be enforced more, together with a rigorous push in our vaccination drive, as well as encouraging proper [sanitising] measures at home, and in both the work and business places, especially with Carnival [on] the horizon... to curb the spread of the virus.”

Also, the Confederation of Regional Business Chambers indicated that it too was pleased with the decision by the government.

However, it urged citizens to get vaccinated, get their booster shots, and ensure they were protected against Covid-19.

It also reiterated the benefits in wearing masks and of social distancing, noting these actions were important parts of the prevention protocol.

“This is the individual’s responsibility,” the CRBC said.



Ryan Chin



Richie Sookhai



Keith Rowley



Carpark & the main Chapel at Mount St Benedict, the site of a robbery last week

Now bandits prey on visitors at Mount St Benedict

Port-of-Spain – A drop in the number of visits to the serene and prayerful Mount St Benedict in St Augustine is now underway following recent robberies at the site where bandits have now started to prey on visitors.

What is also contributing to the fall in visits are the shootings and murders that have been taking place in the surrounding community, the Trinidad and Tobago media reported last week.

According to the reports, interviews with the handful of visitors at the monastery noted concern being expressed over personal security and the safety of property. These concerns followed a robbery that took place in the monastery's carpark earlier this month.

During that incident, a young woman was robbed of her cell-phone and a Honda City motor vehicle. Days later following the robbery, a taxi driver was shot and killed at the major intersection lower down the street that leads to the monastery, at the corner of St John's Road and the Eastern Main Road in St Augustine.

According to the police reports, in the past months five persons have been killed along St John's Road, which leads up into the misty mountains where the religious site is located. The reports noted ongoing rival gang turf wars in the area as a major contributing factor to the growing homicides.

It was noted that criminal gang activity, occasional robberies, and the Covid-19 pandemic, all led to the decline in numbers of visitors making pilgrimages to the well-known religious site.

Said a taxi driver at the intersection leading up to the monastery: "Normally, the crowd does be much bigger than this. Normally, we used to use two buses, now we only use one during the week."

He added, "I think it is still safe, but seeing more police and security would make people feel even safer."

One resident said she wished the old days would return,

T&T-born Baroness Benjamin gets UK Order of Merit

Port-of-Spain – A Trinidad-born national, Baroness Floella Benjamin became the first woman from the Caribbean to be bestowed with one of the UK's highest awards, the prestigious Order of Merit.

The long-standing Windrush supporter and former politician and broadcaster was presented with the honour by King Charles III during a lunch at Buckingham Palace on November 24, 2022.

The award recognises distinguished service towards the advancement of the arts, learning, literature, or science. It was founded by King Edward VII in 1902.

There can only be 24 members within the Order of Merit group at one time, with some additional foreign members. Also, there are a very small group of people who are honorary members of the award.

Baroness Benjamin has dedicated much of her career to campaigning and supporting charities, including Barnardo's, Sickle Cell Society, and Beating Bowel Cancer.

She was previously honoured and recognised for her chari-



Police process the murder scene at the main intersection leading up to Mount St Benedict

where people who lived in the area looked out for each other, and the doors to their homes were left unlocked.

"I really wish that that could come back, but maybe someday, we will have that kind of utopic world again," she said.

Additionally, "The crime in the area, and in the country at large, is extremely concerning, but we have to pray and hope for the best."

One visitor to the monastery said she has been visiting the location since she was six years old. She noted that despite feeling unsafe nowadays, she had no plans to stop coming to pray at the church.

"I see they have security so that is supposed to keep you safe. People come to pray – everyone has issues and problems of their own. [Bandits now at the monastery] don't care about anything and anybody anymore," she lamented.

Visitor Ineez Ramroop prayed for a better country during her visit. She came to the chapel from Chaguanas in central Trinidad to celebrate her birthday.

"Coming up to the Mount has always been so peaceful and serene. For me, my sisters, and brother-in-law, it holds a very special place in our hearts. Really, it's about the calmness of the place," Ramroop said.

She added, "I would want to see more police patrols. I think they have enough security. I'm not too sure because it all depends on their budget. I don't know if they can afford it."

Abbot John Pereira, an official at the monastery, said security will be heightened to ensure visitor safety.

"The administration of the monastery is seeking to establish some more visible security presence at the Abby, and the Monks of Mount St Benedict Monastery are recommitting themselves to offer the only alternative to violence, which is Pax, the Pax Benedictina, The Peace of Benedict, The Benedictine Peace," he said.

table efforts, and was specially chosen by Queen Elizabeth II to receive the award before her passing.

Said Baroness Benjamin: "I am thrilled to be a part of this group. I would have loved for my mum and dad to be here today to just see the fruits of their labour, and to celebrate with me."

She added, "I am one of the first Black women to be included in the Order of Merit, the first Trinidadian woman, the first Caribbean woman, the first Windrush generation to be included, and it is absolutely incredible."

Baroness Benjamin said she and King Charles III "had a deep conversation about diversity and inclusion."

They also talked about the work that he had done in the past, and what he wanted to do in the future to make Britain "feel all-inclusive, all-embracing", she said.

She added, "It's to celebrate each other's culture, each other's differences. This is to show that children, people of my generation, [and] children of the future that anything is possible."



Baroness Floella Benjamin

Fire Hinds says UNC

Port-of-Spain – With Trinidad and Tobago recording 22 murders in the first two weeks of January, the call was made yet again by Opposition Leader and head of the UNC, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for the government to remove Fitzgerald Hinds MP as Minister of National Security.

In a statement to the government, Persad-Bissessar described Hinds as "a weak and absurd appointment that [Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley] must now move on from for the good of the country".

She added, "Since... Rowley ridiculously appointed... Hinds to helm the Ministry of National Security, an alarming 960 people have been murdered. In addition, violent assaults, wounding, robberies, carjackings, rapes, and home invasions have also exploded."

Last year was the worst for murders in Trinidad and Tobago's history, she said.

"[In 2022] the murder rate skyrocketed to 605, with a further 56 missing without a trace, making 2022 the deadliest year in our nation's history," she stated. She also noted that the homicides now continue into the new year, with 22 dead in the first two weeks of 2023.

Persad-Bissessar said the time has come for Rowley to put the security of nationals first, rather than continuing to protect Hinds.

Said Persad-Bissessar: "Rowley and Hinds have failed to produce a working and data-driven plan to tackle violent crime and restore public confidence. I call on Keith Rowley to set aside his petty stubbornness, and not allow 2023 to be even more bloody and violent than 2022. For the safety and security of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago... Hinds must be fired."

She added, "This is not a matter of win or lose. It's about doing the right thing to protect our citizens' lives."

India honours T&T judge

From Page 1

stated that the diaspora was making stellar contributions to world affairs in many leadership positions.

"[The] Indian diaspora today has become an important and unique force in the global system. It has grown into an energetic and confident community in every region," Murmu said.

Additionally, she declared that the diaspora has displayed extraordinary dedication and hard work, and has overcome significant challenges to achieve excellence in arts, literature, politics, sports, business, academics, philanthropy, science, and technology.

Murmu also spoke to her nation's plans for the next 25 years, saying, "India is going to embark on an ambitious journey of collective hard work, sacrifice and intensive development to transform into a self-reliant world leader by 2047, when we would be celebrating the centenary of our Independence."

To this end, Murmu urged the entire diaspora family to engage in full partnership on this journey. The diaspora can contribute to India's goal with its energy, experience, ideas, business acumen, investments, technical expertise, and the sharing of knowledge "to enhance our capacities to fulfil the vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat", she declared.

Guyana's President Ali received the PBSA for his contribution to politics and community welfare. As the citation for his award noted, "...Through his efforts, he has been able to put aside racial differences in Guyana and has been working to diversify Guyana's economy from oil and gas dependence to a more public welfare-oriented approach."

It added Ali is championing environmental causes, such as climate change in the Caribbean, with a low carbon development strategy.

"He has great respect and affinity towards India, and has been very vocal in extolling India for its achievements in various sectors," the citation noted.

In an earlier interview with the Trinidad and Tobago media, Seepersad said he was honoured to receive the PBSA award.

The PBSA has also been conferred on other Trinidad and Tobago nationals, with honorees being former Prime Ministers Basdeo Panday and Kamla Persad-Bissessar; former government minister Lenny Saith; former Central Bank governor Winston Dookeran; and the National Council of Indian Culture.



Persad-Bissessar



Frank Seepersad

The Golden Years of Indian Cinema

Dil Deke Dekho easy on the senses, with lovely songs but so convoluted

Movie Review: *Dil Deke Dekho*

By Madhulika Liddle

Dil Deke Dekho is not quite the perfect film I would like to make it out to be.

(a) The story is not exactly original (Nasir Hussain had already used it in *Tumsa Nahin Dekha*. He also went on to use it in *Jab Pyaar Kisi se Hota Hai* and *Phir Wohi Dil Laaya Hoon*, but that cannot be laid at the doorstep of *Dil Deke Dekho*).

(b) The plot is too complicated, relies too heavily on convenient coincidences, and has some unbelievable – and often unclear – motives.

(c) The lead actress, Asha Parekh (just 16 years old), though pretty as a picture, is not a terribly good actress at this stage of her career.

On the other hand: the film stars Shammi Kapoor.

That may sound very biased, but let us be honest. This was Shammi Kapoor's film, all the way. He ruled it. He was charming, suave, the perfect lover, the perfect son, the perfect everything. He was even better in this film than he had been in *Tumsa Nahin Dekha*, enacting an almost-identical role to the one that had catapulted him to stardom two years earlier.

The film begins in the past, with Harichand (Wasti) coming to meet his mistress Nagina (Indira Billi) with the happy news that he has carried out a thoroughly nefarious plan to lay hands on a vast amount of wealth.

A stranger – resembling Harichand in build and height – had turned up at Harichand's house, and had died there of a heart attack. Harichand has put his own clothes on the corpse, shot the corpse through the face badly enough to disfigure it beyond all recognition, and has planted a letter on the corpse. The letter is addressed to Jamuna Devi (Sulochana Latkar), the wealthy woman who is Harichand's employer.

While Harichand and Nagina watch from the window of her house, Jamuna Devi arrives with her husband Rana Raghbir (Surendra). She finds a crowd gathered outside Harichand's home. The police are there too, and dissuade her from trying to see the corpse for herself; it's too badly mutilated, says the inspector. However, he does tell her that a letter addressed to her has been found in the pocket of the corpse. Jamuna Devi asks the inspector to read out the letter.

The letter, in Harichand's handwriting, implies that Jamuna Devi and he (Harichand) have been having an affair for several years, and Harichand has now given up hope of ever having her all to himself, so he's committed suicide. He also implies, in his letter, that his little son Kailash, whom Jamuna Devi has been bringing up with her own toddler Roop, is in reality the illegitimate child of Harichand and Jamuna Devi.

This results in a huge to-do between Jamuna Devi and her husband. The poverty-stricken Rana Raghbir has always been aware that he has married a very wealthy woman, and now accuses her of marrying him simply for his youth and his looks (considering they've been married only three years, he seems to have gone to seed superquick).

Poor Jamuna Devi does all she can to deny the 'dead Harichand's' filthy allegations, but to no avail. Rana Raghbir, in a fit of anger, gathers up his son Roop and leaves.

Years pass. Jamuna Devi has brought up Kailash (Rajendranath) as her foster son. Kailash has been looking after the operations of the Royal Hotel in Ranikhet – which Jamuna Devi owns – and has been drawing money for his own use left, right, and centre. He's a buffoon and a moron, but he's also a spendthrift, and Jamuna Devi is most annoyed when she discovers what Kailash has been up to.

In the meantime, our heroine appears on the scene. This is Neeta (Asha Parekh, billed as 'A Filmalaya Discovery', though she had been a child actress, and had even appeared as Vyjayantimala's friend in *Aasha* in 1957). Neeta is the daughter of Jagat Narain 'Jagat Babu' (Raj Mehra), a friend of Rana Raghbir and Jamuna. Jamuna has already willed half her substantial property to Neeta. Jamuna and Jagat Babu have decided that Neeta and Kailash will be married once Neeta, who has been studying in London, returns. Neeta is back in India now, and Kailash is eager to get his hands on Neeta and all her gorgeous money.

We now (finally!) catch up with our hero. Rana Raghbir had, all those years ago, fled his wife along with his son, Roop. Shortly after, working in a factory, Rana Raghbir had an accident that blinded him. Now, after all these years, Roop (Shammi Kapoor) has managed to make arrangements for his father's eyes to be operated upon.



Shammi Kapoor (as Roop) with Asha Parekh (Neeta)



Bhanu Athaiya



Shammi Kapoor (left) as Professor Saamri, with Rajendranath (Kailash)

Incidentally, Rana Raghbir has been affectionately calling Roop 'Raja' all these years.

The surgeon is in Delhi, so Rana Raghbir's friend Murli (Mumtaz Ali, the father of Mehmood) offers to accompany Rana Raghbir from Nainital (where they stay) to Delhi.

There is a silly digression here now. Neeta, who is in Nainital, is told by one of her friends that a drummer at a hotel had slapped one of Neeta's friends after having led her on. Neeta vows to avenge her friend's disgrace. We end up with a song, some *tamaasha*, and poor Roop (who's the drummer in question) being thrown out of his job.

What now? With no job, Roop has no money to pay for his father's eye operation. Murli's son (and Roop's buddy), Tom (?) points out an ad in the newspaper: the Royal Hotel in Ranikhet needs a bandmaster. Roop is bound to get the job; they should go to Ranikhet at once.

But Roop has another plan (actually, only a ploy to inject some more songs and some rather tedious comedy into the plot).

Roop tells Tom that in foreign countries, there are private investigators; why shouldn't he (Roop) offer his services as one? He has published an ad in the newspapers, calling himself Professor Saamri – and there have already been two requests for Professor Saamri to meet potential clients.

These turn out to be: (a) Kailash, who hires Saamri to get rid of Chandra, some no-account young man whom Neeta has brought to her home to recuperate after he had an accident;

Kailash fears that Neeta is getting too fond of Chandra.

And, (b) Neeta herself, who wants Saamri to get rid of Kailash – as in, break off the 'engagement' – for her.

This is followed by some convoluted and idiotic twists and turns, with Chandra and Kailash both getting the boot, and Neeta being eternally grateful to Saamri. She has already, by the way, met Roop in his undisguised form. He has told her his name is Raja, and they have had several rather melodious run-ins. Neeta is attracted to this stranger, but always manages to resist temptation.

Roop hands over the money he has earned as Saamri to Rana Raghbir. Roop and Tom decide to go to Ranikhet and apply at the Royal Hotel.

Murli and Rana Raghbir set off by train for Delhi. On the way, just as the train is pulling out of the station, Jagat Babu – who has come to see off a friend – sees and recognises Rana Raghbir. He cannot stop the train, but he begins enquiries to discover where Rana Raghbir lives. Jamuna, on being told, is very grateful and hopes to be reunited with her husband soon.

When Rana Raghbir and Murli get off at Bareilly to change trains, Rana Raghbir discovers that someone has picked his pocket and made off with the money. Now what?

As luck would have it, also on the platform is an old enemy: Harichand. Harichand has been living in Rangoon all these years, and has now returned along with his son Sohan (Siddhu, in his debut).

Harichand recognises Rana Raghbir immediately, and Sohan decides to go and find out what Rana Raghbir is up to. The blind man confides in this solicitous young man, and tells him all about Roop alias Raja, the stolen money, the operation in Delhi, and so on. Sohan tells Rana Raghbir that he, Sohan, is headed for Ranikhet and can carry a letter for Roop, if needed. A grateful Rana Raghbir agrees, and scrawls a letter to Roop, which he gives to Sohan along with a photo of Roop, so that Sohan is able to recognise Roop.

Sohan and Harichand set off for Ranikhet and the Royal Hotel where some more snooping around yields results. They discover that Jamuna Devi has willed half her wealth to Neeta, and the other half to her son Roop (who, of course, is still lost). Now all Sohan needs to do is convince Jamuna Devi that he, Sohan, is in fact her long-lost son Roop. Then, if he marries Neeta, he will not only get Roop's share of Jamuna Devi's money, but also Neeta's share, since he intends to kill Neeta.

If you think that's complicated enough, watch on. There are many more plots and subplots, twists and complications and misunderstandings... and, to redeem it all, a romance and some lovely songs.

Frankly, of all the versions of Nasir Hussain's well-worn story, I think *Dil Deke Dekho* is the most complicated. It is not incoherent, but after a while, I began losing the thread of how and why people were doing what they were doing. Despite that, I don't know how many times I have watched this film, simply because it is such a wonderful Shammi Kapoor showcase.

What I liked about this film: Shammi Kapoor. He is so much fun, so very much the epitome of the romantic-comic-heroic Hindi film hero of the 1950s and 1960s. And, oh, he looks so good.

Asha Parekh. One of my favourite actresses, though here her acting skills are still raw; she is a little gauche in places. But very pretty nevertheless.

The music, by Usha Khanna (another 'Filmalaya Discovery'). Even though the score of *Dil Deke Dekho* had the dubious distinction of borrowing three tunes almost *verbatim* from Western songs (the title song is based on the McGuire Sisters' *Sugar In The Morning*; *Pyaar ki kasam hai* is a copy of Ivory Joe Hunter's *Since I Met You Baby*, and *Meri Neeta* is a very easily recognisable copy of Paul Anka's *Diana*)... a lot of the other songs are very, very nice.

My particular favourite is *Hum aur tum aur yeh samaa*, but *Bade hain dil ke kaale* and *Yaar chulbula hai haseen dilruba hai* are almost as good.

And, house favourite Edwina Lyons can be seen in several scenes as one of Neeta's friends

What I didn't like: Read the first paragraph of this post. And some of the costumes. Please. What was Bhanu Athaiya thinking of?

I have watched *Dil Deke Dekho* at least a dozen times. I know most of the plot (which does not mean all of it makes sense to me!), but I still love to watch it – because it is so easy on the senses, so entertaining and lovely and unbeatable time-pass.

Kher opens up on Oscar shortlist for *The Kashmir Files*

Ever since Vivek Agnihotri announced that his critically acclaimed film *The Kashmir Files*, along with the lead actors of the film Anupam Kher, Mithun Chakraborty, Darshaan Kumar, and Pallavi Joshi had been shortlisted in two categories at the Oscars 2023, a lot has been said, and this has led to a social media storm.

Anupam Kher recently shared his views regarding the ongoing controversy, saying the Oscar eligibility is a slap on the faces of those who called *The Kashmir Files* a propaganda film.

It felt like a "thousand-mile journey is done by taking the first step", he said. He also declared *The Kashmir Files* is not only a movie, but a twisting story of all those people who had to suffer due to genocide.

As he also noted, the film will always remain close to his heart, and that it became more personal when Agnihotri's intention was questioned, along with those involved in the film.

Kher said this is the start to a big dream, as over the past 32 years many tried to keep it under the carpet. When the film was released people even tried to prove this did not happen, and



Anupam Kher

others tried to demean its authenticity when it was enjoying a spectacular box office run.

The Oscar eligibility is a slap on their faces too, he said.

To be recognised by the Academy is also an acknowledgment of the glory of Indian cinema because *The Kashmir Files* represents not just those who were evicted from their homes in Kashmir, but also the 1.4 billion people.

For those not in the know, on January 10 Vivek Agnihotri tweeted: "BIG ANNOUNCEMENT: #TheKashmirFiles has been shortlisted for #Oscars2023 in the first list of @TheAcademy. It's one of the 5 films from India. I wish all of them very best. A great year for Indian cinema."

Sharing a screenshot of the reminder list, he further wrote, "#PallaviJoshi #MithunChakraborty @DarshanKumaar @AnupamPKher are all shortlisted for best actor categories. It's just the beginning. A long long road ahead. Pl bless them all."

Apart from *The Kashmir Files*, the other films named in the list of 301 films eligible for Oscar nominations are *RRR*, *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, *Kantara*, and *Chhello Show*.

Producers push back on actors charging unreasonable fees

Amidst ongoing issues plaguing the Hindi film industry, a lot has been said about actors charging unreasonable fees, which among other things, lead to losses incurred by the film at the box office.

After Karan Johar recently pointed out that younger actors demand 30-35 crore without first proving themselves at the box office, producer Bhushan Kumar recently opened up about the same.

Kumar said that while most actors understand the market and charge accordingly, there are some who are rigid about their fees.

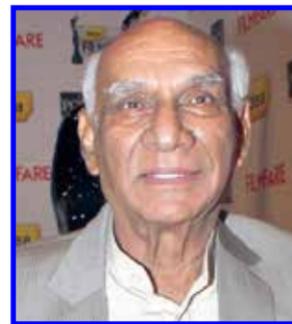
He added that the producers now choose not to work with them, as many have suffered massive losses in big ticket films, and this is not fair, especially when the actors earn large sums.

"Still there are some actors who refuse to slash their fee. So we are not working with them. Why should we bear the loss? We tell them, 'Why we should give you money and we suffer loss, when you earn such a big amount?'"

Kumar also revealed that unlike how it was done in the past, producers now work out the figures if an actor likes a script, and then decide on its viability.

Producer Ratan Jain also weighed in on the issue, saying: "Before 2005, I had never priced an actor above 2.5 crore, be it Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Akshay Kumar, Ajay Devgn, or any other actor. But after the corporates came in, the same price hiked up to 20 crore, 25 crore, 50 crore, 100 crore... There was no regulation."

Jain added, "The star system existed since the 1960s. But back then, the actors' fees were reasonable. It is true the audience won't go to watch a film without a star. There are very few films that work on their merit with a newcomer in the lead. So that star system will stay, and there is no problem with it. But if the stars become unreasonable, a producer may have to sell his house. Now some actors have started coming forward and becoming partners for films. But the share that they are asking for also needs to be considered."



Yash Chopra



Manmohan Desai

Calls for more creative thinking after poor showing by Hindi films

The year 2022 was of a huge concern for the Hindi film industry due to the dismal performance of most of the films, including the most promising big budget films. Meanwhile, the South films fared better even in the Hindi circuits.

Regarding these not so stellar performances, film exhibitor Manoj Desai has said that Bollywood needs to go back to the books when it comes to filmmaking.

"If we want to run Bollywood like how it was before, like when the late Manmohan Desai or the late Yash Chopra used to run things, then we have to feature such successful films like they made," he said to *Bollywood Hungama*.

Desai added that the content, script, dialogues, music, editing – everything, has to come together to make a successful film.

He also indicated there is immense interest among the cinema goers about the advance booking of *Pathaan*. Also, there is immense sincerity in the South film industry. A complete schedule is made in detail, and then the plan is executed no matter what, he said.

Trade analyst and film critic Taran Adarsh also commented on the issue, saying, "South people have been known to give newer subjects since time immemorial"

Additionally, "South has been ahead of Bollywood as far as the thought process is concerned. South writers are definitely more hardworking, and more innovative than Bollywood writers. And it got underlined now, because the release of the South dubbed versions was simultaneous with the original versions. So, this new thing happened in 2022."



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Kishan joins Indian Test squad vs Australia

Wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan has made the Indian Test squad for the first two games against Australia, the opportunity opening up with Rishabh Pant being sidelined following a car crash late last year. K.S. Bharat is the second wicketkeeper.

The team was announced late last week by the Board of Control for Cricket in India, the cricket website *Cricbuzz* reported.

Kishan made his first-class debut in 2014 versus Assam, and has since compiled 2,985 runs at an average of 38.76 in 48 first-class matches. His highest first-class score of 273 came versus Delhi in November 2016.

Suryakumar Yadav has also been showing form in T20Is for India, and was also included in the side. He is a middle-order batter, made his first-class debut back in December 2010 versus Delhi, and has 5,549 runs in that format at an average of 44.79.

Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah has been out of action since September last year due to a back injury, and was not included in the squad for the first two Tests. However, he was picked for the ongoing ODI series against Sri Lanka, but was withdrawn from the squad just before the first ODI in Guwahati.

According to a BCCI statement, Bumrah was set to join the

team in Guwahati ahead of the ODI series but will need some more time to build bowling resilience.

In his absence, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Umesh Yadav, and Jaydev Unadkat form the core of the pace attack.

Unadkat recently made a comeback into the Indian Test side after a gap of 12 years. He took three wickets in the second Test against Bangladesh, which he followed up with eight wickets in the first innings against Delhi in the Ranji Trophy 2022-2023.

All rounder Ravindra Jadeja is also set to make a comeback, with his availability subject to fitness. R. Ashwin, Axar Patel, and Kuldeep Yadav are the other spinners in the squad.

Rohit Sharma missed the Test series in Bangladesh due to a thumb injury, but now returns to captain the side. K.L. Rahul led the side in Sharma's absence in Bangladesh, and will return as vice captain.

Squad

Rohit Sharma (captain), KL Rahul (vice captain), Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, K.S. Bharat (wicketkeeper), Ishan Kishan (wicketkeeper), R. Ashwin, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohd. Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Umesh Yadav, Jaydev Unadkat, and Suryakumar Yadav.



Ishan Kishan



Robin Uthappa



Phil Simmons



Joe Root

Now Simmons in coaching lead with Dubai Capitals

Former West Indies Head Coach Phil Simmons is leading the coaching department of the Dubai Capitals, which is participating in International T20 League now underway in UAE, the *Guyana Times Online* reported last week.

The games started last Friday, and will end on February 12. A total of 34 matches are expected to be played with six franchises participating in the tournament. The franchises are Abu Dhabi Knight Riders, Desert Vipers, Dubai Capitals, Gulf Giants, MI Emirates, and Sharjah Warriors.

Simmons said he was excited to be participating in the brand new T20 League.

"It's very exciting to be a part of the Dubai Capitals, and to be a part of a new league in the UAE. Our team is exceptionally well-balanced. We have a backup for each of the players, who will be a part of the first," Simmons said.

The Dubai Capitals have two superstar players – Joe Root and Robin Uthappa in their squad.

Simmons was looking forward to both players performing in the Dubai Capitals.

"You can't put a price on experience. These two would have seen every situation possible in cricket during their careers. They will know how to manoeuvre the team in difficult situations during the tournament. They are both World Cup winners and that is a huge plus for us," he said.

Simmons also commented on Dubai Capitals Captain Rovman Powell's performance, saying, "Rovman won two tournaments as Captain last year, first in the Caribbean Premier League and then in the Super50 Cup. So you know that he is a winner, and that's one of his top attributes of him being Captain. He is a calm person and I like his demeanour on the field."

Apart from the global stars, there are four talented UAE players in the Dubai Capitals squad. They are two quick bowlers Hazrat Luqman and Raja Akifullah Khan, a young left-arm spinner Jash Giyanani, and Chirag Suri, a top-order batter.



Johnny Grave

New WI head coach by Easter says Grave

It is expected that a new men's head coach for the West Indies will be selected at the end of March or early April, Cricket West Indies CEO Johnny Grave said last week.

Grave made the revelation during an appearance on the *Mason and Guest Cricket Radio* show in Barbados.

The head coach's role became vacant following the resignation of Phil Simmons last October.

Grave also commented on the interim appointment of Andre Coley, saying, "I think we didn't want to rush. I think we wanted to make sure we get the best candidate and give that person the best opportunity to be successful."

Simmons' resigned after West Indies failed to qualify for the Super 12 stage in the World Cup, having lost to minnows Scotland and Ireland. Coley was appointed to fill the gap between the tour of Zimbabwe and the next overseas assignment tour in June.

Grave also said CWI expects to receive the Justice Thompson report – a review of the World Cup performance this month. It will be perused and then discussed within the CWI, he said.

Grave added, "We can then think about how best we want to structure the men's team coaching set-up, and then recruit and be clear to the candidates what the opportunity is, and how best we can find the best person for the job."

He also indicated it was his expectation to also have clarity on the structure, and the type of head coach and candidate for the job by the end of this month.

The recruitment process will then start in February, with the expected first and second round of interviews to be conducted in March.

"So by no later than Easter we would have a candidate that could come in and work with the players, and establish relationships with the players ahead of the next international assignment in June," he said.

Pant unlikely to take to the field soon with surgery, recovery after serious car crash

It is unlikely that Rishabh Pant will take to the field anytime in 2023, and will consequently miss a number of marquee tournaments including the IPL, the Board of Cricket and Control for India was told last week.



Rishabh Pant

Pant survived a car crash on the Delhi-Dehradun highway on December 30. He was driving from Delhi to meet his family in Roorkee.

According to a report by *ESPNcricinfo* last week-end, it was revealed that a medical update given to the BCCI indicated that Pant tore all three key ligaments in his knee,

two of which were reconstructed recently, with the third fix expected after six weeks. It is believed he underwent surgery last week.

The injury, surgery, and recovery could see Pant out of action for at least at least six months, *ESPNcricinfo* reported. It could also potentially affect his chances of being fit for selection for the ODI World Cup, which is scheduled to take place in India in October-November.



Pant's vehicle following the crash

Following the accident, Pant was airlifted from Dehradun at the BCCI's expense, and flown to Mumbai and put under the supervision of Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, one of the specialist surgeons that is contracted by the board.

The BCCI issued three medical bulletins since the accident and the surgery, including one that stated Pant had also injured his right ankle.

However, as *ESPNcricinfo* reported, the three ligaments in the knee were all torn in the accident: the anterior cruciate ligament, posterior cruciate ligament, and medial collateral

ligament, which are necessary for movement and stability.

It is understood that the PCL and MCL were reconstructed in last week's surgery. Another surgery will have to be conducted to reconstruct his ACL, with the surgeons waiting for at least six weeks before going ahead with it.

There was no definitive timeline given by the doctors yet on how long it would take Pant to resume training, but both the BCCI and the selectors have concluded that he could be out for a minimum of six months.

Pant last featured in the away series in Bangladesh in December, and at the time of the accident was being rested for the home series against Sri Lanka.

He was notably absent from the squads that were announced last week by the BCCI for the New Zealand series, and for the first two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia.

He is also the Delhi Capitals' captain, and so will miss the IPL, which begins on April 1. Another key match where his absence will be notable is the World Test Championship final in June, should India make it to the summit clash.

Last week India's selectors named K.S. Bharat and Ishan Kishan as wicketkeeper options in Pant's absence for the first half of the Australia Test series. They are also contesting the wicketkeeper's role in the three-match ODI series against New Zealand, which is now underway.



CA withdraws from Afghanistan ODIs

Australia announced earlier this month it was withdrawing from a men's One Day series against Afghanistan coming up in March, citing the Taliban's restrictions on women and girls as the reason for the decision, the *British Broadcasting Corporation* has reported.

The three-match series was scheduled to take place in the UAE.

Cricket Australia indicated it took the decision after "consultation with relevant stakeholders, including the Australian government".

Immediate fallout from the Australian decision saw Afghanistan spinner, Rashid Khan, stating he was considering pulling out of Australia's Big Bash League. He plays for Adelaide Strikers in the Twenty20 competition.

"I take great pride in representing my country, and we have made great progress on the world stage," Khan said in a post on social media.

He added, "This decision from [Cricket Australia] sets us back in that journey. If playing vs Afghanistan is so uncomfortable for Australia, then I wouldn't want to make anyone uncomfortable with my presence in the BBL. Therefore, I will be strongly considering my future in that competition."

As the *BBC* reported, former Australia captain Belinda Clark said CA's decision was a "reasonable move". Clark retired from cricket in 2005 after winning two World Cups.

She said, "It's a basic human right that people should be able to play sport. If you have a country without that basic human right, then I think you have a problem. I know the [International Cricket Council] is in a difficult position about how they might manage that among members, but if sport is not going to stand up and say, 'You need to be equitable and providing opportunities for both genders, then who's going to do it?'"

She added, "I don't want to overlay my cultural beliefs on to other people, but if countries think that sport should be played by both men and women, boys and girls, then something needs to be done about this situation. People need to stand up and have a view on whether or not it's something that should be available for everyone."

The Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, and has since banned girls from attending secondary schools, from studying certain subjects, and then restricting them to universities within their province.

However, last December the Afghanistan government altogether banned women from attending university, a move that provoked international condemnation. Days later, women were banned from working for local and international non-governmental organisations.

Said CA: "[Our] decision follows the recent announcement by the Taliban of further restrictions on women's and girls' education and employment opportunities and their ability to access parks and gyms."



Belinda Clark

It added, "CA is committed to supporting growing the game for women and men around the world, including in Afghanistan, and will continue to engage with the Afghanistan Cricket Board in anticipation of improved conditions for women and girls in the country."

The response from the ACB was a furious one, with the body stating it was "disappointed and saddened by the pathetic statement", the cricket website, *ESPNcricinfo* reported last week.

The ACB also declared that CA's "unfair and unexpected" decision "will have a negative impact on the development and growth of cricket in Afghanistan, as well as affecting the love and passion of the Afghan nation for the game".

There was also pushback from another international Afghan player, Naveen-ul-Haq, who is now in the BBL for the first time this season.

He said he would not play in the tournament "until [CA stops] these childish decisions".

Australian sports minister, Anika Wells, later publicly supported the CA's move.

Said Wells, "The Australian government welcomes [CA's] decision to withdraw from the upcoming men's One Day International series against Afghanistan, following the Taliban's increased suppression of women and girl's rights."

She added, "The Taliban's systematic removal of women and girls from public life

is unacceptable."

There was also support for the move in Afghanistan, with a former Afghan parliamentarian, Mariam Solaimankhil, thanking CA for its decision. She said boycotts have "a long history of being used as a political tool".

"The international boycott of South African cricket during the apartheid era is a powerful reminder of the impact that refusing to play can have in the fight for justice - Thank you Australia," Solaimankhil posted on Twitter.



Mariam Solaimankhil

Cricket Schedule

(ALL TIMES LOCAL)

Wednesday January 18, 2023

New Zealand tour of India, 2023

India vs New Zealand, 1st ODI, Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, Hyderabad, 02:00 PM

Ireland tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

Zimbabwe vs Ireland, 1st ODI, Harare Sports Club, Harare, 09:15 AM

Saturday January 21, 2023

New Zealand tour of India, 2023

India vs NZ, 2nd ODI, Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium, Raipur, 02:00 PM

Ireland tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

Zimbabwe vs Ireland, 2nd ODI, Harare Sports Club, Harare, 09:15 AM

Monday January 23, 2023

Ireland tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

Zimbabwe vs Ireland, 3rd ODI, Harare Sports Club, Harare, 09:15 AM

Tuesday January 24, 2023

New Zealand tour of India, 2023

India vs New Zealand, 3rd ODI, Holkar Cricket Stadium, Indore, 02:00 PM

Friday January 27, 2023

England tour of South Africa, 2023

South Africa vs England, 1st ODI, Mangaung Oval, Bloemfontein, 01:00 PM

New Zealand tour of India, 2023

India vs NZ, 1st T20I, JSCA International Stadium Complex, Ranchi, 07:00 PM

Saturday January 28, 2023

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

TBC vs West Indies, 4-day Warm-up Match, Day 1, Bulawayo Athletic Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Sunday January 29, 2023

England tour of South Africa, 2023

SA vs England, 2nd ODI, Mangaung Oval, Bloemfontein, 10:00 AM

New Zealand tour of India, 2023

India vs New Zealand, 2nd T20I, Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ekana Cricket Stadium, Lucknow, 07:00 PM

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

TBC vs West Indies, 4-day Warm-up Match, Day 2, Bulawayo Athletic Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Monday January 30, 2023

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

TBC vs WI, 4-day Warm-up Match, Day 3, Bulawayo Athletic Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Tuesday January 31, 2023

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

TBC vs West Indies, 4-day Warm-up Match, Day 4, Bulawayo Athletic Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Wednesday February 1, 2023

England tour of South Africa, 2023

South Africa vs England, 3rd ODI, Diamond Oval, Kimberley, 01:00 PM

New Zealand tour of India, 2023

India vs New Zealand, 3rd T20I, Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad, 07:00 PM

Saturday February 4, 2023

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

Zimbabwe vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 1, Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Sunday February 5, 2023

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

Zimbabwe vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 2, Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Monday February 6, 2023

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

Zimbabwe vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 3, Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Tuesday February 7, 2023

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

Zimbabwe vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 4, Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Wednesday February 8, 2023

West Indies tour of Zimbabwe, 2023

Zimbabwe vs West Indies, 1st Test, Day 5, Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo, 10:00 AM

Thursday February 9, 2023

Australia tour of India, 2023

India vs Australia, 1st Test, Day 1, Vidarbha Cricket Association Stadium, Nagpur, 09:30 AM.



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