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Vol. 43 • No 10 • January 21, 2026 • Tel: 905-738-5005 • 312 Brownridge Dr. Thornhill, ON L4J 5X1 • indocaribbeanworld.com • indocaribbeanworld@gmail.com

Our Community Is Thriving!

Canada announces theme for Black History Month

— The Government of Canada unveiled the official theme for Black History Month 2026 during an announcement earlier this month in Cherry Brook, Nova Scotia, marking 30 years since the national commemoration was formally recognised. The theme was announced alongside new federal funding for Black History Month projects across Atlantic Canada, reinforcing the government's broader commitments to equity, inclusion, and anti-racism initiatives.

This year's theme recognises three decades of Black History Month in Canada, and acknowledges the enduring legacy of Black Canadians whose leadership, creativity, innovation and resilience have shaped the nation's past, and continue to influence Canadian society.



Marc Miller

programming and initiatives that highlight Black history, culture, and community engagement.

Among the recipients in Nova Scotia was Prude Inc. **See Page 3: Ottawa**

Cherry Brook, Nova Scotia — The Government of Canada has announced the official theme for Black History Month 2026, marking three decades since the national observance was formally recognised across the country.

The theme, *30 Years of Black History Month: Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations* — *From Nation Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries* was announced on February 7 in Cherry Brook by MP Marc Miller, Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages.

In a news release, the government noted that each year Black History Month honours the experiences, achievements and enduring contributions of Black communities in Canada, while deepening collective understanding of their history and impact on Canadian society.

The announcement took place at the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, a cultural institution dedicated to showcasing, preserving, promoting and celebrating the history, culture and contributions of African Nova Scotians.

During his visit, Miller also announced more than \$280,000 in federal funding for nine Black History Month projects across the Atlantic region. The funding is intended to support local programming and initiatives that highlight Black history, culture, and community engagement.



Imdadul Islamic Centre held its Ramadan Souk last weekend as the mosque prepares for the coming of the Holy Month of Ramadan; in photo, Imdadul's Sayem Khan (left) with an entrepreneur from Jewelry by R&S. See story and more photos on Page 5

US visa suspension forces Caricom migration reassessment

— A sweeping US decision to suspend immigrant visa processing for 75 countries has disrupted family reunification across the Caribbean diaspora in the US, tightened legal migration pathways, and prompted Caribbean governments, diaspora professionals, and regional leaders to reassess long-standing assumptions about mobility, sovereignty, and development.

By Romeo Kaseram
A Special LJI Report

Toronto — A sweeping decision by the US to suspend immigrant visa processing for nationals of 75 countries has reshaped legal migration flows across the Caribbean, stalled family reunification efforts within the region's diaspora to the US, and triggered a mix of caution, reassurance, and strategic rethinking among Caribbean governments and diaspora intermediaries observing the policy from abroad, including here in the GTA.

The US Department of State announced on January 14 that immigrant visa processing would be paused for applicants from the 75 affected countries, with the suspension taking effect today, January 21. The measure applies to immigrant visas, including those for employment and family reunification; however, it does not affect non-immigrant categories such as tourist, business, or student visas.

With the exception of Trinidad and Tobago,



Guyana, and Suriname, the remainder of Caricom's member States are included in the suspension. The pause also does not apply to individuals seeking to travel to the US for short-term events, including this summer's FIFA World Cup.

According to the US Department of State, the suspension follows directives issued last year requiring increased scrutiny of applicants under the "public charge" provisions of US immigration law, namely those rules that are intended to deny entry to individuals deemed likely to become a financial burden on the State.

"The State Department will use its long-standing authority to deem ineligible potential immigrants who would become a public charge on the US and exploit the generosity of the American people,"

State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott said in a statement last week.

"Immigrant visa processing from these 75 countries will be paused while the State Department reassesses immigration processing procedures to prevent the entry of foreign nationals who would take welfare and public benefits," Pigott added.

As reported by Reuters and the international media, the move forms part of a broader immigration crackdown pursued by the administration of US President Donald Trump since returning to office last January. While Trump campaigned on stopping illegal immigration, his administration has also made legal migration more difficult through expanded enforcement, tighter screening, and broader administrative restrictions.

Ongoing reports by the US media continue to cover federal agents who have been deployed to major US cities as part of enforcement operations, which have sparked violent, deadly, and escalating confrontations involving both migrants and US nationals.

"This administration has proven itself to have the most anti-legal immigration agenda in American history," David Bier, Director of Immigration Studies at the Cato Institute and The Selz Foundation Chair

See Page 11: Caribbean leader

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MP Miller (centre) with officials and guests. Photos: Darren Fisher, MP for Dartmouth-Cole Harbour

Ottawa marks 30 years of Black History Month

From Page 1

which will receive \$76,980 for its BHM celebrations. In New Brunswick, funding will be provided to the Afro-Canadian Initiatives Association of New Brunswick, which will receive \$30,000; funding of \$47,500 has also been earmarked for the Afro-Canadian Initiatives Association of New Brunswick.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, Centra Cultural Collective Inc will receive \$19,970 for its Black History Month Theatre Festival and Anti-Racism Workshops. The Association for New Canadians will receive \$16,414 for its Black History Month celebrations titled *Remembering and Celebrating (Aspects of) Black Identity*.

And on Prince Edward Island, the Black Cultural Society of Prince Edward Island Inc. will receive \$12,000 to support its Black History Month events, *Rooted in Legacy, Rising Together*.

As the government stated in its release, "Throughout February, Canadians are invited to learn more about and celebrate the diversity and accomplishments of Black Canadians across the country. Black History Month is also a time to reflect on Canada's painful history and the systemic barriers that Black communities continue to face, including anti-Black racism and discrimination, and to reaffirm our shared responsibility to address them."

The release also invited communities across the country to participate in "honouring Black excellence in Canada and celebrating the remarkable contributions that Black Canadians make to Canadian society every day".

Miller affirmed that the 30th anniversary provides an opportunity to reflect on progress and recommit to equity.

"The stories of Black communities are woven into the very fabric of Canada's history. As we mark 30 years of Black History Month in Canada, we honour the legacy and contributions of Black Canadians across generations, from those who helped build our country to those shaping its future," Miller stated.

He added, "This anniversary gives us the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to advancing equity, inclusion and opportunity for Black communities from coast to coast to coast."

Community leaders also highlighted BHM's educational and societal importance. George Mbamalu, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Africa Festival of Arts and Culture Society, said, "Black History Month honours our past and achievements, highlighting the need for a just society where everyone can succeed. By taking the Black History Month message to our schools, AFACS is sowing the seeds of a fair and just society through its Black History Month initiatives."

Local representation was underscored by Braedon Clark, Member of Parliament for Sackville-Bedford-Preston, who noted the longstanding presence of African Nova Scotian communities.

"Black History Month is an opportunity to recognise the contributions of Black Canadians who have helped shape communities across our country. For more than 400 years, African Nova Scotian communities have been central to Black history in Canada, building lasting legacies that continue to inspire today," Clark said.

The federal announcement aligns with broader federal anti-racism initiatives. In Budget 2022, the Government of Canada allocated \$85 million over four years, starting in 2022-2023, to Canadian Heritage to launch and implement a new Anti-Racism Strategy and Canada's Action Plan on Combatting Hate. Budget 2024 provided an additional \$273.6 million over six years, beginning in 2024-2025, along with \$29.3 million per year thereafter, to continue supporting the plan.

Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-2028 and the Action Plan on Combatting Hate support community projects that provide Black and racialised Canadians, as well as religious minorities, with access to resources that promote full participation in the Canadian economy while raising awareness of racism and hate.

Internationally, Canada officially recognised the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent in 2018. On December 17, 2024, the UN proclaimed a second International Decade for People of African Descent, renewing the global call for recognition, justice and development. The Government of Canada welcomed the adoption of the second decade.



Officials and attendees at the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia

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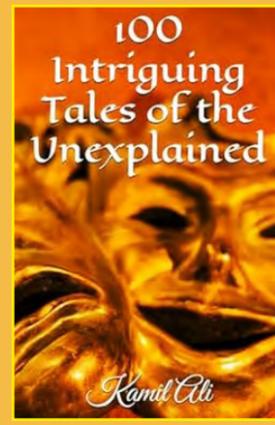
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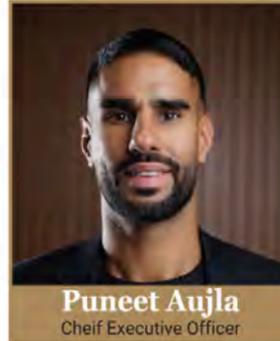
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Imdadul holds annual Ramadan Souk

— The Imdadul Islamic Centre marked the approach of Ramadan with its third annual Ramadan Souk, bringing together local entrepreneurs, faith leaders, and families in a growing marketplace that blends commerce, community, and halal enterprise.



Toronto – The approach of a new year often brings with it fresh ambitions, new ventures, and renewed purpose. For members of the Imdadul Islamic Centre, those aspirations found expression last weekend when the mosque hosted its third edition of *Ramadan Souk* on January 17 and January 18.

The two-day marketplace, timed ahead of the coming month of Ramadan, was designed to give community members a space to prepare for the holy month while supporting local Muslim entrepreneurs pursuing halal livelihoods through small business.

This year's event marked the third staging of the *souk*, which was founded in 2024 by a young member of the Imdadul Centre, Sister Nadia Nafeeza Khan. Since its inception, the initiative has grown steadily as both a commercial and community platform.

Activities began shortly after noon on January 17, with guests welcomed by volunteers offering Arabic coffee and Medjool dates, a traditional gesture that set the tone for the weekend's blend of hospitality and faith.

Approximately 15 local vendors took part in this year's edition, presenting a wide range of products that reflected both entrepreneurial creativity and community needs. Booths lined the hall with offerings ranging from artisanal desserts and calligraphy to educational toys and personal fragrances.

Within Islamic tradition, earning a halal living through honest trade is strongly encouraged, and organisers said the *souk* was built around that principle. Many of the participating entrepreneurs described their ventures not simply as businesses, but as expressions of faith, discipline, and service.

While online platforms now provide many entrepreneurs with virtual storefronts, organisers said the value of in-person showcases remains unmatched. They noted the *souk* allows vendors to tell their stories directly, build trust with customers, and form relationships that cannot easily be replicated online.

Several of the vendors described their businesses as passion projects. Among them was *Rosie's Sweet Atelier*, a dessert and gift venture built around handcrafted sweets and customised presentation.

Others framed their work as a form of community education. *Everything Sensory*, for example, focuses on producing board games and learning tools designed for young students with special needs, blending entrepreneurship with inclusive education.

This year's event also introduced new vendors to Imdadul's marketplace. *Velore Perfume*, a fragrance venture, made its first appearance, alongside *Lacnor*, a well-known consumer goods brand from the United Arab Emirates now being introduced to the Canadian market by a GTA-based couple.

Returning vendors included Sister Zulaika's Calligraphy, Studio 0523 from previous editions of the *souk*.

The weekend drew a diverse audience that included community leaders, representatives of various faith institutions, and families from across the region. Organisers said the turnout reflected the growing role of the *souk* as a gathering point not only for commerce, but for dialogue and connection.

Many of the entrepreneurs were open in discussing the realities of building small businesses, including the challenges of securing start-up capital, gaining shelf space in larger retail outlets, and balancing business demands with family and faith.

Several vendors spoke about the role their religious values played in sustaining them through setbacks and uncertainty, stories that resonated with younger visitors considering their own entrepreneurial paths.

Organisers said these personal exchanges were a central goal of the event, offering aspiring entrepreneurs practical insight alongside inspiration.

By the close of the weekend, the *souk* had functioned as more than a marketplace. It had become an interactive community space where participants mingled, shared experiences, and supported one another financially and socially in pursuit of long-term goals.

With files by Sayem Khan



In photos, Imdadul's vibrant Ramadan Souk marketplace



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Editorial

Engagement and action

The decision by the US to suspend immigrant visa processing for nationals of 75 countries landed quietly on January 14, wrapped in the language of administrative review and fiscal prudence. Yet across our Caribbean homelands, the implications are neither quiet nor abstract. For a region whose economic stability is tightly interwoven with migration and remittances, this pause represents more than a bureaucratic adjustment. It marks a decisive intervention into our Caribbean's future.

Taking effect today, the suspension applies to immigrant visas for employment and family reunification. With the exception of Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Suriname, the majority of member states of Caricom are now caught inside its net. The asymmetry is striking, and destabilising. Within a single regional bloc, access to future migration pathways has suddenly become uneven.

US officials have framed the move as a reassessment of screening procedures under long-standing "public charge" provisions of immigration law, stating the pause would prevent the entry of individuals deemed likely to "exploit the generosity of the American people" by accessing welfare and public benefits. The language is revealing. Family reunification and legal settlement are recast not as social goods, but as fiscal risks.

Unlike mass deportations, which shock through spectacle, visa suspensions operate by delay and denial. They do not remove people already settled; they prevent new lives from rooting. The harm unfolds slowly, measured in years added to family separations, careers deferred, and futures quietly foreclosed. It is exclusion without spectacle.

However, the economic consequences are measurable. According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), remittances to the Caribbean reached approximately US \$20.9 billion in 2025, reflecting a 9.2 percent increase over the previous year. Growth during the first three quarters was robust, driven largely by inflows to Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti.

The US alone accounted for 50.4 percent of all remittances to the region, rising to 61 percent for Jamaica and 62.8 percent for Haiti. As the IADB's report noted, remittances have become a stabilising force for small, tourism-dependent economies, particularly when climate change disasters disrupt traditional revenue streams.

The danger posed by visa suspensions is, therefore, not an immediate collapse in remittance inflows. Those of us already working abroad will continue to send money home. The threat lies in what will no longer grow. Migration pipelines replenish remittance flows over time. When legal pathways narrow, the next generation of senders is never created. The impacted remittances flow appears later as a plateau, rather than a plunge.

For our Caribbean homelands, the implications extend beyond economics. Governments across the region are weighing their diplomatic options with caution, aware that unilateral responses will carry limited weight. The fact that some Caricom states are exempt while others are not risks fracturing regional cohesion at precisely the moment when collective engagement and action are most needed.

Indeed, moving forward from today's visa suspension calls for clarity in thought and action. The US is entitled to define its immigration policies. But our Caribbean governments must recognise the scale of what is at stake. Immigration policy in Washington now functions, in effect, as economic policy for the Caribbean. Decisions in Washington are now shaping labour markets, household resilience, and fiscal stability across our region.

Remittances have long served as a private safety net where public buffers are thin. To allow their future growth to be quietly capped is to accept a slow erosion of our region's economic resilience.

Our Caribbean has endured centuries of externally imposed constraint, and has survived through adaptation. But survival should not be confused with strategy. The suspension of migrant visas is not simply an inconvenience. It is a warning that the terms of mobility are being rewritten, and that our homelands, and our diaspora, must respond with engagement, unity, and resolve.

Blue Monday and our Caribbean mental health realities

Come January, the third Monday is commonly described as one of the most depressing days of the year. The "saddest day of the year", often called Blue Monday, refers to a mid-January Monday claimed to be when people feel most depressed due to factors like winter weather, financial stress, and post-holiday letdown.

It is an opportunity to discuss mental health challenges, raise awareness, and provide support to those who need it.

Depression is solely related to the factors mentioned above, but can be a collection of variables.

As an immigrant community, the causes of depression are augmented, and many stem from the history of our people.

Mental health conditions across the Caribbean remain a serious and often under-addressed public health challenge. While the region is culturally rich and socially vibrant, a combination of historical, social, economic, and systemic factors has contributed to persistently poor mental health outcomes.

Understanding these underlying causes is essential to developing effective, culturally appropriate solutions.

One of the most significant contributors is stigma.

In many Caribbean societies, mental illness is still widely misunderstood and associated with weakness, spiritual failure, or moral deficiency.

Individuals experiencing depression, anxiety, or other mental health conditions are often encouraged to "pray it away"; "be strong"; or keep their struggles private.

This stigma discourages people from seeking help, delays diagnosis, and worsens outcomes.

Fear of being labelled or ostracised can be particularly acute in a culture where privacy is limited and social circles are closely connected.

Economic stress also plays a major role.

Many Caribbean people face high unemployment, under-employment, income inequality, and vulnerability to global economic shocks. This is especially true for many who are new to Canada, or lived impoverished lives in their countries of origin.

Chronic financial insecurity contributes to stress, depression, substance use, and family strain.

For young people, limited job prospects and outward migration create feelings of hopelessness and uncertainty



Ryan Singh

about the future.

Historical and intergenerational trauma cannot be overlooked.

The Caribbean's legacy of colonialism, slavery, indentureship, and exploitation has left deep social and psychological scars.

These experiences disrupted family structures, normalised violence, and entrenched inequality.

Trauma has been transmitted across generations, often without acknowledgement or healing. The long-term effects are reflected in high rates of interpersonal violence, substance abuse, and unresolved grief, all of which are closely

linked to mental health outcomes.

Cultural norms around masculinity further exacerbate the problem.

In many Caribbean communities, men are socialised to suppress emotion, avoid vulnerability, and equate strength with emotional control. This contributes to lower help-seeking behaviour among men and higher rates of untreated mental illness.

The consequences are evident in disproportionately high suicide rates among men in several Caribbean countries, as well as increased involvement in violence and substance misuse.

Family and community dynamics, while often a source of strength, can also create pressure. Expectations to provide financially, care for extended family, or uphold social status can be overwhelming, particularly when resources are limited.

Migration has also fractured families, with parents or children living abroad for economic reasons.

These separations can lead to loneliness, attachment issues, and emotional distress, especially among children and the elderly.

Improving mental health outcomes in the Caribbean communities requires a comprehensive approach: reducing stigma through public education, investing in mental health services, training professionals, updating policies, and addressing the social and economic conditions that drive distress.

Equally important is the integration of culturally informed practices that respect Caribbean identities and experiences.

Only by addressing both the root causes and systemic barriers can the community begin to close the mental health gap and support the well-being of its people.

Portrait of the artist as a young chicken tailfeather thief

I learned early to read when my grandmother's weather was stormy by the words she spoke. There were the sunny days; and then there were days when she thundered in the front yard, "Now where this harden boy gone and disappear?"

For Ma, absence was anathema, since surviving in our dangerous world menaced by interlocked fields of sugar canes meant that if ill-fate was feeling especially efficient one day, her young grandson could easily be consumed by this child-eating, insatiable, and ravenous earth.

Most times I was discovered nearby with both hands knee-deep in what Ma called "mischew". Not mischief, but "mischew", a word she owned outright. It came out of her mouth heavy, chewy, and accusatory, pushed through the widening tooth-gaps as she advanced in age.

Later, when her dentures arrived, clicking, clacking, misaligned, occasionally ejecting halfway, a cuckoo rapidly ejected from a clock, the word stayed, now fed by a new mouthful of more pertinent meaning. But despite her challenges with "mischewing", "mischew" still kept its bite, elevated to permanent vocabulary, reserved for her more thundering moments of bad weather.

"Mischew" for Ma typically defined moments as these: my guilty hands surreptitiously clasped behind, eyes wide and rounded as in Japanese anime, fingers betraying me with the incontrovertible evidence of freshly plucked chicken tailfeathers.

My crime was artistic; yet there was no mitigation, not with Ma's weather quickly changing from a drizzle into pounding nails of a disapproving rainfall.

For the thundering vexation between her ears, she could not fathom why I wanted to fashion a quill from a tailfeather. It was an incipient call to write; yet I did not know the what, or the why – only that I had an itchy trigger finger that made my arm shudder with restlessness.

Ma's empathy was for the poor chicken. Uncooperative as a victim, squawking her grievance with theatrical persistence, performing to Ma, a rapt audience of one, swivelling her head left for one sinister eye-ful, then dexterously right for another eye-ful in my direction, astonished by the sudden ventilation in her posterior plumage.

Complaints act out fast on a barnyard stage. What began as indignation soon became broadcast, rippling down the yard, climbing up the telegraph poles of necks elevated for better viewing, feathered and clean-necked alike.

There was no hiding from that concatenative cacophony. A

chicken run is as efficient for gossip as a newsroom. Hens ratted me out enthusiastically, heads bobbing, dropping editorial comments that were not exactly breadcrumb trails of agreement. Soon the roosters were strutting in with chests puffed up with self-importance, summoned by the promise of deep scandal.

Everyone knew that when sufficiently provoked, roosters cuss worse than Limey sailors washing out locals at a watering hole by the port.

Judgment was swift. The chicken coop was now a no-fly zone, its borders sealed by Ma's wagging forefinger. Then she turned to restorative justice, crouching to meet the plaintiff at eye level, offering cracked corn in a cupped palm, soothing the offended hen pecking greedily at compensation while the higher-ranks up the roost watched sideways, each eyelid blinking with envy, indignation, and resentment at the generous settlement.

It meant my plans had to be trimmed; the quill had to wait, my incipient creativity rerouted. In my time, artistry required improvisation, but most times began with denial, delay, and *différance*, Jacques Derrida's in-between space.

So I was put to work in the galley. Instead of the fowl run, the kitchen was now a foul run for hard labour – soot-blackened walls to be scrubbed, fuliginous pot-cloths deep-soaked, then rolled and whipped against the trunk of the mango tree, buckets of water to be fetched from the nearby well.

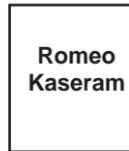
Ma called once; then again. Each time I let the silence widen, out the kitchen window, down the front yard, across the fields, until she cupped her palms and amplified it so the universe curved a hand to its listening ear. I was hidden under the house, sharing the cool, in-between space with still-suspicious chickens apprehensive about their tailfeathers. From there I watched Ma's feet shuffle impatiently, even as her voice feigned innocence.

"I wonder where this boy-child cut-away and gone?" she said, loud enough for ill-fate to take an interest.

I understand now. The world I grew up in, scarce, sun-beaten, disciplined by necessity, was already training me. Disappearance was rehearsal; "mischew" was apprenticeship; tailfeather purloining was cruel, but in a brutal world, it was a search for tools.

Colonial economies take away the whole, leaving scraps behind. We made-do from what failed inspection: crocus bags became hammocks, feathers became quills, and silence from the margin became observation.

Then I did not yet know the homeland was infertile in the ways that matter to empires; but even then it was fertile ground for an emerging portrait of the young artist as a tailfeather thief. It was about learning how to see, even before inscription began.



Romeo Kaseram

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



Delcy Rodriguez



Andrew Holness

Venezuela turmoil a test for Guyana

Dear Editor,

In the wake of its removal of Nicolás Maduro to NY to face narco-trafficking charges, the US has attempted to reduce kinetic adverse reactions within Venezuela by not insisting on regime change *tout court*.

In accepting VP Delcy Rodriguez being sworn in as acting President and deciding to confine its relationship to controlling the oil sector, which she evidently accepts, they have a credible Chavista figure to blunt radical anti-American uprisings that can precipitate new waves of refugees.

While elections have been proposed by some to restore “democracy”, any near-term political campaigning would certainly have the contesting parties debating their stance on their Essequibo Border Controversy, and possibly pressure Opposition favourite Maria Machado to abandon her pro-ICJ stance to resolve the same.

US President Donald Trump accepts that economic stability is critical to the US controlling Venezuelan oil by blunting protests, and has moved swiftly to encourage oil companies to re-enter Venezuela to ramp up its production up from its present 900,000 barrels per day. While Chevron, which had remained because of sanctions exemption, said it will go along, a more positive signal was Exxon indicating it will immediately dispatch a team into Venezuela to examine its options.

The US commitment to use the proceeds from the first 50M barrels of oil to reimburse companies like Exxon and ConocoPhillips for judgments they had obtained for assets seized by the Chavista regime, offers these companies a windfall they can use to start production.

These are very important developments for Guyana, and as a small state in the global system whose sovereignty is ironically threatened by Venezuela, we should continue supporting non-interference in national affairs and a peaceful, lawful resolution of the Venezuela crisis.

But we must be pragmatic in avoiding the sanctimonious condemnation of the US action that is being pushed by some – even within Caricom. We commend Jamaica’s PM Andrew Holness’ formulation: “My job... is to keep Jamaica safe. Not to steer into waters for which we don’t have to go. Not to invite problems on ourselves when we have our own problems to deal with.”

We have experienced Venezuela kicking us

in the face after we went the extra mile and signed the Argyll Agreement to maintain the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace. Economically, the US control over the Venezuelan 300B of crude should signal the world that decarbonisation efforts will be extended, thus allowing us to reap the benefits of our oil over a much longer period.

In the short term, the Venezuelan sour heavy crude will not impact on our sweet light crude, and in the longer term, while increased US-backed increased Venezuelan oil supply might lower oil prices, this will be balanced by the continuing market demand fostered.

We must prepare for the possible post-Venezuela scenarios – a fragmented Venezuela and the subsequent spillover risks; a nationalist rebound with renewed border claims and more positively, normalisation that will be subject to negotiation pressure. Our diplomatic and defense responses must be tailored accordingly, since we must be ready whether Venezuela stabilises or not.

In terms of our national security, as we have consistently advocated, we should continue to utilise the Venezuelan crisis as a catalyst for boosting our defences. As such, with US and European assistance, we should continue expanding our coast guard and maritime surveillance capabilities, which become even more critical to protect our off-shore oil FPSOs.

We suggest a UAV (drone) squadron for EEZ and border monitoring. We repeat our suggestion that we establish a military base in NW Essequibo to boost our rapid response, and to which the US can have access through an explicit agreement as a longer-term deterrence to Venezuelan revanchism, which will not disappear.

We should also retain the presence of GDF personnel along the Venezuelan border that were augmented after the US military intervention. We must have a plan in place for Venezuelan refugee flows across a border that has remained “porous” for far too long.

We should also begin planning post-ICJ enforcement diplomacy, since even a partial ICJ ruling will lock in long-term security and trigger responses from forces in Venezuela. Our cooperation with Brazil should be augmented and formalised, since she has in the past, and will in the future, share many of our concerns and fears *vis-a-vis* Venezuela.

Ravi Dev, Guyana, via email.



Venezuelans on the streets in Caracas after the US intervention

Small nations must tread with care

Dear Editor,

The recent developments surrounding Venezuelan opposition figure María Corina Machado and US President Donald Trump should serve as a sobering lesson for small States, such as Trinidad and Tobago, that are observing the geopolitical chessboard on the sidelines.

Machado’s reported offer to share her Nobel Peace Prize with Trump – following claims he was displeased she received the award ahead of him – reads less like diplomacy and more like political desperation.

What makes this more troubling is that despite her symbolic overture, Trump has since refused to endorse her, or any recognised opposition leader in Venezuela. Instead, he has signaled a preference to manage Venezuela’s transition directly, with the assistance of figures such as Pete Hegseth and Marco Rubio.

This sequence of events reflects a familiar and uncomfortable pattern: the use of local actors as convenient instruments until they are no longer useful. Machado was widely viewed as the preferred “acceptable” face of a post-Maduro Venezuela.

She was deemed palatable to Washington, marketable to the international community, and compliant with external strategic interests. Now that Nicolás Maduro is in an American prison, Machado appears to have been quietly pushed aside.

This is not an anomaly. It is textbook imperial behaviour. Allies are elevated when needed, only to be discarded once objectives are achieved. Loyalty flows in only one direction. The moment a local figure ceases to be strategically convenient, they are thrown under the bus.

For Trinidad and Tobago, this episode should ring alarm bells.

It underscores why our current leadership must be extremely cautious in placing trust in the Trump administration or any foreign power that operates on transactional dominance rather than mutual respect. Sovereignty is not preserved by blind alignment; it is protected by strategic distance and principled neutrality.

Trinidad and Tobago’s national interest is best served by remaining a satellite of none and friend to all. We must resist being dragged into the geopolitical theatre where the script is written elsewhere, and smaller nations are reduced to supporting roles or collateral damage.

History repeatedly shows that those who outsource their destiny to powerful patrons eventually lose both leverage and dignity.

Venezuela’s unfolding situation is not just a regional crisis; it is a warning. Trinidad and Tobago should pay attention, stay clear-eyed, and above all, stay independent.

Simon Wright, via email, Trinidad and Tobago.



María Corina Machado



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Starting 2026 right: Why January matters a lot more than you think

January has a strange energy. The holidays are done, routines are creeping back in, and tax season is quietly approaching whether we like it or not. For many Indo-Caribbean families, especially from Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, this time of year comes with a familiar mix of motivation and avoidance. We know we should get organised, but life is busy, work is demanding, and money conversations often get pushed down the list.

In many of our homes, money was not something that was openly discussed. Our parents worked hard, paid bills, supported family here and back home, and somehow made things work. Questions about income, taxes, debt, or long-term planning were often brushed aside. That approach came from survival, not neglect. But in Canada, silence around money can quietly create problems that compound over time.

January is one of the few moments in the year when we have a natural reset. It is a chance to pause before tax deadlines, before the year gets away from us, and before small issues turn into stressful surprises.

For small business owners and self-employed individuals in our community, this matters even more. Many people are hustling. Side businesses, contracting, ride-sharing, beauty services, construction, catering, events, and creative work are common paths. Income may be coming in, but records are scattered, taxes are an afterthought, and clarity is missing. The result is a familiar feeling: working hard but never quite feeling caught up.

Starting the year right does not mean perfection. It means intention. Knowing what accounts exist, where income is coming from, what expenses are real, and what obligations are

coming later in the year. It means understanding that tax season is not just about filing a return. It is about telling the financial story of the past year clearly and honestly.

For families, January is also a good time to reflect on longer-term questions that are often avoided. Do we know where important documents are kept? Is there a will? Are finances structured in a way that would make things easier or harder for loved ones if something unexpected happened? These are uncomfortable topics, but avoiding them does not protect us. It simply passes the burden forward.

First- and second-generation Canadians often carry an extra layer of pressure. There is pride in building something better than what we started with, and guilt when we feel we are not doing enough. That tension can lead to decisions made on emotion rather than clarity. Getting organised financially is not about abandoning culture or family values. It is about protecting them.

As tax season approaches, the goal should not be fear or urgency. The goal is steadiness. A calm understanding of where you stand, what needs attention, and what can wait. January gives us the space to do that work before deadlines force rushed decisions.

A good financial year rarely starts in April when taxes are due. It starts now, with a few honest conversations, some basic organisation, and the willingness to look at the numbers without judgment.

Michael Samlalsingh is the founder of MM Financial Solutions; he is a Certified Executor Advisor and Chartered Professional Accountant, and can be reached at 416-993-6153, or michael@mmfinancialsolutions.ca.



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Agro-processing emerges as strategically important economic sub-sector

As Guyana strives to diversify its oil-based economy and take advantage of its agriculture potential, agro-processing has emerged as a strategically important sector that is aligned with the country's broader goals of economic diversification, rural job creation, and value-added exports.

Incidentally, agro-processing has been the subject of exhaustive discussions and political pronouncements among various governments – past and present. They have long recognised the country's potential in this area.

However, aside from the challenges of developing a feasible agro-processing sector that evolved over time, political motivations have always superseded business motivations, leading to the failure of the sector to take-off.



Dwarka Lakhan

In as much as the underlying motivations of politicians might have been based on real potential, the failure to put credible measures in place to develop the sector amounted to no more than cheap posturing, instead of strategic commitment. A well-defined plan with realistic goals, taking into consideration the capabilities and resource needs of the sector, was never developed.

Rather, ad hoc projects made headlines only to become white elephants primarily because of inadequate planning and resource allocation.

As well, there has been weak integration of implementation efforts, resulting in sporadic ventures that engendered limited success. In fact, over time there have been more failures than successes in a broad spectrum of agro-processing businesses. Yet politicians gained mileage from short-lived successes that eventually turned to failures.

While now emerging, agro-processing is now increasingly recognised as critical for reducing Guyana's reliance on unprocessed primary commodities (sugar, rice, fish, and raw crops), and for capturing higher margins in global and regional value chains.

As the largest agricultural producer in the Caribbean region, Guyana benefits from its fertile lands, river systems, and tropical climate which can potentially provide a consistent source of raw materials for agro-processing. Despite its lucrative positioning, there remains many risks to a sustainable future for agro-processing.

Incidentally, Guyana is positioned to lead Caricom's efforts to reduce imported food by processing frozen vegetables, packaged fruits, condiments, and protein-based products, among other packaged products.

Currently, there is growing demand for items such as coconut-based products, gluten-free cassava derivatives, natural spices, seasonings, nutraceuticals, and herbal teas. In addition, the diaspora markets in Canada, the US, and the UK, have strong demand for products such as pepper sauces, cassareep, fruit preserves, and snack products.

Agro-tourism is also an emerging segment of the market, with value-added products being marketed through tourism channels such as resort gift shops, festivals, and local fairs.

The expansion of the industry is supported by a variety of government incentives, including tax exemptions, financing support, and aggressive value-added policies that reduce production costs and attract investment.

As well, new entrants are experimenting with modern processing technologies, packaging upgrades, and e-commerce-based sales.

Growth has been strengthened by government incentives, private investment, and the opening of new regional and international markets.

Government policy strongly emphasises agro-processing as part of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS 2030) and diversification of the oil-driven economy. Support includes tax and duty exemptions

on machinery, access to concessional lands, grants and innovation financing through the Small Business Bureau and a special focus on food security under the 25 by 2025 Caricom initiative.

Simultaneously, private capital, both local and foreign, is increasing due to improved confidence and new export demand.

In addition, upgrades to road networks, farm-to-market access, cold storage, electricity generation, and industrial parks (for example, Wales Development Zone and Lethem Industrial Estate) are enabling more reliable production and export logistics.

Higher output in key commodities, such as coconut, cassava, fruits, spices, has created a raw-material foundation for scaling processing industries.

At a sector level, coconut processing is one of the fastest-growing subsectors. Products include virgin coconut oil, bottled coconut water, flour, cosmetics, and animal feed by-products. Expansion is driven by large-scale coconut replanting programs, while local brands are gaining regional attention. However, this sector is constrained by inconsistent supply and limited mechanisation.

Another growth area is cassava and root crop processing, with manufacturers pushing cassava-based flour, chips, and packaged traditional foods, supported by the strong potential of gluten-free products for export markets. However, processing is still fragmented and dominated by small operations with limited scale.

A growing number of processors produce jams, jellies, sauces, pepper products, frozen fruit pulps for export and packaged snacks and condiments have also emerged. In this area, challenges persist with seasonality, gluts, and limited cold-chain infrastructure.

Exports of processed prawns, shrimp, and filleted fish are also strong, with increasing interest in farmed tilapia and also the large fresh water fish, tambaqui. However, there is need for modern HACCP-certified facilities (food safety) to access higher-value markets.

Though rice is a mature industry, there is scope for value-added processing into rice cereals, rice flour, and packaged branded rice. The industry is dominated by large millers, with small entrants facing high capital barriers.

At a macro level, several challenges remain in agro-processing. Among them are the inconsistent supply of feedstock such as fruits, coconut, cassava, and spices for manufacturing plants to operate efficiently. This can lead to costly downtime and consequently higher cost of goods. A limited aggregation system for small farmers further complicates the problem.

In addition, the country has limited cold storage and post-harvest handling capacity, resulting in high losses due to inadequate storage, drying, grading, and cooling systems.

Energy costs, although falling, remain a barrier for small processors operating dryers, chillers, and heavy machinery.

Access to finance is a key issue for many small processors who lack collateral or financial statements to apply for finance. Although the government offers innovation grants, demand far outstrips supply.

In order to tap the export markets, it is necessary for the country to have internationally accepted packaging standards and compliance. While some companies are currently compliant, smaller businesses, in particular, are falling short.

Overall, the outlook for agro-processing in Guyana is strongly positive, supported by oil-driven capital availability, identification as a national priority for economic diversification, rising agricultural production, establishment of industrial zones and the growth in export markets.

However, success hinges on addressing per-



Agro-processed products on display at GUYEXPO 2025

sistent constraints in supply chain reliability, energy cost reductions (promised through the gas-to-energy project), implementing quality standards and investments in technology.

History shows that production of agriculture crops has been sporadic due to the vagaries of weather and diseases. This trend has had a negative impact on processing output and the

inability to maintain consistent supply.

It would also be necessary to improve co-ordination of farm-to-factory supply and establish a formal mechanism to ensure that processes put in place actually work. It is easy to argue that such mechanisms already exist, but whether they work effectively remain

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Ottawa invests in youth programs for safer GTA neighbourhoods

— The federal government has announced more than \$3 million in new crime-prevention funding for two major youth intervention projects in the GTA, targeting at-risk communities in Rexdale, Malvern, and Scarborough as part of Canada's National Crime Prevention Strategy.

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Community Report

Ottawa has announced more than \$3 million in new funding for two multi-year youth crime-prevention initiatives in the GTA, aimed at reducing gang involvement, strengthening community resilience, and steering at-risk young people toward positive life pathways.

On January 12, Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree confirmed \$1.89 million in funding for a four-year project in Rexdale, alongside more than \$1.16 million in new federal support for a five-year prevention program in Malvern and Scarborough.

Together, the two initiatives form part of the federal government's broader effort under the National Crime Prevention Strategy to address the root causes of youth involvement in gangs and violent crime through early intervention, skills development, and community-based support.

In Rexdale, \$1.89 million will be provided to the United Nations Association in Canada through Public Safety Canada's Youth Gang Prevention Fund.

Delivered in partnership with the Rexdale Community Health Centre, the project will focus on youth aged 16 to 19 who are considered at risk for gang involvement. The program is designed to help participants build resilience, secure employment, and pursue positive pathways away from criminal activity.

Activities will include pre-employment training, life-skills and decision-making workshops, peer mentorship, and participation in a Model United Nations training program and conference focused on crime prevention, leadership, and community engagement.

"Our government is committed to creating safer communities by investing in programs that give young people the tools and support they need to succeed," Anandasangaree said, add-

ing, "This project will help at-risk youth build skills, confidence, and connections that steer them away from gangs and toward brighter futures."

Secretary of State for Labour John Zerucelli said the initiative responds directly to community needs in Etobicoke North.

"As the Member of Parliament for Etobicoke North, I know how vital it is to invest in programs that strengthen Rexdale and support our youth," Zerucelli said.

He added, "Together, we will provide young people in this area with opportunities to learn, lead, and thrive, reducing the risk of gang involvement and creating a safer community."

Aki Temisevä, President and Chief Executive Officer of the United Nations Association in Canada, said the funding will expand community-based prevention work.

"We are grateful for Public Safety Canada's support, which enables us to advance our goal of building safer and more resilient communities," Temisevä said.

"This investment will help us work alongside Rexdale Community Health Center to provide meaningful opportunities for youth that build confidence, skills, and hope. Together, we can tackle systemic barriers and create safe spaces where young people can thrive and lead positive change in their community," Temisevä affirmed.

Founded more than seven decades ago, the United Nations Association in Canada is a national civil-society organisation that educates and engages Canadians on the work of the United Nations and on global issues.

Also on January 12, Anandasangaree announced more than \$1.16 million in federal funding for the Malvern Family Resource Centre through the Crime Prevention Action Fund.

The funding will support *On the Rise: Building resilience in at-risk youth across Malvern and Scarborough*, a five-year project designed to prevent crime and support youth aged nine to 30 through counselling and school-based prevention programs.

Activities will take place in youth hubs, recreation spaces, and schools within the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board. Key partners, including Strides Toronto and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, will provide access to mental-health resources and

community-based supports.

"Preventing crime before it happens is one of the most effective ways to keep our communities safe," Anandasangaree said.

He further declared, "By investing in programs like *On the Rise*, we are helping youth build resilience and giving them a chance for a better future for themselves while reducing the risk factors that lead to crime."

Dominique Robinson, Executive Director of the Malvern Family Resource Centre, said the program responds to complex challenges facing youth in the community.

"Across Malvern and Scarborough, many young people are navigating complex challenges and need consistent, prevention-focused support," Robinson said, adding, "Through *On the Rise* program, we are strengthening this work. We create safe, reliable spaces designed to help youth build resilience, develop life skills, and feel a strong sense of belonging. We are grateful for this investment, which helps deepen our impact by addressing risk factors early and supporting young people in making positive choices for their futures."

Both initiatives are funded under the National Crime Prevention Strategy, the federal framework that supports evidence-based interventions to prevent and reduce crime while strengthening community safety.



Gary Anandasangaree

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Caribbean leader seeks move from 'brain drain to brain gain'

From Page 1

in Immigration Policy, told the international media last week.

Bier said the suspension would "ban nearly half of all legal immigrants to the United States," estimating that approximately 315,000 prospective legal immigrants could be turned away over the next year. He added that family reunification cases, employment-based applications, and diversity lottery winners from the affected 75 countries are now facing indefinite delays.

Cato Institute research also noted that since Trump returned to office, the State Department has revoked more than 100,000 visas, and adopted stricter policies on visa issuance, including expanded social media vetting and enhanced screening procedures. The Institute described the current action as Washington's most expansive legal immigration restriction in decades.

However, the rationale underpinning the suspension has been challenged by research cited by *IMI Daily News*. A 2025 Cato Institute study found that immigrants consumed 21 percent fewer welfare and entitlement benefits *per capita* than native-born Americans in 2022, contradicting claims that new arrivals place disproportionate strain on public resources.

Also, David Lesperance, Managing Director of Lesperance & Associates, criticised the nationality-based approach to the suspension, arguing that it fails to distinguish between visa categories with vastly different risk profiles.

"By halting immigration categories based on nationality rather than visa category, the Trump administration has just thrown the baby out with the bathwater," Lesperance told the media. He noted that applicants under programmes such as EB-5, as well as E-1, E-2, and L-1 intra-corporate transfer visas, "are hardly interested in, or likely to become 'public charges'."

Lesperance warned that any potential welfare savings would be overshadowed by immediate losses in foreign direct investment and broader economic benefit.

Notably, the suspension directly affects permanent residency applications from ten countries operating Citizenship by Investment (CBI) programmes. Among Caricom members, these include Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Other affected global CBI jurisdictions include Cambodia, Egypt, Jordan, and Sierra Leone.

IMI Daily News reported that Grenada's January 14 inclusion marks a policy shift, as the country had been exempted from US travel restrictions and visa bond expansions in December, likely due to its E-2 investor visa treaty with the US.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was also added to the suspension list despite having no operational CBI programme at this time. However, its newly-elected government announced plans in late December to launch such an initiative to help manage its more than \$3 billion in public debt. With the US migrant visa suspension move, the government now faces curtailment even before activating its CBI initiative.

As a precedent, the partial travel bans imposed by the US on Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica in December explicitly cited their citizenship programmes as security concerns. Those restrictions blocked specific visa categories while preserving diplomatic access.

But according to *IMI Daily News*, a US State Department cable viewed by *Reuters* raised concerns that some CBI programmes allow for applicants' name changes that could conceal criminal histories, complicating background verification. Meanwhile, US officials did not specify which programmes permit such changes, nor did they provide data quantifying past security incidents linked to those practices.

Across the Caribbean and within diaspora communities in the US, the suspension has translated into immediate uncertainty for families already deep into the formal, immigration process.

As reported by the *Cayman Compass*, Elaine Harris, Jamaica's Honorary Vice-Consul in the Cayman Islands, said the effects would be felt sharply among Jamaican nationals.

"It will affect Jamaican nationals, as we have Jamaican nationals who are currently in the process of filing for US immigrant visas for their family members," Harris said.

Green cards, which are officially known as permanent resident cards, allow immigrants to live and work permanently in the US, and remain central to long-standing migration pathways from the Caribbean.

The US remains the primary destination for Jamaican migrants. Data from the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) show a 23.4 percent increase in migration to the US in 2022 compared with 2021. According to the PIOJ's *Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica 2023*, 16,482 Jamaicans migrated to the US in 2022, up from 13,357 the previous year.

Over the 11-year period from 2013 to 2022, an average of 16,911 Jamaicans migrated to the US annually. The highest number was recorded in 2016, when 23,350 Jamaicans migrated. The lowest figure was in 2020, when 12,826 Jamaican nationals migrated.

Countries impacted by the suspension

Africa (27 countries)

Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Gambia, Togo, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire

Asia (22 countries)

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Cambodia

Europe (eight countries)

Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia

North America & Caribbean (13 countries)

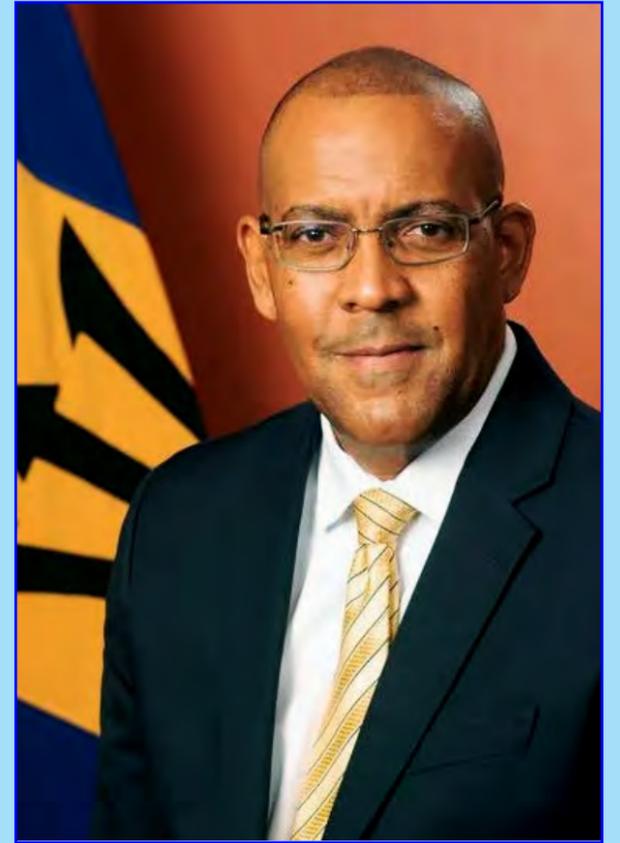
Haiti, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Barbados, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Belize

South America (3 countries)

Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela

Oceania (one country)

Fiji



Barbados Minister of Foreign Affairs Kerrie Symmonds

In the US, reaction among the Jamaican diaspora has been marked by anxiety and caution. Sylvia, a teacher in Brooklyn, New York, would not reveal her full name, telling *The Gleaner* in Jamaica she feared potential punitive US scrutiny since she had recently filed an application for her mother to join her.

"This makes no sense, because there are already safeguards in place to stop new immigrants from accessing government programmes such as Medicaid and food stamps," she said.

Sylvia said sponsors are already financially liable if relatives seek public assistance within five years of arrival.

"If I sponsor someone for residency in the US and that person applies for government assistance within five years, the government can garnish my pay to recover the funds," she said.

Immigration attorney Michelle Fanger of Jacksonville, Florida, told *The Gleaner* she received multiple calls from Jamaican clients seeking clarity on how the pause will impact on their cases.

"Pausing the application process will drag out the situation, and people will have to wait longer before applications are approved, but I don't think denial will be widespread," Fanger said.

Wayne Golding, a Jamaican immigration attorney in Orlando, advised applicants not to dispose of assets amid anticipated delays.

"If you don't meet the financial threshold, this could derail the application," Golding said, warning of "extraordinary delays" that would significantly affect family reunification.

Immigration attorney Winston Tucker noted that a similar process introduced during Trump's first term was later reversed by the administration of former President Joe Biden. He said US embassies would now play a larger role in approvals, potentially reducing the number of successful applications.

"They will be looking at the health, education, and financial strength of applicants, and this could be used to disqualify people," Tucker said.

Diaspora advocate Irwine Clare Sr, head of the New York-based Caribbean Immigration Service, said he was not surprised by the move, but warned of its consequences.

"This is a true onslaught on legal migration," Clare told *The Gleaner*, adding, "Family reunification will definitely be affected."

Clare also expressed concern that additional measures, namely visa fee bonds, could be expanded. Currently, Caricom nationals from Haiti, Dominica, Cuba, and Antigua and Barbuda face refundable bonds of up to US \$15,000 when applying for visitor visas.

Meanwhile, here in Toronto, immigration practitioners monitoring the US move were reluctant to speak on the record, citing ongoing cases involving clients with US connections, and concerns about punitive exposure when crossing the border for work or personal travel.

One practitioner, who spoke anonymously, acknowledged the US' right to determine its immigration policy, but expressed disappointment that families who had already paid application fees and met legal requirements were now facing indefinite

delays.

The practitioner also observed a gradual recalibration in migration preferences, noting that the US is now being increasingly viewed by Caribbean nationals as a destination to be avoided.

"We are likely to see the brain drain in the Caribbean pivoting to Canada, changing the historical first-choice trajectory from the US, which more and more is showing reluctance to accept migrants from certain parts of the world," the source said.

Additionally, the source argued that the historical first-choice migration trajectories could shift as migrant prospects reassess risk and openness.

While Canada's own immigration targets have tightened in recent years, practitioners said the GTA and other provinces still remain comparatively attractive for skilled migrants, capital, and entrepreneurial investment.

In the Caribbean, its political leaders responded to the US move with a blend of reassurance, realism, and strategic reframing.

Barbados Minister of Foreign Affairs Kerrie Symmonds urged calm, emphasising that the policy affects only those seeking to travel permanently to the US, *Barbados Today* reported.

"The policy will only affect a Barbadian national if he or she is seeking to immigrate or relocate to live in the United States," Symmonds said, adding that non-immigrant visas remain unaffected.

Symmonds explained that the measure is grounded in the public charge provisions of US law, which allow consular officers to deny visas if applicants are deemed likely to rely on public benefits such as healthcare, housing, or financial assistance.

He noted that the administration had signalled its intentions well before assuming office, and described the approach as a "sweeping policy" that applies uniformly across nearly half the world's countries.

"We must be mature enough as a people to recognise that everyone will not see us or treat with us in the same way," Symmonds argued, adding that Barbados' "highly regarded and globally respected" brand continues to afford its citizens "an abundance of other excellent options" for relocation.

A more ideological reframing came from Nevis' Premier Mark Brantley, who urged Caribbean citizens to view the development as an opportunity to reverse decades of brain drain.

As was reported by the *West Indian News Network*, Brantley argued that developed countries have long benefited from the migration of the Caribbean's most skilled citizens.

"For far too long, developed countries around the world have benefited from the migration of the best and brightest minds from the Caribbean," Brantley wrote, describing the current moment as a chance to convert "brain drain into brain gain."

He called for land access, fiscal incentives, and investment opportunities to encourage return migration, citing Nevis' policy of offering land to returning graduates at EC \$1 per square foot.

"Let this crisis become an opportunity," Brantley wrote, urging Caricom to deepen intra-regional migration, investment, and development.



Sir Ronald Saunders



Fitz Bramble

Caricom states react to US visa suspension

— The administration of US President Donald Trump has announced a suspension of immigrant visa processing for nationals of 75 countries worldwide, a move that affects 11 Caricom member states, and has prompted impacted governments across the region to seek clarification on the scope and duration of the measure.

...

The administration of US President Donald Trump has announced a suspension of immigrant visa processing for nationals of 75 countries worldwide, including 11 member states of the Caribbean Community (Caricom), a move Washington says is intended to tighten vetting procedures and prevent new arrivals from becoming a public charge on the US.

The United States Department of State said the pause, which took effect on January 21, will remain in place indefinitely while immigration screening procedures are reassessed. State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said the measure is aimed at stopping what the administration describes as abuse of the US immigration system by migrants who “extract wealth from the American people” through access to welfare and public benefits.

“The Trump administration is bringing an end to the abuse of America’s immigration system by those who would extract wealth from the American people,” Pigott said, adding that visa processing from the affected countries will remain paused until the State Department is satisfied that applicants will not rely on welfare or public benefits.

Of Caricom’s 15 member states, 11 are included in the suspension: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines. The Caricom nations not affected are Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Across the Caribbean, governments said they were seeking clarification from US authorities on the scope of the measure, particularly whether it applies strictly to immigrant visas, commonly referred to as green cards, or extends to non-immigrant categories.

In The Bahamas, Foreign Affairs Minister Fred Mitchell told Parliament on January 14 that Nassau had taken note of the statement from the US Embassy indicating that the suspension does not apply to non-immigrant visas, including temporary student and business visas. He said existing arrangements between The Bahamas and the US, including travel facilitated by police records, remain unchanged.

“Bahamians should take note: the US is not our country,” Mitchell said, adding, “Just as we set rules for entry into The Bahamas, they set rules for entry into theirs. In the past, we have worked with the US on multiple issues, and the results have always been fair and rational.”

In St Vincent and the Grenadines, Foreign Affairs Minister Fitzgerald Bramble said the government had not received formal notification from the US Embassy in Barbados or other US officials, but was actively seeking

information through diplomatic channels.

“As of now, we don’t have any official information,” Bramble said, adding that the public would be informed once confirmation is received.

The Belize government said it is engaging with the US Embassy in Belmopan, and had instructed its embassy in Washington, DC, to seek clarification from the State Department. Preliminary information, it said, suggests the pause affects only immigrant visas, which are typically family-, employment-, or diversity-based.

“There is no indication at this time that the decision affects visitor or student visas,” Belize’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade said.

Antigua and Barbuda’s Ambassador to the US, Sir Ronald Sanders, said he made immediate inquiries with senior State Department officials after becoming aware of media reports on the suspension. He said no formal written notification had yet been issued to embassies of the affected countries.

According to Sir Ronald, the measure arises from a new White House directive and applies only to immigrant visas, with a temporary pause of up to 60 days while vetting and screening procedures are reviewed.

In Trinidad and Tobago, which is not among the affected countries, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs acknowledged the US announcement and emphasised that immigration policy remains a sovereign matter for Washington.

“Trinidad and Tobago is not among the countries to which this measure applies,” the ministry said, reaffirming its commitment to strong bilateral relations with the US.

State Department documentation shows that routine visa services were previously suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic, disrupting both immigrant and non-immigrant processing. While services resumed gradually from mid-2020, migration flows have remained uneven.

Despite those disruptions, seven Caricom countries received immigrant visas in 2024, totalling 51,168 approvals. Trinidad and Tobago accounted for 1,292 of those visas, alongside recipients from The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, and Cuba.

Regional analysts in Trinidad and Tobago described the current suspension as a sovereign policy choice by Washington rather than a targeted action against the Caribbean.

International relations expert Professor Anthony Bryan said he does not believe the affected countries are being punished for opposing US foreign policy.

“[Caricom nations] are just caught in the dragnet,” Bryan said, adding, “Any country is free to impose whatever restrictions it wishes.”

Dr Anthony Gonzales said the policy appears driven by concerns over welfare usage rather than diplomatic alignment.

“They are trying to determine which countries tend to send people who rely heavily on public assistance,” Gonzales said, adding that the decision is unlikely to be based solely on foreign policy considerations.



Ask Jay...

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I’VE SEEN IT BEFORE: WHY BRAMPTON LANDLORDS CANNOT ‘WING IT’ ANYMORE

I remember walking through a basement apartment that looked perfect at first: fresh paint, new flooring, a tidy kitchen. The landlord was proud of it. “I take care of my place,” he told me. Then he quietly admitted: no permits, no registration, no inspections. He wasn’t trying to be reckless — he didn’t believe the rules applied to him. That mindset is exactly why Brampton’s new landlord rules became unavoidable.

Starting in the new year, any landlord in Brampton with one to four rental units must register those units with the city and obtain a valid licence before renting them out. This isn’t a one-time form you fill out and forget; it includes annual renewal, a mandatory online learning module, compliance with health, fire, and building codes, and posting the licence on the property. Importantly, the licence itself is free. The city has indefinitely suspended the original \$300 annual fee, and that detail matters. This change isn’t about generating revenue — it’s about accountability and setting baseline standards.

Policies are not made for perfect situations; they are meant for when problems happen. When a property becomes crowded or unsafe, issues tend to spread. Fire crews respond, and bylaw officers spend weeks investigating. Neighbours deal with noise, parking chaos, and safety worries. If tragedy occurs, the first question is always: why didn’t someone act earlier? The city’s response now makes it clear: prevention is more important than reacting.

Brampton’s decision to roll out its Residential Rental Licensing (RRL) program city-wide starting January 1, 2026, didn’t surprise me. It actually seemed long overdue. Not registering an extra rental unit now results in fines of \$1,000 for the first offence, \$1,250 for the second, and \$1,500 for further violations. Other offences related to the RRL, like failing to display a licence or ignoring city orders, face the same escalating penalty system.

From my perspective, this isn’t an anti-landlord policy. It’s an acknowledgment that rental housing in Brampton is no longer informal. Basement apartments, shared homes, and small multiplexes now house a significant part of the city’s population. With that reality comes responsibility. Licensing won’t magically turn someone into a good landlord, but it does establish a baseline. It encourages education. It leaves a paper trail. And when issues occur, it provides the city with tools to intervene before problems escalate.

I’ve seen too many landlords rent first and worry about compliance later. Under the RRL program, that approach no longer works. A licence must be obtained or renewed before a unit is rented — otherwise, the tenancy is illegal. Even beautifully finished units can be unlawful if they were never permitted or registered, and operating an unregistered Additional Residential Unit is a serious offence. Non-compliance can also prevent a landlord from renewing a licence altogether, effectively cutting off rental income.

This is the moment for landlords to ask themselves an honest question: Am I managing housing, or just renting out space? If it’s the former, these changes are manageable. If it’s the latter, Brampton has made it clear those days are over. The city’s rental market is entering a new chapter — one that prioritises safety, consistency, and accountability across every ward. You may not agree with every detail, but the direction is hard to dispute. In today’s Brampton, doing nothing is no longer an option — and “I didn’t know” is no longer a defence. I encourage every landlord in Ontario to follow Brampton’s RRL program, and every tenant in Brampton to rent only licensed suites.

SEE DISPLAY ON BACK PAGE

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Looking to ‘Manufactured in Guyana’

From Page 9

The question of how farmers would get their produce to a single plant needs thorough examination.

If the local market for processed agricultural goods is to grow, the government must show its commitment by implementing tariffs and quotas on imported substitutes for local goods. Evidently, Guyanese have a preference for foreign goods, which ultimately limits the expansion of domestic industries. If agro-processing is not given some form of protection to develop as part of a feasible business strategy, the sector will not prosper.

Market penetration must be supported by marketing and branding initiatives and educa-



A selection of Guyana's agro-processed foods

tion about the virtues of locally manufactured goods. Pricing of processed goods must also be competitive to gain market share and attract local as well as foreign buyers.

At a more macro-level, Guyanese have a knack for focusing on the cultivation of crops in which it has neither a comparative nor a competitive advantage. Therefore, the government must guide the cultivation of crops for processing in which the country has a clear competitive advantage. Such strategy would also be beneficial because the sector would be able to maximise the use of its existing skills in the production of established crops for processing.

The government also needs to assist with the acquisition of appropriate technology to support agro-processing, as well as seek tech-

nical assistance through international donor agencies to assist with the development of the sector. While it should leave implementation of an agro-processing strategy in the hands of the private sector, it should not take a hands-off approach.

Notwithstanding, the private should not expect to be spoon-fed by the government in developing its initiatives. It should also take responsibility for ensuring the viability of its business initiatives and for the success of the sector.

It goes without saying that the agro-processing has tremendous potential in Guyana. As the Caribbean's largest food producing country, its food import bill is way too high, given the country's capability.

Developing the sector will reduce the country's vulnerability to its traditional industries, create jobs, improve its trade balance, and enhance its overall development prospects.

At the end of the day, if agro-processing takes off, Guyanese at home should be able take pride in buying processed foods labeled 'Manufactured in Guyana', instead of some foreign country with less potential in agriculture.

...
Dwarka Lakhan, BA, MBA, FCSI, FICB is a Member of the Canadian Association of Journalists, and an accomplished financial writer. His book, *Winning Ways, Real World Strategies to Help You Reimagine Your Practice*, is available on Amazon and on winningways101.com. He can be reached at dlakhan@rogers.com.

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Hundreds of devotees gathered at Triveni Mandir in Brampton in early January, welcoming 2026 with song, prayer, and celebration. The mandir filled with chanting, warm hands clapping, and the soft sussuration of voices as families, elders, and children marked the opening days of the year in a shared spirit of unity and devotion. Triveni takes its name from the sacred Triveni Sangam in India, the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and

Saraswati. For the founders of the Brampton mandir, the name carries a second meaningful memory as well: the meeting of the Essequibo, Cuyuni, and Mazaruni rivers in Bartica, Guyana. In these beautiful photos taken from Brampton Triveni's Facebook page, six rivers quietly flow across continents – India, Guyana, and Canada – to meet in dance, music, and prayer, a diaspora gathered in its own worshipful place of confluence.



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Golden passports, dual citizenship, national development, and global power

By Dhanpaul Narine

You are rich, super rich, and it seems like you have it all. You have spent millions on the sleek private jets, the imposing yachts and the fancy hotels. But there is something missing. You need a second passport, a status symbol that will open doors in another country, and will guarantee you the rights and privileges there.

At the end of 2025, the actor George Clooney was granted French citizenship for himself and his family. It was widely reported that he would be able to skip long lines at the airports and live in style. But which passport would he use? According to the experts, he would leave the US on a US passport and enter France with his French passport, and would reverse the practice on his return.

It is generally agreed that there are three ways in which one could become a citizen of another country. They are through naturalisation, descent, or being able to invest in the country of choice. But where are these countries and why would they allow people to buy their passports?

In July 2017, there were at least 17 countries that offered their passports and citizenships for sale. In 2025, the number increased to over 30 countries. The Caribbean remains in the top five for the Citizen by Investment program (CBI). These countries are as follows: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia. They are singled out because of their lower entry costs and their fast-processing times. It is said that a passport from Dominica can gain one access to over 150 countries.

The CBI does not come cheap. They have special requirements and they vary in different countries. A cursory look at the countries shows that New Zealand, for instance, needs the investor to have three years of business experience, and for him or her to invest about two million British pounds over four years. The investor is then granted residency after living for five years in the country.

Cyprus sells citizenship for about \$2 million and the money should be invested in mostly real estate. If you want to be a resident of Australia you must be worth at least \$5 million to begin the process.

One of the most popular residency programs was offered by Canada. The program began in the 1980s, and applicants had to live for at least three years in Canada and worth about \$2 million. Canada profited from this program to the tune of about \$2 billion, largely from Chinese investors. The program ended in 2014, although Quebec still accepts a handful of applicants each year.

Bulgaria has a fast-track option to citizenship that includes an investment of about \$1 million in government bonds. Cyprus, has a Golden Passport program that requires "significant investment in property or in a local company". But the program grants permanent residency and not citizenship. Bulgaria adopted the Euro in January 2026 and applicants must invest BGN 1 million to show intent. Children of the Golden Visa holders can apply for citizenship without passing a language exam.

Spain has a Golden Visa program that requires an investment of around \$1 million in real estate. Citizenship is granted after ten years. The US offers conditional resident status through the EB-5 visa program. An applicant is required to invest about \$500,000 to start the paper work, and over the past decade the Chinese took about 75 percent of the visas allocated in the visa program. The US conditional resident status has so far realised about \$8 billion.

In September 2025, US President Donald Trump proposed the "Trump Gold Card" that would allow individuals to fast track residency, and lead to citizenship, if they pay US \$1 million to the government. The Commerce Secretary reported that the US has so far generated over \$1.3 billion from the sales of gold cards.

Portugal, like Spain, also has a Golden Visa program. An investment of about \$1 million that could create ten jobs in the country, and six years of permanent residency, will lead to a Portuguese passport.

As far as the Caribbean is concerned, as we have seen, second passports can be obtained for a price in Saint Lucia, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Antigua and Barbuda. Citizenship in Saint Lucia begins at \$100,000 with an investment in the National Economic Fund.

Dominica has a similar program. A Dominican passport allows for extensive travel to more than 150 countries. One client says that he had problems traveling with his Iraqi passport, but the one from Dominica "allows me to travel freely and is



Shoppers in downtown Georgetown, Guyana

helping me excel in my profession".

Grenada requires a \$200,000 donation to the Grenada National Transformation Fund and real estate investment. Saint Kitts and Nevis require \$250,000 to begin with the filing of the papers. Antigua and Barbuda wants a similar sum with investment in real estate of about \$400,000.

The advantages of having a second passport should be seen from two angles, the applicant, as well as the country that is selling it. For the applicant, the argument is that a second passport gives more options. These would include travel, do business, move assets, and invest, among others. If a person is being harassed in his or her country of birth, that person can hop on a plane and seek refuge in a second country.

At one time, a Maltese passport could have enabled a person to visit the US and Canada without a visa, the right to live and work in the European Union, and access to 167 countries. But Malta abolished this program in 2025.

However, the Golden Visa program is still active. It grants permanent residency in Malta through investment and a donation. What stands out with the current program is that the person does not have to live in Malta for long periods. The Brexit vote means that over five million Britons are eligible for Irish passports, and there has been a surge in applications for them.

The countries that sell passports claim that there are benefits to be derived. For example, Saint Kitts and Nevis began selling dual residency since 1984, and the IMF reports that the "amount of money flowing into the public sector from the economic citizenship program grew to nearly 25 percent of the GDP in 2013".

Another attractive aspect of some of the programs is that the waiting period to qualify as a citizen can be minimal. Antigua and Barbuda, Cyprus, Dominica, Grenada and Saint Kitts and Nevis offer immediate citizenship with no residency requirements. In Latvia, Spain, and Switzerland, the waiting period is over ten years, but with no residency requirements. The acquisition of a second passport, then, does not necessarily mean that the applicant has to live in the country.

An interesting development occurred a few years ago when the government of the UAE came up with a plan to relocate about 100,000 of its stateless Bidoon population to the Comoro Islands. The plan was for the Bidoon to become citizens of the Comoro Islands and the UAE would pay the Comoro government millions of dollars as part of the deal. There was even talk that Comoro might become the new Dubai. However, a variety of problems have prevented this deal from happening.

There are objections as to why a country should not become a party to the second passport program. The most obvious is security. It is argued that the purchasers of these passports, or their associates, can belong to terrorist organisations. It would be difficult to monitor their movements once residency is granted.

The release of the 'Paradise Papers' has brought offshore banking, hedge funds, and money transfers into the spotlight. It has revealed unethical business practices by some well-known names, but the question is: To what extent are they connected to second passports or residencies? Then there is the question of allegiance.

The US State Department says that "dual nationality may limit the US government efforts to assist nationals abroad. The country where a dual national is located generally has a stronger claim to that person's allegiance". The State Department added that dual citizenship could disqualify an applicant for sensitive positions in the US government.

In recent years, there have been steps to tighten the steps to dual citizenship. In December 2025, Senator Bernie Moreno, a Republican from Ohio, argued that Americans should show "sole and exclusive allegiance to the United States". He continued: "If you want to be American, it's all or nothing". Moreno was born in Colombia and is the architect of the Exclusive Citizenship Act of 2025.

But there have been pushbacks. Senator Moreno was criticised by Dr Peter Spiro, a Professor of Law at Temple University. He says that that Moreno's idea is unconstitutional and will never come to pass.

It is agreed that one of the world's most powerful passports belongs to Singapore. But while it gives global mobility, Singapore does not allow dual citizenship. The perks are that "holders gain access to a high quality of life, including government subsidised housing, world-class health care and a top-tier education system". Investment does not come cheap. It starts at \$10 million and can be as much as \$200 million.

One country that could become a big player in the dual passport and residency game is Guyana. The discovery of oil and gas is leading to a change in the character and complexion of the country. Some observers believe that in 30 years it would be difficult to recognise Guyana, as we know it, as there could be more foreigners than locals in the country. It is suggested that they will have second passports and buy lands, and other resources for profit, while little is left for the locals.

In 2025, a random survey proved interesting. People at a shopping mall in outer Georgetown were asked to state their country of origin. Their responses included Antigua, Bangladesh, China, Dominica, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, and Venezuela, among others. In fact, the 12th person to be interviewed happened to be a Guyanese!

One thing was certain: the non-Guyanese were not in Guyana for a vacation. They held jobs, ventured into business and education, and many of them looked forward to the day when they could become Guyanese citizens. The Guyanese passport has become a much sought after document.

There has to be steps to protect the patrimony and to confer citizenship based on a 'Guyanese first' policy. What does this mean in terms of practice? It is no secret that Guyana's oil and gas discoveries have attracted many persons from all over the world. Many of them may end up staying in Guyana. It is, therefore, necessary for the government to define who is a Guyanese. It is suggested that legislation should be crafted to define a Guyanese as a person who has Guyanese origins, or a PGO.

Guyana may do well to look at the rules of citizenship in the UAE. The expatriate population of the UAE is over ten million persons. Indians with 38 percent are the largest group, followed by Pakistan at 17 percent, and Bangladesh at seven percent. The local Emirate is around 1.31 million persons, or 12 percent of the population. The foreign population, which is about 88 percent, is concentrated mainly in Dubai and Sharjah.

Acquiring citizenship in the UAE is not easy. The person must have 30 years of residency, must be fluent in Arabic, have a clean police record, have exceptional contributions in the society, and be nominated by a local who can attest to his or her character. It is said that only a handful of applicants meet the requirements. There is a ten-year Golden visa and a one-year Digital Nomad Visa in the UAE, which have benefitted 150,000 foreign professionals, but they are not for citizenship.

As we have seen, the acquisition of a second passport, with or without residency, is complicated. It can build the local coffers, and offer comfort to applicants, but careful vetting is recommended for security and other purposes; the glitter is not necessarily gold.

Now Dabydeen's gentle, restless imagination explores Forgotten Exiles

Cyril Dabydeen, *Forgotten Exiles*, Mosaic Press

A review by Derek Dabee

It is refreshing to come across Cyril Dabydeen's new book of short stories, *Forgotten Exiles*, Mosaic Press, 2024, recently published and gaining high praise from readers. This volume follows upon *My Undiscovered Country* (stories) also released by Mosaic Press, Ontario, and a prize-winner in the Guyana Prize competition.

Dabydeen is one of the Caribbean's and Canada's most prolific authors with about 20 books to his credit. His novel, *Drums of My Flesh* (Mawenzi House, Toronto), was a best-novel winner in the Guyana Prize competition in 2006, and a nominee for the prestigious IPAC Dublin Prize.

He is also well-known as a prolific poet. He was the official Poet Laureate of Ottawa in the 1980s, the first visible minority person so named in a major Canadian city; and the House of Commons (Canada) described him as a "a noted Canadian poet" (*Hansard*, April 24, 2001). He is also well-known for his work in human rights with work in governments, and travelled widely across Canada.

I have heard Dabydeen read from his books to us in Winnipeg on more than one occasion with much appreciation. He has also read across Canada and internationally – he last read

fiction at the University of Vienna as a guest of the International Conference of the Short Story. He has also taught writing at the University of Ottawa for many years. Significantly, he has won the Okanagan Fiction Prize, the Canute A. Brodhurst Prize (fiction), and recommended for a Pushcart Prize via Prairie Schooner (US); the title story of this new book was first published in key Canadian and US magazines.

Critics' comments about his stories are *apropos*: "It is the epiphany, the moment of illumination, which comes out of an ordinary experience" (*World Literature Today*); "Dabydeen is a short story master" (*Canadian Literature*); and Fred D'Aguiar, Director of Creative Writing, Virginia Tech University, writes about his "unique background and stellar writing".

Dabydeen prefaces his new collection with a quote from Maya Angelou: "The greatest agony is an untold story." In *Forgotten Exiles* stories go back to the 1970s when he lived in the Lake Superior region planting trees while in the quest for higher education and the search for identity.

Outsider and insider images are central as Dabydeen aligns north and south, hinterland and urban life of the coastal Amazon with the urban landscape of Canada. The metaphor of



Cyril Dabydeen

"exile" can be seen in context of the Canadian as a newcomer – as Dabydeen writes about his Ottawa background where he has lived for decades.

Dabydeen looks into the proverbial mirror and what is behind its cracked glass in lived experiences. Indeed here are stories of an earnestly searching soul as Dabydeen crosses boundaries where the "exile" longs for a real place in Canada. Stories such as *Welcoming Mr Anang*, *My Teaching Days*, *A Father's Son*, *Jagnath and Tomby*, and *Black Like Who?* make for a compelling read with their enticing narrative format; they are metaphorically rich.

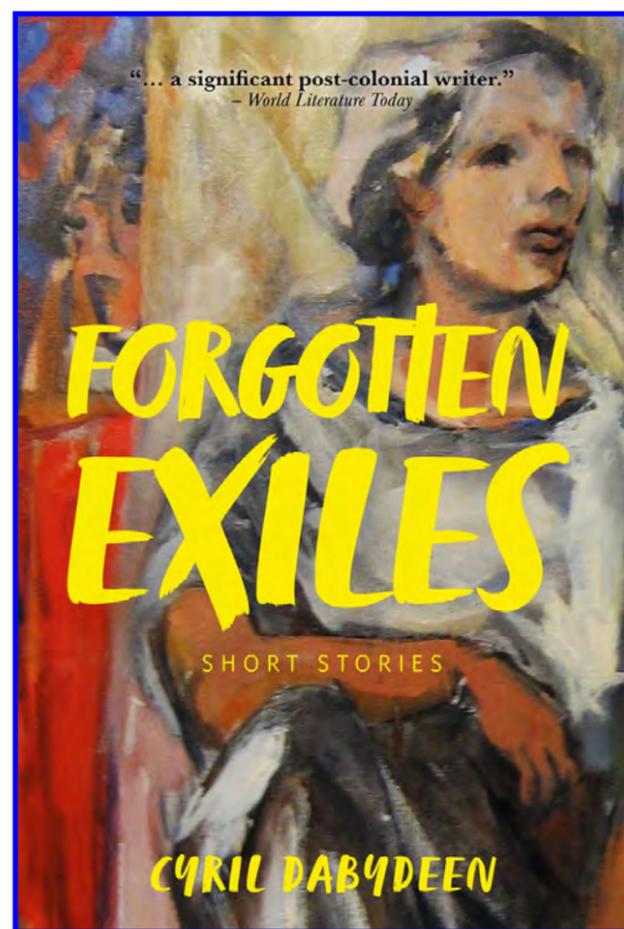
Dabydeen also introduces humour mixed with irony as he depicts his characters' lives, as his style is fused with his inflection tied to oral and dialectal energy and poetic rhythms – a hallmark of his work.

He is widely published in the literary magazines in Canada, UK, and the US across many years. The 16 stories here also reflect triangles of love associated with personal and social concerns about race and class comprising the essence of his characters' lives, as Dabydeen flits between past and present, bringing memory and landscape together. For him, memory is the mother of the imagination.

This new collection adds to Dabydeen's many books of fiction of novels and short stories that include *My Multi-Ethnic Friends and Other Stories*, *North of the Equator*, and *My Brahmin Days*. His major poetry collections include *Imaginary Origins: New and Selected Poems*, and *God's Spider* published by Peepal Tree Press, UK, which has also published his novels.

Noteworthy is that Dabydeen has twice juried for Canada's Governor General's Award for Literature, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature (University of Oklahoma), and the Bocas Literary Prize (Trinidad). He has also edited major collections such as *Beyond Sangre Grande: Caribbean Writing Today* and *Another Way to Dance: Contemporary Poetry in Canada and the USA* – both published by Mawenzi House, Toronto.

This new volume explores identity, belonging, and the immigrant experience in the nuanced portrayal of his characters navigating life between the cultural landscapes of Guyana and Canada while addressing larger social issues. Cyril's own journey from Guyana to Canada mirrors the tension between "outsider" and "insider" defining much of what is known as the "exile" confronting realities of one's Caribbean roots and North



American life, especially seen in the shift between Canada's Lake Superior region and life along the coast of Guyana. Dabydeen blends contrasting settings while crossing boundaries.

Forgotten Exiles solidifies Dabydeen's position as a major voice in Canadian and post-colonial literature. It is a testament to his ongoing contribution to Canadian artistic life and to the broader conversation on immigration, identity, and what it means to belong. His storytelling is praised as "seamless between past and present, fantasy and reality", according to *Canadian Literature*. As *Montréal Serai* states: "There is a kaleidoscopic quality to these short stories, a shifting and colliding of the bits of coloured glass held up to the light. Much to share that is not necessarily easy to render in a short story format."

I look forward to more to come adding to Dabydeen's *oeuvre*, and for us to hear him read again in Winnipeg!

The screams and the phone's blinding flashes startled Rudy out of sleep. His body flexed into a sitting position. His heart pounded.

The phone's screen displayed the animation of a large, green, wart-covered toad with bleeding eyes and goat's horns.

"We're ugly!" A loud croaking voice boomed from the toad and echoed around the room, sending an uncontrollable tremor throughout Rudy's body. The high court judge recoiled. Disbelief raised every hair on his body.

Before Rudy had a chance to collect his thoughts, the screen went blank, and graveyard silence followed. The 62-year old judge relieved his aching lungs by letting the air pressure out. He glanced at the clock on the night table. The moment of terror ended a few minutes after midnight.

Rudy picked up the phone, curious to see where the strange call had originated. No traces of activity showed on the phone since he had turned it off and plugged it in to charge when he went to bed at ten o'clock earlier that evening! His logical mind could not comprehend how the phone had come to life when he had powered it off as he did every night to avoid being disturbed from sleep by unwanted phone calls and notices.

Unable to fall back to sleep, Rudy googled the weird phenomena but no matches appeared. He resigned himself to the only reasonable explanation – he had awoken from a true-to-life nightmare.

The following morning, he used a fresh, cold shower to shock himself into alertness. The effect of the ice-cold shower lost its potency in court by mid-morning. While lawyers argued on behalf of their clients in front of him, Rudy's mind kept drifting off to the night before, rendering him incapable of forming accurate conclusions. He called recesses several times to review the court reporter's notes in his chambers, but was eventually forced to reserve judgment for the following day. He could not complete the first of four cases scheduled for that day.

After supper that evening, Rudy shut the TV off and went to sleep.

"I am your TOAD – your Totally Obnoxious And Despicable



The Supernatural Judge and jury

persona!" The scream snatched Rudy out of sleep. "These claws are the barbs we use to bully people." The amphibian on the TV lifted a front leg and pointed its four sharp toenails at Rudy. "Each wart growing out of us is a criminal we refused to indict when we were a prosecutor. We and our corrupt police department protected perpetrators by planting false evidence to send innocent people to prison. The tears of blood are from the victims and their families who suffered because of our selfish and thoughtless ambitions. I am you...you are me...we're us...the judge and the jury – your conscience..."

"I climbed the judicial ladder..."

"Ha...ha...ha..." The toad puffed his chest. "More like we corrupted our way up the ladder." The creature let out an evil giggle. "Which brings me to our belly. We are yellow-bellied cowards, Rudy. Our wrong to our community as prosecutor got even worse when corrupt politicians benefited from appointing us to the high court."

"I earned my position..." Rudy sounded unconvincing.

"Really? As we recall, instead of fighting to protect innocent lives, we defended drug lords and crooks with vendettas..."

"Stop saying, 'We', and get away from me...you do not exist, you hideous creature," Rudy yelled at the toad and threw the remote at the TV. "I need sleep for work tomorrow."

"There is no tomorrow for you, Rudy." The toad's loud laughter evoked terror in Rudy. The judge clutched his chest in excruciating agony. "Your reckoning has arrived, Rudy."

"Oh, and the horns...I'm sure you're curious about the horns." The toad leaned forward to present a close-up of the horns. "Every lie grew them an inch longer, and every evil thought widened them a bit more. You be the judge... measure how many times we've violated our morality." The toad leaned

back on its hind legs and rubbed its belly with loud laughter.

"Please don't let me die..." The reality of his situation sent a cold chill through Rudy's veins. Instinct from fear of a judgment he dreaded rolled him into a praying position on his knees. He begged the toad for mercy. "I'll make everything right."

"Are we going to put life back into the innocents who suffered and died in prison at the hands of merciless thugs?" The toad became serious. "How about the families we have destroyed, Rudy? How are we going to make things right for them?"

"Please..." Rudy had no answers but begged for his life in desperate pleas, tears streaming down his face. His posture brought back the visions of hundreds of innocent defendants that he had put in the same position while wielding his power over other people's lives.

"Instead of soaring into the afterlife as an angel with wings, we will leap into the dark, bottomless pit as the ugly toad we are." A gavel appeared in the toad's hand.

"Please..." Rudy's loud sobs jerked his body into violent shivers. "Please forgive me!"

"I hereby sentence us to an afterlife of terror and torment from which there will be no reprieve, not even for a split second." The toad cleared its throat. "For all eternity!" The toad banged the gavel on a courtroom desk that appeared in front of it.

Rudy's brain registered the last words out of the toad's mouth before his heart exploded, and he felt himself plummeting in free-fall, squeezing through a dark tunnel. He hugged himself tighter against the plunging sub-zero temperature. The toad sat on Rudy's back with one arm in the air while holding on to a barbed rein tied to Rudy's tongue that dug deeper and threatened to sever the bleeding appendage with each tug that accompanied his gleeful hollers of 'yippee' as if he were a rodeo cowboy. The cries of pain from the spurs that dug into Rudy's ribs evoked boisterous cheers from the souls that he had wronged. Universal justice had prevailed.

Kamil Ali





Los Parranderos de UWI performing at the Les Rois event

TT's 2025 parang season ends with Les Rois event

— Parang enthusiasts marked the close of the 2025 season at St Michael's Roman Catholic Church in St Joseph, with music, Mass, and reflection, as the National Parang Association reaffirmed parang's cultural power and outlined plans for unity, education, and cultural tourism.

...

Port-of-Spain – Parang devotees gathered on January 10 at St Michael's Roman Catholic Church in Maracas, St Joseph, to observe the Feasts of the Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord, as parranderos came together in music and fellowship to formally close the 2025 parang season.

The Feast of the Epiphany, which is also known as Lehwah, Les Rois, or Los Reyes, is observed annually on January 6 and commemorates the visit of the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, celebrated on the Sunday following Epiphany, recalls Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, and marks the end of the Christmas season.

This year's celebration was hosted by the National Parang Association of Trinidad and Tobago (NPATT) in partnership with St Michael's Roman Catholic Church. Proceedings began with a 6:00 p.m. Mass, followed by parang performances in the churchyard from 8:00 p.m.

Groups performing included *Los Parranderos de San Miguel*, *Viva Jesus*, *La Familia de Carmona y Amigos*, *Los Parranderos de UWI*, *Amantes de Parranda*, *Los Buenos Parranderos*, *Los Ruiseñores*, and *Los Sonidos*. A special guest appearance was made by Alicia Jaggassar, widely regarded as the "First Lady of Parang" and president of NPATT.

Speaking after the event, Jaggassar said the 2025 season reaffirmed the power and relevance of parang music, noting the success of new initiatives introduced this year. These included a panel discussion and a lyrics workshop, both of which she said were well-supported.

"Next season, we hope to expand on these events to share our knowledge of the parang artform with others," Jaggassar said.

She also expressed appreciation to the media for its consistent coverage of NPATT's activities throughout the season.

"It was heartwarming to have the media supporting our events, ensuring we remained in the public eye throughout the

season," she said.

Jaggassar thanked members of the NPATT executive, sponsors including Penta Paints, as well as parents, teachers, students, and the wider public for their support of *El Poder de la Parranda* – Parang Festival 2025 and *Somos Un Solo Pueblo*, the primary and secondary schools festivals.

Looking ahead to 2026, Jaggassar said her vision is for a more unified parang fraternity.

"Part of my vision is to see a fraternity that genuinely embodies the spirit and meaning of *Somos Un Solo Pueblo* — *We Are One Village*," she said.

She added, "Unity within the parang community is not only essential for harmony, but for the preservation, growth and respectful transmission of our traditions to future generations."

She added that she strongly believes parang can be positioned as a significant national cultural asset, and expressed optimism about future collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Community Development and the Ministry of Trade, Investment, and Tourism.

According to Jaggassar, parang has the potential to be developed into a high-value cultural experience capable of attracting both local and international audiences.

"Parang offers more than music; it is a living expression of faith, history, language, and Hispanic heritage," she said, adding, "When strategically supported and authentically presented, it can serve as a powerful gateway for cultural education, community development and sustainable cultural tourism."

She also highlighted the importance of collaboration with the Ministry of Education to integrate parang into the school system as a practical tool for teaching Spanish.

"This initiative supports cultural appreciation and aligns directly with our national goal of becoming a bilingual nation, allowing students to learn language through heritage, music, and lived cultural expression," she said.

Jaggassar also indicated it was her hope to strengthen partnerships with other cultural groups and organisations to encourage collaboration and shared learning across cultural spaces, ensuring that parang continues to evolve while remaining rooted in its authenticity and traditions.



Los Ruiseñores at the Les Rois event

EMA tightens noise control for Carnival

— The Environmental Management Authority has rolled out enhanced noise management measures for the Carnival season, introducing stricter planning, monitoring, and public engagement requirements aimed at reducing noise pollution while preserving the cultural vitality of Carnival celebrations.

...

Port-of-Spain – The Environmental Management Authority (EMA) has begun implementing a series of strengthened noise management initiatives for the Carnival season, saying the measures reflect the Trinidad and Tobago government's commitment to reducing noise pollution while safeguarding cultural expression.

In a media statement issued on January 14, the EMA said the new measures are intended to improve the regulation of noise generated by Carnival activities and other large-scale events, particularly in high-density residential areas where noise-related complaints have been a long-standing concern.

The authority noted that residents, notably those living in residential neighbourhoods, have repeatedly raised concerns over excessive noise during the Carnival period.

In response, and in keeping with the government's broader noise mitigation strategy, the EMA has taken proactive steps to enhance its noise variation application, monitoring, and enforcement processes.

According to the EMA, the improvements are designed to promote greater transparency, accountability, and community engagement, while prioritising residents' health and well-being, and ensuring that cultural celebrations are conducted responsibly.

One of the key changes involves improved public access to information. The EMA said that all notices of intent to apply for a noise variation are now publicly accessible on its official website. This allows residents and other stakeholders to be informed in a timely manner, and to submit feedback through a user-friendly public comment form.

Another major change relates to location-specific noise planning. Event promoters are now required to submit detailed event location maps and site plans that clearly show proximity to residential areas, site layouts, and all proposed noise mitigation measures.

"This information is essential to ensure that noise control strategies are appropriately designed for the specific venue and surrounding environment, and that potential noise impacts are effectively managed," the EMA said, adding that it also enables more stringent and accurate assessments of proposed noise control measures.

To support compliance, the EMA has issued an *Event Variation Information Guide* and a *Quick Reference Guide* outlining mandatory requirements for noise variation applications. The authority said these guides provide clear direction on event location mapping, resident notification procedures, and noise abatement measures that organisers must incorporate into their event planning documentation.

Stronger requirements have also been introduced for events deemed high-risk. These include activities in areas with a history of noise-related complaints or breaches, locations near sensitive facilities such as health care institutions, or events with the potential to generate significant noise impacts.

In such cases, organisers must implement a formal resident notification process and submit a comprehensive noise management plan.

The EMA said it has also adopted a targeted, intelligence-led approach to monitoring, with priority given to events, whether operating with or without a noise variation that have a history of complaints or breaches.

"Where violations are detected, Environmental Police Unit officers will work closely with event organisers and the senior divisional officer responsible for the event to facilitate immediate corrective action," the statement said, noting that enforcement proceedings will follow where necessary.

The authority expects the measures to increase transparency and public participation, reduce noise-related complaints, encourage improved sound engineering and noise management practices, and strengthen overall compliance with the Noise Pollution Control Rules.

The EMA said it will continue to monitor trends in noise complaints, analyse complaint data to assess the effectiveness of the measures, and collaborate closely with the police service to ensure timely enforcement. Where feasible, sound testing and microphone checks will also be conducted at events to advise promoters of acceptable noise levels in advance.

"The EMA remains committed to balancing environmental protection, community well-being, and the cultural vitality of Carnival festivities through ongoing collaboration with government agencies, event promoters, and the public," the statement concluded.

No dictators here says Augustine as TPP sweeps THA elections

— Tobago House of Assembly Chief Secretary Farley Augustine has reassured Tobagonians that his administration will govern with restraint and accountability, despite his party securing all 15 electoral districts and the new Assembly convening without an Opposition. He outlined legislative amendments, governance reforms, and new appointments aimed at strengthening oversight, efficiency, and representation within the THA.

...

Scarborough – Tobago House of Assembly (THA) leader Chief Secretary Farley Augustine last week gave the assurance the absence of an Opposition would not translate into authoritarian rule. He stressed that the Tobago People's Party's clean sweep of the January 12 elections would be used to advance reforms without obstruction, rather than to consolidate power.

"I want you to know that giving us all 15 seats will not result in us abusing you, will not result in us becoming elected dictators, but will allow for us to introduce measures without being stymied by those who are anti-Tobagonian, and will ensure that Tobago sees progress along a trajectory that leads to the greatest little island on the planet," Augustine said.

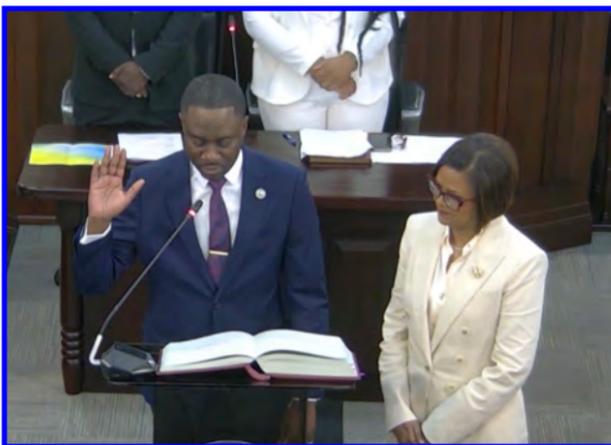
His comments came as the newly constituted THA was formally inaugurated on January 15, with President Christine Kangeloo presiding over the ceremony. Fifteen elected assemblymen, three councillors and a presiding officer were sworn in, bringing the total membership of the Assembly to 19. There was no Opposition representation.

During the ceremony, Augustine was sworn in as Chief Secretary, Dr Faith Brebnor as Deputy Chief Secretary, Niall George as Presiding Officer, and Niketa Percy as Deputy Presiding Officer. The three councillors appointed to the Assembly are Adanna Joseph-Wallace, Petal-Ann Roberts, and Ackel Franklyn.

The TPP secured all 15 electoral districts in the THA election, which was held on January 12.

Following the inauguration, Augustine led his team to James Park in Scarborough, where he addressed supporters alongside Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar. In his remarks there, Augustine detailed two amendments to the THA Bill that he said were necessary to modernise the Assembly's operations.

According to Augustine, the first amendment addresses the quorum required for the Assembly to legally conduct business. He explained that when the THA previously comprised 12 elected members, the quorum was set at nine. However, when



Farley during his swearing in; looking on at right is Trinidad and Tobago's President Christine Kangeloo



The 2026 THA team following the swearing-in on January 15

the number of electoral districts increased from 12 to 15, the quorum was never revised.

With the full Assembly now standing at 19 members, Augustine noted that the existing law still allowed nine members to make decisions for the entire House.

"That quorum does not fit, so the quorum now changes to 12, which is the highest standard, which means 12 members must be in the House for any debate to be considered legal," he said.

The second amendment increases the number of THA secretaries, he said, noting that the last such adjustment was made two decades ago in 2006.

"We are now in 2026 with an expanding House with more members, and we feel that this time to make a change there again," he said, adding that the expansion would allow for a more "granular approach" to governance.

Augustine pointed to the current structure of the THA, where multiple portfolios are often housed within a single division, as a constraint on effective administration. He cited the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment, and Sustainable Development as an example of what he described as an over-concentration of responsibilities.

"So you see how we have been trying to cram 33 areas into a small number of divisions," he said, contrasting the situation with Trinidad, where multiple ministries and ministers allow for greater focus and efficiency.

As part of the restructuring, Augustine announced the creation of a new Division of Legal Affairs and Intergovernmental Affairs, which will function in a role equivalent to that of an Attorney General for both the THA and the Tobago Island Government. Attorney Adanna Joseph-Wallace has been appointed to head the division.

Describing Joseph-Wallace as an attorney of "excellent repute", Augustine said her career reflects a strong commitment to justice, education and human resource development. He noted that she currently serves as deputy dean for outreach, and as a lecturer in law at The University of the West Indies.

"She will be fitting to assist us as we build out that novel division that treats with all of our legal affairs," Augustine said.

Augustine also addressed the appointment of the three councillors, explaining that their selection was guided by geographic balance, rather than political considerations. Two councillors were chosen from Tobago West and one from Tobago East, a decision he said was intended to ensure equitable representation across the island.

"That decision was guided not by politics but by fairness and function," he said.

In additional announcements, Augustine revealed that Abby Taylor, the Assembly's former presiding officer, will be appointed as Antiquities Officer. He described the position as central to preserving Tobago's history and heritage, signalling a continued focus on cultural stewardship alongside administrative reform.

Newsday closes after 32 years citing mounting print pressures

— Trinidad and Tobago's third daily newspaper, *Newsday*, is closing after more than three decades in publication, with its parent company applying this week to the High Court to wind up operations. Management has cited a decade-long convergence of financial and advertising turbulence facing standalone newspapers, while taking the opportunity to express concern over the contracting landscape for the journalist as a guardian of democracy.

...

Port-of-Spain – The daily newspaper, *Newsday*, published by Daily News Ltd, applied late last month to the High Court of Justice for an order to wind up the company under the Companies Act. A public notice of the application was filed on December 31, 2025, with the first court hearing taking place on January 19.

In a statement explaining the decision, managing director Grant Taylor said the closure was the result of what he described as a "perfect storm of challenges" that had been building for more than a decade.

"*Newsday* is no different in most respects from the other players in the market; this is an industry under severe pressure," Taylor said, adding "But one crucial difference is that, as a stand-alone entity which is not part of a media conglomerate, there is nowhere for *Newsday* to hide the year-on-year losses all the local daily newspapers are suffering."

While acknowledging that the Covid-19 pandemic played a role, particularly during periods of national shutdown when advertising revenue fell sharply, Taylor stressed that turbulence was not the sole cause of the newspaper's demise.

"Whilst the scourge of [Covid-19] is certainly a factor, as the country shut down more than once, and with it, advertising sales fell off dramatically, that was by no means the only nail in the coffin," he said, adding, "The elements of this perfect storm are as varied as they are damaging, with no single factor exclusively to blame."

Taylor said the closure should not be viewed as a sudden collapse, but rather the cumulative result of pressures playing out over many years.

"This is also not a 'This just suddenly happened' scenario, but



Newsday's office in Port-of-Spain

rather, a symphony of events playing out over a decade," he said.

He noted that the challenges facing *Newsday* are mirrored across the global media industry, where traditional print outlets have struggled to adapt to structural shifts in readership, advertising, and public trust.

"Some challenges have been causes of our demise; others have hastened it," Taylor said.

Among the most significant pressures, Taylor identified the escalating cost of raw materials, notably paper, which he described as the newspaper's single largest expense. He said these increases have been compounded by sharply rising costs associated with printing machinery and ongoing maintenance.

"The world has also changed, and Trinidad and Tobago is no different," Taylor said, further noting, "The value placed on traditional media has diminished, and the political campaign to discredit them for nefarious reasons has ramped up."

Taylor also highlighted the impact of declining circulation and price sensitivity among readers. He said when *Newsday* increased its cover price by (TT) \$1, from \$2 to \$3, approximately 40 percent of its readership opted out.

According to Taylor, even at a price lower than that of a local snack as doubles, many readers viewed the cost as unaffordable.

"A newspaper entails hundreds of people working every day of the year, and working around the clock, to keep the public informed, but \$3 is too much to ask for that service," he said.

However, the decline in advertising revenue proved to be the most damaging factor. Taylor said advertising across all media

platforms has fallen significantly over the past decade, but that print media have borne the brunt of the contraction.

"Print advertising has fallen by 75 percent," he said.

"In the context of the significant increase in costs, this is the most impactful element of the perfect storm that has been brewing over the last decade," he stated.

Despite the closure, Taylor said he remained proud of the newspaper's editorial legacy and independence.

"As we become another statistic in the casualties on the print media landscape, we remain proud of our legacy of unwavering independence in keeping the public informed," he said, affirming, "We are grateful to those who supported *Newsday* throughout, to long-time readers and those who discovered and came to appreciate the paper's strengths more recently."

He also paid tribute to the staff who sustained the publication over its 32-year run.

"We are grateful, too, to the dedicated staff of every department who worked every day and night for over two decades, determined that the paper must come out, in the interest of that readership," Taylor said.

Taylor urged the public to continue supporting journalists and media workers, warning that attacks on the press have wider democratic consequences.

"The media are one of the most important elements in any democracy, and it is a telling sign of a democracy itself under threat when the media are under threat," he said.

He also addressed industrial relations challenges, saying disputes and court rulings have often been difficult for small media organisations to absorb financially.

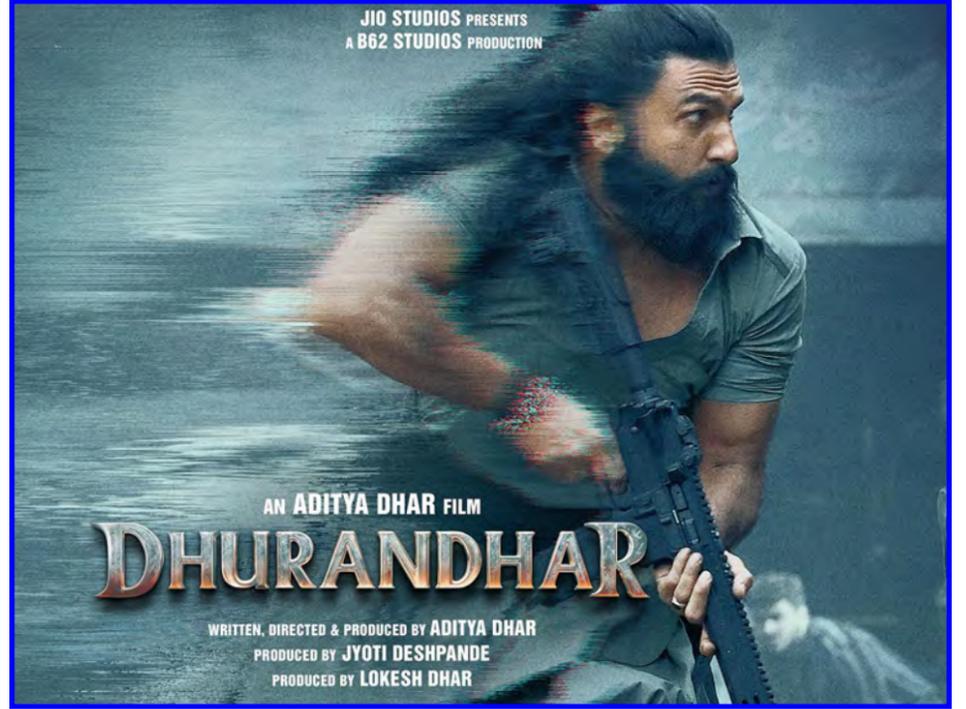
"Industrial relations have always been difficult, from aligning all stakeholders to facing rulings that at times ignored the financial realities of companies, often harming both the organisation and its staff," Taylor said.

He added that while the courts' approach has evolved in recent years, the financial cost of litigation "is in the millions and is a challenge for a small company".

Founded on September 20, 1993, with its main location on Pembroke Street in Port-of-Spain, *Newsday* was the youngest of Trinidad and Tobago's three daily newspapers.



Sanjay Dutt (left to right), Akshaye Khanna, Aditya Dhar on *Dhurandhar*'s set



Ranveer Singh in action in *Dhurandhar*

Aditya Dhar's discipline meets creativity on Bollywood's big screen

— From a reticent hotel-management graduate to one of Bollywood's most bankable directors, Aditya Dhar has built a career on discipline, restraint, and method. His movies, *Uri*, *Article 370*, and *Dhurandhar*, reveal how quiet preparation can yield the loudest impact.

Bollywood is not built for silence. It rewards volume, velocity, and visibility. Yet Aditya Dhar climbed to the top by refusing all three.

His ascent has not been loud or performative. It has been deliberate, marked by long gestation, private doubt, and a near-monastic faith in preparation. For Dhar, filmmaking was never a sprint toward recognition; it was endurance training.

That truth surfaced poignantly on January 11 this year, when Dhar marked the anniversary of *Uri: The Surgical Strike*, the debut that changed his life with a rare public reflection.

He wrote on his *Instagram Stories*, "11th January 2019. A day that changed my life forever. My first film, *Uri*, released that day. I had waited a long time for that moment. My dream finally became a reality."

What followed was not triumphalism, but an assertion of the rootedness in grounding.

He continued, "I remind myself often to never forget where it all began. Beginnings

keep you grounded and hungry. Filmmaking is a hard, unforgiving journey, full of doubt and long nights. But when the audience shows up and embraces your work, every struggle suddenly makes sense."

He was speaking to the tension when doubt is paired with conviction, which has defined his career.

When *Uri: The Surgical Strike* was released in 2019, few expected a first-time director to deliver a film that felt both technically assured and emotionally restrained. Based on India's retaliation following the 2016 *Uri* terror attack, the film resisted spectacle in favour of procedural realism.

Shot largely in Serbia on a modest budget, the film relied on immersive action staging rather than excess. Vicky Kaushal's performance as Major Vihaan Shergill carried quiet authority, while the now-iconic line "How's the Josh?" landed not as slogan, but as an organic, earned release.

The film grossed approximately US \$42 million worldwide, becoming the highest-grossing debut by a first-time Indian director, and earning Dhar the National Film Award for Best Director and the Filmfare Award for Best Debut Director.

Yet even at that peak, Dhar kept his distance from the spotlight.

Dhar's reluctance toward self-mythologising may stem from a long apprenticeship where recognition came slowly, and sometimes not at all. Veteran filmmaker Priyadarshan recently underscored that history, publicly celebrating Dhar's success following *Dhurandhar*.

"There is no greater happiness than watching my disciple rise with such remarkable success," Priyadarshan wrote, adding, "Congratulations, Aditya Dhar, on *Dhurandhar*, and heartfelt best wishes for *Dhurandhar 2*."

The relationship stretches back years. Dhar served as dialogue writer on Priyadarshan's *Aakrosh* and *Tezz*, contributions that sharpened his sense of rhythm, restraint, and moral clarity, often without public credit.

Dhar's response was deeply personal and heartfelt.

"You believed in me when I was a nobody, and when all I had was conviction and a few written pages," he stated, adding, "You treated me like an equal, and gave me something far more precious than just work – dignity, trust, and love."

He went further, framing mentorship not merely as professional guidance, but as ethical formation.

"In an industry where I often learnt what not to do, you taught me exactly what to do – not just as a filmmaker, but as a human being.

I will forever be your student first."

That emphasis on how one works, not just what one makes, runs through Dhar's films.

In 2019, Dhar co-founded B62 Studios with his brother Lokesh, marking his transition from director to creative architect. The studio's output reflects his instincts: politically charged narratives grounded in process rather than polemic.

That approach paid dividends with *Article 370*, a tense political thriller starring Yami Gautam, which became one of India's top-grossing films of 2024. It was followed by *Dhoom Dhaam* (2025), a Netflix comedy that demonstrated tonal agility without sacrificing authorial control.

Released on December 5, 2025, *Dhurandhar* marked Dhar's second turn in the director's chair, and his largest canvas yet.

Set within the covert world of India's Research and Analysis Wing, the espionage thriller stars Ranveer Singh, alongside Sanjay Dutt, Akshaye Khanna, R. Madhavan, and Arjun Rampal. It ignited national conversation about ideology, representation, and the porous boundary between patriotism and propaganda.

Yet even at this scale, Dhar's signature held: professionals under pressure, moral ambiguity, and competence rather than heroics. As Dhar reminded his audience earlier this month, beginnings matter, since it keeps one hungry.

Ram Gopal Varma predicts record-breaking Dhurandhar sequel

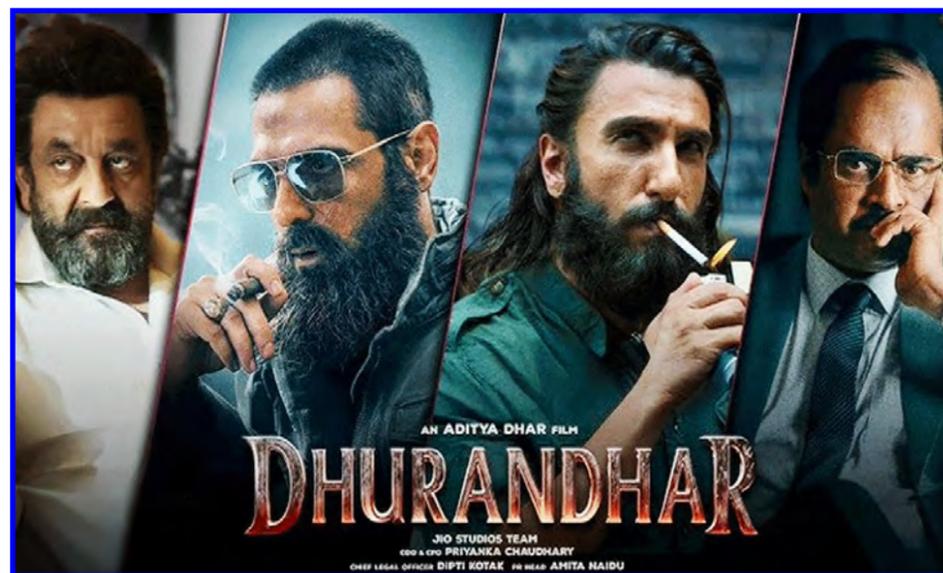
— Following the blockbuster success of *Dhurandhar*, anticipation is building for its sequel, with filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma hailing *Dhurandhar 2* as an unprecedented multi-starrer. As production clarifications emerge and plans for a five-language release take shape, the sequel is being positioned for a major pan-India and global rollout in March.

With the runaway success of *Dhurandhar*, attention has now firmly shifted to its sequel, *Dhurandhar 2*, which is scheduled for theatrical release on March 19.

The film's makers recently confirmed that a fresh trailer cut is currently in the works, fueling anticipation among audiences. The update comes amid renewed discussion sparked by filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma, who described the sequel as potentially the "biggest multi-starrer ever" in cinema history.

Writing on X, Varma said the scale of the sequel stems from the transformation of its ensemble cast following the first film's success. He argued that characters who may once have appeared small or peripheral had since become "giant superstars" in the minds of audiences, redefining the meaning of stardom.

Varma has been an outspoken supporter of *Dhurandhar* since its release in December, pre-



viously describing the film as a "pathbreaking and monstrous hit".

In earlier posts, he suggested that the film's impact unsettled parts of the industry, particularly projects conceived before *Dhurandhar* reshaped audience expectations. He also claimed the film had become one of the most discussed Indian releases in decades.

Meanwhile, speculation surrounding Akshaye Khanna's involvement in the sequel

was addressed this week. Reports suggesting the actor had returned to set for additional filming were dismissed by sources close to the production.

"There is no additional filming happening with Akshaye Khanna at the moment," a source told Indian media, adding, "His portions were wrapped earlier and are part of key flashback moments in the narrative."

The original *Dhurandhar* starred Ranveer

Singh, Khanna, Sanjay Dutt, R. Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, Rakesh Bedi, among others, and went on to become one of the highest-grossing Indian films of 2025.

Directed by Aditya Dhar, the movie followed a decade-long covert Indian intelligence operation centered on an undercover agent embedded within Karachi's criminal and political underworld. The sequel is expected to pick up from the first film's cliffhanger ending.

Producers Jio Studios and B62 Studios have confirmed that *Dhurandhar 2* will mark a significant expansion in reach. Unlike the original, which released theatrically only in Hindi, the sequel will debut simultaneously in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam as part of a pan-India and global rollout.

According to Jio Studios, the decision was driven by sustained demand from southern markets, where *Dhurandhar* generated strong traction through word-of-mouth and social media, despite the absence of dubbed theatrical versions. Distributors and exhibitors in South India reportedly received consistent requests from audiences seeking access in regional languages.

The expanded release strategy reflects the makers' intent to capitalise on the franchise's growing national footprint as expectations continue to build ahead of the sequel's Eid 2026 window for its arrival in theatres.

Rahman cites 'communal' shifts as industry colleagues push back

— Oscar-winning composer A.R. Rahman has said his work in Hindi cinema has slowed in recent years, citing shifting power dynamics and indirect signals of exclusion. His remarks, made in a BBC Asian Network interview, prompted pushback from several industry figures, even as Rahman later clarified his intent in a video statement.

Oscar-winning composer A.R. Rahman has said his work opportunities in Hindi cinema have declined over the past eight years, attributing the change to what he described as shifting power dynamics within the industry and, possibly, a “communal” factor.

Speaking in a recent interview with *BBC Asian Network*, Rahman said the reasons behind the slow-down often reached him indirectly rather than through explicit rejection.

“It comes to me as Chinese whispers,” Rahman said, using a colonial-era phrase commonly understood to mean information distorted as it is passed along informally.

Elaborating, he added: “People who are not creative have the power now to decide things, and it might have been a communal thing also, but it is not in my face. It comes to me as Chinese whispers that they booked you, but the music company went ahead and hired their five composers.”

Rahman said he chose not to dwell on such developments, revealing, “I said, ‘Oh, that’s great, rest for me. I can chill out with my family,’” he said, adding that he does not actively seek work and prefers projects to come to him organically.

The comments triggered strong reactions from several figures in the arts and in Hindi film industry.

Novelist and columnist Shobhaa De described Rahman’s remarks as “dangerous,” saying she did not believe Bollywood operated on communal lines.

“I have been watching Bollywood for 50 years,” De said in a statement, adding, “If I have seen any place which is free of any kind of communal tension, it is Bollywood. If you have talent, you will get a chance. If you don’t have talent, there is no question of religion being a factor.”



A.R. Rahman

She added that Rahman’s stature made the comment more concerning, declaring, “He is such a successful and mature man. He should not have said it. Maybe he has his reasons. You will have to ask him.”

Singer Shaan also rejected the suggestion of communal or minority bias, framing fluctuations in work as a personal and industry-wide reality.

“I have been singing for so many years and I am also not getting much work,” Shaan told *IANS*. “But I don’t go into it much because I feel it is a personal thing. Everyone has their own thoughts and likes.”

He added that Rahman’s popularity remained undiminished.

“It is amazing that he is a composer and his fans have not decreased, they are increasing. I don’t think there is any communal minority angle. Do good work, do good music, and don’t think about all this,” he said.

Lyricist and screenwriter Javed Akhtar echoed similar sentiments, saying he had never experienced or observed communal

bias in the industry.

“I meet people here in Mumbai. They have great respect for him,” Akhtar told *IANS*, adding, “Rahman is such a big man. Even a small producer is afraid to go to him. I don’t think there is any communal element in this.”

Rahman’s comments were made in response to a question about whether prejudice existed in the Hindi film industry, particularly toward people from the Tamil community or those not based in Maharashtra. He said he had not directly experienced discrimination but suggested broader structural changes might have influenced decision-making.

“Maybe I never get to know of this, maybe it was concealed,” Rahman said, further noting, “But in the past eight years, because a power shift has happened and people who are not creative have the power now, it might be a communal thing also — but it is not in my face.”

Following the public reaction, Rahman issued a video statement on Instagram clarifying his position and saying he did not intend to hurt anyone.

“India is my inspiration, my teacher and my home,” Rahman said.

He added, “I understand that intentions can sometimes be misunderstood. My purpose has always been to uplift, honour, and serve through music.”

He highlighted several initiatives aimed at nurturing musical talent and celebrating cultural diversity, including mentoring young musicians, building the Sunshine Orchestra, developing the virtual band *Secret Mountain*, and presenting projects such as *JHALAA* and *Rooh-E-Noor*.

Rahman also reaffirmed his commitment to India and its creative landscape, declaring, “I feel blessed to be Indian, which enables me to create in a space that allows freedom of expression and celebrates multicultural voices.”

He has several high-profile projects lined up, including *Ramayana*, which he is co-scoring with international composer Hans Zimmer, as well as *Lahore 1947* and *Hansal Mehta’s Gandhi*, all scheduled for release later this year.

Abhishek Banerjee’s upward rise mirrors *Stree 2*’s cinematic success

— Fresh from the box-office success of *Stree 2*, Abhishek Banerjee says he is now receiving offers for leading roles, marking a turning point in his career. As critics, including Shafiq Ul Hasan Siddiqui, praise the sequel’s performances and writing, Banerjee’s rise reflects the film’s wider impact.

Abhishek Banerjee, one of the breakout performers in the blockbuster sequel *Stree 2*, says the film’s success has opened a new chapter in his career, with offers for leading roles now arriving for the first time.

Speaking to the media after the film’s strong box-office run, Banerjee said the shift had been sudden and unexpected.

“I have begun receiving offers for lead roles, which is a new development for me,” he said, adding, “Previously, I was offered smaller, low-budget projects. Just last week, I got three offers, and I am eager to dive into reading and choosing what is next.”

The actor’s remarks come as *Stree 2*, the sequel to the 2018 horror-comedy hit *Stree*, continues to draw large crowds and positive critical attention, consolidating its status as one of the year’s most successful Hindi releases.

In the film, Banerjee reprises his role as Janna, alongside Rajkumar Rao, Shraddha Kapoor, and Pankaj Tripathi. The sequel follows the return of supernatural danger to the town of Chanderi, this time in the form of a headless demon named Sarkata.

While Banerjee acknowledged competition at the box office from films such as *Vedaa*, he said the scale of *Stree 2*’s success had exceeded even his expectations.

“No one expected *Stree* to be such a colossal hit. I knew it would be big, but it has grown into something even larger — like *Godzilla*,” he stated.

Much of the film’s momentum has been reinforced by strong critical response, including a detailed review by the movie critic Shafiq Ul Hasan Siddiqui, who situates *Stree 2* within the broader evolution of Bollywood’s horror-comedy genre.

In his review, Siddiqui traces the genre’s lineage from the Ramsay Brothers’ cult horror films of the 1970s and 1990s to more recent hybrids such as *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* and *Go Goa Gone*, before crediting director Amar Kaushik with giving the form renewed depth and staying power.

“With films like *Stree*, *Bhedhiya*, and now *Stree 2*, Kaushik has proven himself to be a master of this delicate balancing act,” Siddiqui writes, arguing that the genre has moved beyond novelty into a sustainable cinematic space.



Abhishek Banerjee

Siddiqui describes *Stree 2* as a sequel that both honours its predecessor and expands its narrative complexity, noting the return of the original ensemble cast, including Banerjee, Aparshakti Khurana, and Atul Srivastava, while introducing new characters to refresh the story.

He writes that at the centre of the sequel is a town that has found temporary peace after the defeat of *Stree*, only to be threatened again by Sarkata, a demon whose detachable head becomes one of the film’s most striking visual devices.

Within that ensemble, Siddiqui singles out Banerjee’s performance for particular praise, warmly recognising his handling of the role’s emotional and comic demands.

“Abhishek Banerjee is lovable with his particular style of reacting to the situation,” Siddiqui writes, declaring, “He is first-rate.”

In the film, Janna remains marked by the trauma of his earlier possession by *Stree*, making him both vulnerable and central to the group’s strategy against Sarkata. The plot eventually turns on the risky decision to use Janna as bait in an attempt to summon *Stree* herself, a narrative choice that places Banerjee’s character at the emotional core of the sequel.

For Banerjee, the reception has reinforced the value of patience in a career that began largely in supporting roles.

“Earlier, I was offered smaller, low-budget projects. Now I am finally getting the chance to choose what is next,” he said.

Siddiqui’s review also highlights the film’s writing and pacing, crediting the script by Niren Bhatt for weaving together humour, suspense, and intertextual references that reward attentive viewers.

He praises Rajkumar Rao’s comic timing as “laser sharp”, Pankaj Tripathi’s performance as “taking scenes to another level”, and Aparshakti Khurana’s dual portrayal of vulnerability and possession as “very effective”.

The review notes that even cameo appearances by stars such as Varun Dhawan and Akshay Kumar add momentum, while post-credit sequences hint at the expansion of a larger horror-comedy universe.

“Every actor in the movie knows exactly what to do, how to react and respond,” Siddiqui writes, arguing that the film’s success rests not on spectacle alone, but on ensemble precision.

He ultimately awards the film four out of five stars, calling it “a must-watch” and praising its combination of smart writing, performances, visual effects, and family appeal.

For Banerjee, the convergence of box-office success and critical validation marks a rare inflection point.

As he stated, the experience of competing releases such as *Vedaa* only underscored the scale of *Stree 2*’s achievement, noting that even well-directed films struggled to match its audience pull.

While he remains cautious about his next steps, Banerjee said the sudden influx of leading-role offers has changed how he views his own trajectory.

“I am eager to dive into reading and choosing what is next,” he said following the arrival of more substantive career offers.

With *Stree 2* continuing the momentum of its theatrical run, Banerjee’s rise mirrors the film’s own arc, a supporting presence now taking sure steps into the foreground, buoyed by both audience response, critical endorsement, and a reward for his hard work and diligence.



Bangladesh congratulate a teammate after a bail is dislodged

Bangladesh World Cup participation still in doubt

— With less than three weeks before the first coin toss of the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup, Bangladesh's participation hangs in the balance as the Bangladesh Cricket Board and the International Cricket Council remain deadlocked over venue and security concerns. A final decision is expected by today, January 21, with the possibility of a late replacement, most likely Scotland, looming if Bangladesh refuses to travel to India.

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Cricket Report

The Bangladesh Cricket Board will take a final call by today, January 21, on whether the national team will travel to India for the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup, amid an escalating standoff with the International Cricket Council over security concerns and venue arrangements.

The deadline was communicated to the BCB during high-level discussions in Dhaka on January 17, according to *ESPNcricinfo*, as the ICC pressed for clarity with the tournament set to begin on February 7.

At the heart of the impasse is Bangladesh's firm refusal to play its scheduled group matches in India, citing security risks linked to deteriorating political relations between the two countries.

While the BCB has repeatedly expressed its willingness to participate in the World Cup, it has insisted that its matches be relocated to co-host Sri Lanka.

During the weekend talks, BCB officials reiterated their preference for Sri Lanka as an alternative venue. However, the ICC has so far refused to alter the tournament schedule, which places Bangladesh in Group B with matches in Kolkata and Mumbai.

The standoff has now stretched beyond three weeks. The BCB first raised formal concerns on January 4, leaving the ICC with limited time to resolve a dispute that threatens to disrupt the tournament's carefully planned logistics.

Bangladesh are scheduled to play West Indies in the tournament opener in Kolkata on February 7, followed by two more group games at the same venue, before their final group match in Mumbai.

The ICC has rejected multiple proposals from the BCB, including a request to swap groups with Ireland, whose matches are scheduled in Sri Lanka. The ICC has also maintained that there is no specific security threat to the Bangladesh team.

In an advisory sent to all 20 participating teams and prepared by an independent security agency, India's overall threat level has been assessed as "medium to high," but without any direct or specified risk to any travelling team.

Those familiar with the ICC-BCB discussions say the governing body will now wait for the BCB's final decision. Should Bangladesh formally withdraw, the ICC is expected to name a replacement team, with Scotland currently the highest-ranked eligible side.

The crisis was triggered earlier this month after the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) directed IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to release Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman from their squad, amid rising political tensions between the two countries.

Although no formal reason was given for Mustafizur's removal, the decision sparked a chain reaction. The Bangladesh

government subsequently banned the broadcast of the Indian Premier League in the country, and the BCB sent a formal letter to the ICC refusing to play its World Cup matches in India.

Bangladesh's sports adviser, Asif Nazrul, has been at the forefront of demands to relocate the matches, adding a political dimension to what has become a major sporting and diplomatic issue.

In a video conference earlier this month, the BCB was represented by president Aminul Islam, vice-presidents Shakawat Hossain and Faruque Ahmed, cricket operations chairman Nazmul Abedin, and CEO Nizam Uddin Chowdhury.

In a statement following the talks, the BCB said, "During the discussions, the BCB reaffirmed its position regarding the decision not to travel to India, citing security concerns. The Board also reiterated its request for the ICC to consider relocating Bangladesh's matches outside India."

The statement added that while the ICC urged reconsideration, the BCB's position "remains unchanged", and that both parties had agreed to continue discussions.

Vice-president Shakhawat Hossain later made the BCB's stance unequivocal.

"We are firm in the position we have taken. We will not change our stance even by an inch. We are not going to India," he said.

Acknowledging the narrowing window for a solution, Hossain added, "Yes, the time is short. They know that too. Arrangements will be made very soon."

One of the BCB's key proposals was a group swap with Ireland, whose matches are scheduled entirely in Sri Lanka. Under the current draw, Bangladesh are placed in Group B with West Indies, England, Nepal and Italy, while Ireland are in Group C with Sri Lanka, Australia, Zimbabwe and Oman.

However, Cricket Ireland has said it has received firm assurances that its schedule will not be altered.

"We've received definitive assurances that we won't move from the original schedule. We're definitely playing the Group Stage in Sri Lanka," a Cricket Ireland official told *Cricbuzz* earlier this week.

However, the BCB acknowledged that a group swap had been discussed, stating, "Among other points, the possibility of moving Bangladesh to a different group as a means of facilitating the matter with minimum logistical adjustments was discussed."

But the proposal has gained no traction with either the ICC or Ireland.

If Bangladesh withdraws, Scotland are widely expected to be named as the replacement team. The Scots are currently the highest-ranked side not already qualified for the tournament.

Although reports earlier this week suggested no formal talks had taken place between the ICC and Scotland, the *BBC* reported that Scottish players were ready for a late call-up. However, Scottish officials are understood to be reluctant to lobby for inclusion out of respect for the BCB.

Scotland narrowly missed qualification last summer, finishing fourth in the Europe Qualifier behind the Netherlands and Italy.

The 2026 T20 World Cup will be staged in India and Sri Lanka from February 7 to March 8. With venues booked, tickets on sale, and broadcast schedules locked in, the ICC faces mounting pressure to resolve the crisis quickly.



Shakawat Hossain

Guyana's Sampson earns his maiden T20I call-up

— Cricket West Indies handed a maiden international call-up to Guyanese batter and CPL standout Quentin Sampson in the 16-member squad now playing the three-match T20I series against Afghanistan in Dubai, a contest head coach Daren Sammy has noted is a crucial rehearsal for the upcoming 2026 T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

Quentin Sampson's rise through the Caribbean Premier League has been rewarded with his first international selection as West Indies named a 16-member squad for the three-match T20 International series against Afghanistan, now underway in Dubai and concluding tomorrow.

The 25-year-old Guyana Amazon Warriors batter was one of the standout performers of CPL 2025, scoring 241 runs in nine matches at a strike rate of 151.57, and has been identified by the selectors as one of the most exciting prospects emerging from the regional system.

The series forms part of West Indies' final phase of preparation ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, to be staged in India and Sri Lanka next month.

Brandon King was appointed captain for the series in the absence of regular skipper Shai Hope, who is unavailable due to his SA20 commitments.

Hope was one of four frontline players missing the series for that reason, alongside Roston Chase, Akeal Hosein, and Sherfane Rutherford, forcing the selectors to reshape the squad and provide opportunities for fringe and returning players.

Shamar Joseph and Evin Lewis were both recalled after recovering from injuries sustained in earlier international assignments, while several senior players were rested as part of workload management.

Rovman Powell, Jason Holder, and Romario Shepherd were all omitted for the Afghanistan series, with Cricket West Indies confirming the move being part of a broader plan to manage workloads ahead of the World Cup.

Fast bowler Alzarri Joseph, who missed the recent Test series in India with a lower-back injury, was left out despite making progress in his rehabilitation.

CWI said the decision was taken as a precaution following medical assessment, with Joseph set to remain under observation ahead of possible World Cup selection.

Head coach Daren Sammy said the Afghanistan series would play a central role in sharpening the team for subcontinental conditions.

"The opportunity to play competitive matches in subcontinental conditions is ideal, as it assists with our preparations and confidence building ahead of what will be a competitive T20 World Cup," Sammy said.

"It also presents a valuable platform to assess players who missed significant time towards the end of 2025, as well as those stepping into important roles for this series, prior to the selection of the final squad," he added.

Speaking to Sammy's pick, Sammy described his selection as part of a deliberate strategy to blend emerging talent with experienced campaigners as West Indies build toward the global tournament.

"He was one of the bright spots for us, especially with what he did for Guyana. He's definitely one for the future, and I'm looking forward to seeing what he can offer at the international level," Sammy said.

Sammy added that the Afghanistan series offers a dual opportunity, namely to expose young players to international cricket, while at the same time allowing established names to fine-tune their games in World Cup-like conditions.

"It's a great chance for some of the young players to start building at the international level, while also allowing those already in the World Cup frame to fine-tune their games in similar conditions against strong opposition," he said.

He added that the team's senior players and coaching staff would play a key role in helping Sampson and other newcomers settle into the international environment.

Sammy also stressed that defining roles within the team would be as important as results.

"Our main objective is always to win, but just as important is solidifying roles heading into the World Cup," he said.



Quentin Sampson

Healy bows out as Australia make preparations for post-captaincy

— Australia captain Alyssa Healy has announced that the upcoming home Test series against India will mark the end of her international career, bringing down the curtain on a 15-year journey that reshaped women's cricket through leadership, innovation and sustained excellence. Meanwhile, her move is leaving Australia amidst preparations for a new era just months before a T20 World Cup.

Australia captain Alyssa Healy has confirmed she will retire from international cricket in March, with the sole Test against India in Perth set to be her final appearance in national colours.

The 35-year-old wicketkeeper-batter said the timing felt right to step away, ending a 15-year career that has defined an era in Australian women's cricket and helped lift the global profile of the women's game.

"It's with mixed emotions that the upcoming India series will be my last for Australia," Healy said, adding, "I'm still passionate about playing for Australia, but I've somewhat lost that competitive edge that's kept me driven since the start, so the time feels right to call it a day."

Her farewell match will be the four-day Test in Perth from March 6-9, the only red-ball fixture of the series.

Healy made her international debut as a teenager and has been a fixture of the Australian set-up for a decade and a half. She took over the full-time captaincy in 2023 following the retirement of Meg Lanning, inheriting leadership of a side that had already become the dominant force in women's cricket.

"Every contest I wanted to be a part of and wanted to compete and it's probably drained me a bit more over the years," Healy said earlier this month.

She added, "The opportunity to finish at home is something I really wanted to do."

Despite the emotional weight of retirement, Healy said she was not perturbed by the decision.

"When it comes to retirement it's quite daunting for a lot of people, but standing here right now, I'm really excited," she said.

The physical toll of international cricket had become increasingly difficult to manage. Healy admitted that pushing through to the T20 World Cup in England in June and July would not have felt right while she felt her drive beginning to wane.

She has ruled herself out of the T20 matches against India so as not to disrupt Australia's preparations for the World Cup, which will now be led by a new captain.



Alyssa Healy

Ashleigh Gardner and Tahlia McGrath have emerged as the leading contenders to succeed her, with Beth Mooney, Annabel Sutherland, and Phoebe Litchfield also in the frame as part of a broader leadership transition.

"We're able to take the group and lead this next generation into doing their own thing," Healy said, signalling a deliberate handover to the next cohort of leaders.

Her departure leaves Australia managing not only a captaincy change, but the loss of one of the most influential figures in the modern women's game.

By the time she retires, Healy will have scored more than 7,000 international runs and completed 275 dismissals. She is likely to finish on 299 international matches, having opted out of the T20 leg of the India series.

Her Test career spans just ten matches, a reflection of the limited opportunities for women in the long format. However, across all formats she holds the record for the most dismissals in international women's cricket, with 269.

Her honours are equally formidable: six T20 World Cup titles, two ODI World Cups, 11 WNCL titles and two WBBL championships. She was player of the final in Australia's 2022 ODI World Cup triumph and featured in six T20 World Cup-winning campaigns.

Individually, she claimed the Belinda Clark Award in 2019 and was twice named ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year. Healy's path to greatness was shaped early by both privilege

and pressure. As the niece of former Australia wicketkeeper Ian Healy, she entered the system with doors open, and expectations firmly attached.

The surname ensured early opportunity, but it also carried the burden of comparison. Over time, she carved out a legacy entirely her own, redefining the role of wicketkeeper-batter with power, innovation, and relentless consistency.

She is now regarded alongside Adam Gilchrist as one of the great wicketkeeping revolutionaries, not merely because of the evolution of women's sport, but because of the way she personally altered perceptions of what was possible behind the stumps and at the top of the order.

Healy was part of the first generation of Australian women to receive structured marketing contracts from Cricket Australia. Her emergence coincided with a new phase in the promotion of the women's game, one that began to produce genuine household names.

While that early marketing era reflected the limitations of its time, Healy seized the opportunity to build a public profile previously unattainable for women cricketers. Alongside Meg Lanning and Ellyse Perry, she became central to mainstream sporting conversations across Australia.

Her influence extended well beyond statistics. She helped normalise visibility, commercial relevance, and star power in women's cricket, reshaping how the game was consumed, marketed and valued.

Healy has already begun building a media career, emerging this summer as one of Fox Cricket's most popular commentators and co-host of a successful podcast.

She has also spoken openly about her desire to start a family with her husband, Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc, though she declined to outline any fixed plans.

"I've been fortunate enough to have had a lot of opportunities outside of the game in the last 12 to 18 months. But I still feel like I can contribute to the game ... it's given me so much and I still owe a lot to cricket," she said.

Cricket Australia chief executive Todd Greenberg described Healy as one of the defining figures of the modern era.

"Alyssa is one of the all-time greats of the game and has made an immeasurable contribution both on and off the field over her 15-year career," Greenberg said.

"On behalf of Australian cricket, I'd like to thank Alyssa and congratulate her on an incredible career that has inspired so many and changed the game for the better."

Heather Knight balances playing future with new London Spirit role

— England great Heather Knight has begun a carefully managed transition toward life after playing by accepting a senior administrative role with London Spirit, while insisting she remains fully committed to England and the 2026 home T20 World Cup. It is a dual-track decision that reflects both the physical realities of a 15-year career and a deliberate effort to shape her post-playing future without stepping away from the game.

Former England captain Heather Knight has moved into a senior leadership role with London Spirit while reaffirming that retirement is not imminent, as the 35-year-old charts a deliberate and carefully staged transition from elite player to cricket administrator.

As ESPN and the BBC reported earlier this week, Knight has been appointed Women's General Manager at London Spirit for the 2026 season, a role that will see her step away from playing in The Hundred while continuing her playing commitments for England and Somerset, including at this summer's home T20 World Cup.

Speaking at Lord's during Spirit's rebrand launch earlier this week, Knight said the role should not be interpreted as a signal that her international career is nearing its end.

"It's not me retiring or finishing playing, it's just me turning my head slightly towards what might come next," Knight said.

"This was an opportunity to continue playing, in terms of my commitment to England and Somerset. It was a tricky decision, but one I felt was a really good opportunity for me that I didn't want to turn down," she said.

Knight insisted that playing for England remains her primary focus, including at the T20 World Cup in June and July, where she is expected to remain a central figure in the squad.

"I'm certainly committed to playing at the moment," she said, adding, "One thing the last couple of years has taught me is it's not actually super beneficial to look too far ahead sometimes... While I'm still performing, enjoying my cricket and contributing to the team being successful, I want to carry on playing."

Despite her new off-field responsibilities, Knight will not



Heather Knight

feature as a player for Spirit in the 2026 Hundred season, instead supporting sporting director Mo Bobat and women's head coach Jon Lewis during the tournament.

Knight acknowledged that a spate of injuries in recent seasons forced her to confront the finite nature of her career. She has missed two of the last four editions of The Hundred, including last summer after a hamstring tear that limited her to a mentoring role during Spirit's run to the women's final.

"I was injured a lot last year, and that gave me a little bit of time to think," Knight said, further noting, "As you do get a little bit further in your career, you know that it's not going to last forever."

At 35, she said the new role allows her to remain competitive while proactively preparing for an eventual transition away from full-time playing.

"You obviously have a huge amount of your life being a professional cricketer, and that's very much linked to your identity,"

she said.

Additionally, "I obviously know a lot of people that have transitioned out of playing, and it's not the easiest thing to do... so part of me doing this is being quite proactive in terms of what comes next."

Knight's decision comes from a position of strength rather than decline. During England's run to the semi-finals of the 50-over World Cup, she topped the team's batting averages with 288 runs at 48.00, including a match-winning century against hosts India.

She recently returned from a stint with Sydney Thunder in the Women's Big Bash League, and will prioritise early-season game time with Somerset ahead of the World Cup before turning her attention to her Spirit duties when The Hundred begins on July 21.

In her new position, Knight will focus on recruitment strategy, auction planning and providing an experienced voice during competition, while remaining separate from match selection.

"I'll sit across a lot of decisions around the women's recruitment and be part of a group of us that will form the strategy around our auction planning," she said, adding, "In terms of day-to-day during the competition I won't be involved in selection... I'll be the objective person in the dressing room to make sure I'm supporting and challenging the head coach."

Knight said the role suited her background, drawing on her extensive experience in selection and leadership as both England and Spirit captain.

The appointment reunites Knight with former England head coach Jon Lewis, who was named Spirit's women's coach in December following England's Ashes whitewash last winter, a traumatic series that ended both their tenures as captain and coach.

"We've stayed in touch. I had a really good working relationship with Jon - we worked brilliantly together over those three years," Knight said, declaring, "No beating around the bush, the Ashes didn't finish how we wanted for both of us, and I think we've both learned a huge amount from that experience."

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