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The Canadian Islamic Civic Academy held an *Iftar* gathering on March 14 at its Etobicoke mosque. In attendance for the breaking of the Ramadan fast were (left to right) Aneesa Boodram and Shafeeya Nazeem – see story and photos on Page 17; also, more Ramadan coverage on Pages 3 and 16



Philanthropist Jay Brijpaul rolled out his inaugural Wealth Workshop at his Rexdale Blvd office on March 14, a response to educating our community on issues impacting lives and livelihoods. Last Saturday's event focused on Brampton's landlords now requiring a Residential Rental Licence. The next workshop will be on June 13, and will look at estate planning and taxation. In photo, Anjie Brijpaul (at right), with Jay; he can be reached at 416-418-2745.

Devi Mandir honours memory of Sam Persaud

— The Devi Mandir community gathered on March 15 for a Special Volunteer Recognition Service dedicated to the memory of the late Samlal Persaud, whose decades of leadership, financial stewardship, musical devotion, and quiet commitment to *seva* continue to inspire Hindu organisations and youths across the Greater Toronto Area.

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Community Report

Scarborough – Members of the Devi Mandir community in Pickering gathered on March 15 to honour the memory of the late Samlal Persaud, a revered volunteer, leader, and musician whose decades of selfless service helped shape the mandir's spiritual and institutional life.

The Special Volunteer Recognition Service, organised by the mandir's leadership, was dedicated to Persaud's legacy nearly a year after his passing on March 19, 2025, following a brief illness. He was 71.

In announcing the ceremony, Devi Mandir described the gathering as both a tribute to Persaud and an occasion to celebrate the volunteers whose quiet dedication sustains the temple's work.

"With heartfelt gratitude for the spirit of *seva* that strengthens our community, we are pleased to announce a Special Volunteer Recognition Service on March 15," the mandir stated in its message to members.

"This year, we will dedicate this gathering in loving memory of our late Samlal Persaud, whose unwavering volunteerism and devotion had a profound and lasting impact

on our Devi Mandir family. His example of selfless service continues to inspire us all," it stated.

The event also served as an opportunity to thank the many volunteers who contribute their time and energy to the mandir's religious, cultural, and community activities.

"The day is dedicated to honouring and appreciating the many volunteers who generously give their time, energy, and commitment in service to the Mandir throughout the year," the statement noted.

Following the service, members of the Board of Directors prepared and served lunch to volunteers in a symbolic gesture that was an inversion by the leadership, reflecting the egalitarian spirit of humility, reciprocity, and service that Persaud himself had championed.

"Following the service, there will be a special lunch prepared and served by the Board of Directors as a small token of our appreciation. We look forward to personally serving those who so often serve others," the mandir's message added.

Addressing the gathering, Vishnu Sookar, Vice-Chair of Trustees at Devi Mandir, reflected on Persaud's life and the gap left behind by his passing.

"Today we pause to remember and honour our dear friend and former Chair of the Board of Directors, Sam Persaud, whose passing a year ago left a deep void in the Devi Mandir family," Sookar said.

He added, "Sam was not only a leader, but a humble servant of *Dharma*. He had a profound respect for the many volunteers who give their time and energy to Devi Mandir. He

See Page 5: From *seva* to song



Sam Persaud

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There was no stopping the Unstoppable all-ladies' team that participated at the Metro All Fours League Tournament on the weekend of March 7-8 at Twilight Restaurant in Scarborough. Winner of the tournament saw Team Spicy, led by Shiva Nandlall, taking away back-to-back trophies, and continuing their winning streak. In photo, front row left to right, are Meena Ganpat, Shweta Manickchand, Kimoy Bachelor-Cooke, Brittany Hosein, Angie Munasar, and Maltee Ramlogan-Teewarie; back row, left to right, are Alissa Hosein, and Sasha Parks; missing from the team photo are Acola Lawrence, and Lenora Gajetan.



The gathering marking the breaking of the fast at IMO on March 8. Inset, Iftar sponsor Zabiha Halal

Community, charity, and reflection mark IMO Iftar

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Community Report

Toronto – The spirit of Ramadan was evident on March 8 when hundreds gathered at the International Muslim Organisation (IMO) for a community Iftar sponsored by Zabiha Halal.

The evening welcomed approximately 800 attendees, who came together to break their fast in an atmosphere filled with gratitude and unity. In keeping with Ramadan's emphasis on compassion and community, Zabiha Halal also ensured that the youngest members were not forgotten, providing 400 colouring books for children, allowing mothers to enjoy the evening while the youngsters engaged in creative activities nearby.

The gesture reflected the inclusive spirit of the gathering, an event designed not only to nourish the body after a day of fasting, but also to nurture the bonds that hold the community together.

Following the event, IMO President Omar Farouk offered heartfelt reflections on the significance of the evening and the blessings of the holy month.

“As we continue through the blessed days of Ramadan, we pray that Allah (SWT) accepts our fasting, prayers, and acts of charity, and fills our hearts and homes with His mercy, guidance, and peace,” he said.

Brother Farouk also took the opportunity to acknowledge the generosity of those who helped make the evening possible, noting the importance of partnerships that strengthen community life.

“We also take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the generous sponsors who have supported the Iftars at IMO, including Zabiha Halal. Your kindness and commitment to serving the community help bring people together in the true spirit of Ramadan, one of compassion, generosity, and unity.”

He concluded with a prayer for continued blessings upon those who contribute to such acts of charity.

“May Allah (SWT) reward you abundantly for your generosity and place *barakah* in your sustenance and efforts,” Brother Farouk said.

The evening was further enriched by the presence of Shaykh Nazim Baksh, the former CBC journalist who now resides in Guyana, and who continues to be deeply engaged in community and educational initiatives.

Addressing the audience, Baksh shared reflections on the spiritual meaning of Ramadan. Drawing on both his professional experiences and personal faith journey, his remarks resonated deeply with those who were gathered at the event.



Nazim Baksh addresses the gathering on March 8



IMO's sisters serving food during the Iftar event

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From seva to song, community honours the legacy of Samlal Persaud

From Page 1

often reminded us that a temple stands strong not only on its walls, but on the hearts and hands of those who serve selflessly.”

Sookar noted that Persaud’s philosophy of service reflected the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Said Sookar, “As the *Bhagavad Gita* reminds us: ‘You have the right to perform your duty, but not to the fruits of your actions.’ Sam lived this principle. His service was never for recognition, but always for the good of the Mandir and the community.”

Persaud’s contributions to Devi Mandir were both spiritual and practical. For more than a decade he served as Treasurer and later held leadership roles on the Board of Directors, guiding the mandir through one of the most important financial transformations in its history.

Recalling their years of collaboration, Sookar said Persaud’s financial leadership helped secure the mandir’s future.

“As Chair of the Board of Directors, I had the privilege of working closely with Sam when he served as Director of Finance from 2005 to 2013,” Sookar told the gathering, adding, “During that time, Sam proved himself to be one of the most effective Finance Directors our Mandir has ever known.”

Under his stewardship, the mandir successfully restructured its debts, and completed repayment of its financial obligations in less than four years.

“With wisdom, discipline, and unwavering commitment, he restructured the mandir’s debts and led the endeavour that completely paid off our financial obligations in less than four years, an extraordinary achievement that strengthened the future of Devi Mandir for generations,” Sookar said.

While Persaud’s financial expertise strengthened the mandir’s foundation, his spiritual devotion was equally expressed through music.

A gifted musician and devoted leader of the mandir’s Kirtan group, Persaud helped fill the temple with prayerful melodies that uplifted worshippers and fostered a deep sense of spiritual community.

“Beyond his leadership and financial stewardship, Sam’s devotion also found expression through music,” Sookar said.

“As a leader of our Kirtan group, he helped fill the Mandir with prayerful melodies and spiritual joy, reminding us that devotion is not only expressed through service, but also through song and praise of the Divine,” he stated, poignantly noting, “Our scriptures remind us: ‘Where devotion is sung, there the Divine resides.’”

In a tribute written shortly after Persaud’s passing last year, Sookar reflected on the character that defined his friend and colleague.

“Though Sam’s body has left us, his eternal soul lives on. His spirit, teachings, and music will forever reside in the hearts of those he touched,” he wrote.

“What defined Sam most was his kindness and humility. He listened more than he spoke, and when he did share his wisdom, his words were thoughtful and uplifting.”

Sookar said Persaud inspired those around him not through authority, but through quiet strength and genuine care.

“He inspired us not through grand gestures, but through genuine care, quiet strength, and steadfast friendship; an embodiment of the wisdom in the *Gita*: ‘It is better to live your own destiny imperfectly than to live an imitation of somebody else’s life with perfection.’”

Drawing from the *Rig Veda*, Sookar added, “Let noble thoughts come to us from every side.”

“Samlal embodied this wisdom. He welcomed new ideas, new voices, and always sought to uplift the community with open-mindedness and care,” Sookar recalled.

Reflecting on Persaud’s enduring influence, he wrote, “Let us honour him not just in words,



Leaders at Devi Mandir during its Volunteer Special Recognition Service

but in action; in the way we serve, support, and uplift one another.”

Quoting from the *Upanishads*, Sookar concluded: “From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality.”

“May Samlal’s soul find peace in the eternal light. And may we, inspired by his life and his legacy, continue to build the loving and united community he envisioned,” he declared.

Even after his passing, Persaud’s influence has continued to ripple across the GTA’s Hindu community.

Late last year, Triveni Mandir in Brampton established the Lotus Scholarship to honour his musical legacy and lifelong dedication to community service.

Triveni Mandir’s spiritual leader, Pandit Yudhishtir Dhanrajh, explained that the scholarship was inspired by Persaud’s love for music and his encouragement of young musicians.

“After consulting with my sister, Gauri, it was decided the way to move forward was via Persaud’s love for music, and to preserve his legacy via students who are studying in a music program at the tertiary level,” Pandit Yudhishtir told *Indo-Caribbean World* last year.

Reflecting on Persaud’s character, he described him as a unifying presence within the Hindu community.

“He was a binding force,” Pandit Yudhishtir said, adding, “He had the ability to navigate the turbulence, and yet find calm and harmony among the many eddies. But what was stable was his love for music.”

Persaud was affectionately known by some as “Lotus,” a nickname that inspired the symbolism behind the scholarship.

“The beautiful Lotus flower can bloom in the dirtiest water. It is the perfect metaphor for Uncle Sam, who stood strong in the midst of trouble,” Pandit Yudhishtir explained.

The scholarship is funded by Triveni Mandir, with hopes of expanding its reach in the coming years.

“We are aiming to grow it, and we have many deserving candidates,” he said.

For Pandit Yudhishtir, the scholarship represents a continuation of Persaud’s encouragement of young musicians.

“One word that remains is continuity,” he said.

“In Samji’s time there were very few musicians, but with his contribution, music is much more accessible today. His impact was on two or three generations. He encouraged youths;

he was that kind of person. Now, anyone who wants to be serious about music, know that Triveni would be there.”

Persaud’s contributions were also honoured last November by the Hindu Federation at its Hindu Federation Gala 2025.

At the November 23 ceremony, Persaud was posthumously recognised for his unwavering service to Hinduism in Canada. The award was accepted on behalf of the family by his widow Ena Persaud and son Aditya.

In a statement following the gala, Pandit Roopnauth Sharma reflected on Persaud’s influence within the broader Hindu community.

“We of the Hindu Federation wanted to express our sincere grief for the loss of our dear brother Samji,” Pandit Sharma told *Indo-Caribbean World* following the event.

“He was a pillar of strength. He believed in the objectives of the Hindu Federation, a united Hindu voice in Canada. He was a doer and a people’s person,” Pandit Sharma said.

Pandit Sharma said Persaud’s dedication to youth and mandir collaboration had left an enduring mark, noting, “He was supportive of all Hindu mandirs, and took great pride in working with youths at the Devi Mandir, and in all aspects of youth initiatives.”

In recognition of his legacy, the organisation announced that the honour, known as the Lotus Award, will be presented annually.

“This award, named the Lotus Award, will be awarded annually to a person who in their daily activities exemplifies the qualities and values that Samji lived by,” Pandit Sharma said.

For many within the Devi Mandir family and the wider Hindu community, Persaud’s legacy continues to resonate not only through the institutions he helped strengthen, but through the spirit of service he embodied.

As Sookar reminded the gathering on March 15, the most fitting tribute to Persaud lies in continuing the work he cherished.

“To all our volunteers: Sam believed deeply in you and in the sacred work you do,” he said, adding, “The greatest way we can honour his legacy is to continue serving with the same dedication, humility, and unity that he exemplified.”

Quoting a timeless teaching, Sookar concluded: “The fragrance of a flower spreads only in the direction of the wind, but the goodness of a noble person spreads in all directions.”

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Editorial

A sacred season

We are presently immersed in an auspicious period marked by prayer, fasting, reflection, and joyful celebration. Our Muslim brothers and sisters are observing the holy month of Ramadan, a sacred time of devotion that will soon culminate in the celebration of *Eid-ul-Fitr*. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, commemorates the revelation of the *Holy Qur'an* to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and guides believers toward spiritual awareness and righteousness.

At the same time, our Hindu community recently observed *Shivratri* and *Holi*. These gatherings bring devotees together in celebration through devotional singing of *Bhajans* and *Chowtals*, alongside the joyful scattering of coloured powders that symbolise renewal, forgiveness, and the triumph of good over evil.

Meanwhile, Christians across our community are observing Lent, the 40-day season of prayer, fasting, and reflection that will culminate with Good Friday and the Easter weekend. Easter's message of hope and renewal resonates deeply as believers prepare spiritually for the celebration of renewed life.

That these observances occur within the same season is more than a coincidence of calendars. Though rituals differ, the principles at the heart of these traditions with humility, compassion, generosity, and renewal remain strikingly alike.

The observance of Ramadan offers a vivid example of these shared values. Fasting during Ramadan sees abstinence from food and drink becoming an act of devotion and discipline. At the same time, fasting cultivates empathy for those who experience hunger and hardship, while strengthening one's relationship with Allah through prayer, reflection, and acts of charity.

The lessons of Ramadan extend beyond the sacred month itself. The virtues of patience, humility, and generosity are meant to ripple outward into everyday life, shaping how individuals interact with their families, neighbours, and communities.

Similar principles appear in the observances of Lent and Holi. Each tradition encourages believers to look inward, practise forgiveness, and renew commitments to values that strengthen community and family life.

These overlapping sacred seasons represent more than moments of religious observance. They remind us of the ethical foundations that sustain our diaspora in our respect for difference, empathy for others, and a shared commitment to living with kindness and humility.

Such lessons carry special meaning in today's troubled world. The ongoing global wars remind us daily of how quickly conflict and division can dominate global affairs.

Against this backdrop, the quiet disciplines practised in our homes, mosques, mandirs, and churches offer a powerful counterexample. In the GTA, our Caribbean diaspora and its many different faiths celebrate side by side, often in the same neighbourhoods, and even within the same families.

The presence of mosques, mandirs, and churches in close proximity, whether in our homelands, or in Canada, stands as a quiet testament to the possibility of coexistence. Our ancestors, many of whom arrived as enslaved labour, or as indentured labourers in unfamiliar lands, together built communities grounded in mutual respect, despite their differences.

Their legacy continues today in the warmth of our gatherings, in shared Iftar meals at sunset during Ramadan, in the joyful sprinkling of colours during Holi, and in the solemn, prayerful reflections of Lent.

As this sacred season unfolds, we extend warm greetings to our community now observing these holy periods of reflection and celebration. May the discipline of fasting, the joy of spring festivals, and the solemn reflections of Lent inspire our renewed commitment to compassion, generosity, and peace.

In a world marked by conflict, our shared observances offer a hopeful reminder that faith, guided by humility and kindness, can illuminate a path toward understanding, harmony, and peaceful coexistence.

Pragmatic governance marks PM Mark Carney's first year

The rapidly shifting dynamics of geopolitics have reshaped political landscapes around the world. Canada has not been immune. In an era defined by economic uncertainty, geopolitical realignment, and domestic political fatigue, the country has undergone a recalibration of its own political leadership.

One year ago, on March 9, 2025, members of the Liberal Party of Canada elected Mark Carney as their new leader, and, in effect, the prime minister of Canada.

Following a snap election, Carney secured his own mandate from Canadians, though his party fell a few seats short of forming a majority government. Yet in just one year, the rookie politician and Canada's 24th prime minister have demonstrated a level of political acumen that many initially underestimated.

Before entering politics, Carney built an extensive career in international finance and economic policy. He began working at Goldman Sachs in 1988, spending more than a decade in offices in London, Tokyo, New York, and Toronto, where he specialised in sovereign risk, emerging markets, and international financial systems.

In 2003, he transitioned into public service, joining the Bank of Canada as a Deputy Governor before later serving at the federal Department of Finance Canada as Associate Deputy Minister of Finance. In that role, he helped shape Canada's economic policy during a period of growing global financial volatility.

Carney's international reputation rose sharply when he became governor of the BoC in 2008, placing him at the centre of Canada's response to the Global Financial Crisis. His leadership during that period is widely credited with helping Canada weather the crisis more effectively than many other advanced economies.

In 2013, he was appointed Governor of the Bank of England, becoming the first non-British person to lead the institution in its more than 300-year history.

There, he guided the UK's monetary policy and financial stability through turbulent years that included the Brexit referendum.

Carney was never entirely removed from politics. His proximity to power and economic policymaking meant he was often viewed as a potential political figure.

Around 2012, while serving as governor of the Bank of Canada, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper reportedly asked whether he would consider becoming Canada's Minister of Finance in the Conservative government. Carney declined.

More than a decade later, the political environment changed dramatically. By 2024, the Liberals were struggling in the polls under former PM Justin Trudeau, and the party faced the real



Ryan Singh

Library visit with a twist as young reader asks for more

There are still two institutions today by which I measure the moral depth of a new neighbourhood. One is the public library, with the other being its pool hall. With these two landmarks a growing boy could receive a decent education in action, consequence, geometry, ambition, and the hierarchical habits of humanity.

One establishment taught me silence was enriching; the other taught me to assess angles before approaching complications; and both showed me how to survive in a world constantly unfolding with tumult and turbulence.

My first entry into empire's library was when adolescence began its rearrangement of the furniture in my head, the floor abrasive with rebellion. Already I was making room in my mind for bookshelves, afflicted with a thirst for learning about my fractured world. That thirst did not always endear me to the gatekeepers of the imposed orderliness of empire.

I remember my first visit to the public library. Looking back, it had all the elements of being told to enter the upper crust residence that was empire through its back door. Rules were explained, and forms laboriously filled out, with my emergent, artistic handwriting scrutinised by the librarian with creased brows, and dismissed as a new species of crapaud-footed script.

The paperwork done, the depth of scrutiny spent on its accuracy was finally rewarded with the librarian stretching across her desk, her slim, lengthy fingers delivering into my outstretched palm two paltry, miniature envelopes, pockets that were nothing less than a small window into the cloistered world into which I had just been admitted.

Looking back, the pocket handover had something faintly Sistine about it. In Michelangelo's famous fresco, God stretches out His finger toward Adam, transmitting the spark of life. Here in my small town library the geometry, angle, and delivery were much the same, with the divine energy conveyed to a much frailer form via finger nails painted sky blue with polish.

The librarian reaching across the desk did so with the solemnity of one entrusted with the very key to civilisation itself. In that moment she was not merely issuing stationery with its unwritten corollary of surveillance and tracking; instead, she was granting me limited access to the republic of books.

Had Michelangelo been working with the leftovers of empire, he might have painted the same scene as an emergent mind receiving a minimum of two miniature envelopes held up against the vastness of solemn and antiquated bookshelves.

prospect of electoral collapse.

Seeking credibility on economic management and a fresh political brand, the party turned to Carney.

His victory was decisive. Carney won the leadership with 86 percent of the vote, and quickly repositioned the party ahead of a snap general election, ultimately leading the Liberals to win the most seats and retain power.

What has surprised many observers since then is how quickly Carney adapted to the realities of partisan politics.

Entering office without prior elected experience, he faced the immediate challenge of governing with a fragile minority in the House of Commons of Canada. Rather than simply managing parliamentary survival, Carney has since demonstrated an ability to shape the political landscape to his advantage. In recent months, four opposition Members of Parliament have crossed the floor to join the government benches – three from the Conservative Party of Canada, and one from the New Democratic Party.

While floor-crossing is rare, it is not unprecedented. What is unusual, however, is the strategic use of such moves to alter the balance of power in a minority Parliament.

Carney's success in attracting MPs from across the political spectrum suggests that his leadership style – technocratic, pragmatic, and less ideologically confrontational – has broadened the Liberal coalition.

His approach contrasts with the increasingly polarised tone that characterised the latter years of Trudeau's government.

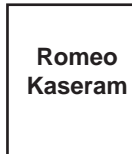
Now, upcoming by-elections could further reshape the parliamentary math. If the Liberals capture two of three seats at stake, including contests in traditionally safe Liberal ridings, Carney could move within striking distance of a working majority.

No prime minister in modern Canadian history has relied on floor-crossing as a pathway to majority status.

Yet Carney's strategy reflects a broader shift in Canadian politics: a move away from purely partisan battles toward coalition-style governance shaped by pragmatism and political opportunity.

In just one year, Carney has altered the operational style of government, injected renewed dynamism into federal politics, and repositioned the Liberals as a governing coalition rather than simply a party.

If the current trajectory continues, Canadians may soon see a more assertive phase of the Carney government, one in which a technocrat-turned-politician attempts to convert cautious minority leadership into durable political power.



Perhaps, too, he would have captured the abject form of an employee, on her knees like a supplicant, wiping away the gathered dust from each text with an impenetrable wonderment at its contents, her alphabetised, uphill Sisyphean task barely underway in the section containing the Dickensian poor houses.

Two mere pockets; in my mind, an outrage bordering on censorship; a pre-determined limiting of the capacity for my living quarters to hold additional furniture, and even more bookshelves.

I had only just been barely granted access, and already the rationing had begun. Somewhere deep in the distant kingdom someone had decided my growing appetite for books were to be rationed like the wartime scoops of flour and sugar my grandmother complained about.

Two books; two pockets; two ration cards to bind them all, to roam an entire alphabet of books. It was my first formal encounter with a limiting, administrative imagination – that peculiar, detachment of distant officialdom taking youthful wonder and reducing it to mere square centimetres as two narrow pockets.

I said, "Miss, two pockets are not enough." The librarian's eyes leapt with crapaud-footed agility over the top of her glasses, searching in the upper reaches of an adult's height for the originator of the protest. She said, "You want another pocket?!"

"Please, Miss, I want more." The humidity in the room parted as the silence cupped its ears.

"But what is this?" she said, fracturing the silence in the room, addressing the distant duster-of-books.

"He wants more pockets!"; the duster echoed, turning an incredulous gaze to the young reader seeking books on how to conquer dragons, and who was challenging the order of things.

Now add two more pockets to the four I received that day, and we cue into my second measuring rod for the moral depth of a neighbourhood, which is its pool hall.

Looking back, I see a boy standing up to empire demanding more, challenging its rationing authority, oblivious that he was enrolling in two different schools of learning, where the library trained the mind, and the pool hall his judgement.

Reading a book taught the discipline of turning page after page until the final paragraph, but in the pool hall, there was the discipline of waiting a turn. One was performed in silence; sometimes, the other involved argument, but always precision.

Yet both required the same virtues: patience, attention, and the uneasy humility of discovering the chosen path always led to outcomes buried in a pocket. And so I learned to read this world.

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, Dhanpalu 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

Stabroek News ceases publication, leaving behind an enduring legacy

Dear Editor,

On March 15 the printing press at *Stabroek News* grew silent, and the newspaper has now become an essential part of Guyana's historical records. *Stabroek News* has been Guyana's preeminent post-Independence national newspaper, and the closure of this publication is a great loss to the nation.

Within recent weeks of the editor's announcement that publication of the paper will cease to be published on March 15, many individuals have written of the important role the paper played over the four decades of its existence, and of their sadness over its closure.

I share their views and sentiments, and I wish to extend my thanks to the editors/publisher for publishing my many letters over the years. In this piece, I take a look at the background against which the paper was launched, and the commitment to public affairs, democracy, and press freedom of the paper's founder, David de Caires.

At the time of Guyana's Independence in 1966, the country had two national daily newspapers, the *Guyana Chronicle* and the *Guyana Graphic*. The *Guyana Chronicle*, a more politically biased, right wing paper, was owned by Peter D'Aguiar, then leader of the United Force party and Minister of Finance under Prime Minister L.F.S. Burnham in the PNC-UF coalition government.

On the other hand, the *Guyana Graphic*, owned by the Thompson family of Canada, was a more independent and even-handed paper in its reporting.

After D'Aguiar ended his political career in 1969, the *Guyana Chronicle* was sold to the Burnham government around 1971. This was followed in September 1974 by the government acquiring the *Guyana Graphic*. In December 1975 the two papers were merged under the company name *Guyana National Newspapers Limited*.

Years later, based on the *Wikileaks* release of US documents, *Stabroek News* of November 22, 2015 reported, "A September, 1974 US diplomatic cable described the sale of the *Guyana Graphic* by the Thompson Group to the state as a forced one and cites the then PNC government's 'harassment' of the newspaper's employees as a key factor".

The article also quotes a cable from the US Ambassador to Guyana, Max V. Krebs to his government: "Demise of *Graphic* can probably be realistically interpreted as demise of principal



remnant of press freedom in Guyana..."

Ambassador Krebs' words were prescient. By the mid-1980s, all national elections since Independence were rigged to keep the PNC in power. The government had become increasingly repressive with harassment and violence against opponents, including the assassination of WPA's leader, Dr Walter Rodney in June 1980.

The economy was in shambles, and malnutrition was prevalent. Judicial decisions were tainted in favour of the government, and press freedom was curtailed. Importation of newsprint by non-government entities was restricted, and radio was under government control. It should be noted that *Stabroek News*' launch in 1986 predates the government's television broadcasting service, which started as *GTV* in 1988.

That was the background against which *Stabroek News* was launched. The origin is reported in the article "30th anniversary of *Stabroek News*" (*Stabroek News*, November 21, 2016) as follows: "The paper had its origins in an overture by Managing Director of the *Trinidad Express* Ken Gordon to then President Desmond Hoyte. Following that, local lawyer David de Caires asked Hoyte about starting a newspaper, and the latter raised no objection, but said no foreign exchange would be granted. *Stabroek News* for the first months of its life, therefore, was printed at the *Trinidad Express* courtesy of a grant from the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED)."

That was the prevailing environment when in 1986, de Caires launched *Stabroek News*. Years earlier, he had qualified as a Solicitor (a British colonial legal designation that was later changed to Attorney in Guyana), and practiced law, but had a keen interest in public affairs, social justice, and democracy.

In 1962 he and his friend, fellow Solicitor, Miles Fitzpatrick, joined Trinidadian Lloyd Best, then an Economic Planning Advisor to Guyana's Premier, Dr Cheddi Jagan, in forming the *New World Group*, which from 1963 to 1972 published 14 issues of the *New World* magazine, including a commemorative issue on Guyana's Independence, the preface of which was written by PM Forbes Burnham.

Also, around late 1965, the duo of de Caires and Miles Fitzpatrick, together with Moses Bhagwan, who had earlier resigned from the PPP, and few others including former First Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana, Dr Harold

Drayton, and Journalist Rickey Singh, formed the *Committee for National Reconstruction*.

This organisation was intended to bridge the political and racial divide in the country following the turbulent years of 1962 to 1964. Unfortunately the CNR soon faltered. Subsequently, after the 1980 elections, de Caires joined the *Compass Group*, an organisation of a number of professionals in the city that was seeking to engage in discussions to move the country forward, away from its economic and political difficulties. Finally, after *Compass* floundered, he launched the *Stabroek News* with a grant from the NED in 1986.

Following the passing of de Caires, in an article headlined, 'David de Caires had a passionate commitment to democracy' (*Stabroek News*, November 4, 2008), the former Speaker of Parliament, Harri N. (Ralph) Ramkarran offered a fitting tribute to de Caires and the paper, stating, "David's irrepressible commitment to democracy drove *Stabroek News*' dedication to the restoration of free and fair elections and press freedom in Guyana. Thereafter, *Stabroek News* has been a fixture in the daily life of Guyana and plays an important role in shaping opinion and discourse".

The earlier noted article, '30th anniversary of *Stabroek News*', concludes: "For many years *Stabroek News* struggled to survive, first because of the foreign exchange challenges in the early Hoyte years, and then because of the very burdensome repayments attached to the loan for the new press. The newspaper also continued to appear despite the seventeen months' ban on state advertisements which was instituted against it by the last government (that is, the PPP government under President Dr Bharat Jagdeo). The Founder and first Editor-in-Chief of the paper died in November 2008, but he created an institution which still endures."

Having played its part in helping to restore and preserve democracy, and championing press freedom, now with the current state of technology, competition from social and government-controlled media, and reducing revenue from government advertisements, sadly the "institution" created by de Caires can no longer endure.

Hopefully the archive could be acquired by a public institution, possibly the University of Guyana, where it would be an invaluable source of historical information for future generations of Guyanese.

Harry Hergash, Toronto, via email.

Stabroek News sparked my lifelong belief in independent journalism

Dear Editor,

As a Fifth Form student at Bishop's High School, I spent much of my time in the science laboratories. At that stage of my life, those "labs" were the centre of my academic interests. It was there that a particular science teacher would occasionally peak my interest in politics. Those conversations, though informal, sparked in me a growing curiosity about the concept of "free and fair elections", and why it was so important for our beloved Guyana. At the time, this subject was part of the national discourse.

During the 1986-1987 period, I began reading some of President Hugh Desmond Hoyte's thoughts in the *Guyana Chronicle*. At the time, however, the *Guyana Chronicle* largely reflected the official government perspective exclusively. But the news often felt one-dimensional and boring.

One Monday morning, that same teacher offered me a complimentary copy of a new newspaper that had just been launched. It was called the *Stabroek News*. I gladly accepted. That afternoon, I opened the red paper.

From its first edition, the newspaper struck me as being different. It appeared committed to presenting the news plainly, without embellishment or partisan framing, and its style struck a nerve in me. I was hooked.

While reading that complimentary copy of that newspaper, I noticed a photograph of the editorial board, none of whom I knew at the time, though I would later become familiar with the name Sharief Khan, one of the reporters whom I occasionally encountered at the USIS Library in Main Street, while still a student.

What captured my attention most was a compelling story concerning a controversial figure of the time, widely known as the "Rabbi". While serving a 15-year sentence for manslaughter, he had sought preferential treatment to have his meals brought in from outside the prison, against regulations at that time. I recall feeling youthful satisfaction when I read that President Hoyte, who also held responsibility for Home Affairs, had rejected the request from the "Rabbi".

Reading Father Andrew Morrison's book will provide enough evidence that the "Rabbi" was not a good man; not a good soul at all, and he did lots of damage to our socio-political landscape at the time with his "hockey stick" gang.

More importantly, I was struck by the boldness of the reporting. Guyana was still emerging from deeply restrictive political currents. It felt significant that such a story could be published openly for national scrutiny.



Nomination Day for Manzoor Nadir, Leslie Ramsammy (left photo), and Dr Clive Thomas and Dr Rupert Roopnarine

At the time, I did not fully appreciate that this expansion of space for independent journalism had been facilitated under President Hoyte's leadership. Over the years, I have developed considerable respect for President Hoyte's role in opening that democratic space, even while acknowledging that aspects of his later political approach, including the "slow fya, mo fya" marches, did complicate his public image. But that debate is for another day.

Equally impactful was the newspaper's policy statement, words that have remained with me ever since, namely, "We believe in and will work for a free and open society in which the rule of law prevails. We believe that an independent and responsible newspaper can make an important contribution to the political and cultural life of a society and can accustom people to thinking for themselves and forming their own opinions."

From that day forward, I made it a point to purchase *Stabroek News* whenever I could. Demand often exceeded supply during those early days; and the vendor at the La Penitence Market next to Kawall Drug Store would ration copies. Yet, as a regular customer, she would discreetly set one aside for me. With my red Guyana one-dollar note in hand, I would buy my *Stabroek News* (of course, with devaluation, the price subsequently increased).

As I matured, I did not always agree with every editorial position taken by the newspaper. However, that was never the point. The value of the Fourth Estate lies not in unanimity of opinion, but in its independence of thought that was open to debate. When not steered or constrained, it remains one of the strongest institutional safeguards of any democratic society.

A democratic system cannot function meaningfully if citizens

are limited to curated or controlled information. An independent press amplifies diverse voices, provides platforms for minority perspectives, and strengthens pluralism. Unity cannot be sustained without respect for diversity.

Now that the decision has been made and the familiar coffee tables on which new editions of the *Stabroek News* previously rested, will no longer hold fresh copies, life will have to go on; that is life. I expect a natural sense of quiet from the departure of *Stabroek News* in our home circle. The discussions once sparked by a headline or investigative piece may no longer fill the room in the same way; but the only constant in life is change.

It is my earnest wish that the stories already written must be preserved and archived for the researchers of the future. These past articles form part of our beautiful history as a country, especially those articles prior to 1992.

As an example, I vividly recall August 30, 1992, when Sharief Khan's headline in *Stabroek News* announced, "October 5 is the day". In the months that followed, detailed reports in *Stabroek News* registered the entry of 11 political parties into the election race. I leave the actual picture of nomination day of Dr Clive Thomas and Dr Rupert Roopnarine from the Working People's Alliance (with their bell and all), the youthful Manzoor Nadir from the United Force, and Leslie Ramsammy from the United Republican Party (pictures compliments of *Stabroek News*.)

The many articles during that day, recorded with precision, the sequence in which representatives submitted their lists before the 18:00-hour deadline, a moment that symbolised a permanent turning point in our country's history. Such reporting did more than document events; it preserved the unfolding of our democracy in real time.

An idea truly dies only when it is forgotten. The work of the many journalists who laboured at the *Stabroek News* will not be forgotten. The principle of an independent and responsible newspaper (committed to openness, legality, and intellectual independence) will always have a place in a democratic society.

To Anand Persaud and his team: thank you for your stewardship. The contribution has been significant; the newspapers may be gone from our sight, but the legacy endures. Let us pray that the idea of a *Stabroek News* does not die, since such a condition carries serious consequences for our country, and our commitment to the idea of democracy.

Sasenerine Singh, Guyana, via email.

Hustle is definitely not a tax strategy

Across the Indo-Caribbean community, one thing is consistent: we work hard. Many Trinidadian and Guyanese families in Canada built their lives through long hours, multiple jobs, side businesses, and constant sacrifice. That work ethic is something to be proud of.

But hustle, by itself, is not a financial plan. And it is definitely not a tax strategy.

During tax season, this becomes very clear. Every March and April, people are surprised by balances owing, missing slips, unreported side income, or disorganised expenses. The reaction is often frustration. "I worked so hard. How do I still owe?"

The answer is usually not that someone did something wrong. It is that income without structure creates problems.

In our community, side income is common. Ride-share driving, catering, beauty services, construction jobs, DJ work, tutoring, event promotion, consulting. These activities often start informally. Money comes in. Maybe some expenses go out. Records are not always tracked carefully because the focus is on earning.

From a tax perspective, however, once you are earning income, you are operating a business. That means keeping proper records, reporting income accurately, and understanding what expenses are legitimately deductible. It also means setting aside money for taxes instead of assuming everything deposited into your account is yours to spend.

Another common issue during tax season is misunderstanding write-offs. There is a belief that incorporating or claiming business expenses automatically eliminates taxes. In reality, deductions reduce taxable income. They do not create free money. If income is strong and no tax installments were set aside

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



during the year, a balance owing is not a surprise. It is math.

For employees, similar issues arise. Multiple T4 slips, investment income, rental income, or foreign income from back home can all affect the final tax result. Canada's system is structured and compliance-based. Informal habits that may have worked elsewhere do not translate smoothly here.

March is a good time to shift perspective. Tax season should not feel like a yearly crisis. It should be a reporting exercise that reflects decisions made intentionally throughout the year.

If you are self-employed, ask yourself:

- Do I know my actual profit, or just my revenue?

- Am I tracking expenses properly?
- Am I setting aside funds for taxes?

If you are employed, consider:

- Am I aware of all sources of income that must be reported?

- Have I reviewed credits and deductions available to my household?

The goal is not perfection. It is clarity. Hard work deserves structure. Hustle deserves organisation. Income deserves a plan.

Tax season exposes what we ignored during the year. Instead of reacting with stress, we can use it as a checkpoint. When effort is combined with systems, the result is not just survival. It is progress.



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Guyana govt highlights job bank to meet labour shortage challenge

— Guyana’s rapidly expanding economy is generating unprecedented employment opportunities, but persistent labour shortages, particularly in skilled sectors, continue to challenge growth, even as the government highlights its job bank, and programmes increasingly target women and persons with disabilities to bridge the gap.

Georgetown – Guyana’s labour market is undergoing a period of rapid transformation, marked by a surge in job creation, expanded training initiatives, and a growing push toward inclusivity, even as employers continue to grapple with a shortage of skilled workers.

The government is urging citizens to take advantage of these opportunities, with nearly 3,000 individuals placed in jobs through the Ministry of Labour’s job bank over the past five years, despite more than 16,000 vacancies being registered during the same period.

Labour and Manpower Planning Minister Keoma Griffith, speaking on the *Starting Point* podcast, said the Ministry’s Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency has been actively working to match job seekers with employers through a system designed to function like a commercial bank.

“Employers are able to come and register jobs. They come and say, ‘We have a hundred vacancies, and this is what we’re looking for.’ Employees can come to the bank and say, ‘These are my qualifications, and I’m looking for a job. This is what I can offer,’” Griffith explained.

According to the Minister, the agency screens applicants and aligns them with suitable positions. Over the past five years, 16,922 vacancies have been registered, with 2,960 individuals placed into jobs, of whom approximately 1,837 remain actively employed.

Griffith is encouraging more Guyanese to register with the job bank, emphasising that opportunities exist across a wide range of sectors, from entry-level positions to major national development projects.

“[If] you’re looking for work, please come to the job bank. Tell us what you have to offer, and we will try to match you with a suitable job so that you can be productive and contribute to Guyana... I assure you, there are many opportunities for jobs,” he said.

The Ministry has already facilitated employment placements in construction, shipping, and retail, while also supporting large-scale national initiatives. In December, a job fair in Region Three (Essequibo Islands-West Demerara) aimed to recruit approximately 1,000 workers for the Gas-to-Energy Project at Wales.

“All work is honest work. There is no need to discriminate against what kind of job it is... The possibilities are endless,” Griffith stressed.

The urgency of these efforts is underscored by Guyana’s broader economic trajectory. Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance Dr Ashni Singh last week described the country as being in an “era of opportunity”, driven by rapid growth and structural transformation. “This generation of young Guyanese is the

most fortunate generation of all generations because we are literally living in the era of opportunity,” Singh said during his appearance on the *BBC World Questions* programme in Georgetown.

According to Singh, approximately 104,000 new jobs have been created over the past five years, supported by policy measures such as free education and financial incentives aimed at increasing participation in the education system.

“There are more employment opportunities and there are more entrepreneurial opportunities available to young people than at any other time in our country’s history,” he added.

The expansion of the oil and gas sector has played a central role in this growth. Singh noted that some 6,000 individuals are now employed in the sector, many in highly skilled technical roles that did not previously exist.

“We have more people working as engineers, we have more working as architects... in jobs that simply did not exist before,” he said.

Despite this surge in opportunities, private sector representatives say the labour market is constrained by a shortage of skilled workers.

Clinton Urling, Secretary of the Private Sector Commission (PSC), described the lack of human capital as the “number one binding constraint” facing businesses, citing a study which estimated a shortfall of some 52,000 skilled professionals in the oil and gas sector alone.

“Right now, our private sector is struggling to find employees... sometimes I’m hesitant to invest in any big, huge project because it’s difficult to find skilled employees,” Urling said.

He urged both local and diaspora Guyanese to upskill and return to participate in the country’s development, while also calling for greater alignment between training programmes and industry needs.

Businesswoman and activist Ayodele Dalgety Dean echoed the need for systems that not only develop skills, but also retain young talent within the country.

Amid these challenges, the Guyana government is increasingly turning to inclusive training programmes to expand the labour pool, particularly by empowering women and persons living with disabilities.

According to Minister Griffith, women are now playing a leading role in Guyana’s technical transformation, including in fields traditionally dominated by men.

“In the last five years, we’ve trained 9,331 women and we’ve trained 7,021 men. And what is even more beautiful is that women have dominated all of the training programmes, especially the male-dominated ones,” he said.

Hundreds of women have been trained in specialised areas such as electrical installation, heavy-duty equipment operation, photovoltaic systems, welding and fabrication, tractor operation, and maintenance.

“These aren’t just the regular types of skills training. We’ve moved away from cooking and garment construction... what we’re seeing here is that women are taking opportunities which will directly impact the transformation of Guyana,” Griffith noted.



Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance, Dr Ashni Singh (second from left) with members of the panel during the *BBC World Questions* programme

At the same time, the Board of Industrial Training has expanded access for persons living with disabilities, helping to integrate a traditionally under-represented group into the workforce.

“In the last five years, we have trained close to 500 persons living with disabilities,” Griffith said.

In 2025 alone, some 107 persons with disabilities received training in areas including welding, digital marketing, drone technology, plumbing, sustainable farming, and website development.

“It’s a wide cadre of training opportunities for persons living with disabilities,” he added.

According to Minister Griffith, approximately 77 percent of all individuals trained through BIT are either currently employed or

have established their own businesses.

“So, we are seeing not just [the issuance of] a training certificate, but we’re seeing transformation in lives,” he emphasised.

As Guyana continues to expand at a historic pace, the central challenge remains bridging the gap between opportunity and workforce readiness.

In response, the government has pledged to increase awareness of the job bank, and is calling on the private sector to register vacancies, while continuing to invest in training and upskilling initiatives.

“There is a little more awareness that can be done of the job bank... Let us know when you have opportunities available so that we can match skilled and competent individuals to your employment,” Griffith said.



Women at an industrial jobsite in Guyana

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ICGAA celebrated the March-April birthdays of its members when the group marked Holi last week; in photos, members, family, and guests at the event

ICGAA holds joyful celebration marking Holi

The Indo-Caribbean Golden Age Association held a joyful celebration of Holi on the afternoon of March 15 at the Agincourt Recreation Centre in Scarborough. The program was chaired by President Lalita Sanicharan and Chair and Co-Founder Leila Daljit, who warmly welcomed members and guests. Several members observing the holy month of Ramadan were acknowledged in their absence.

As in previous years, the highlight of the celebration was the lively Chowtal singing, a cherished folk tradition passed down from the East Indian ancestors of Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. Senior members led the performance, accompanied by the Association's live band, Naya Roshni, bringing energy and joy to the afternoon.

The festivities continued with popular Holi songs performed by local musicians, drawing members and guests of all ages to the dance floor. Guests were later treated to a traditional Holi meal and special desserts, generously sponsored by Lalita and

Leonard Sanicharan of Air Touch Travels Inc, along with their children and families.


Another special moment was the cutting of the birthday cake, honouring members celebrating birthdays in March and April. Early birthday recognition was also extended to Chair & Co-Founder Leila Daljit, who will celebrate her 80th birthday in April.

The celebration concluded with the traditional playing of colours, as members joyfully shared colourful holy powders in a spirit of unity, happiness, and renewal.

Special thanks were extended to the volunteers whose efforts in decorating the venue created a bright and festive atmosphere for all to enjoy.

The Indo-Caribbean Golden Age Association looks forward to welcoming members and friends to its Mother's Day celebration on May 3 from 4:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. For further details, please contact Lalita Sanicharan at 416-291-9439.

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Community Outreach



Special Constable Deanne Taylor
A Community Message

By Special Constable Deanne Taylor
Crime Prevention, 31 Division

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- **If you think you are being followed by a person, switch direction or cross the street.** Walk toward an open store, lighted house, or an area with other people. Take advantage of the presence of a passerby by turning towards the person following you and saying "Are you following me?" in a loud, clear voice and don't be embarrassed to yell for help
- **If you think that you're being followed or bothered by someone in a car, do not approach it.** Turn around and quickly walk in the opposite direction
- **Keep distractions to a minimum when using your phone or electronic devices!** Do not walk and read text messages, watch videos, and so on, or otherwise compromise your ability to hear traffic, trains, and other threats by using earphones. If you must talk on the phone while walking, don't get lost in conversation. Pay attention to traffic, people around you and where you are going.

STAY ALERT!



Knowing the Game Doesn't Mean Knowing the Odds

Parlay bets are everywhere before big games. How much do you actually know about them?

By **Melissa Toney**
Associate Director, Community Engagement
and Partnerships, Responsible
Gambling Council

This year is shaping up to be one of the most exciting in Canadian sports in recent memory. March Madness. The Stanley Cup Playoffs. FIFA. For millions of fans, these moments are what the whole year builds toward. The energy is real; the stakes feel enormous, and for a growing number of people, placing a bet is part of how they enjoy it.

There's nothing wrong with that. Sports betting is a form of entertainment, and for most people, that's exactly how it remains: entertainment.

But something happens during big games that doesn't get talked about enough. The excitement that makes these events so memorable is the same thing that can quietly override the careful thinking we'd normally apply to a financial decision. And one betting product in particular is tends to feel most appealing in exactly that environment: the parlay bet.

Parlay betting has become one of the fastest-growing forms of sports wagering in Canada. The appeal is straightforward. You combine multiple picks into a single bet, and the potential payout climbs with every selection you add. It feels strategic. It feels like you're putting your knowledge of the game to work.

Here's what most people don't fully understand until after the fact: every single selection must win. All of them. Get four out of five right, and you still lose the entire wager. The more picks you add, the longer the odds become against you, even though each individual selection might feel like a reasonable call.

Parlay products are promoted heavily during major sporting events, often alongside bonus offers that make the risk feel smaller than it is. The result is a product that looks attractive, feels skillful, and is, mathematically speaking, significantly harder to win than it appears.

The point is that people are placing these bets

without fully understanding how they work, and that has real consequences. Research consistently tells us that sports bettors experience gambling harm at twice the rate of the general gambling population. Young adult males between 18 and 34 are at particularly elevated risk. Those aren't abstract statistics. They're people watching the same games the rest of us are watching, making split-second decisions in environments that make it hard to pause and think.

One of the most persistent myths we encounter at the Responsible Gambling Council is that sports knowledge gives bettors an edge. It doesn't. Gambling is fundamentally random. Knowing every injury update, every matchup history, every statistical trend makes watching the game more engaging. It doesn't change the odds. The belief that expertise translates into success is what researchers call the 'illusion of control', and it is one of the most significant risk factors for gambling harm.

So, what can actually help? A few things, and none of them require you to stop betting on sports.

Make your plan before the game starts. Set a budget before tip-off, before puck drop, before the moment your team ties it up and the room goes electric. In that moment, you're not the best person to make financial decisions. The calm, clear-headed version of you who planned ahead is.

If you are going to bet, stick to single bets where possible. Avoid placing bets while drinking. And if something starts to feel off, whether it's the urge to chase a loss or the anxiety creeping in after a big wager, pay attention to that. That feeling is usually a sign that you may need to think about your next move.

For more than 40 years, the Responsible Gambling Council has worked alongside players, communities, operators, and regulators because we believe gambling should never come at a human cost.

The games ahead are going to be incredible. Go in with a plan, and you'll enjoy them a lot more when they're over.

Grenada extends call to diaspora

— Grenada has issued a national invitation to its global community with the official launch of **Grenada Diaspora Homecoming 2026**, a two-week national programme aimed at reconnecting Grenadians abroad with their heritage while strengthening the nation's development through deeper engagement with its diaspora.

•••

St George's – Grenada last week launched a major national initiative inviting its global diaspora to visit the homeland in 2026, as the government seeks to deepen ties with Grenadians abroad while promoting cultural renewal, investment, and national development across the tri-island state.

The initiative, scheduled for June 21 to July 5, 2026, was formally unveiled during a press conference at the National Cricket Stadium last week, where government officials, tourism leaders, and diaspora representatives outlined a vision to strengthen the ties between Grenadians at home and those living abroad.

Organised as a national engagement programme, the Homecoming will bring together Grenadians from North America, the UK, Europe, the Caribbean and beyond, including second- and third-generation Grenadians eager to experience the island that shaped their family histories.

The initiative is spearheaded by Grenada's Office of Diaspora Affairs, and is intended to encourage nationals living abroad to reconnect with their roots while contributing to the country's future development.

Grenada's Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell extended the invitation directly to the diaspora during his 52nd Independence Anniversary address in February, urging Grenadians across the world to return home and participate in the historic national programme.

"As we mark our 52 years of Independence... we celebrate more than half a century of self-determination, resilience and progress. And we will host Grenada Homecoming 2026, a moment designed especially for you: our sons and daughters abroad," he stated.

He added that the initiative reflects the enduring bond between Grenadians at home and those living overseas.

"Because no matter how far you travel, Grenada has never travelled from you," he affirmed.

Mitchell described the Homecoming programme as a major national initiative intended to strengthen connections between the diaspora and their homeland, while creating new opportunities for economic development and collaboration.

"Grenada's Diaspora Homecoming 2026 is our major national initiative... designed to reconnect our diaspora with their homeland," he said.

The programme will include investment forums, cultural exchanges and community-based celebrations aimed at fostering stronger partnerships between Grenadians abroad and local institutions.

PM Mitchell emphasised the critical contributions the diaspora has already made to the country's development.

"You have carried our culture into the world: our music, our food, our values, our unmistakable Grenadian spirit," Mitchell said, adding, "You have represented us with distinction in classrooms and boardrooms, hospitals and construction sites, parliaments and communities across the globe."

He noted that diaspora communities have long supported Grenada through remittances, investments, advocacy, and mentorship, describing them as an essential part of the

country's national story.

"Grenada's story cannot be told without you," he said.

PM Mitchell also highlighted the government's broader development agenda, which he said aims to build a stronger and more resilient nation.

"We are building a Grenada that is more resilient, more inclusive, more innovative, and more prepared for the future. A Grenada investing in education, healthcare, digital transformation and climate resilience, and a Grenada that creates opportunities so that young people can thrive at home and return home," he declared.

As part of the Homecoming programme, the government plans to host investment, trade, and development forums that will allow diaspora professionals and entrepreneurs to connect their expertise and capital with opportunities in Grenada.

PM Mitchell said the initiative is designed not only as a celebration of Grenadian identity, but also as a platform for meaningful national engagement.

"Come back and reconnect," Mitchell urged, adding, "Reconnect with family. Reconnect with community. Reconnect with opportunity. It will be a year of celebration, of culture, music, food, sport and faith – but it will also be a year of engagement, connecting skills to needs, ideas to action, and capital to opportunity."

The Homecoming programme will also feature a wide range of cultural and community events across Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, reflecting the shared heritage and traditions of the tri-island state.

Ambassador Terrance Forrester, Head of Diaspora Affairs, described the initiative as a powerful opportunity for Grenadians abroad to rediscover their cultural roots while strengthening ties with the islands.

"We are extending a formal national invitation to Grenadians across the diaspora, and to friends of Grenada, to come home for this special occasion," Forrester said, adding, "This is about reconnecting with family and rediscovering the spirit of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique."

He noted that the programme also encourages younger members of the diaspora to develop a deeper connection with their heritage.

"We are especially encouraging second and third generation Grenadians to come home and experience the country of their heritage," Forrester added.

Last week tourism officials emphasised the strategic importance of diaspora engagement to the country's long-term growth.

Randall Dolland, Chairman of the Grenada Tourism Authority, said Grenadians living abroad represent one of the nation's most valuable assets.

"As a small island state, our greatest resource is our people, many of whom live and contribute from all over the world," Dolland said.

He added, "If we are to continue building a stronger Grenada, it will require a collective effort that includes the strength, expertise, and support of our diaspora."

In addition to national events and fora, organisers have also launched a global logo design competition, inviting Grenadians worldwide to contribute creatively to the identity of the Homecoming movement.

A dedicated Homecoming website has also been introduced and will serve as the central hub for programme updates, events and opportunities for diaspora participation.



Grenadian PM Dickon Mitchell



Ask Jay...

Please send your questions to
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A REAL ESTATE MARKET YOU DON'T RECOGNISE - BUT CAN WIN IN

I ran into Janet in late January. A couple of years ago, she was priced out of the market – frustrated by bidding wars and properties selling for tens of thousands over asking. In late January, she noticed condos were staying on the market for weeks. I showed her some, and now the sellers' realtors are calling me to say the sellers are willing to negotiate. This is the first time in many years that buyers can genuinely purchase the home they want without overextending themselves.

What Janet experienced isn't unique. Across the Greater Toronto Area, I've observed the same trend. Sales have declined sharply, inventory has increased, and homes that would have attracted bidding wars two years ago are now sitting unsold for weeks. Buyers aren't rushing to waive inspections or offer large deposits just to stay competitive. They are taking their time, asking questions, and arranging proper financing.

Investors are returning. One of them, Marcus, told me he has seen condos drop 15-25 percent from their peaks.

"I'm not trying to flip," he said. "I want something that will cash flow and appreciate over time." He's looking near transit, in neighbourhoods with strong fundamentals – not chasing hype. Buying an investment property isn't a get-rich-quick scheme, but for someone like Marcus, who is thinking long term, the numbers are starting to make sense again. If you are buying condos, choose the best location in older buildings with larger suites and good reserve funds.

Just because prices have softened doesn't mean everything suddenly becomes affordable. Know your budget and don't stretch yourself to get in the door. Janet is taking her time. She is comparing neighbourhoods, crunching the numbers, and not rushing simply because there's less competition. The market now rewards patience, not panic.

Toronto's market has cooled, and for buyers like Janet, that is a good opportunity. Carefully crafted deals now could create real wealth in the future. For the first time in years, buyers truly have a chance to grab them.

There are many excellent real estate deals available. If you're an investor, look for homes in desirable neighbourhoods with spacious lots. Some of these properties require renovations, and have been on the market for an extended period. Buyers can purchase them at a lower price, renovate them, and rent them out, rather than sell. Once upgraded, the property's appraised value will increase, which boosts your borrowing capacity. This way, you acquire both the property and the income it generates.

Many sellers are opting to sell because affordability is a challenge. They prefer to stay in their local area, and would rather sell their homes at a discount to investors who can keep them as tenants. Twenty years ago, I bought a property, and the previous owners became tenants. Today, the previous owner is still living there and paying rent. This creates a win-win situation for both parties. The previous owner used the proceeds to buy a business, and I secured a great deal with excellent tenants.

Buyers can benefit from distressed properties, such as vacant homes, handyman specials, and properties from divorces and estate sales.

Homeowners who are mortgage-free can also tap into their home equity to assist their children in buying a home. Recently, I met a family with four adult children. They have completed their education, secured employment, and are earning a good income.

They wanted to buy a home but lacked the down payment. Their parents took out a \$400,000 mortgage on the family home and gave each child \$100,000. Each of the four children purchased a condo. Their parents told me that by doing this, they are helping their children to own property. Now that each child has financial responsibilities, they are more cautious with their spending.

The GTA is a diverse city with a large immigrant population, and its population is expected to continue growing. The demand for housing will remain strong. The market should bounce back in about five years, and anyone investing in real estate now is likely to see substantial profits.

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Shri Krishna Sudama Mandir

Chowtals, colour, community mark Holi celebrations

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Community Report

Holi, also known across the Caribbean as Phagwah, is an ancient festival rooted in the Hindu calendar, observed on the full moon night of the month of *Phalgun*, typically in March. The festival begins with *Holika Dahan*, where bonfires are lit to symbolise the burning of evil and negativity, commemorating the legend of Prahlad, whose faith triumphed over persecution as the demoness Holika perished in the flames. This ritual establishes the moral and spiritual foundation of the observance: the enduring victory of good over evil.

From this solemn beginning, Holi transitions into a vibrant and participatory celebration. Communities gather in prayer, offering thanks for renewal and the arrival of spring, before moving into the festival's most recognisable expressions in its music, colour, and fellowship.

Participants, often dressed in white, engage in the playful exchange of *abeer* and *abir/gulal*, coloured powders and liquids that transform public and sacred spaces alike into level fields of

shared joy. The act of colouring one another carries symbolic meaning, dissolving social boundaries and reinforcing equality, unity, and collective celebration.

A defining feature of Holi in the Caribbean diaspora is *chowtal* singing, a tradition brought by our Indentured ancestors from India during the late 18th and 19th centuries. Performed in groups with rhythmic accompaniment from instruments such as the *dholak* and *jhal*, *chowtal* involves antiphonal, call-and-response singing that is both devotional and communal.

These performances often take on a spirited, competitive energy, reflecting both religious devotion and cultural continuity. In mandirs and community spaces across the diaspora, *chowtal* remains central to the observance, anchoring the festival in sound as much as in colour.

The journey of Holi from India to the Caribbean is tied to our history of Indentureship, through which our ancestors carried our religious and cultural practices to colonies such as Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname between 1838

See Page 15: Holi colours unite



Shri Krishna Sudama Mandir held its Holi Mela 2026 on March 7 at the Bharat Sevashram Sangha in Etobicoke. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo



Shiva Mandir & Cultural Organisation



Holi celebrations at Shiva Mandir. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo



Holi colours unite communities across diaspora worlds

Ontario Hindu Cultural Association

From Page 14

and 1917. Over time, Holi, also known as Phagwah in these regions, evolved beyond its origins as a strictly religious festival to become a national and multicultural celebration.

In Guyana, Phagwah is recognised as a national holiday, marked by large public gatherings known as Phagwah Melas, and the sharing of traditional meals, including seven-curry offerings served on water-lily leaves.

In Trinidad and Tobago, major celebrations at venues such as the Aranguez Savannah incorporate unique elements like *Pichakaree* competitions, where performers blend music with social and political commentary.

In Suriname, the festival is observed with large-scale, high-energy public events, particularly in urban centres such as Paramaribo.

Across these settings, Holi has retained its core themes while adapting to local contexts, becoming a symbol of cultural resilience and inclusivity. This trajectory continues in our diaspora

communities here in the Greater Toronto Area, where Holi is observed in mandirs and community spaces through prayer, *chowtal* singing, and the joyful dispersing of colour.

These celebrations reflect both continuity and adaptation, as traditions shaped in India and transformed in the Caribbean find renewed expression in Canada's multicultural landscape.

Food and shared meals further reinforce the communal nature of the festival. Traditional sweets such as *goja*, *mithai*, and *kheer*, alongside savoury items like *bara*, *phulourie*, and *bigany* with chutney, are prepared and shared among family, friends, and visitors. These culinary practices serve not only as nourishment, but as expressions of hospitality and cultural memory.

At its core, Holi remains a celebration of renewal, unity, and joy. From the lighting of the Holika pyre to the final exchanges of colour and food, the festival unfolds as a continuum that links past to present, and carries forward a living tradition across generations and geographies.



The Ontario Hindu Cultural Association held its 9th annual grand Chowtal singing in Mississauga on March 9. In photos, participants, guests, and attendees participate in the colourful, enriching, and celebratory occasion. Photos by Russell Lutchman

Hindu Cultural Society



Holi celebrations at the Hindu Cultural Society. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo

Vishnu Satsang Mandir



Holi celebrations at Vishnu Satsang Mandir. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo



Iftar tables overflow with community

Across the Greater Toronto Area, the evening call to prayer during Ramadan carries with it a familiar rhythm in the quiet anticipation of the day's fast drawing to a close, and the gathering of community members who arrive at their mosques to share in the simple but profound ritual of *Iftar*.

Inside the halls, long tables are transformed into landscapes of hospitality and refreshment. Rows upon rows of carefully arranged plates stretch down the length of the room, each one prepared with thoughtful care.

Dates, which are traditionally the first food eaten to break the fast, sit beside golden pastries and savoury samosas, accompanied by small touches of chutney and sweets.

A perspective of plates, identical yet individually prepared, creates a visual rhythm that reflects the spirit of Ramadan itself: collective devotion expressed through shared acts of generosity.

Behind the visual display of neatly arranged plates and its welcoming food are volunteers who are quietly but steadily working to prepare the evening meal. Along serving tables lined with large trays of rice, vegetables, and fragrant dishes, members of our thriving community stand shoulder to shoulder, generously ladling out savoury and steaming spoonfuls of food.

For the servers of food, it is a further act of self-discipline and giving to distribute the nourishing fare, even as they postpone a seat at the eating tables, their volunteerism a subtle movement in the choreography of service: calm, selfless, and deeply communal.

In these moments, the blessings of Ramadan becomes visible. The *Iftar* meal does not appear by magic, but is the result of countless small acts of dedication in many hands preparing, serving, arranging, and welcoming.

Elders who have long been part of the mosque's dedicated population work alongside younger volunteers who are learning the rhythms of service for themselves. The passing of plates across the serving tables becomes more than a practical exchange, instead evidencing quiet expression of care, solidarity, and generational futurity.

As the mosques' halls fill in the GTA, families, friends, and neighbours gather at tables, creating a lively tapestry of voices, community, and the layering of generations.

Parents sit beside children, elders share dates with grandchildren, and newcomers are welcomed with lavish helpings of food.

Meanwhile, against a wall, a lengthy coat rack weighs down with winter wear, with scarves peeping out of sleeves, a reminder that this is Ramadan in wintry Canada, a season where traditions carried from many parts of the world have come together as many shining rays under one roof.

There is a gentle hum of anticipation in the room. After a long day of fasting, sisters and brothers in the faith wait together for the moment when the fast will be broken. When that moment arrives, the first bite of a date and the first sip of water bring both relief and gratitude, shared simultaneously by hundreds gathered in the same space.

In our mosques across the GTA, scenes like these are unfolding night after night during Ramadan. They are reminders that beyond the discipline of fasting lies something equally powerful; that the warmth of community, the generosity of volunteers, the welcoming of strangers, the enduring tradition of breaking bread, and the sharing of dates, are the eternal ties that bind us together as a thriving community.

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Secure Your Tables Early!

One Love Table holds Iftar fund-raiser

When the fast is broken at sunset during Ramadan, the table is never simply about food. It is about intention in quiet prayerfulness, the gathering of friends and families, and the gentle circling of hearts around a shared act of gratitude.

That spirit filled the elegant Emerald Banquet Hall in Etobicoke on March 7, where One Love Table hosted its Ramadan Interfaith Iftar Dinner in support of its community Food Bank. The evening brought together guests from across faith traditions and cultural backgrounds, united in fellowship as they shared in the sacred rhythm of Ramadan.

More than an evening meal, the gathering celebrated the ideals that define the holy month: reflection, generosity, and the quiet joy of community. As the sun set and the fast was broken, participants sat side by side at tables adorned for the occasion, embracing a tradition that invites both contemplation and togetherness.

One of the most meaningful aspects of the evening was its interfaith embrace. Guests arrived not merely as observers of a religious tradition, but as companions in reflection. From the breaking of the fast to the words of welcome and prayerful moments shared across the room, the gathering fostered a sense of understanding and mutual respect.

The evening's Iftar meal added its own vibrant expression to the gathering. Drawing on

the rich culinary traditions of the Caribbean, the dishes brought colour and warmth to the tables, reminding guests that the act of sharing a meal after a day of fasting is itself a form of gratitude.

Art and culture also found a place in the celebration. Musical performances, poetry, and artistic displays added texture to the evening, offering moments of reflection through song, word, and visual expression.

At the heart of the gathering was the spirit of compassion that defines Ramadan. The fundraising component of the evening supported the One Love Table Food Bank, while also encouraging charitable acts such as an Eid toy drive for recently arrived Palestinian families. In this way, generosity became more than an idea, rising up to become a shared act of care.

As the evening unfolded beneath softly lit décor and elegant centrepieces, the hall filled with conversation and a quiet sense of unity. Volunteers and sponsors were recognised for their contributions, honouring those whose service strengthens our community throughout the year.

When it concluded, One Love Table's Ramadan Interfaith Iftar offered a poignant reminder that touched on something simpler, enduring, and evocative – that when people gather in goodwill to breaking the fast together, there is room and one love at the table for everyone.



Canadian Islamic Civic Academy



One Love Table Family Services



CICA's Iftar event nourishes soul, body

At sunset on March 14 a special calm settled inside the Canadian Islamic Civic Academy in Etobicoke. It was a moment when the day of fasting drew to its close, the steps of the faithful soft with the texture of reverence on the floor of their mosque as they assembled in quiet anticipation.

In that moment, the spirit of reflection and community was on full display as families, friends, and neighbours came together to share in the sacred rhythm of Iftar.

Inside the mosque's hall, the air hummed gently with preparations for prayer. Conversations flowed softly, punctuated by greetings and smiles as familiar faces reunited, and visitors were warmly greeted, welcomed, and made comfortable.

It soon became evident that in Ramadan the breaking of the fast, and the sharing of the evening meal, was more than nourishment for the body; that it was a shared ritual binding a community of believers together.

The fragrance of a freshly prepared meal

emanated from the adjacent kitchen. Across contiguous tables, plates of dates, samosas, phoulories, and a gently seasoned sauce prepared by volunteers were laid out with care in lengthy lines for easy reach.

As the sun set for the breaking of the fast, many hands lifted up in unison to the mouth for the first bite of a date, carrying to lips the first sip of bottled water, the moment resonant with gratitude, a reminder of sacrifice, self-discipline, the blessings of provision, and the spirit of sharing food together.

The CICA's Iftar also brought waves of camaraderie and sisterhood to the thriving mosque, as women, men, and young people worked together with faith and harmony to build a welcoming and nourishing space.

Fund-raising efforts woven into the evening's program similarly reflected that spirit of unity and solidarity, underscoring another central value of Ramadan though outreach with generosity, giving, concern, and caring for others.



Centenary Test could honour WI-England cricketing legacy at Lord's

By Dhanpaul Narine

There is no buzz, no hype, no excitement. In fact, there is nothing on the calendar to suggest that West Indies will play a Centenary Test against England. But there are compelling reasons why a Centenary Test should be played between the two countries.

There is tradition. One recalls that a Centenary Test was played between England and Australia in 1977 at the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). That Test captured the imagination of the cricket world. Who would have thought that the margin of the Australian victory in 1977 would have been the same as it was 100 years earlier, 45 runs? Who wrote that script?

There was also a Centenary Test between Australia and England at Lords in September 1980 to mark the first Test Match in England. It resulted in a draw. Both of these events were so popular that plans are underway to play a 150th Anniversary Test between Australia and England from March 11 to March 15, 2027, at the MCG. This begs the question: What is Cricket West Indies (CWI) doing to plan the Centenary Test between England and West Indies?

Apart from tradition and precedent, there is rich cricket history in the West Indies. In 1886, a team from the West Indies toured the US and Canada. It was an all-white team in keeping with the practice at the time. During the years 1886 and 1900, various teams from England visited the Caribbean, but cricket was played mainly among the aristocratic class.

A team from the West Indies visited England for the first time in 1900. The results were mixed, but one positive aspect was the inclusion of four Black players in the West Indies side. Another tour took place in 1906, and this time the games were accorded first-class status. The results were again moderate, but it exposed the team to quality cricket.

West Indies cricket went into the doldrums in the next few years as England turned its attention to South Africa and Australia. The 1912 Triangular Tournament was arranged among the three Test playing nations. The games were played at Old Trafford, Lords, and Headingly.

England won the series, but a number of factors led to a disappointing season. The weather was one "of the wettest since records began in 1766". There were disputes between players and management, which meant that some of the best players did not make the team. The crowds stayed away, and the white only triangular tournament was a failed experiment.

The 1923 season saw West Indies back in England. They won six of the 20 first class games, but the tour was notable for a sustained bowling attack. It was led by Learie Constantine, George Francis, Snuffy Browne, and George John. In the batting department, George Challenor, Joe Small, and Maurice Fernandes stood out.

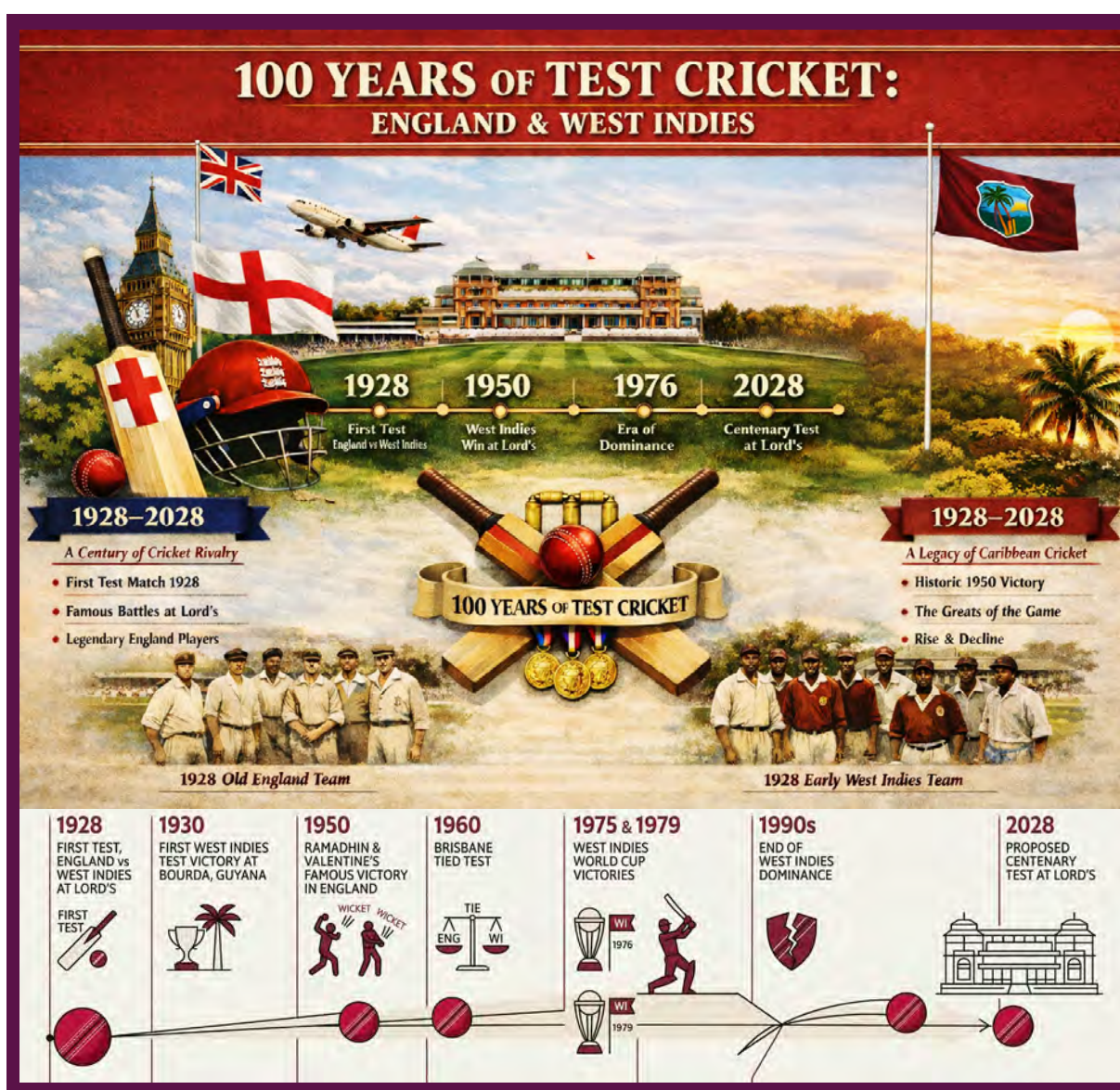
In 1926, a team from England toured West Indies and met with opposition. The English team won one of the three games, and *Wisden* was generous in its comments. It commented on the "rapid progress" of West Indies cricket, setting the stage for Test Status.

West Indies toured England in 1928 to play three Tests. The First Test was played at Lords from June 23 to June 26. West Indies lost by an innings, and suffered the same fate in the Tests at Manchester and the Oval.

There were problems with selection even before the tour started. Four players were selected from each of the colonies, Jamaica, Barbados, British Guiana, and Trinidad. This limit meant that some of the best players were omitted.

In addition, there were questions as to the captaincy that was offered to Karl Nunes, and the lack of experience of the vice-captain Vibart Wight. In the Tests, the wicketkeeping was poor, and so was the fielding in the slips. There were reports that Nunes could have conducted himself better.

Wisden summed up the tour, stating, "the team of 1928 fell so much below it that everybody was compelled to realise that the playing of Test Matches between England and West Indies was a mistake". Still, there were positives in the batting and bowling departments.



England did a tour of the West Indies in January 1930. The two sides played four Test Matches that ended in a 1-1 drawn series. But statistics do not tell the whole story. England was able to muster two teams. It sent one in the Caribbean and the other to New Zealand. This was the first time that two English teams were simultaneously playing Test cricket in different parts of the world. England argued that it was done to promote the game.

The Third Test Match on February 26, 1930 will go down in history. The game was played at Bourda in Georgetown, Guyana. The hosts were captained by Guyanese Maurice Fernandes. West Indies won the toss and chose to bat. Clifford Roach led the way with a scintillating double hundred, followed by a century from George Headley, which led West Indies to a respectable 471. Constantine and Francis set about the English batters. England were bowled out for 145, with Patsy Hendren scoring 56.

Captain Fernandes did not enforce the follow on as West Indies compiled 290 in their second innings. This included another century from George Headley. England were asked to make 617 for victory.

Patsy Hendren's 129 was the only notable score. But there was drama on the afternoon of the final day. West Indies managed to snatch victory with time running out. The bowling of Constantine and Francis ensured victory.

The Fourth Test at Jamaica was a timeless Test that ended in a draw after nine days. This was a high scoring match with England making 849 runs in the first innings and Andrew Sandham scoring 325 in the first innings. George Headley scored 223 in the second innings, and rain on days eight and nine ensured a draw.

West Indies first Test victory at Bourda did wonders for the team's morale. It instilled confidence in the players and placed them in the arena of the big leagues. West Indies played Australia in five Tests in 1930-1931 and lost 4-1, but their victory in the Sydney Test proved to be a turning point in their cricket history. It showed them what was possible with determination and a positive attitude. The series was notable for the bowling of Constantine and Herman Griffith. It was Griffith who dismissed Don Bradman for his first duck in Test cricket.

During the period 1930 to 1940 West Indies played Australia and England. West Indies won their first Test series against England at Sabina Park on England's 1930-1931 tour. The 1939 tour to England saw two Test Matches being played before the tour was cancelled because of the start to World War II. Play resumed in 1948 with a West Indies tour to India, which West Indies won 1-0.

The 1950 tour to England was West Indies first series win in England with a famous victory at Lords. West Indies won the series 3-1 with the spin twins, Ramadhin and Valentine immortalised in local folklore. The 1950s saw tours to Australia, West

Indies hosting India and Australia, and a tour to New Zealand.

In 1960, West Indies toured Australia and grabbed the attention of the cricket world. West Indies was led by a Black captain in Frank Worrell. He moulded the team into a cohesive unit, where playing for country took precedence over self-interest.

The Tied Test at Brisbane was the first ever in Test cricket, and the Australian public responded in large numbers to two evenly matched teams. Over a million fans lined the streets to bid the West Indies team farewell. Victories against India at home and England away showed that West Indies cricket was in the ascendency.

Rohan Kanhai, as captain, led the revival with a series victory in England in 1973. It set the stage for dominance under Clive Lloyd that included World Cup victories in 1975 and 1979. The 1976 tour of England saw the emergence of Viv Richards as a world-class batsman.

In fact, West Indies cricket was so strong that the Kerry Packer affair, and rebel tours to South Africa, did little to diminish its dominance. Under Lloyd, and later Richards, West Indies ruled the roost for over 15 years, producing some of the finest players to grace the game.

But all good things must come to an end. Contractual disputes, the impact of other sports, the lack

of proper planning, inadequate facilities, insularity, and other reasons, led to the drying up of the cricket factory. There are still occasional glimpses of greatness, and the sweet feeling of victory, but they are too few to shout from the rooftops.

West Indies cricket is now a shadow of the halcyon days when the three W's, Headley, Sobers, Kanhai, and Lloyd, and others, walked like gladiators on the field. In the old days, fans lined up in the early hours of the morning to get into the grounds to watch Test cricket. Today, Test cricket is played to empty stadiums in the Caribbean.

CWI is the organisation that runs cricket, but it seems to be out of touch with the fans. There are times when CWI would promise a report, or guidelines to improve the game, but these have proven to be empty and without substance.

It has been argued that West Indies cricket is more suited to the shortened T20 format. The team won the 2012 and 2016 editions, but it has struggled to maintain consistency in the ensuing years. A low point occurred in 2026 when Nepal beat West Indies in the T20 International of the Unity Cup. This victory shows the rapid improvement other nations have made since they were granted first-class status. There are no more minnows in world cricket.

In the old days, not so long ago, playing Test cricket for West Indies was the dream of many players. They would walk many a mile to get to the practice facilities and represented the country with pride. But the dream these days is to play T20 cricket. The logic is: why play five days of Test cricket when one can earn more money in the five-hour T20 version?

The open market means that players in the West Indies are able to pick and choose their formats and franchise. In the 2026 T20 World Cup some of the best players stayed away from representing West Indies, preferring instead to focus on their own franchise. West Indies lost in the semi-finals of the T20 World Cup.

Why does any of this matter? There is no question that Test cricket holds the key to the fortunes and the revival of West Indies cricket. The year 2028 presents CWI with a golden opportunity to focus on Test cricket, as it would be 100 years since Test cricket was played between England and West Indies.

The Centenary Test should be played at Lords where West Indies and England first met. Every player who represented West Indies in Test cricket should be mentioned, and honoured, and Centennial Medals should be presented to living Test cricketers. There should also be an Anniversary Test Match in Guyana, in 2030, to mark West Indies' first victory in Test cricket.

CWI needs to get to work to make the Centenary Test at Lords happen. Later, there will be the opportunity to plan other anniversaries with Australia, India, New Zealand, and other nations. But for now, June 2028 is of tremendous significance to West Indies cricket. Fans are looking forward to the Centenary Test at Lords.

A letter to every sister: Sunita Gopaul's message of faith, strength, and becoming

— Trinidadian author Sunita 'Sunny' Gopaul is offering readers a message of resilience and spiritual renewal through her new book, *Dear Sis, This Too Shall Pass*. Launched in Port-of-Spain earlier this month, the work blends personal testimony, faith reflections, and lessons drawn from the lives of biblical women, forming a guide for readers navigating life's difficult seasons.

•••

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Diaspora Feature

On a warm, pleasant evening in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, a gathering of women and community leaders assembled not simply to celebrate a new book, but to witness a deeply personal offering of faith and resilience.

The launch of Sunita 'Sunny' Gopaul's *Dear Sis, This Too Shall Pass* unfolded in a spirit of reflection and encouragement, its timing closely aligned with the global observance of International Women's Day the next day on March 8.

For Gopaul, the moment marked more than a literary debut. It represented the culmination of years of personal testing, spiritual growth and quiet perseverance, experiences that she has now distilled into a slim but deeply reflective volume that she describes as "72 powerful pages of lessons for each season of your life."

Written as a series of heartfelt letters addressed to women, the text explores themes of hope, healing, faith and self-love. Its tone is intimate and conversational, almost as if the author is speaking directly to a sister, friend, or confidante navigating the difficult terrain of life's uncertainties.

"I never saw myself as a speaker," Gopaul admitted at the launch, reflecting candidly on her earlier fears of public speaking, and which was reported by the *Trinidad Express*.

She added, "Speaking in front of people was always very intimidating. For the majority of people, it is a scary thing."

Her honesty drew affirmative nods and warm smiles of empathy from the audience as she recalled an early corporate communications meeting where nerves overtook her. During a presentation, she became so unsettled by someone in the room that she accidentally knocked over a glass of water.

It was a small moment of the fluidity of embarrassment, but one that remained with her as a reminder of how far she has travelled since that water glass toppled over.

Years later, after what she describes as a process of finding alignment with her deeper purpose, the stage that once intimidated her has become a place where she now speaks freely about



Sunita Gopaul

faith, resilience, and personal transformation.

As she explained, the book itself emerged from seasons of trial that forced her to confront life's uncertainties head-on.

"Often we would tell the Lord: I don't want to go through this test; don't put me through this," she said, further noting, "But in the middle of that mud, there is something there, a lesson, calling you to rise higher than what you envisioned for yourself."

It is this philosophy, namely that adversity can become a catalyst for growth, which runs through the core of *Dear Sis, This Too Shall Pass*.

At the heart of the book is the quiet reminder that life unfolds in chapters, and that the struggles of the present moment are rarely the final word in one's narrative.

In one passage in her text, Gopaul writes with gentle reassurance: "One day, you'll look back at everything you've been through and realise just how strong you were, how you kept going even when it felt impossible."

Her message is one of endurance, in a strength that she suggests is often revealed only after the storm has passed.

Equally central to the book's philosophy is the notion that progress is not always dramatic or visible.

"Progress is not always loud or obvious," she writes, adding, "Sometimes, it's simply choosing to keep going, even when nothing makes sense."

That sentiment resonates strongly in an age where achievement is frequently measured through visible milestones and public success.

Instead, Gopaul's reflections encourage us to recognise quieter forms of survival in our small decisions to continue, to hope, and to endure.

At another point she offers what is perhaps the most powerful reassurance in the book: "You're in the middle of your story, not the end."

It is a deceptively simple idea, but one with profound implications. The present moment, no matter how heavy it feels, does not determine the final outcome of one's life.

"You're not stuck," she reminds readers; instead, she affirms, "You're becoming."

For many women balancing the pressures of family, career, relationships and personal expectations, that message lands

with particular clarity.

Gopaul's reflections are also deeply rooted in faith. Throughout the book, she emphasises the belief that divine intervention and unexpected opportunities can shift circumstances in ways that cannot always be anticipated.

"Remember the Lord can make situations change at any time," she writes.

"In one moment, one opportunity, one shift everything can change," she declares.

This spiritual dimension gives the book a distinctive tone that blends motivational encouragement with theological reflection. It invites us not only to persevere, but to trust that unseen forces may already be at work behind the scenes.

Self-compassion is another recurring theme. Gopaul urges readers to release the harsh judgments they often place upon themselves.

"We are so hard on ourselves," she explained, noting, "But we have to stop it right there and remember that we did what we did with the knowledge which we had. And now that we know better, we can make better choices. But your past does

not define you."

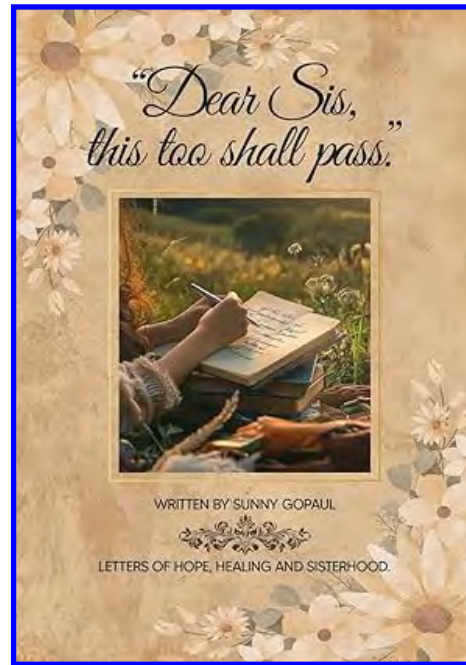
Such reflections form the therapeutic backbone of the book. The narrative moves gently from acknowledging pain to encouraging acceptance, forgiveness, and renewal.

Beyond personal reflection, *Dear Sis, This Too Shall Pass* also draws inspiration from scripture. The book highlights 13 women from the *Bible* whose lives illustrate courage, perseverance, and faith in the face of adversity.

These stories serve as spiritual archetypes, connecting ancient narratives with the challenges faced by women today. By revisiting their journeys, Gopaul suggests that strength and resilience have always been part of women's shared heritage.

The release of Gopaul's text coincided with the lead-up to International Women's Day, an alignment that underscores its message of empowerment. Yet she is quick to clarify that her

See Page 20: A journey of hope



The squeaking of the rusty hinges on the front door yanked Johathan out of sleep. He stared at the door but could not see it in the dark. Emma's deep breathing beside him sent his heart into overdrive. Who had just entered if Emma was lying right next to him?

Jonathan alternated glances between Emma and the door. He leaned closer to his wife and reeled back in horror. Emma's eyes were wide open with a blank, enraged glare at him.

With his heart pounding in the silence that followed, Jonathan rolled onto his back and stared at the ceiling, searching for a logical explanation.

An instant migraine made him turn to gaze at the wall and make sense of what he had just experienced. An uncanny sensation of Emma's eyes staring at the back of his head sent a cold chill down his spine.

"Jonathan, open this door!" Emma's loud shouts and bangs on the door made Jonathan jump.

"What the...!" Johathan spun around and gasped. Emma was no longer in bed. He sprang up and dashed to the door. Upon flinging it open, he discovered an angry Emma shivering in the chilly mountain drizzle outside.

"Why did you lock me out, Jonathan!" She knocked him aside to pummel her way into the dwelling. Jonathan, shocked into open-mouthed speechlessness, stared at his wife. "Don't just stand there, shut the door!" Emma's scream unfroze him. Jonathan closed the door and locked it. Emma dried herself with her towel and slipped into warm night clothes.

Without a word or a glance in Jonathan's direction, she climbed into bed and disappeared under the covers. Jonathan cautiously climbed into bed and turned away from Emma. He remained fully awake in the same position for an agonisingly long time, tormented by his eerie experiences.

His mind wandered back to the time when Emma proposed a vacation to the log cabin to rekindle the spark in their relationship, when he was caught cheating with a coworker. He felt humbled by his wife's forgiveness and her desire to preserve their marriage.

Jonathan's thoughts returned to the present. With his head



The Supernatural The Realisation

pounding, he decided on some fresh air. He eased himself out of the cottage. The drizzle was gone. Jonathan took several deep breaths of the fresh mountain air. Assisted by the light of the full moon, he untied the little boat that came with the cottage rental and paddled out to the centre of the lake. His high-powered camera with its heavy zoom lens hung around his neck by a strap. The bright orange glow of the low-hanging Harvest Moon's reflection stretched across the mirrored surface of the placid lake.

By the time he reached the middle of the lake, his focus was redirected to the moon, which eased his headache. He pulled his oars on board and reclined in the little flat-bottomed boat with his head on a life jacket to take close-up photos of the moon while capturing the surroundings and allowing the wind to drift the watercraft.

A bump on the bottom of the boat startled Jonathan. He winced when the heavy camera landed on his solar plexus, while instinct forced him to grab the edges of the boat as the little watercraft started to rock violently from side to side, taking on water each time an edge dipped below the surface. Jonathan's throat tightened. He had never learned to swim. His stomach churned when the life jacket that he had used as a cushion and the two oars washed overboard and floated away.

A dark fog blanketed the lake, trapping Jonathan in a sudden calm of deathly silence. A stale, earthy odour stung his nostrils.

In a flash, the boat flipped over, tossing him into the water. By the time he inhaled to yell out in panic, he was already submerged. Lungfuls of water sank him like a log toward the bottom of the lake.

A day later, Emma returned to the city when Jonathan stopped responding to her texts and phone calls. She reported her husband missing, but was burdened by a secret she could not

disclose. She had a vengeful body double, a doppelganger named Emmalita, who had appointed herself protector of Emma since childhood. Like everyone else who had crossed paths with Emma in a harmful way, she suspected that Jonathan had become a victim of Emmalita's revenge. Evidence around the house suggested that Jonathan was unfaithful while she was away in another city to attend to her terminally-ill mom.

In hindsight, Emma theorised that Emmalita had caused the taxi accident that had sent her to the hospital in a coma. She believed that her doppelganger had texted Jonathan from her phone, which had mysteriously disappeared after the accident. When the phone inexplicably reappeared at the hospital, deleted texts to Jonathan by Emmalita, which were recovered by police forensics, stated that Emma's mom had died, resulting in her decision to return home earlier than planned. Authorities, knowing that Emma was in a coma at the time of the texts, assumed that someone had found the phone and had played a prank on Jonathan. They had no explanation of how the phone had found its way back to Emma, who was forced to hide the truth.

Video evidence showed Jonathan shopping for cottage supplies while interacting with an invisible person beside him.

In response to the missing person's bulletin, a realtor recognised the photograph of Jonathan and produced a copy of the rent receipt for the cottage.

Emma suspected that Emmalita, pretending to be Emma, may have manipulated Jonathan into the idea of the cottage getaway.

Jonathan's body was recovered from the lake. The coroner labeled his death as 'misadventure'.

Emma used Jonathan's life insurance to buy the cottage. She used the remaining funds to live in isolation after her mother passed away.

Emma loved Jonathan. She cherished the urn containing his ashes. Now she would have him all to herself. Emmalita's protection completed her ideal world.



Kamil Ali

Balkaran's biographical dictionary celebrates Guyana's business titans

Lal Balkaran: *Notable Business Leaders of Guyana – Leadership, Legacy, and Lasting Impact – A Biographical Dictionary*

– with a Foreword by Hon. Professor Jeff Ridley, Lincoln International Business School, University of Lincoln.

A review by Nizam Ali, FCCA, CTA, Retired Partner, Nizam Ali & Co.

Notable Business Leaders of Guyana is another landmark contribution to Guyanese and Caribbean business literature by this prolific author of non-fictional works. In this meticulously researched and thoughtfully structured volume, Lal Balkaran documents the lives, leadership philosophies, and enduring legacies of 116 influential business figures whose collective impact spans more than two centuries of Guyana's economic history since 1815.

Guyana has produced remarkable business leaders whose legacies deserve recognition. Starting with Josias Booker – who arrived in 1815



Lal Balkaran

and later helped establish Booker Brothers & Company, a firm that reshaped the country's economic and social landscape – our nation has seen many other outstanding leaders emerge.

Individuals such as Robert Badal, Balam Bhaichandeen, Madho Beepat, E.B. Beharry, Derek Chin, P.S. D'Aguiar, Chris Fernandes, Sattaur Gafoor, Gerry Gouveia, Glen Khan, Lyla Kissoon, Toolsie Persaud, Yesu Persaud, Clifford Reis, Komal Samaroo, Kayman Sankar, Brian Tiwari, Joseph Vieira, and many more, built and grew their enterprises through determination, creativity, and courage.

Some started with little or no capital; others overcame poverty or limited formal education. Yet each left an indelible mark on their indus-

A journey of hope, joy, and becoming

From Page 19

work is not meant to exclude men.

"The men who love us will also find something valuable in the book," she said, noting that the themes of healing and resilience are universal.

Her commitment to uplifting women extends beyond the pages of the book. Gopaul is the founder and manager of *Crowded Room Events*, a Trinidad-based initiative that organises workshops and gatherings focused on leadership, personal empowerment, and professional development.

Through at least seven annual events, the organisation has created spaces where girls and women can learn, connect, and grow.

"Unfortunately, a lot of women see other women as competition, and sometimes we think there is not enough space for all of us, which is not true," she said; however, "We all come with our gifts and our own stories."

In her view, the advancement of women is not a zero-sum game; instead, when one woman rises, the entire community benefits.

"Pulling up a woman lifts an entire community," she said.

The launch itself reflected that communal spirit. Attendees were treated to speeches and performances by a diverse group of speakers, including Yasmin Khan Lee Wen, Dean of St Joseph's Convent in Port-of-Spain; Yasmin Rahamansingh, former principal of ASJA Girls' College in San Fernando; Pastor Semone Hayes; business development coach Koya Barrimond; Miss World Trinidad and Tobago Georgia Lee Gill; and musician John Thomas and friends.

More than 70 people attended the event, a turnout that Gopaul described as both humbling and encouraging.

"People felt inspired, they felt empowered, which is exactly what I wanted to do," she said.

try and on Guyana's standing in the global business community.

Balkaran addresses a long-standing gap in national scholarship: the absence of a comprehensive, authoritative work dedicated to business leadership in Guyana. While political and social histories have been extensively chronicled, the architects of enterprise – entrepreneurs, professionals, industrialists, and institution-builders – have often remained underrepresented. This book corrects that imbalance with clarity, balance, and intellectual rigor.

One of the book's greatest strengths lies in its diversity. The leaders profiled come from a wide range of ethnic, social, educational, and economic backgrounds. Some were formally trained professionals; others were self-made entrepreneurs who relied on intuition, perseverance, and resilience. Many began with minimal resources, endured political instability, economic hardship, and systemic barriers, yet succeeded through discipline, innovation, and ethical leadership. The work, therefore, reflects not privilege, but purpose and persistence.

Each profile goes beyond biographical narration. Balkaran frames the lives of these leaders through identifiable business themes such as entrepreneurship, governance, risk management, diversification, succession planning, corporate citizenship, and national development. This thematic approach elevates the book from storytelling to structured analysis, making it particularly valuable for students of business, management, accounting, economics, and public policy.

Importantly, *Notable Business Leaders of Guyana* is not a celebratory catalogue. The author maintains an objective tone, acknowledging chal-

Also, "The reviews of the book have been really good."

However, for Gopaul, the launch was not the end of the journey, but the beginning of what she describes as a ministry of encouragement.

"It is a ministry of some sort that is beginning," she said, stating, "I want to focus a lot of my energy now on sharing the book, sharing the messages and just trying to inspire hope and courage in other women going through stuff."

Her words reflect an understanding that many people silently carry burdens they rarely voice.

"As women, we are going through stuff, but very often we don't like to admit that we are dealing with things because we have to keep up a façade," she said, adding that the book emerged directly from her own struggles.

"This book is really about my personal test, my personal thoughts and my personal journey with faith," she explained, adding, "We always say we can't have testimonies without test."

Written as a series of letters, what she describes as "my soul to the soul of another woman", the narrative traces a path from darkness to hope, from uncertainty to joy.

For our Caribbean diaspora, including communities here in the GTA, the message may carry particular resonance. Migration, family responsibilities and the pressures of building new lives often bring their own moments of doubt and exhaustion.

In such seasons, Gopaul's central message offers a simple but powerful reassurance: no hardship is permanent; no story is finished while it is still unfolding; and sometimes, the most important progress we make in life is the quiet decision to keep going.

As she writes in the closing reflection in the chapter, *Hold On*, in *Dear Sis, This Too Shall Pass*, "You're not stuck. You're becoming."

lenges, failures, and strategic missteps alongside success. This balanced perspective enhances the book's credibility and makes it a practical learning tool for leadership development and executive education. Readers gain insight into how decisions were made under uncertainty, and how leaders adapted to changing political, regulatory, and global environments.

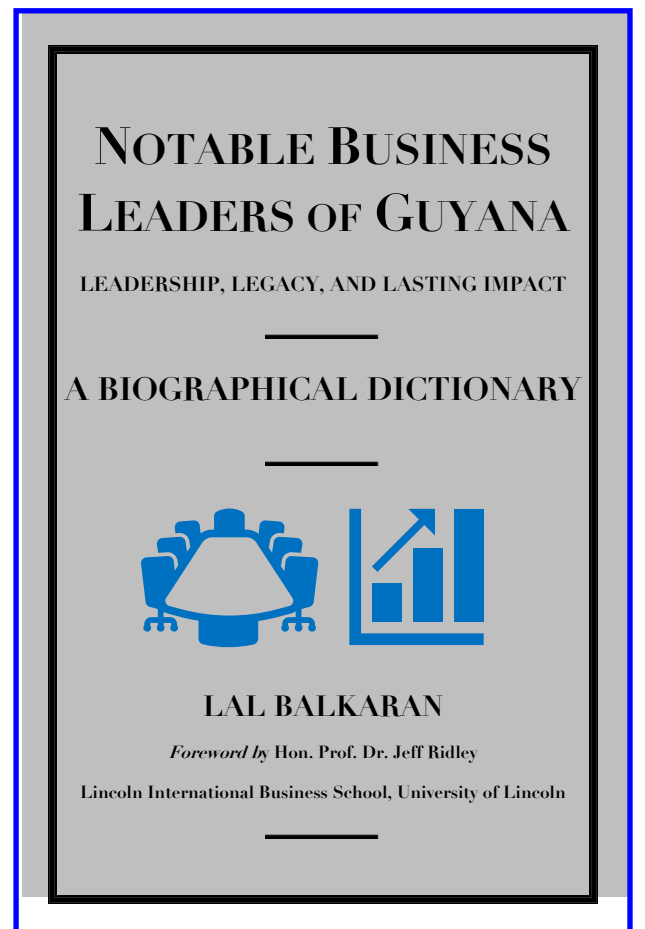
The book also serves as a bridge between generations. For young Guyanese at home and in the diaspora, it offers tangible role models grounded in local context. For researchers and policymakers, it provides a longitudinal view of the evolution of private enterprise and its intersection with national development. For practitioners, it reinforces the idea that sustainable success is rooted in ethics, governance, and long-term stewardship.

Well-written, carefully curated, and historically significant, *Notable Business Leaders of Guyana* stands as a definitive reference work. As a bonus, there are two appendices with the timelines of almost 1,000 key business and economic issues and events since 1621 to put the profiles in context. It preserves legacy, informs scholarship, and inspires future leadership.

What makes the book more authoritative is that it has been endorsed by respected business academics and practitioners such as Professors David Dabydeen (Warwick and Cambridge universities) and John R. Rickford (Stanford University), Ramesh Lal (Managing Partner at TSD Lal & Co.), and several other influential figures.

Indeed, Balkaran has produced a volume that will remain relevant for decades, and should be considered essential reading for anyone interested in Guyana's economic past, present, and future.

Lal Balkaran, MBA, FCG, FCPA, FCMA is an award-winning internal auditor and widely



published author with over 20 books and 50 articles, some of which have been reprinted in several languages. His publications include *Managerial Control Techniques (CIMA)*, *Rise of Accounting, Auditing & Finance (Nova)*, *Practical Guide to Auditing & Related Terms (Lexis-Nexis)*, *The IIA-Toronto, 1944-2024 (LBA)*, *A History of Accounting & Auditing in Guyana (LBA)*, and *Directory of Global Accounting & Business Certification Programs (Wiley)*. His articles have appeared in several prestigious journals. Balkaran earned all three of IIA Canada's National Awards and the Global IIA's Bradford Cadmus Memorial Award. A Past IIA-Toronto President, he established the IIA-Guyana in 2000 and is listed in the *Marquis Who's Who in the World* – the world's preeminent biographer since 1899.

Persad-Bissessar hails security gains via Shield of America coalition

— Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has announced that Trinidad and Tobago's participation in a US-led anti-cartel coalition will enhance national security efforts, strengthen intelligence-sharing, and deepen diplomatic and economic ties with regional and international partners.

Port-of-Spain – From the corridors of Parliament to the security tables of hemispheric power, Trinidad and Tobago is positioning itself at the frontline of a renewed regional push against guns, drugs, and transnational crime.

So said Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, declaring that Trinidad and Tobago's alliance with US President Donald Trump's Americas Counter Cartel Coalition will significantly bolster the country's fight against illegal firearms, narcotics trafficking, and organised crime.

Speaking in Parliament on March 13, Persad-Bissessar reported on her recent visit to the US, where she attended the Shield of the Americas Summit in Doral, Florida, at the invitation of President Trump.

Persad-Bissessar said she engaged directly with the US president during the summit.

"...I had the honour of speaking directly with President Trump and thanking him for his support of Trinidad and Tobago and the region. I reaffirmed the commitment of Trinidad and Tobago to working together in the interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the people of our hemisphere," she said.

She outlined the growing threat posed by illegal drugs, firearms, and organised criminal networks, describing them as part of a transnational system extending from South America through the Caribbean into North America and Europe.

Persad-Bissessar noted that these networks traffic cocaine, heroin, and synthetic drugs through regional waters and ports, while illegal firearms and illicit financial flows move in the opposite direction, fuelling violence within local communities.

She said criminal organisations have evolved into highly sophisticated entities with advanced weaponry, complex financing systems, and extensive international connections. She emphasised that this reality underscores the importance of Trinidad and Tobago's participation in coordinated international efforts to dismantle such networks.

"For decades, Caribbean nations have complained about not being heard on the global stage," she said, adding, "This time we were heard, Trinidad and Tobago. This time we were seen,



Persad-Bissessar with US President Trump at the Shield of Americas' meeting

Trinidad and Tobago. This time we were invited to participate."

She said President Trump, in his address to the summit, advocated the use of "hard power" to counter threats to regional security and stability. Persad-Bissessar read from his proclamation, which called for dismantling cartels and for collective action to prevent "malign external influences" from destabilising the hemisphere.

According to Persad-Bissessar, membership in the coalition will deliver tangible benefits, particularly through enhanced intelligence-sharing among partner nations. Law enforcement agencies will gain access to real-time data on trafficking routes, gang leadership, financial networks, and weapons shipments, enabling faster and more targeted responses.

She also highlighted improvements in maritime and border security, noting that Trinidad and Tobago lies along some of the world's busiest drug-trafficking corridors.

"Through joint operations, surveillance support, and coordinated interdiction efforts, coalition partners can disrupt shipments before they reach our shores," she said.

Addressing the issue of illegal firearms, Persad-Bissessar pointed out that Trinidad and Tobago does not manufacture guns, yet continues to face a proliferation of imported weapons.

"We don't make guns in Trinidad and Tobago," she said, noting that law enforcement agencies have seized a wide range of firearms. She added that coordinated enforcement and investigative collaboration will help intercept illegal weapons before

they enter local communities.

The Prime Minister also said the coalition will provide access to training, advanced technology, and capacity-building initiatives for local security forces. Police and defence personnel are expected to benefit from joint training programmes, and enhanced cooperation in areas such as financial crime investigations and the prosecution of organised criminal networks.

Persad-Bissessar stressed that Trinidad and Tobago's sovereignty would not be compromised by participation in the initiative.

"[Our] sovereignty remains strong and firmly intact. Our participation in the Americas Counter Cartel Coalition reflects our commitment to regional cooperation in tackling transnational crime, while at the same time we maintain full control over our national decisions and policies," she said.

She further emphasised that any use of force under the coalition framework would be conducted within the bounds of international law.

Beyond security cooperation, Persad-Bissessar said the visit yielded diplomatic and economic gains through a series of bilateral meetings with senior US officials.

She met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau to discuss regional engagement, including developments involving Venezuela.

In discussions with US Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, Persad-Bissessar said there was immediate commercial interest.

"Within hours, energy giant Chevron reached out, expressing interest in doing business with Trinidad and Tobago," she said.

She added that talks with US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick focused on potential investment by US-based companies in infrastructure and rehabilitation projects, while discussions with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer addressed tariffs and their potential impact on energy exports.

Persad-Bissessar also met with several Latin American leaders and engaged Paraguay's representatives on Trinidad and Tobago's application for associate membership in Mercosur.

Following the March 9 summit, she visited the US Southern Command, where she met with Commander General Francis L. Donovan. The discussions focused on strengthening defence cooperation, including support in cybersecurity, forensic analysis, ballistics, and intelligence-sharing.

Persad-Bissessar described the overall outcome of the visit as a major diplomatic and strategic success.

Sobers reports sharp drop in asylum applicants following UK visa implementation

— Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs Sean Sobers has confirmed that the majority of Trinidad and Tobago nationals who sought asylum in the UK have been repatriated, following the UK's imposition of visa requirements aimed at curbing abuse of the asylum system.

Port-of-Spain – A sharp policy shift in the UK's immigration system has triggered a dramatic reversal in asylum flows from Trinidad and Tobago, with hundreds returned home and applications dropping to near zero.

Hundreds of Trinidad and Tobago nationals who travelled to the UK and applied for asylum have been repatriated, Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs Sean Sobers said earlier this week.

Speaking to the media, Sobers reported that up to 97 percent of more than 700 nationals who had sought asylum in the UK have been returned to Trinidad and Tobago in recent months.

The development follows a decision by the UK government on March 12, 2025, to introduce visa requirements for all Trinidad and Tobago nationals, including those travelling for short visits.

The UK government said the measure was implemented in response to a "significant increase" in individuals entering as visitors and subsequently claiming asylum. Between 2023 and 2024, there were 797 asylum applications from Trinidad and Tobago nationals.

An explanatory memorandum presented to the UK Parliament by the Home Office on March 12, 2025, detailed the surge, noting that the 797 claims that included dependants, marked a sharp increase compared to an annual average of 49 asylum applications between 2015 and 2019.

The Home Office stated that most claims were made at UK ports of entry, placing operational strain on border systems and diverting resources from other priorities.

It added: "Trinidad and Tobago's visa status will be kept under review; particularly with regards to whether the visa introduction affects the number of individuals claiming asylum from within the UK and the internal security situation in



Sean Sobers

Trinidad and Tobago."

Former Minister of National Security Fitzgerald Hinds had previously attributed the rise in asylum claims to individuals seeking to evade criminal accountability in Trinidad and Tobago.

Earlier this month, on March 5, the UK Home Office issued a public update highlighting concerns over abuse of legal migration routes.

"Thousands have abused legal routes into the UK to claim asylum. By introducing visit visas for tourists from Jordan, Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Botswana, over 6,000 people were prevented from making claims. Nicaraguans and Saint Lucians will now also require visit visas," the statement said.

Sobers said that since the introduction of the visa regime, asylum claims from Trinidad and Tobago nationals have dropped sharply, with only about three claims recorded in the UK over the past year.

"The numbers have dropped drastically, so it shows that the visas are working," he said.

He added that more than 700 applicants have since been repatriated, bringing the return rate to nearly 97 percent.

Sobers also noted that Trinidad and Tobago has not yet been asked to cover the costs associated with repatriation.

"At this point in time, no, that is something that [the UK authorities] have asked us to consider. Obviously, that is a decision Cabinet has to make," he said.

The minister further revealed that among those repatriated were individuals identified as "persons of interest", adding that local law enforcement authorities have been made aware of their return.

Following his attendance at the Shield of the Americas Summit in Doral, Florida, hosted by US President Donald Trump on March 7, Sobers travelled to London where he participated in a Commonwealth meeting and held discussions with King Charles III.

"The King recalled visiting... and his memories of Trinidad and Tobago are fond," Sobers said. He added that King Charles III was aware of Trinidad and Tobago's recent general election, and extended congratulations to Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Sobers said the visa issue was also raised during the UK-Caribbean Forum, where Trinidad and Tobago's delegation met with the UK's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Migration and Citizenship, Michael Tapp.

He noted that UK officials acknowledged Trinidad and Tobago's ongoing efforts to strengthen border security, including preparations for the implementation of an Advance Passenger Information System.

The system will allow passenger data, such as travel history, possible criminal records, and regional database alerts, to be shared with UK authorities prior to departure, enabling more informed decisions on whether individuals should be permitted to board flights.

"We can provide them with information that will help them make a decision much faster in terms of whether or not the claim for asylum is *bona fide* or not, saving the British people monies that would usually be expended on a claim, which is around 65,000 British pounds. So we would be able to cut down that drastically," Sobers said.

Oscars' Dharmendra omission sparks debate over global recognition

— The 98th Academy Awards has come under scrutiny following backlash over the omission of several late film personalities from its televised *In Memoriam* segment, including legendary Indian actor Dharmendra, prompting debate across global and diaspora communities about recognition, visibility, and the politics of remembrance.

The omission of Indian cinema legend Dharmendra from the Oscars' televised *In Memoriam* segment has sparked global backlash, raising questions about recognition, representation, and how the film industry honours its most enduring figures.

Held in Los Angeles on March 15, the ceremony celebrated the year's most accomplished films and performances, while also paying tribute to members of the film industry who passed away over the past year.

The *In Memoriam* segment, a longstanding feature of the Academy Awards, was notably restructured this year. Moving beyond the traditional montage format, the tribute was presented in multiple parts, with personalised honours dedicated to select figures from Hollywood's history.

Among those recognised on-air were Robert Redford, Rob Reiner, Diane Keaton, Catherine O'Hara, and Robert Duvall. These tributes were delivered through curated segments, with notable presenters adding personal reflections.

Actor Billy Crystal honoured Reiner, his longtime collaborator on *When Harry Met Sally*, while Barbra Streisand paid tribute to Redford, describing him as a "brilliant, subtle actor" and an "intellectual cowboy", before singing a portion of *The Way We Were*. Canadian actor Rachel McAdams paid tribute to Keaton.

Despite the expanded format, reportedly running approximately 15 minutes longer than in previous years, the televised segment featured only a limited selection of names. A more comprehensive list of those who died over the past year was subsequently published on the official website of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

It was within this distinction, between televised tribute and online acknowledgement, that the controversy emerged.

Dharmendra, one of Hindi cinema's most enduring and influential figures, was absent from the broadcast segment, though his name appeared on the Academy's official online *In Memoriam* list.

The extended list also included prominent figures from Indian cinema such as Manoj Kumar, B. Saroja Devi, and S. Krishnaswamy, whose contributions were acknowledged digitally, but not featured on-air.

The omission drew responses from



Dharmendra with Hema Malini

Dharmendra's family, reflecting both personal dignity and public disappointment.

His daughter, Esha Deol, told *Variety India* that her father would not have been troubled by the oversight.

"I don't think it would ever make a difference to Papa. His heart has always been far too big to worry about such things. For him, life was never about recognition or status – it was about love, kindness, and the place he held in people's hearts," she said.

In contrast, Dharmendra's wife, Hema Malini, expressed disappointment in an interview with *Bollywood Hungama*, calling the omission "a shame".

"It is a shame, of course. A shame for them to have overlooked an actor who means so many things to so many people in many parts of the world. Dharamji was known and recognised everywhere," she said.

She added, "He never got too many awards during his lifetime. Why should he care about the Oscars? Both of us were happy to be loved in our country. But awards always eluded him."

Dharmendra's omission has also drawn attention to a broader pattern within this year's *In Memoriam* segment. While the Academy expanded the duration of the tribute, several other figures from the global entertainment industry were similarly absent from the televised segment.

These included actors such as James Van Der Beek, Malcolm-Jamal Warner, Robert Carradine, George Wendt, Richard Chamberlain, Eric Dane, and Brigitte Bardot, among others.

Responding to the criticism, Rob Mills, the executive overseeing the Oscars broadcast, defended the process in remarks to *Variety*,

emphasising the difficulty of curating the segment.

"It is hard. I think it's the hardest thing they possibly do. It always is hard when they are sort of villainised for this," Mills said.

He added, "Yes, there are always people who are left out. Unfortunately, we're losing more and more people, and especially, we're losing legendary people every year, so it is probably the hardest needle to thread."

Mills added that, despite the criticism, he believed the segment was among the strongest in the ceremony's history.

"I do think what they did [on March 15] might have been the best *In Memoriam* in the history of the Oscars," he said.

Yet for many observers, particularly with-

in diaspora communities, the issue extends beyond logistical limitations to questions of visibility and representation.

Dharmendra's absence from the televised segment, despite his inclusion in the official archive, has been interpreted by some as indicative of a broader imbalance in how global cinematic contributions are recognised on Hollywood's most prominent stage.

Over a career spanning more than six decades, Dharmendra appeared in more than 300 films, earning acclaim for performances in classics such as *Sholay*, *Satyakam*, and *Chupke Chupke*. His influence extended across generations of Indian cinema, where he was widely regarded not only as a leading man, but as a cultural icon.

Earlier this year, his legacy was acknowledged internationally at the BAFTA Awards 2026, where he was honoured during the *In Memoriam* segment. The tribute featured British singer-songwriter Jessie Ware performing *The Way We Were*, accompanied by a montage celebrating his life and career.

Dharmendra died on November 24, 2025, in Mumbai, shortly after being discharged from Breach Candy Hospital. He is survived by his wives, Hema Malini and Prakash Kaur, and six children, including actors Bobby Deol, Sunny Deol, Esha Deol, and Ahana Deol. His final film, *Ikkis*, directed by Sriram Raghavan and released on January 1, was praised by critics, though it under-performed commercially.

The broader Oscars ceremony also reflected the continued presence of Indian and diaspora talent within global cinema. Indian-American filmmaker Geeta Gandbhir received nominations in two documentary categories for *The Perfect Neighbor* and *The Devil Is Busy*, though neither project secured a win.



Dharmendra with Amitabh Bachchan in *Sholay*

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Cricket to Conquer Cancer calls our community to step up to the crease

— For generations across our GTA's Caribbean and South Asian diaspora, cricket has been more than a sport: it is memory, identity, and community. On May 30 at Celebration Square in Mississauga, that cherished game will unite players and supporters in a powerful drive to conquer cancer.

For so many of us across the Greater Toronto Area, especially in our Caribbean and South Asian diaspora, cricket has never been just a sport.

It is a language we speak without thinking. It is leather striking willow in schoolyards and in our neighbourhood parks, improvised wickets leaning against chain-link fences, and long, animated debates about innings and run-outs that defined eras.

It is about parents bonding with the next generation, teaching sons and daughters how to correctly grip the bat, cousins arguing over a questionable edge that made it into the keeper's gloves, and weekend leagues unfolding beneath indigo, summer skies.

In our diaspora communities here in the GTA, cricket travels with us. It crosses oceans packed like overfilled suitcases inside memory, inside laughter, inside the rhythm of stories told around our kitchen tables and to the riot of colour of summer sunsets washing across community grounds.

It is patience learned one ball at a time, camaraderie built through long afternoons of a lengthy partnership at the wicket, and a shared inheritance passed from generation to generation.

Now, our game, beloved throughout the Caribbean, is once again taking on a new purpose.

On May 30, 2026, the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation will host its second annual Cricket to Conquer Cancer tournament at Celebration Square in Mississauga, the summer event transforming one of the GTA's most visible public spaces into a vibrant field of collective purpose.

Teams made up of colleagues, families, friends, neighbours, rookies, ringers and community champions will gather not just to play cricket, but to raise funds for life-saving cancer research at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. Put another way, in this big match, every one of us has an innings to bat; already, we are on the scorecard.

Here in Canada, two in five of us will be diagnosed with cancer in our lifetime. Behind that statistic are parents, siblings, friends, and co-workers whose lives have been touched by the disease. Which is why this tournament carries a meaning that stretches far beyond the boundary.

When we register for Cricket to Conquer Cancer, we are not simply stepping onto the field. They are going to bat for every family that has faced a diagnosis, every survivor fighting through recovery, and every researcher working toward the next breakthrough.

Come May 30, true to our cricket tradition, the day's play will begin with a ritual as old as the game itself, with our collective eyes lifting to the blue sky, then following the inevitability of gravity as the tossed coin falls to the surface of the pitch.

Captains gather. The coin flashes briefly in the sunlight. For a moment, the entire gathering at Celebration Square holds its breath, awaiting the age old outcome: heads or tails? Bat or bowl? And just like that, Celebration Square becomes a cricket ground.

What unfolds next is cricket in its most joyous and accessible form, a fast-paced street cricket format where energy surges through every over bowled.

Each match lasts just five overs per side, a whirlwind contest where every ball matters, and every run feels precious. Teams are guaranteed three matches across the day, ensuring that the square remains alive with motion, laughter, and spirited competition.

And what a scene it will be. Bowlers charging in with determination. Batters calling urgently as they sprint between wickets. Fielders diving to stop a racing ball. Cheers erupting from teammates gathered at the boundary: "Catch! Run! Run!"

The cry echoes through the square as two runners dash between the wickets, pushing for that extra run while a fielder scoops the ball and fires it back toward the wicketkeeper. A quick dive, the flash the bat grating across the crease, and suddenly the crowd is laughing and applauding with relief at the close call.

Here is cricket stripped to its most inclusive essence. Each



The Princess Margaret
Cancer Foundation UHN

CRICKET

The message shines brightly from the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation: *Carry the Fire*, both a call and a promise. When we step onto the field for Cricket to Conquer Cancer, we are doing more than playing a game. Each team, each run scored, each dollar raised helps carry that fire forward, lighting the path toward brighter tomorrows for cancer patients everywhere.

Fundraising efforts through the tournament help *Carry the Fire* for a new generation of patients, supporting the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation's trailblazing work to transform what it means to be diagnosed with cancer.

As the PMCF explains, cancer is complex. It is not a single disease, but a group of hundreds, shaped by lifestyle, environment, and genetics. The challenges are immense. Yet the belief guiding the work at PMCF is equally powerful: through collaborative research, intensive training, and engaged philanthropy, those challenges can be overcome together.

Today, the PMCF's world-renowned team of doctors, researchers, and scientists continue to carry that fire forward. Their mission is to advance early detection, develop innovative treatments, and expand comprehensive patient support so that those facing cancer can benefit from the very best outcomes and experiences.

The goal is clear: to help cancer patients everywhere live longer, healthier lives; and ultimately, to build a future where fewer people live in fear of the disease.

And come May 30, as the bat meets the ball at Celebration Square, our diaspora will help keep that fire burning.

crease with a first-time player gripping the bat nervously for the opening delivery. A colleague might discover the thrill of bowling their first over while teammates cheer them on from the sidelines. Co-ed teams are encouraged, reinforcing the spirit that cricket belongs to everyone.

And on this field, the action rarely pauses. Batters retire after scoring 15 runs, allowing the next player to step forward and experience the moment of walking to the crease, with the eyes of the spectators lively with interest. If five wickets fall, the innings closes, but then the drama continues as the teams switch roles and the chase begins.

The tournament also adds a playful twist that keeps the crowd engaged. Across the field, designated targets offer bonus runs when struck by a well-placed shot: two runs for a large target, four for a smaller one, but only if the batters complete at least one physical run between the wickets.

A solid shot off the bat, the ball skidding across the field, and suddenly it smacks into one of those targets. The crowd erupts. The scoreboard jumps. Team-mates high-five in celebration. In a five-over contest, those bonus runs can change everything.

Yet this version of cricket carries the unmistakable DNA of the street games many of us grew up playing. Sixes are not allowed. A ball hit cleanly over the boundary without touching the ground actually costs the batting side a run, a reminder that in this format, cricket stays alive on the ground, where fielders sprint, and throws fly like missiles toward the stumps.

Even batters cannot stand still. Under the tournament's active play rule, any contact with the ball means they must run, keeping the match lively and ensuring that every delivery sparks movement. Wides and no-balls add a single run to the batting side, nudging the scoreboard forward and keeping momentum alive.

And what if the scores are tied at the end of both innings? Then comes one of cricket's most thrilling spectacles: the bowl-out. Like soccer's penalty shootout, the tension becomes electric as players line up to deliver their best ball at the stumps. Each team selects six players, each given one attempt to strike the wicket.

Silence falls. A bowler runs in. Smash! The wicket shudders. Celebrations explode across Celebration Square.

But beyond the runs scored, the catches taken, and the friendly rivalries unfolding across the field, something deeper is taking place throughout the day. Every ball bowled, every sprint between the wickets, and every shout of encouragement from teammates carries with it a quiet but powerful purpose.

Together, these teams are helping to fund cancer research that saves lives.

Cricket has always taught us patience, the understanding that progress comes one ball at a time, one partnership at a time, one session at a time. In much the same way, cancer research advances through persistence, collaboration, and the steady determination of scientists working toward the next discovery.

Cricket to Conquer Cancer brings those two worlds together. Corporate teams can rally their colleagues and challenge other organisations to join the tournament, turning the event into a spirited day of employee engagement and friendly competition.

Community teams can gather family members, classmates, neighbours and lifelong friends, the same networks that have sustained our diaspora communities for decades. And all players are welcome, regardless of experience. No need for first-class credentials; no consulting *YouTube* on how to perform a textbook cover drive. All that is needed is the willingness to show up.

And when you do, you will become part of what has already grown into Canada's largest street cricket fundraiser, bringing together teams from across the country to support world-class cancer research at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre.

For our diaspora that has long cherished cricket as a symbol of resilience, unity, and shared joy, the invitation is clear. Come out and play; come out to raise your voices cheering; come out and support the cause.

Come May 30, when the coin spins upwards and then hurtles down onto the pitch, and immediately after the first ball is bowled in Celebration Square, the match will not just be about runs and wickets.

It will be about hope; and in that match, every one of us in our thriving diaspora has a role to play.



team fields eight players at a time, a bowler, a wicketkeeper, and six fielders enthusiastically chasing every ball. Every player gets their moment with both bat and ball across the day's matches, ensuring that the experience is shared by everyone on the team.

Here, the seasoned weekend league veteran might share the

Music, devotion, community return with Sangeet Ki Kahani 4



Following the tremendous success of *Sangeet Ki Kahani 3*, the Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir & Cultural Center once again extends the invitation to an evening where music, devotion, and cultural celebration come together in harmony. On Saturday, April 18 at 5:00 p.m., the stage will once again come alive with the rhythms, voices, and energy that have made this event one of the mandir's most cherished and looked-to-gatherings.

Sangeet Ki Kahani 3, which was held in 2024, left audiences inspired and uplifted. Much of that magic came through the electrifying stage presence of the iconic and versatile Pandit Joe Jaglall, whose charisma and mastery of the microphone kept the audience mesmerised throughout the evening. Alongside him, talented performers, dedicated volunteers, and enthusiastic supporters created an unforgettable night where music became a bridge among generations, traditions, and community spirit.

Come April 18, the evening promises to take the celebration to yet another level. *Sangeet Ki Kahani 4*, under the musical leadership of the versatile and charismatic Pandit Dave Ramotar, will feature a dynamic lineup of performers and ensembles. Among them are Anthony Prasad, Nalini Chaitan, Kevin Dhar, Devin Ramoutar, Devi Singh, and the vibrant Mahima Dance Academy, along with the talented input from the eminent Sangeet Vidyalaya, Akashvani Rhythms, and Amargeet Music. Together they will present an evening filled with soulful singing, inspiring lyrics, energetic dance, and the joyful spirit of cultural expression.

Beyond the music and celebration, the evening carries a deeper community purpose. *Sangeet Ki Kahani 4* is a fundraiser supporting the future of the Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir, which currently operates from the basement of a commercial building at Midland and Eglinton in Scarborough. The present location presents accessibility challenges, particularly for seniors and devotees with mobility difficulties. With the community's support, the mandir hopes to secure a street-level space that will allow all devotees to participate fully in worship and cultural activities.

The community is warmly invited to come out, enjoy a spectacular evening of music and culture, and help build a more accessible future for the mandir.

Join us for a night where every note carries devotion, every performance celebrates culture, and every supporter helps strengthen our community. [See ad below for ticket info.](#)



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Nalini Chaitan



Pt. Dave & Nanda



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Devin Ramoutar



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Akash Choudhary



Dhanesh Bephia



Dave Doobay



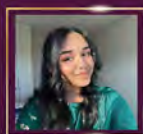
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