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Our Community Is Thriving!

Law & You brings real-life issues to the community

The upcoming *The Law & You Conference at Vishnu Mandir on April 19 stands as a crucial opportunity for the community to engage with the legal system, learn from experts, and most importantly, reflect on the consequences of actions, which in a single moment, can change lives forever.*

Toronto – An upcoming conference at Toronto's Vishnu Mandir seeks to vividly demonstrate the severe consequences of drinking and driving through a compelling and realistic legal scenario, featuring expert insights from judges, attorneys, and insurance specialists.

The second part of the event will see a legal education information session for students seeking to pursue a career in law. The conference will be moderated by Dhaman Kissoon, Barrister and Solicitor, Adjunct Professor at Queen's University Faculty and Law, and a community builder and advocate.

An initiative of the Laxmi Sabha Voice of the Vedas at Vishnu Mandir, the community-focused *The Law & You Conference* initiative is in its third year; this year it is continuing to promote legal literacy while raising awareness about



Dhaman Kissoon

the life-altering impact of impaired driving.

Riffing off a fact situation, in its first part, the conference's speakers will examine the 'fictitious' scenario where Roger, a 35-year-old Permanent Resident of Canada, had his life tragically altered following an evening out with his family on January 1.

After consuming four beers at dinner, Roger became agitated when spouse, Renee, concerned about his slurred speech, offered to take over driving duties. He angrily sped off onto icy roads, ultimately losing control of the vehicle in Richmond Hill. The crash severely injured Renee, their two young children aged four and six, and Renee's parents. Tragically, Renee's father succumbed to his injuries.

Post-accident tests revealed Roger's blood alcohol readings stood at 145 and 140, significantly above the legal limit of 80. He now faces serious criminal charges: impaired driving causing death and bodily harm, along with an over-80 Blood Alcohol Concentration causing death and bodily harm, each with three counts.

This devastating, life-altering incident also led to Roger's

See Page 14: Community meets



Esha Shaikh receives her Certificate of Appreciation for Outstanding Volunteerism during Ramadan from Humber-River Black Creek's MPP Tom Rakocevic during Eid celebrations at the Imdadul Islamic Center on April 5. *Story and photos on Page 17.*

Diaspora explores Guyana's golden passport potential

With energy, precision, and a powerful message of return, Guyana's April 5 diaspora job fair in Toronto connected hundreds of skilled Guyanese-Canadians to dynamic career and investment pathways, affirming the homeland's commitment to partnership, progress, and diasporic belonging.

By Romeo Kaseram

A Local Journalism Initiative

Toronto – With meticulous planning, energetic engagement, and clear objectives, the Guyana diaspora job fair hosted in Toronto on April 5 offered hundreds of skilled Guyanese-Canadians insights and a government-approved path forward into significant career and investment opportunities back in the homeland.

Organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Diaspora Unit and the Private Sector Commission, the event at the Toronto Don Valley Hotel and Suites highlighted the strength, unity, and potential of the thriving Guyanese community here in Toronto, and at the same time the Guyana government's commitment and willingness to assist in moving investment and other diasporic initiatives forward.

Rosalinda Rasul, head of the Diaspora Unit, emphasised the careful attention her department imbued into every detail, describing the event as worthy of the highest standards.

"With respect to our planning, it took meticulous energy that we brought to it. My view is that events representing Guyana must always have a high level of professionalism, high energy, and meticulous planning. It all points back to Guyana, which is very



Rosalinda Rasul addressing the gathering

important to us," she said.

Rasul also spoke to the importance of Guyana's representatives maintaining high standards, noting that the diaspora expects nothing but the best.

"The people that we serve, Guyanese anywhere, are viewed all the same, as being worthy of nothing but the best. That is how we engage them," Rasul affirmed, adding that preparation for the April 5 event was thorough, and completed well in advance.

It is notable that the atmospherics at the job fair was immediately discernible as professional and

energised through Rasul's and her team's meticulous preparation in making the venue ready and welcoming.

The professionals in the booths, the marketing and advertisements materials, and the finessed presentation set the tone that quickly energised the hundreds of attendees, making them eager to interact with officials who were available from both the government and private sectors.

Similarly energised, Rasul underscored the excitement that was immediately discernible at the start of the event, stating, "I worked the room, listening to the interactions that were happening. We were listening to the diaspora – to their queries, concerns, and interests."

She added the event had engendered a pivot, stating, "Now we move on to, 'How do we do better'. We are moving on to new things, to improvements, moving to a higher, more sophisticated direction," Rasul remarked.

At the same time, she hinted at transformative ideas that were in the works for future engagements in Toronto, adding that her office will keep the diaspora informed on developments. Among these she hinted were more online facilitation, more standardisation for accessibility to services, and the creation of data repositories.

It was in this vein that Rasul recognised the positioning of the Consulate General of Guyana in Toronto as a site for convenience, accessibility, and reliable information.

Thanking the Toronto office for its integral role

See Page 11: Toronto job fair

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Following his well-received performance at Pranav Hindu Mandir on April 6, Guyana's Visham Budhoo (second from left), with Toronto musician Devin Ramoutar (left to right), Pranav Mandir's Swami Bhajananandaji, Joe Jaglal, and Pranav Mandir's President Sat Purushuttam

Guyana's Budhoo performs at Pranav Hindu Mandir

Toronto – Following a successful Diaspora Job Fair in Toronto on April 5, where he managed the booth for the Guyana government's General Register Office, Deputy Registrar General Visham Budhoo made a guest appearance the following day at the Pranav Hindu Mandir in Toronto.

While he excels at his day-job looking after national registers and registration forms such as birth and marriage certificates, Budhoo is also well-known and respected as a skilled vocalist and harmonium player. He is also well-regarded for his repertoire of Indian classical, devotional, and folk music and singing.

Apparently Budhoo's reputation preceded him to Toronto as a musician, and it was for his high calibre performance that a large number of devotees arrived at the Pranav Hindu Mandir on the morning of April 6.

As community activist, vocalist, and fund-raiser *par excellence*, Joe Jaglal, told *Indo-Caribbean World* earlier this week, "Visham is an excellent singer. Devotees came out to see and hear him, and he did not disappoint."

Jaglal added, "It was an amazing event. Visham is also good at folk songs, and also for his religious singing. Devotees were clapping and enjoyed his performance. We are hoping he would come back soon."

Budhoo was accompanied by the artistic and similarly skilled musician, Toronto's own renowned Devin Ramoutar, on the

tabla and dholak.

"Together, they made an ideal pair of musicians working together," Jaglal stated, adding, "Pranav's Swami Bhajananandaji was very appreciative of the visit."

Budhoo hails from Mon Repos, East Coast Demerara, and comes from a long lineage of musicians. His great-grandfather was a skilled vocalist and harmonium craftsman from India, while his father was a talented *Quesada* singer.

Budhoo's roles have seen him serving as musical advisor for the Guyana Central Arya Samaj, and participation in television and radio programs in Guyana, among them *Sangeet Ki Raat*, and the *Indian Melody Album*.

He has also earned acclaim for his evocative interpretations of Anup Jalota's *Bhajans*, and has trained many students, both in Guyana, and in the US.

...

Editor's Note: In our previous edition, it was reported on Page 21 that a fund-raiser featuring Joe Jaglal's golden voice raised \$12,000 for his singing of the eternal melody, *Kabhi Kabhie Mere Dil Mein*. Joe has since indicated that (1), the song he made glitter to the tune of \$12,000 with his golden vocal chords was *Yeh Dosti Hum Nahi Todenge*; and (2), he set the record straight that Guyana's Indian anthem is nothing less than the uplifting and expressive *Suhani Raat*.

Markham's VCC holds fund-raiser, heritage program

Markham – The Toronto Arya Samaj/Vedic Cultural Centre will host its 27th Annual South Asian Heritage Month program on May 3 to mark the 187th anniversary of the Arrival of Indians in Guyana. The commemorative event will take place at the VCC's premises at 4345-14th Avenue in Markham, and will be open to the public free of charge.

In the lead-up to the program, the VCC will launch its inaugural 5K Run & Walk-A-Thon on April 27 as a fundraising initiative in support of the heritage program. The run/walk will begin at 1:00 p.m., starting from the VCC and concluding at Trillium Park. Community members are encouraged to sponsor participants, or register online through [the event flyer's bar-code](#) or via the [VCC's website](#).

This year's observance will be structured into a three-part program beginning at 3:30 p.m. on May 3. The day opens with an interactive exhibition of artifacts and memorabilia, followed by a youth-led stage show at 6:30 p.m. showcasing emerging talent from Toronto's Indo-Caribbean community.

The program also features the launch of a commemorative magazine containing written contributions from younger Indo-Caribbeans reflecting on how they have adapted to life in their

respective countries of residence. Printed and digital versions of the publication will be made available.

Among the highlights of the day is an appearance by renowned Chef Dev, who will deliver a live cooking demonstration and promote his cookbook, *Mad Love*. Dignitaries from municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government, as well as representatives from consular offices, are expected to attend. While general admission to the event remains free, an ethnic food booth will operate on a cash basis.

This year's programming theme continues from last year, under the title *A Fractal Journey of Indians in the Diaspora*, which is an exploration with India at the centre and the various countries of migration radiating outward. The thematic focus is on the adaptation and contributions of the descendants of Indian immigrants across the diaspora.

Organisers have also noted the event is being coordinated by a dedicated and enthusiastic group of young planners who have invested considerable effort into its success. Community members are encouraged to show their support by attending and participating in both the Run & Walk-A-Thon and the main heritage program.

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One Love Table's latest hamper drive took place on April 12 in Scarborough, with its dedicated team of volunteers distributing culturally-appropriate

food to families throughout the day. One Love Table is a registered, not-for-profit organisation based in Toronto, and it provides for those in need via pickup,

or through volunteers making deliveries across the GTA. In photos, team members ready food hampers for pickup; above, centre, is director Ali Shaw.

Radha Krishna mandir's outreach shines with Ram Leela and Mother's Day gala

– Two cultural celebrations, one steeped in ancient epic storytelling, the other honouring mothers through music and community, are uniting under a shared purpose: to raise essential funds for the ongoing construction of the new Radha Krishna Mandir in Cambridge. Together, these events promise to uplift hearts and strengthen the spiritual foundation of a growing community.

Cambridge – The Radha Krishna Mandir & Cultural Centre is inviting community members to participate in two upcoming cultural and spiritual events, the story of *Ram Leela*, and the recognition of mothers, each blending tradition and celebration with a meaningful purpose: fund-raising for the ongoing construction of its new temple in Cambridge.

The first of these events, *Ram Leela: A Celebration of Story, Culture, and Devotion*, will take place on April 19 at 5:00 p.m. at the Humanities Theatre, University of Waterloo. Presented by Panwar Production and Radha Krishna Mandir, the event promises an immersive theatrical journey through the timeless

Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*.

More than just a play, the *Ram Leela* performance transforms the stage into a spiritual landscape, from the city of Ayodhya to the golden realm of Lanka, offering a powerful retelling of Lord Rama's exile, the strength of Sita, Hanuman's loyalty, and the final battle against Ravana. With vivid costumes, stirring dialogues, music, and dance, the performance draws audience members into an experience that connects generations.

"As the evening unfolds, let yourself be transported into an era of divine heroism and moral dilemmas," organisers shared.

They added, "This is not just a play – it is a cultural experience, an ode to the spirit of resilience and justice. Whether you come with knowledge of the epic or are witnessing it for the first time, you will leave with a renewed sense of connection to a story that has shaped millions."

Free parking will be provided in Lot H opposite the Humanities Theatre at the University of Waterloo. Attendees will enjoy an intermission snack pack, including a light snack,

water or soft drink, and tea. Seating will be assigned by ticket number to ensure a seamless experience.

All proceeds from the *Ram Leela* event will directly support the construction of the new Radha Krishna Mandir in Cambridge, a sacred space envisioned to serve future generations through worship, education, and cultural preservation.

Continuing this wave of community support, the Mandir will host a second fund-raising event, a special Mother's Day celebration on May 10 at the Triveni Mandir auditorium in Brampton. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. for an evening of music, sumptuous cuisine, and community connectivity.

The program includes a buffet dinner and a vibrant live concert. On the entertainment agenda are Sur Sagar, winner of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Punjab; Mumbai's internationally acclaimed singer Aditti Sahani; Brampton's own Gauri Dhanrajh from Triveni Mandir; and Udit Sharma and Udit Beats.

For ticket prices and further details, call Dwarka at 519-240-0870; Ramesh at 647-973-2791; or Radha at 647-533-7826.

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Editorial

Navigating uncertainty

From our vantage point as members of the Caribbean diaspora in Canada navigating the turbulent economic currents caused by recent US tariffs, we view with deep concern the parallel upheavals that are being faced in our Caribbean homelands.

As economies in our homelands grapple with US-imposed tariffs, now at ten percent, but who know what it will be tomorrow, the familiar waves of economic vulnerability threaten once again to destabilise our fragile shores.

Earlier this month, US President Donald Trump introduced sweeping tariffs affecting most global trading partners, explicitly aimed at boosting US domestic manufacturing. Employing rhetoric heavy with confrontation, Trump characterised international trade practices as having left the US “looted, pillaged, raped, and plundered”.

This stark language, while provocative domestically, ironically glosses over the historical experience of our Caribbean homelands, whose economies were genuinely shaped by centuries of European imperialism that plundered our wealth, destabilised societies, and entrenched economic dependence that continues to this day.

Caribbean leaders have since responded cautiously yet proactively. Both Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago have emphasised diplomatic engagement. In Barbados, its leaders are exploring global supply chains more aggressively, are examining the Common External Tariff to enhance regional trade, and are actively seeking partnerships with Africa and Latin America.

These approaches align closely with the broader vision articulated by Barbados PM Mia Mottley and Chair of Caricom. She warns us that the Caribbean, still bearing colonial legacies of economic fragility, faces unprecedented risks from these tariffs.

Emphasising regional solidarity, she insists Caribbean nations must urgently unite, engage diplomatically at the highest levels with the US, and accelerate efforts to diversify economically by increasing regional agricultural production and local manufacturing capacities.

Critics of a unified regional response might argue that individual bilateral negotiations with the US could yield better outcomes for specific countries. Yet, historical evidence clearly demonstrates otherwise.

As Mottley points out, Caribbean economic history underscores that fragmented negotiations invariably weaken collective bargaining power. The Caribbean Basin Initiative in the 1980s under former US President Ronald Reagan, for example, achieved significant success precisely because it represented a cohesive, regional stance. Together we stand, in this case, is pragmatically essential.

Others might contend that genuine economic diversification and increased regional self-reliance are idealistic and impractical given the structural limitations of our Caribbean economies.

However, recent initiatives within Caricom already demonstrate tangible successes. Investments in agricultural projects, and promising regional ventures into manufacturing underscore a capacity to achieve economic resilience despite long-standing vulnerabilities.

As members of the diaspora acutely aware of our homelands’ economic fragility, we call on our Caribbean leaders to prioritise regional unity and solidarity as foundational principles moving forward.

Diplomatic engagement with the US must be pursued collectively, emphasising the negligible threat Caribbean economies realistically pose to US interests. Simultaneously, Caribbean governments must intensify investment in intra-regional trade and local industries while diversifying economic partnerships globally, especially with Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

Navigating these turbulent economic waters will not be easy, but Caribbean history is replete with examples of our resilience and reinvention. We have done it before, and can again weather this storm and emerge stronger.

As the Caribbean diaspora, we remain connected, supportive, and ready to advocate, mindful that even as we navigate similar uncertainty in Canada, that the strength and stability of our homelands still matter deeply to us all.

Our radical mobility and available network of relations

Last week I crossed the border into Detroit. Given the rapidly changing politics of the US/Canada border, I was scared. With videos of plain clothes ICE officers forcing migrants and international students into unmarked vans then spiriting them away to private for-profit detention centres, it is clear that the border is not simply a naturalised divide between two countries.

It is meant to exclude. Some spaces are “purely” for citizens; others are deliberately kept outside. Borders are an exercise in power, separating the developing world from the first; the south from the north; a dark, swarthy perceived threat from a land of the pure.

Many Guyanese and Trinidadians entered Canada as refugees in the 1970s and 1980s. Most of us also have relatives who might have ‘backtracked’, or illegally entered the US. We are a dispersed and transnational community, with family across the borders. We intimately understand the importance of having multiple modes of mobility and flight, for you never know when you might need to call on the strength of family and ancestors.

Some of our ancestors attempted to escape the plantation by seeking a route back to India, with their only remaining trace being bones, found in the jungle.

All this was on my mind. Detroit is located across from Windsor, Ontario; the two cities are separated by a river. I thought to myself, if I am in hostile territory, at least I could swim for it. The Americans I met were also newly weary of the border, asking whether it was safe for them to visit Canada. There are so many communities like Detroit/Windsor where lives are cross-border; yet everyone was feeling a bit trepidatious. The border can feel like a potentially dangerous line of separation.

Detroit is a fascinating city with a rich Black history. Its population is roughly 75 percent Black, as reflected in the Charles Wright Museum of African American History, and its rotunda with flags from around the world, including Guyana.

A few years ago, I took an Underground Railroad Tour (Niagara Bound Tours), that revisited the history of Black Americans fleeing slavery in the US for the land of freedom, then Canada. The tour included a visit to the church established by Harriet Tubman in St Catharines; so I wanted to visit the Underground Railroad on the American side.

On the city’s tourism website was listed the “Underground

Railroad Living Museum” at the First Congregational Church. I thought it would be a typical museum exhibit, but it was anything but. The Church dates back to 1848, with interior Byzantine arches, and murals from the Old Testament that once served a predominantly European congregation.

It is not an original site of the Underground Railroad, but its now all Black congregation have ensured that the history is not forgotten. To that end, they have built a labyrinth passage in the basement of the church, recreating the route from the ‘Door of No Return’ (the doorway of the slave dungeon that one passed through before being forced onto the slave ship) to a Louisiana plantation, then crossing the Ohio River, into a safe house in Indiana, to “Midnight” (the code name for Detroit), before moving into freedom (Canada).

All this is imagined with artificial trees, some hanging branches, a few wooden signs, a wooden shack, and small lights representing the stars. It is not a well-funded exhibit, but it is a living memory.

A church member, who asked us to call him Moses, led us along the route to freedom. Moses was also the code name of Harriet Tubman.

Moses pointed out deep geographical knowledge required to gain freedom. For example, what do you do when on a cloudy night you cannot see the north star? Moss grows on the north side of trees, so you must pay attention to what the land teaches you.

As Moses metaphorically put us in a rowboat to Canada we repeated a call and response: “Where are we headed? Freedom!” Then he led us up the stairs into the church hall. The pastor waited for us. This was not a tour to be passively consumed. The pastor quizzed us on what we had learned, and then he shared the lesson he wanted us to take away.

He said: “When abolitionists witnessed the terror of captivity, and knew they had to act. They took great risks to provide a safe house and help guide those enslaved to freedom. So what does this history teach us in the present? It teaches us that when we see ICE knocking on the doors of our neighbours, we have a moral duty to aid and assist. Do like the abolitionists. Aid and Assist.”

The pastor taught me the lesson of the border is not only violence. Black (and Caribbean) geographies undo the border. They remind us of our relations of radical mobility that have helped us build a new network of relations.



Nalini Mohabir

Sepia smiles reveal a slow scattering of family abroad

I discovered the photo album one evening while following a dust ball that had escaped from the clutches of the wire spine on an old notebook. As I pulled the album down, a faint, musky scent drifted upward in a mingling of nostalgia with decay, building a sensory bridge across decades of memory.

The album was the heavy, card-board solid type, bound by faux-leather covers that had cracked into contours, like on an aging map. Opening its cover felt like an intrusion into an abandoned house, its windows discoloured with the passage of time, its rooms containing furniture that had been covered with sheets now weighted down with dust and cobwebs.

Each yellowing page was like a room in the house holding the memory of its inhabitants in the photographs, which were now tinged with a sepia melancholy, with networks of capillaries of chemical residue, all fingerprinted with barely visible lines of memory.

There was innocence in the black and white photographs in the early pages. Here figures squinted into bright sunlight, their shadows slender and lengthening beyond bare feet buried in the sand on a beach. The sea behind them shimmered, its small waves dotted with gems of light, caught mid-motion and perpetually breaking, yet forever held back by the camera’s capture.

Right away I recognised a younger version of my grandmother, her *orhini* playful, defiant with youthfulness, fluttering in a sea breeze long stilled by the film’s millisecond exposure to the light. Ma’s gaze was innocent, patient, almost radiant with the joy of family togetherness; in that frozen moment yet to be touched by the dispersal that was ahead.

Caught in the blur in the background were other family members, some bent with preparatory cooking tasks, other gazing outwards to the horizon. It was as if fate was playing a trick in that photograph; or perhaps, with prescience, foreseeing family members who would leave the centre of our family for journeys beyond the blurred-out horizon.

A few pages down and the patriarch emerged like a monolith, filling out the entirety of the page with its enlargement, as if there was no other way to project his dominance, his immutable stare fiercely fixed at the centre of the lens with determination to control the very future where I was now anchored.

His towering presence, immaculately dressed with English mimicry, with cane and bowler, projected colonial authority and unquestioned tradition. Yet alongside this proud pose was a subtle absence in later photographs, where he was not to be

found in family portraits, where Ma’s *orhini* was stilled and starch-stiffened in the stillness following the camera’s flash.

Now my reading of the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, returned to whisper gently, reminding me that each photograph, each smile, in this photo album was already fading at the moment of capture, preserving not life, but the instant before inevitable loss.

Here was a moment of double-edged reality: photographs affirm existence, even as they simultaneously underscore absence. The album in my hands contained more than memories; here were silent narratives framed as departures to come; of dreams to be quietly pursued abroad; of promises made to construct new lives in distant lands.

Feel the protesting weight of turning more than a few pages together as the aged sinews of the album strained to arrive at the middle, and the narratives of the photographs were then transformed from beachside idylls and patriarchal formality into occasions punctuated by ritual and communal identity.

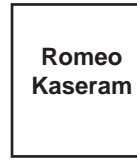
Now the prints swam with colour and laughter with birthdays, and radiant weddings where Ma’s smile was too-toothy with drink and celebration.

But too soon, mere pages down, the photographs began showing cracks in the family gatherings, the narrative grown bumpy with gaps and distances. Here familiar faces peered out from Christmas settings in snowy landscapes, the album documenting the forging of our distant diaspora, its photographic moments reproducing northern novelties of grandchildren sitting on Santa’s laps, or snowfalls in narrow backyards walled-in with pine-board fences.

I was reflected here too, younger; perhaps uncertain with the uncertainty some of us have when standing in front of a camera, unable to be untrue to oneself with the make-happy laugh, the smile forced, as if the future must be forever misguided that the past was always a pleasant existence.

I closed the album softly, feeling the weight of what Derrida calls *hauntology*: these photographs haunted not merely by people, but by the very absences they implied, the spectral presences of lives that had been lived, our family connections strained, and then forever broken by journeys across oceans.

I held more than an album. Therein were chapters of a family and its dispersal; what began in unity ended with fragmentation; photographs that once connected, celebrated, then divided, have now left me to mourn the loss of something unrecoverable.



Romeo Kaseram

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

US protectionism demands collective response from Caribbean region

Dear Editor,

The echoes of history are growing louder, and the Caribbean must pay attention.

Ninety-five years ago, the US passed the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, raising duties on thousands of imported goods. Intended to protect US jobs during a time of economic distress, it instead triggered global retaliation, collapsing trade flows and deepening the Great Depression.

Now let us fast-forward to April 2, 2025. US President Donald Trump announced sweeping new tariffs of ten percent on all imports, with as high as 145 percent on China.

Framed as "economic independence", this move threatens to ignite a new global trade war. For large economies, this is a political chess game. But for the Caribbean, it is an existential threat.

As Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley, chair of Caricom, rightly warned, Caribbean economies, which are still recovering from the pandemic and battling a cost-of-living crisis, are dangerously import-dependent. Most goods on our shelves here in the Caribbean come from, or pass through, the US. These new tariffs are not just an American issue, they will hit us in our purses and our pantries.

Higher US tariffs on imports from China and others mean increased prices on consumer goods, electronics, vehicles, and



President Trump announces global tariffs on April 2 food-costs that will be passed down to Caribbean households. Add possible retaliatory measures from other trade powers, and we face serious supply chain disruptions and inflationary pressures in every corner of the region.

We must not dismiss this as a problem "over there". Smoot-Hawley taught us that trade wars do not stay confined. The ripple effects devastate small, open economies first – and hardest. In 1930, global trade fell by nearly 65 percent. Today, we risk similar contraction if retaliatory tariffs escalate and markets freeze.

Mottley is right: we must act. First, we must renew dialogue with US policymakers, emphasising that the Caribbean is not the problem; that we are their neighbours, partners, and often, family.

Second, Caricom must fast-track its own food and product security agenda, accelerating initiatives like the 25 by 2025, which is the effort to reduce the region's food bill 25 percent by 2025.

Third, we must expand trade ties beyond traditional partners, and deepen South-South cooperation, especially with Africa and Latin America.

This moment demands regional unity, not political point-scoring. It is a test of our resilience, but also a reminder: if we fail to act collectively, we will pay the price individually.

Let Smoot-Hawley serve not as a history lesson but a warning. Protectionism does not protect the small; it punishes them. The Caribbean cannot afford to wait.

Therese Baptiste, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

Guyana cultivating future for agricultural leadership and food sovereignty

Dear Editor,

Guyana is rapidly emerging as a formidable force in global agriculture, with the government taking deliberate, strategic steps to transform the country into a regional breadbasket and beyond.

Traditionally reliant on rice and sugar, Guyana is diversifying and modernising its agricultural sector, aligning itself with global food security priorities at a time when the world is seeking sustainable, reliable food sources.

With over 200,000 hectares of arable land and abundant freshwater resources, Guyana is uniquely positioned to scale up food production.

Recognising this potential, the government has embarked on a bold agricultural transformation agenda.

Under President Dr Irfaan Ali's leadership, Guyana has championed the Caricom 25 by 2025 initiative, a goal to reduce

the region's food import bill by 25 percent by the year 2025. The country has already launched mega-farms and agro-processing facilities to scale up production of crops like corn, soybeans, and spices, diversifying its agricultural output.

Importantly, the government is not just setting goals, it is delivering results.

In 2023, Guyana produced over 50,000 tonnes of corn and soybeans, reducing dependence on imports and providing a solid foundation for agri-industrial development.

Investments in climate-smart agriculture and drainage and irrigation infrastructure have also expanded under projects supported by international partners like the IDB and World Bank, making farming more resilient



Irfaan Ali



to climate shocks.

Moreover, the construction of farm-to-market roads, the deployment of drone technology, and the development of agri-business hubs signal the government's commitment to creating an enabling environment for both local and foreign investors.

This agricultural boom represents more than just increased output; it is a game-changer for Guyana's economy. It means job creation in rural areas, increased exports, reduced food insecurity, and stronger economic diversification in a country long dependent on oil and gold.

As Guyana plants the seeds of agricultural leadership today, it cultivates a future where sustainable growth, regional influence, and food sovereignty are within reach, proving that this developing nation is not just talking the talk, but truly walking the walk.

Aubrey Cort, Guyana, via email.

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Guyana symposium sparks national conversation on heart disease

— Three Canadian Guyanese doctors united by family, profession, and a common mission joined health leaders and specialists in Georgetown to address Guyana's urgent public health challenges with noncommunicable diseases. Drawing over 300 in-person and online participants, the full-day symposium offered insights into the future of prevention, innovation, and community-centred care in a rapidly changing Guyana.

Georgetown – In a landmark moment that brought expertise home, three Canadian Guyanese physicians Dr Vivian Rambihar, Dr Sherryn Rambihar, and Dr Nadira Rambihar, participated in a *Cardiology and Endocrinology Symposium on Preventing Heart Disease*, which was held at the New Pegasus Convention Center in Georgetown.

The event was hosted by ChiroSyn Canada Inc, in collaboration with the Medical Council and Pharmacy Council of Guyana, and brought together local health leaders, international experts, and public stakeholders in a unified effort to rethink strategies for cardiovascular and metabolic health in Guyana.

Guyana's Minister of Health Dr Frank Anthony opened the conference, outlining Guyana's national health vision amid new infrastructure developments and workforce expansion.

In his address, he described health challenges in Guyana and the government's plans to address them, including increasing health promotion to create a healthy population, opening of new hospitals across the country, and training of staff and health professionals to deliver the highest quality care.

He also discussed the future in a changing Guyana, using technology, AI, community and government strategies for change.

Delivering a compelling keynote address, Dr Vivian Rambihar, cardiologist and long-time advocate for preventative care, underlined the escalating crisis of non-communicable diseases both globally and in Guyana.

Quoting World Health Organisation data, Rambihar noted that 80 percent of heart disease was preventable, adding that combating it required an all-in-society approach encompassing individuals, communities, and the government.

He echoed the earlier warning by former Guyanese Minister of Health Dr Leslie Ramsammy that heart disease and diabetes are leading causes of death in Guyana, a concern reinforced by local cardiologist Dr Mahendra Carpen's observations that younger patients were now suffering heart attacks, some as



Drs Nadira, Vivian, and Sherryn at the conference young as in their twenties.

Rambihar urged for an early, aggressive approach to prevention rather than waiting for events to occur, aligning with the March 2025 *Lancet Commission Report on Rethinking Heart Disease*.

His presentation explored lifestyle-based interventions, among them healthy eating, exercise, blood pressure and cholesterol management, smoking cessation, even as he emphasised starting these in childhood, especially where family history indicates early risk.

And he introduced newer paradigms in cardiology, focusing on genetic and emerging biomarkers like Lipoprotein(a) [Lp(a)], which does not respond to current medications but signals future treatment directions.

He also discussed cholesterol risk metrics such as non-HDL cholesterol and apoB, and examined the emerging role of colchicine in heart disease prevention. On the diagnostic front, he spotlighted cardiac CT scans and the potential of AI-assisted imaging in pre-empting cardiac events.

In a powerful closing note, Rambihar advocated for using chaos and complexity science to address systemic health challenges, drawing from decades of his own research. He emphasised that community-based and culturally responsive strategies, particularly those that recognise ethnic and demographic diversity, are key to building a future of precision medicine and

equitable care.

Meanwhile, in her address, cardiologist Dr Sherryn Rambihar delivered a focused session on women's cardiovascular health, highlighting distinct presentations in female patients and the need for tailored prevention.

She discussed specific risks such as hypertensive disorders during pregnancy and postmenopausal changes, stressing that heart disease remains the leading, and often under-appreciated, cause of death in women. Her presentation underscored the efficacy of cardiac rehabilitation for both men and women, and advocated for broader implementation and awareness in clinical settings.

In her presentation, Dr Nadira Rambihar, a physiatrist and specialist in sports medicine, brought attention to the foundational role of exercise, not only in prevention but also in rehabilitation across a range of diseases. Her talk highlighted how physical activity contributes significantly to long-term heart health, injury recovery, and general wellness.

The afternoon sessions shifted focus toward endocrine health and emerging pharmacological interventions. Pediatrician and endocrinologist Dr Gaitri Satram addressed the growing burden of diabetes in Guyana, while Tarlika Persaud, Managing Director of ChiroSyn, presented on semaglutide tablets, a newer class of medications used for Type 2 diabetes and obesity.

Dr Karishma Jeeboo, Chair of the Pharmacy Council of Guyana and Director of the School of Pharmacy at the University of Guyana, emphasised the importance of multidisciplinary, collaborative approaches to patient care.

The symposium also marked several significant milestones. Notably, it was ChiroSyn's 15th anniversary, Dr Rambihar's 50th year since graduating medical school, and the first time three family members, all of them physicians, presented together at a medical symposium.

Organisers noted the enthusiastic engagement from attendees, including over 100 questions submitted during discussions.

As ChiroSyn declared, the event was a resounding success, reinforcing its commitment to continuing professional education and better health outcomes in Guyana and the Caribbean.

The conference concluded with a shared sense that the emergent collective expertise, commitment, and community dialogue had not only raised awareness, but at the same time laid the groundwork for transformative, locally grounded solutions in the fight against noncommunicable diseases in Guyana.

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Guyana's political journey still being defined by ethnic division

Guyana's tumultuous political journey continues to be marked by ethnic division and a fierce struggle for power between its major political parties, the People's Progressive Party/Civic and A Partnership for National Unity (APNU). This, in spite of apparent gains made in recent years to bridge the racial divide.

At the heart of Guyana's political struggle is the entrenched ethnic division between the two largest segments of the population: Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese. These divisions have largely shaped the support bases of the two main political parties – the PPP, traditionally supported by Indo-Guyanese, and the People's National Congress (PNC), historically backed by Afro-Guyanese.



Dwarka Lakhan

Although shifts in the traditional support base have recently emerged, with the PPP/Civic apparently being the biggest beneficiary of recognisable crossovers from APNU, the ingrained racial biases in the population persist, manifesting themselves particularly around general elections.

At the same time, the PPP/Civic has also apparently gained greater political support among grassroots APNU supporters across the country, but the reliability of such support could come into question as the election draws near.

In an open display of racism, individuals who switched support to the PPP/Civic were openly abused and criticised for not supporting a party aligned with their own racial orientation.

The reality is these behaviours are not new, and it is doubtful whether cosmetic shifts in the support base will make a big difference in the electoral results. At the end of the day, it all comes down to the quest for power, and whether an Indian or Black led party will attain power.

Incidentally, following Independence in 1966, Forbes Burnham and the PNC (now APNU) ruled for nearly three decades, although East Indians comprised the majority of the population.

During this time, the PNC consolidated control through rigged elections and a strong grip on the military and State apparatus, creating significant political disenfranchisement among the Indo-Guyanese population.

This era saw the rise of international interest in Guyana, especially during the Cold War, when the US viewed the PPP as a potential ally of the USSR. There is historical evidence that the US' CIA played a role in undermining Dr Cheddi Jagan's influence during the 1960s, further complicating Guyana's internal power dynamics.

The 1992 elections marked a turning point as they were deemed the first free and fair elections in decades. The PPP, under Jagan, returned to power, initiating a period of relative political stability and strong growth.

However, despite democratic processes being restored, the ethnic divide in political affiliation persisted, often translating into electoral volatility and social tension.

The early 2000s were marked by sporadic political violence, allegations of corruption, and state-sponsored extrajudicial killings, especially during the presidency of Bharrat Jagdeo (PPP). The PNC-led opposition frequently accused the government of marginalising Afro-Guyanese communities and mismanaging State resources.

In 2015, a significant shift occurred when an APNU+AFC coalition, led by David Granger, narrowly defeated the PPP in general elections. This was hailed as a step toward breaking the ethnic stronghold on Guyanese politics, though challenges persisted in practice. This period of coalition rule saw a return of corruption and racial behaviour.

However, the 2020 elections plunged the

country into a constitutional and political crisis. After initial claims of victory by the APNU+AFC, the opposition PPP accused the incumbent government of electoral fraud.

A prolonged recount process, international mediation, and intense public scrutiny followed, culminating in the declaration of the PPP's Dr Irfaan Ali as the legitimately elected president.

Guyana's recent discovery of vast offshore oil reserves has intensified the political stakes. With ExxonMobil and other international corporations investing heavily, the country stands on the brink of becoming one of the wealthiest per capita nations in the Western Hemisphere.

However, this newfound resource wealth has exacerbated fears of corruption, inequality, and further political infighting.

Both major parties recognise the transformative potential of oil revenues, but the competition for control over the State and its resources has grown fiercer.

Calls for transparency, stronger institutions, and constitutional reform are rising, with civil society and international partners urging inclusive governance and responsible resource management.

The underlying reality is that the quest for power is the paramount objective of the two major political parties. Regardless of how they have presented themselves to the population – as multiracial, all-encompassing, inclusive, or otherwise – their absolute goal has always been to secure power. The people and the future of the country have always been secondary to the ambitions of the leaders of its major political parties.

Arguably, the races co-exist peacefully under normal conditions, but at elections the divisions prevail.

Although the emergence of minority parties have had the potential to change the order of power by attracting voters who are disenchanted with either party, they have never been able to garner sufficient support to break the stranglehold of the two major parties.

While the AFC has been the only fringe party, with the exception of the now defunct UF, which appeared to have had the potential to change the political order based on its promise of mass inclusiveness, it turned out to be no more than a sidekick of APNU, backed by former power-hungry PPP/Civic outcasts.

This development caused it to lose favour, once voters recognised that it was merely a prop for the APNU government.

Other fringe parties, mostly led by former major-party soup drinkers and individuals who have their own axes to grind, have never had a significant impact, making them hopeless "also-ran" contenders.

What many Guyanese had hoped for was that a powerful and credible "third force" would emerge and weaken the support for both the PPP/Civic and APNU. This force would have had the power to sway decisions, and the independence to shift support if necessary, with no allegiance to either of the two major parties.

But so far, it would appear that this is simply a dream.

Therefore, the *status quo* of the struggle for power between APNU and the PPP/Civic would remain intact in the near future. Racial politics, in the meantime, will remain at the core of the political process.

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



PPP/Civic supporters at a political meeting in Guyana



Supporters of the Opposition APNU political party

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ICCA holds inaugural leadership summit

Toronto – With a bold call to action for the next generation, the Indo Caribbean Canadian Association (ICCA) will host its inaugural **Indo-Caribbean Leadership Summit** on May 3, which is designed to empower emerging and current leaders between ages 18 and 35 from Canada's Indo-Caribbean community.

Described by the ICCA as a “first of a kind” one-day conference, the event promises a deep dive into immersive, skill-building experiences. It will take place at the University of Toronto Scarborough.

“It is important we foster an environment for growth and learning so our next generation will have a greater impact here in Canada,” the ICCA stated.

The event will feature interactive workshops led by seasoned professionals and change-makers. These sessions are structured to strengthen leadership capabilities, enable peer and mentor linkages, and drive future contributions to Canadian civic and professional life.

Among the featured speakers is Ashni Ramsammy, Manager of Business Development at the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation, who is currently leading the foundation's Cricket to Conquer Cancer initiative. A dedicated Rotarian and President of the Rotary Club of Brampton Flower City Centennial, Ramsammy is known for her ongoing efforts in the philanthropic and corporate sectors.

“A true leader, change-maker, and advocate, she continues to leave a lasting impression in both the philanthropic and corporate worlds while continuing to build a legacy of impact,” the ICCA said.

The summit will also feature Dr Natasha Bridgmohan, President of The BridgGroup of Companies, as another eminent speaker.

Bridgmohan's integrated firm spans services across mortgage, real estate, investment, aid, legal, and entertainment. She also founded the Canadian Changing Lives Foundation, focused

on removing structural barriers and enabling transformation.

Melissa Sumnauth, Partner at BIPOC Executive Search, will also speak. Identifying as an Indo-Guyanese-Canadian settler, Sumnauth is known for bringing what the ICCA calls “big Auntie energy” and an intersectional lens to her work in people and culture.

With over two decades of experience across private, public, and non-profit sectors, she is recognised as a coach, facilitator, consultant, and guide for organisational development.

The summit's distinguished roster includes Senator Hassan Yussuff, a former President of the Canadian Labour Congress, and the first person of colour to lead Canada's union movement.

A Guyanese immigrant, Yussuff began his career as a truck mechanic at General Motors before rising through the labour ranks. He was appointed to the Senate of Canada on June 22, 2021, by former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Shivani Persad, a Trinidadian-born model, tech marketer, and content creator, will also address the summit. Persad challenges conventional narratives of success, offering critical insight into ambition, mobility, and systemic inequality. Through her digital platform *CourseCritic*, a database of independent educational reviews, and her newsletter *LearnShiv*, she is supporting millennials navigating modern career pathways.

Closing out the panel is Balrāj, a yogin and philosophical teacher, whose private mentorship of leaders in business, law, medicine, and philanthropy focuses on emotional composure and experiential insight.

With advanced academic studies in South Asia, Indian philosophy, and a Diploma in Yoga from Annamalai University, Balrāj was conferred the title Yoga Vidyā, signaling his deep lineage of yogic learning.



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Demerara Bank bridges distances one transfer at a time

– Demerara Bank’s new partnership with Ria Money Transfer was a prominent booth for inquiring visitors at the April 5 Toronto Diaspora Job Fair, the display highlighting the bank’s faster remittance services, and its new digital banking conveniences available to Guyanese living abroad.

...

Toronto – Demerara Bank Limited was a prominent participant at the April 5 Toronto Diaspora Job Fair, where it highlighted its collaboration with Ria Money Transfer, a leading global remittance service provider.

The event, hosted at the Toronto Don Valley Hotel and Suites, brought together representatives from Guyana’s government and private sector, providing a platform to connect with the Guyanese diaspora in Canada.

The Toronto fair served as a pivotal moment for outreach, reaffirming Demerara Bank’s commitment to staying ahead in financial innovation and strengthening the lifeline between the diaspora and the homeland.

Pravini Ramotar, Chief Manager – Marketing, Customer Service & Public Relations at Demerara Bank, shared how the Ria Money Transfer partnership is streamlining remittances for overseas Guyanese.

“This partnership offers our diaspora a fast, reliable way to send money back home. It eliminates long waits and puts funds directly into bank accounts – instantly with Demerara Bank, and within hours at other local banks. It’s about making life easier for our customers, wherever they are,” she stated.

The integrated service allows funds to be deposited directly into recipients’ accounts, offering faster turnaround times and greater convenience for families.

Ramotar indicated that the system is now fully operational within Demerara Bank’s infrastructure, with features including competitive exchange rates, full transparency with no hidden fees, and enhanced peace of mind for senders.

She added this latest development is part of Demerara Bank’s ongoing efforts to strengthen digital accessibility for the diaspora, and other overseas’ clients.

In addition to the remittance upgrade, **Demerara Bank is expanding its online services.** The diaspora can now remotely initiate applications for new accounts, loans, and other financial services from wherever they are in the world.

However, while final documentation must still be completed in person at a branch in Guyana, the ability to begin the process online marks a significant convenience for clients abroad.



Demerara Bank’s Pravini Ramotar at the Job Fair



Guyana officials, diaspora at the April 5 job fair



Toronto job fair sparks interest by diaspora in opportunities, potential in Guyana

From Page 1

in the job fair’s success, at the same time she emphasised the importance for the diaspora to have available accurate information from primary sources, such as the Consulate General.

Reliable, verifiable, and accurate information “is a gap we need to address... about remigration, investments, how to make applications... These are critical areas that we have at the Consulate,” she pointed out.

She also declared that her interest in Toronto was more than establishing fruitful and lasting connectivity between the government and the thriving and responsive diaspora, noting a deeper, personal connection with friends and family resident here in the GTA. Hers was a deep respect and appreciation for all Guyanese living in Canada, she affectionately declared.

Among the visiting officials from Guyana were Foreign Secretary, Robert Persaud; Chairman of the Private Sector Commission, Komal Singh; Chief Investment Officer of Go-Investment, Dr Peter Ramsaroop; Cindy Sauters, *Chargé d’Affaires* at the Guyana High Commission in Ottawa; Holly Greaves, General Manager of the National Insurance Scheme; and the ubiquitous staff members from the Guyana Consulate General in Toronto, led by Acting Consul General Grace Joseph.

Also in attendance were many government officials who were on hand to offer advice to attendees on remigration; who assisted with NIS and passport queries; and officials from Go-Invest

who advised on investment opportunities in Guyana.

Many participants from the diaspora across a range of professions, including real estate, banking, and the trades, also had the opportunity to network with industry leaders and other prominent figures from key Guyanese sectors.

Also present was Komal Singh, Chairman of the PSC in Guyana, who spoke during the official opening of the event, which was ably led by the energetic Rasul.

In his presentation, Singh highlighted the wealth of opportunities available across various sectors in Guyana, stating, “What is taking place right now can actually expand beyond the boundaries of Guyana and help everyone.”

He added, “Together we are here as the private sector, along with the government, to solicit your interest in coming back home, not just to be workers in companies and organisations. There are huge amounts of investment opportunities in almost every sector,” Singh revealed.

He further encouraged the diaspora to explore partnerships, citing small businesses in Guyana needing technical expertise, experience, and financial support – all areas where the diaspora could significantly contribute.

In his presentation, Foreign Secretary Robert Persaud held the rapt attention of the entire audience when he illustrated Guyana’s changing regional and global eminence with an evocative gesture that saw him holding up a Guyanese passport.

“There was a time when the Guyanese passport was something you hid. Now it is being called a golden passport,” he said to the room’s positive affirmation, illustrating Guyana’s rapid development while urging the diaspora to get involved.

As he declared, “Our development is moving rapidly. And if the diaspora doesn’t take up the opportunities now, they may be left out.”

He also acknowledged our diaspora’s historical support for democracy, and underscored the forging of ongoing connectivity as essential to continued national development.

During the all-day event, hundreds of visiting participants engaged in one-on-one discussions, and received valuable guidance from officials representing key services that included the National Insurance Scheme, the passport office, and investment authorities such as Go-Invest.

Additionally, attendees heard about notable diaspora-driven ventures now underway, such as the Timehri Sands Golf & Country Club, a (US) \$3 million project initiated by a Canadian-based Guyanese family, evidence of tangible outcomes of direct and ongoing diasporic interventions and investment in the homeland.

The job fair here in Toronto followed successful events that were held in Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and New York, reflecting a consistent and robust effort by Guyana to actively engage and remain connected with its thriving global diaspora.



US President Donald Trump

Mottley issues warning over US tariffs

— Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley issued the warning earlier this month to Caribbean nations about the escalating global trade war threats, emphasising severe regional economic impacts and calling for renewed self-reliance and strategic international cooperation. She also called for unity, agricultural investment, and immediate diplomatic dialogue to mitigate widespread price hikes.

...

Bridgetown – Barbados Prime Minister and current Chair of the Caribbean Community, Mia Mottley, delivered a stark warning on April 4, alerting Caribbean nations to the looming dangers posed by a potential global tariff war. Stressing unprecedented economic vulnerability, Mottley cautioned that Caribbean communities face substantial price hikes across critical consumer sectors.

In her statement, Mottley underscored the grave implications of a tariff war triggered by proposed US levies, potentially ranging from (US) \$1 million to \$1.5 million on Chinese-made ships entering American ports.

She emphasised that such tariffs would dramatically escalate the cost of goods, severely impacting Caribbean populations whose economies remain heavily reliant on imports.

“Our Caribbean economies are largely reliant on imports,” Mottley noted, highlighting the pervasive presence of imported goods, from food and electronics to clothing and automotive parts. She described the proposed tariffs as direct threats to everyday affordability, asserting, “That means higher prices for all of us at the corner shop, higher prices at the supermarket, higher prices at the electronics store, higher prices at the restaurant, higher prices at the car dealership and beyond”.

Mottley also acknowledged the historical roots of Caribbean economic vulnerability, tracing dependence back to colonialism.

“That... is a legacy of our colonial dependence,” she declared, underscoring ongoing efforts by Caribbean governments to diversify regional economies, particularly through agriculture. While acknowledging initial successes, she candidly admitted that significant work remains to achieve meaningful self-sufficiency.

She directly addressed the misconception among some Caribbean citizens that global crises remain distant, affecting only major economies.

“A lot of Caribbean people will think these things that you are seeing on television news or reading about are far away. Also, ‘They don’t impact on me’,” Mottley stated. She emphasised that tariff-induced price increases would affect every individual, whether a farmer in Saint Lucy, Barbados; a schoolteacher in Portmore, Jamaica; or a mechanic in San Ignacio, Belize.

In an appeal for regional unity, Mottley stressed the Caribbean’s inherent economic fragility, asserting that even eliminating tariffs within Caricom would not insulate member states from global market disruptions.

She highlighted additional risks, including potential spillover effects on tourism, a critical economic pillar, urging the tourism sector and

regional private stakeholders to collaboratively formulate immediate strategies to maintain market share amidst global uncertainty.

“We suggest that the region takes steps to sustain the tourism industry,” she said, cautioning that deteriorating conditions in key tourism source markets could negatively impact travel affordability and frequency.

Addressing the US directly, Mottley called for diplomatic dialogue at the highest levels, emphasising the minimal economic threat Caribbean nations pose to US interests. She referenced historical cooperative initiatives such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative, established under President Ronald Reagan, to illustrate mutual benefits achieved through partnership and goodwill.

“To the US, I say this simply. We are not your enemy. We are your friends,” she affirmed, highlighting deep familial and cultural connections between Caribbean nations and the US.

Directly addressing US President Donald Trump, she appealed for understanding, urging American leadership to recognise the negligible impact Caribbean economies have on US trade balance sheets. Mottley emphasised the importance of maintaining decades-long friendship and mutual economic stability.

She also laid out a clear, four-point strategy for Caribbean nations in response to the looming crisis. First, she advocated immediate, high-level diplomatic engagement with the US to address shared concerns transparently.

Second, she underscored the urgency of regional unity, invoking the adage, “United we stand; and divided, we fall.”

And third, she called for aggressive investment in regional agriculture and light manufacturing, suggesting that existing initiatives, such as Guyana’s “25 by 2025” program aimed at increasing agricultural production, should be significantly expanded.

Fourth, she proposed diversifying trade partnerships beyond traditional markets, strengthening ties with Africa, Latin America, Europe, Canada, and the UK.

Despite the gravity of her warnings, Mottley conveyed cautious optimism, asserting that crises can present unique opportunities. She urged Caribbean citizens, businesses, and hoteliers to prioritise buying local and regional products, reinforcing self-reliance and economic resilience.

“Buy local and buy regional. The products are better, fresher, and more competitive in many instances,” she asserted, suggesting collective action would bolster regional economies.

In her closing remarks, Mottley expressed faith in the resilience of the Caribbean spirit, encouraging citizens to support and uplift one another.

She concluded with a hopeful yet sober call for collective strength and innovation, drawing inspiration from historical Caribbean resilience: “Our forefathers faced tribulations far worse than we will ever do, and yes, they came through it. We can make it. We shall make it.”



Ask Jay...

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THE EVOLUTION OF UNIQUE HOME STYLES IN THE GTA: A MODERN APPROACH

Toronto is a megacity with an exploding population and limited residential land space. Traditional housing types have metamorphosed into buildings that cater to the average family while conserving land. Knowing these house types is essential when buying real estate because of their unique challenges and advantages.

Zero-lot-line properties are homes constructed right on the edge of the property line. The building functions like a large fence for the adjacent property, making it ideal for cities with limited land. The lots are small and require minimal upkeep. Zero-lot-line homes are more affordable than conventional ones. This unique concept provides an impressive privacy advantage due to the interlocking land design, where the walls of the property function like a massive privacy fence.

Given that these homes are closely situated, noise can become a nuisance. Since the property sits on the lot line, the neighbour has the right to access your land for any necessary repairs to their property. I remember an incident where the furnace of one home vents to the side of the property. The neighbours placed their garbage bins next to the vent, obstructing the air intake for the furnace and causing damage. These issues can pose a problem because the vent encroaches on the neighbouring property. Expanding these homes is challenging due to the unique land configuration. While these homes are more affordable, they lack universal appeal and may take longer to sell.

At first glance, linked houses may appear similar to detached homes; however, they share a common wall in the foundation or basement. Generally, linked homes are more affordable than detached homes, but pricier than semi-detached ones. Builders appreciate this type of home because it removes the need for separate foundations and sewer and water connections, conserving land space and lowering construction costs. You pay less property taxes since these homes are less expensive than those with separate foundations.

An unsuspecting buyer may think they are purchasing a detached home when it is linked underground. When selling a linked home, market it as a ‘Linked Detached Home’ to avoid confusion and reduce the risk of potential lawsuits. Link-detached homes were popular in the 1970s and 1980s. However, nowadays, builders tend to construct detached homes instead of linked ones, as detached homes generally sell for a higher price and outweigh the savings that linked detached homes provide.

A Parcel of Tied Land (POTL) occurs when freehold properties are connected and share standard amenities such as roads, landscaping, or playgrounds. This concept blends freehold and condo principles. To optimise land use, the builder constructs narrow streets that do not meet the criteria for public road designation, and the residents must maintain it since they share the road. A condominium corporation manages the shared amenities and must have its bylaws.

The unique nature of POTLs encourages a sense of belonging for the community, as residents share the amenities. The residents make decisions about maintaining and upgrading the shared amenities, which can sometimes cause conflict. POTLs are more challenging to sell than freehold properties. If you buy a POTL property, make your agreement conditional upon reviewing the status certificate, where you can review the bylaws and check if there are adequate reserve funds. POTL’s properties are becoming popular in GTA, where land is scarce.

Most POTLs are freehold townhomes with limited parking spaces. You can park one car in the garage and another in the driveway, which may require you to shuffle vehicles to accommodate each other. Another downside is that your driveway and your neighbour’s driveway are joined together, which can lead to complications. Due to the limited parking, you might need to place your garbage, recycling, and compost bins in front of your home, which isn’t ideal.

When considering the purchase of POTLs, consider your family’s needs. If you can manage the parking and garbage challenges, POTLs are a great option with plenty of living space to enjoy.

Bungalofs blend the charm of a bungalow with an upper loft space. Bungalofs are single-storey homes with a living room, kitchen, bedroom, and washroom all on one level. The loft space can be an additional bedroom, a home office, or a secondary living area. Bungalofs feature stunning designs with tall vaulted ceilings and large windows allowing ample natural light.

Bungalofs entered the marketplace within the past 30 years and are not available in older neighbourhoods. This concept is popular in adult lifestyle communities.

Stacked townhomes are two or three-story homes built above each other. Picture a row of townhomes with shared walls and another row stacked above them. This design doubles the number of homes in the same space, making them more affordable and cost-effective to build.

Since they are stacked, upper-level units require climbing stairs. Lower units may have a patio and yard space, while upper units usually feature a large deck above the garage. Each home has a furnace, AC, water heater, and separate utility meters.

Stacked townhomes offer an affordable, low-maintenance lifestyle. A property manager looks after exterior upkeep and landscaping. They are popular in cities near public transit, shopping, and amenities.

However, there are drawbacks. Limited parking, multiple staircases, and tiny balconies can be inconvenient. Shared walls also mean potential noise issues. Despite these downsides, stacked townhomes provide a practical and private living option in urban areas.

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Community meets at VM conference to confront DUI consequences

From Page 1

separation from his spouse, and an ongoing lawsuit by Renee and her family against him, with his insurance coverage limited to only \$1 million.

Highlighting the grave implications of such decisions, the *Law & You Conference* will present a high-impact, reality-based panel at Vishnu Mandir on April 19.

Its expert speakers will include Justice Amit Ghosh of the Ontario Court of Justice, Criminal Defence Lawyer Michelle Johal, Assistant Crown Attorney Rashmi Kumar, and Personal Injury Lawyer Douglas Strelshik.

Each speaker will unpack Roger's fictitious but deeply plausible case from their unique, professional lens.

Last week Kissoon spoke with *Indo-Caribbean World* about the conference's enduring and elucidating purpose. As he noted, *The Law & You Conferences* aim to build on real-life incidents, and the consequential fallout from poor decision-making by reproducing the likely legal repercussions that could result.

In its latest effort, this time round the emphasis is on the importance of understanding the judicial consequences of impaired driving.

"In our scenario, the Crown will have to go by indictment, and aim for a severe jail penalty," Kissoon explained. He added that the



Dr Budhendranauth Doobay

Crown would most likely push for a conviction with significant time behind bars for Roger due to the death and serious bodily harm caused.

Kissoon also sought to illustrate the argument that the defence might raise.

"Meanwhile, the defence lawyer will try to

inform the judge notwithstanding the facts, that Roger made a mistake, and she will also tell the Judge Roger is likely to be deported if convicted. At the end of the day, the Judge will make up his mind on a sentence. In my view, a sentence of between three to five years will be appropriate, along with the loss of driving privileges, such as the suspension of his driver's licence," Kissoon stated.

Justice Ghosh will discuss the sentencing considerations, particularly noting the prevalence of such offences in York Region. Assistant Crown Attorney Rashmi Kumar will explore the evidentiary and sentencing priorities from the perspective of the prosecution, while Defence Lawyer Michelle Johal is expected to outline strategic legal responses, including arguments for mitigating circumstances and immigration impacts.

Strelshik, drawing on his experience as both a former insurance defence lawyer and current personal injury practitioner, will detail the stark financial repercussions for drivers like Roger.

As Kissoon pointed out, "Insurance of \$1 million will not be enough to cover all of the damages suffered. After the insurance is paid out, the driver will be liable for the difference. All because he was stubborn, and made the wrong decision."

He also stressed that many drivers, includ-

ing in our community, do not realise that the consequences of impaired driving extend far beyond criminal court.

Kissoon also extended an invitation to our community members to attend the conference, stating that the issues being targeted by *The Law & You* do not only happen to other people.

Speaking to what he described as a veneer of denial within our community that he has noticed during the decades of being in the profession, Kissoon noted: "People think this doesn't happen to us. But I can tell you from my practice: Monday morning bail hearings are filled with members from our community who were charged over the weekend, often second offenders or those who have breached court orders."

He expressed profound gratitude to Vishnu Mandir and its spiritual leader, Dr Budhendranauth Doobay, for hosting the event, calling the temple's support vital to creating a space where difficult conversations and learning can occur.

In this case, it is about saving lives, livelihoods, and families, he declared, adding that if the 'fictitious' scenario of Roger's poor decision-making, and consequential unravelling can make just one person think twice before getting behind the wheel after drinking, then *The Law & You Conference* would have made a difference. (Romeo Kaseram, LJI Reporter)

Consequences dire, escalating, and punitive for drinking and driving

— The following article on alcohol-impaired driving was published in the December 18 edition of *Indo-Caribbean World*, part of our effort to make our community aware about the consequences, notably immigration penalties, for drinking and driving. We are republishing it again in the light of *The Law & You Conference*, part of which will focus on the consequences of impaired driving, to take place at Vishnu Mandir on April 19. See display on next page.

...

By Dhaman Kissoon & Ruth Odit

Toronto – The holidays are upon us, a time for various celebrations and parties, often leading to an increase in alcohol-impaired driving incidents in Ontario.

This holiday season, the Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) campaign is as vigilant as ever. The RIDE campaign, an annual provincial police initiative aimed at reducing alcohol-impaired drivers, has been proactively addressing impaired driving since 1977.

While the program runs throughout the year, it intensifies during the holiday season. This year, the campaign started mid-November and will run until January 1, 2025.

Alcohol-impaired driving continues to be a major issue in Ontario. This problem causes significant deaths and injuries on the road, continuing to be one of the leading causes of death on the streets.

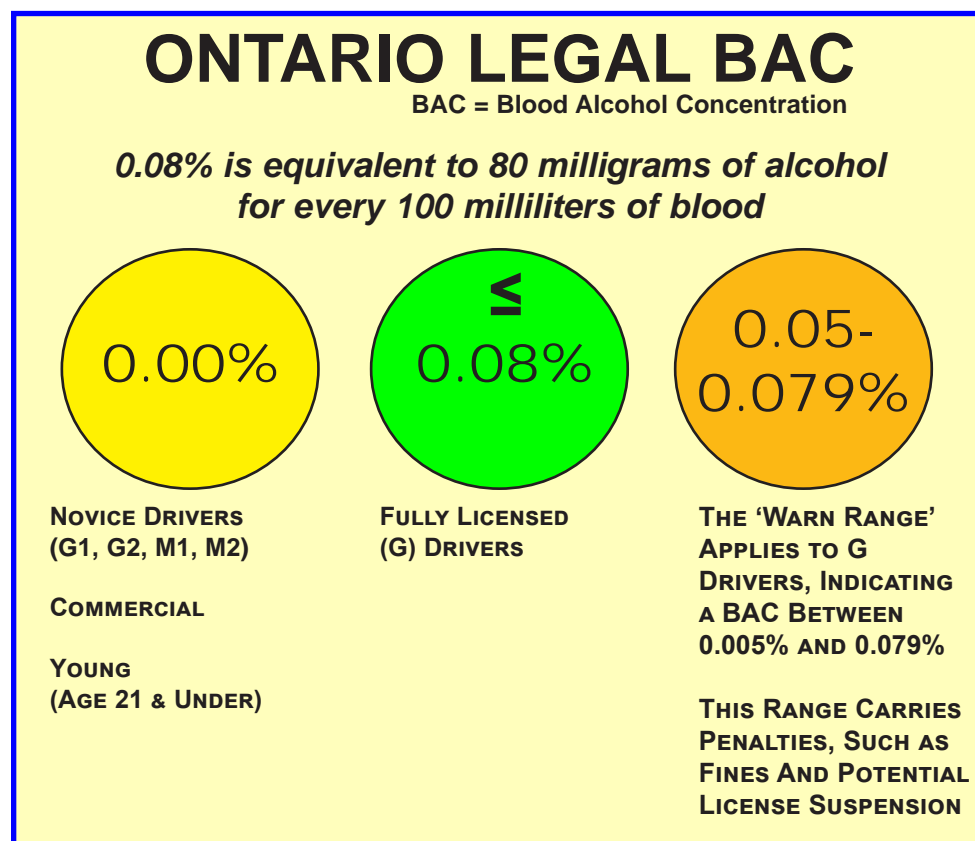
According to provincial data, one in three road deaths involves impaired driving. Furthermore, over 10,000 impaired driving charges were laid in Ontario in 2023. In 2024, that number is expected to be exceeded.

Within the first two weeks of this year's RIDE Program, there were already 45 impaired driving charges laid. Some of these charges resulted in death and serious injuries. Efforts like the RIDE Program during the holidays are crucial reminders of the consequences of driving under the influence during a season meant for joy and togetherness.

Legal consequences

Drivers can face legal charges if their blood alcohol concentration is equal to or greater than 0.08, or even if they are in the warning range between 0.05 and 0.079.

However, drivers under 21, novice drivers (who hold a G1, G2, M1, or M2 licence), and commercial drivers must have no alcohol in their system under Ontario's zero-tolerance policy; convictions under this policy include a 30-day licence suspension, paying a fine, and



a licence cancellation, requiring the driver to retake all tests.

The aftermath of impaired driving can often be irrevocable. Penalties can vary depending on several factors, including the driver's age, licence type, the amount of alcohol in their system, and their history of being convicted, or having their licence suspended.

The legal consequences in Ontario are vast, similar to those in other provinces across Canada, and can include a range of penalties.

Fines

Drivers will face a minimum \$1,000 fine for a first conviction of alcohol-impaired driving in Ontario. The amount can increase depending on their blood alcohol concentration level during the offence.

Increased Insurance Rates

A drinking and driving conviction can significantly impact a driver's insurance premiums, increasing their annual rates by approximately 150-300 percent. In some cases, insurance providers may refuse to renew the driver's policy.

Suspension of Driver's Licenses

A driver's licence is automatically suspended for 90 days upon being charged with a drinking and driving offence.

A first alcohol-impaired driving conviction results in an automatic licence suspension of at least one year. For a second offence within ten years, the suspension increases to at least three years, and a third offence can lead to a lifetime driving prohibition with the possibility of reinstatement after ten years.

Additionally, drivers must pay a licence reinstatement fee for each suspension.

Impoundment of Vehicle

Drivers pulled over with a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 or higher will have their vehicles impounded for seven days. The same results apply if a driver refuses to provide a breath sample.

Civil Action

If an impaired driver causes an accident, they may also face civil action. Victims can seek compensation for damages, injuries, or loss of life. This action will be commenced by both the vehicle's owner and driver, if they are not the same person.

In some cases, the insurance company will notify the owner and driver that the claim made has far exceeded their policy limits. In this situation, the owner and driver must retain a lawyer to defend the claim for the

excess amount.

Jail Time

The maximum sentence for a first offence is ten years. A second offence within ten years results in a mandatory minimum sentence of 30 days and a maximum of ten years. The mandatory minimum sentence for a third offence is 120 days, and the maximum is ten years.

If the impaired driver causes bodily harm, the maximum sentence increases to 14 years. In incidents causing death, offenders can face the possibility of life imprisonment.

Possible Immigration Consequences

In 2018, the *Criminal Code of Canada* was amended to make the maximum sentence for impaired driving more than ten years.

As a result, a conviction can seriously affect permanent residents and foreign nationals in Canada. Under sections 36 (1) and (2) of the *Immigration and Refugee and Protection Act*, a criminal conviction could render a permanent resident or someone on a temporary visa inadmissible to Canada, jeopardising their immigration status.

Should immigration commence proceedings against permanent residents or foreign nationals, the results can be quite detrimental.

Drinking and driving can be costly.

The legal fees involved with a drinking and driving charge can be very costly. Thus, it is vital to plan ahead to avoid the dangers of alcohol-impaired driving.

Here are some practical steps you can take to be safe this holiday season:

- Choose alcohol-free drinks or monitor your alcohol consumption;
- Have a designated driver;
- Call a friend or family member for a ride;
- Use a taxi, rideshare, or public transit;
- Stay overnight.

Considering the above, a single charge for drinking and driving can result in substantial costs. Choose to be responsible this holiday season.

...

Ruth Oudit is an aspiring legal professional. She holds an Honours Bachelor of Applied Science in Justice Studies and a diploma in Community and Justice Services from the University of Guelph-Humber. Currently, she is interning at Kissoon Law and also serves as the Business Development Executive at ABIDE Consulting. Passionate about law and justice, Oudit is committed to contributing to positive change in her community through various volunteer initiatives.



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From Hush Harbours to Hallelujahs, US Black churches still in resistance

By Dhanpaul Narine

It is 1758, and a slave reports on the condition of Blacks. He says, "The white folks would come in when the coloured people would have prayer meetings, and whip every one of them. Most of them thought that when coloured people were praying it was against them."

In 2015, in Charleston, South Carolina a weapon, deadlier than the whip was used, and it brought tragic results.

Black churches were a cause for concern to the White establishment, during and after slavery. A Black congregation was seen as a threat to White supremacy. The congregation was an example of faith, togetherness, and the ownership of property, and this did not sit well with Whites. When Whites in the South wanted excitement, they would set fire to Black churches. The flames provided relief from boredom, and sent a message to Blacks to mind their message and manners.

But former President Barack Obama reminded us that Black churches have provided a sanctuary from hardships. According to Obama, "Over the centuries, Black churches served as hush harbours, where slaves could worship in safety, praise houses, where free descendants could gather and shout, 'Hallelujah...'"

Obama in his Charleston eulogy outlined the importance of Black churches. They were more than centres of worship. The Black churches in America have from the time of their inception stood for justice and equality. Their influence have extended to politics, economics, and education. They challenged the *status quo* that a good slave would obey his master and reap the rewards in Heaven.

In 1863, the four million freed Blacks were a powerful constituency. The task was to organise their voices for militant action, and the church was seen as the instrument that would facilitate such action.

A towering figure in the early development of the church was Daniel Payne, who for over 50 years, gave both physical and religious instructions as to how to expand the laity. Payne was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and his religious ideology was shaped by the belief that Black independent churches were the most potent way to fight slavery and racism.

There were other important figures in the church movement and they included Theophilus Gould Steward and Richard Allen. Both were influential in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Steward was awarded a Doctor of Divinity Degree in 1881 from Wilberforce University in Ohio. Allen founded the AME Church in 1794, and realised that free Blacks needed a sanctuary in which to fight racism, and to become literate so they can organise for political action. Allen also founded Sunday Schools to teach literacy programs and to focus on discussing the politics of the day.

In 1829, there were the Cincinnati Riots in which Blacks were attacked by Whites; the reason given was that Whites resented Black settlement in parts of Cincinnati, fearing that jobs would be lost to Whites. The violence was perpetrated by Irish settlers; around 1,100 Blacks left Cincinnati, and some of them even migrated to Canada, where they founded the Wilberforce colony in Ontario.

It was against this repression that Richard Allen and his followers decided to act. In 1830, they organised in Philadelphia the first Negro Convention. The riots dominated the agenda, and one of the resolutions was to work to improve Black education so they could compete for jobs better with Whites. Despite the resolutions, and some degree of literacy intervention, the condition of Blacks improved only slightly.

Black children were not admitted to public schools, while Blacks that owned property were required to pay taxes to support the schools. In addition, Blacks could not give evidence in



Pope Francis with Barack Obama during the 2015 visit

court against a White person, sit in a jury, or even serve in the militia.

In 1841, another riot broke out. Black leaders celebrated the Emancipation of slavery in England and many in the White community were unhappy with the ceremonies. In the riots that followed there were reports of the loss of lives in the Black community, and meetings were held in the Betel AME Church to plan further action.

The *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* on September 6, 1841 reported that during the mayhem the press of the *Philanthropist* was seized and dumped into the river. As can be seen, it was far from easy for Blacks to express themselves in the days following Emancipation.

The churches played an active role to mobilise the people, but there were tensions from within as well. The leadership in the North had its own ideas as to how the church should be organised, and what message should be dispensed. There were those who believed that all references to Africa should be abandoned and these included dancing and drumming.

Religion should follow an intellectual path in which learning and literacy would feature prominently. But this Northern idea did not go down well with the Southern leadership. It was argued that the majority of the ex-slaves were illiterate and depended on an oral tradition that included chanting and drumming.

Many of the churches were located in the rural areas and members stuck to their customs. These involved the hush harbours and the emotional and chanting style of preaching.

However, by 1900 the emergence of a Black middle class meant that the church was more involved in schools and colleges, in noting social inequality, and possessed the ability to publish and to circulate information to its members about the latest happenings.

The main issues of the day were questioned from the pulpit and rural and urban, poor and middle class, and illiterate and literate, found that they had a lot in common. The stage was then set for further conflict and confrontation between Blacks and Whites.

History has a way of repeating itself and can cause one to pause and take stock when least expected. In 1865, there was a rededication program of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Charleston. The Reverend Randolph Benjamin had served as a Chaplain in the 26th Regiment, United States Colored Troops. After his stint was over, he was sent to Charleston because "he wanted to be useful to

his race".

Reverend Randolph became the Assistant Superintendent of Education in Charleston in 1865. His record is impressive. He was able to establish schools for freed Blacks, and to advocate for adequate staff to be sent to them.

In 1867, he started a newspaper, the *Charleston Advocate*, and later that year, he was elected a delegate to the State Constitutional Convention. He won a seat in the State Senate and campaigned on the Republican ticket for Ulysses S. Grant to be President.

Then in 1868, tragedy struck. Reverend Randolph was boarding a train in South Carolina. In broad daylight, three men belong-

ing to the Klu Klux Klan assassinated him. This was a life that was cut short in its prime by attackers that were blinded by hatred. No one was apprehended for the crime.

In 2015, another life was cut down. He was Reverend Clementa Pinckney, who was also a pastor at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, and his attacker was blinded by hate as well.

In the rich and engaging history of Black churches, one would do well to salute the contributions of stalwarts such as Denmark Vesey and his son Robert. There was also Robert F. Boyd, educator and doctor, who used public forums to advocate for Black causes, and who helped to organise the Society of Colored Physicians and Surgeons. By 1895, the importance of a union between various denominations was realised.

It was in that year that more than 2,000 clergymen met in Atlanta, Georgia. The purpose was to discuss racial intolerance and violence against the Black community. The big conventions included the Baptist Foreign Missionary Convention, the American National Baptist Convention, and the National Baptist Educational Convention.

One result of the meeting, was the merging of the three Conventions to form the National Baptist Convention of America. There were some powerful names at the Convention, including Reverend A.D. Walters, who was the grandfather of Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

Black churches continued to organise and to speak out against racial inequality and injustice. When the fight for Civil Rights came, they were in a good position to advocate passionately against injustice. Black churches have remained the soul of the community. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. said in 1958 that Black churches should be concerned with people in the slums, and about the economic conditions that strangle them.

In 2015, Pope Francis visited the US and this message was repeated. Black churches then have been ahead of the times in spreading the message of justice and equality to the flock. May they long continue on this mission.

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Imdadul Youth Council's Sayem Khan (photo above) addresses the Eid celebration on April 5; in photos, members, family, and friends celebrate the occasion

Imdadul gathers for Eid

– In the spirit of continuity and community, the Imdadul Islamic Centre hosted its annual Eid Dinner on April 5, bringing together worshippers, volunteers, and youth leaders to reflect, reconnect, and honour shared values following the conclusion of Ramadan.

...
 With files by Sayem Khan
 Volunteer, Imdadul Youth Council
 Special to Indo-Caribbean World



Toronto – As the sacred month of Ramadan came to a close, members of the Imdadul Islamic Centre gathered for celebration and continuity with a special Eid Dinner, which took place on April 5.

Held to mark the end of the deeply spiritual month, the event reinforced the linkages of togetherness and renewal for the centre's committed membership. With its focus on spiritual development, volunteer recognition, and celebration of fraternity, the evening fulfilled multiple communal and emotional needs.

The post-Ramadan period is often marked by what some describe as the "Ramadan withdrawal" effect, namely a sudden absence of the nightly gatherings and shared *Iftaars* that define the month. Imdadul's Eid Dinner served as a site of reunion, bridging this transition with warmth, sacred intention, and the sharing of delicious food and sublime desserts.

The event had three primary objectives. The first was to encourage reflection on how to continue the spiritual growth achieved during Ramadan. The evening began with an opening *dua* led by Imam Muzammil Ali, who emphasised the importance of sustaining the momentum created during the month.

The *dua* was followed by recitations of verses from the *Holy Quran* by two young leaders of the Imdadul community: Hafiz Javid Khan, known for leading the *Qiyamul Layl* (late night prayers) during Ramadan; and Yaseen Khan, an emerging youth leader at the mosque.

The second and decidedly exciting objective was to honour the dedicated volunteers whose efforts ensured a successful Ramadan at Imdadul. Recognition certificates were awarded to these individuals by the mosque's leadership, and by MPP Tom Rakocevic, always a welcome guest at Imdadul.

Several volunteers were joined by their parents, marking a proud moment of achievement for many families. Some of Imdadul's youth volunteers are soon to graduate from educational institutions such as York University and Seneca College, and may relocate to other communities. However, the evening served as a reminder that the values and friendships nurtured at Imdadul form lasting bonds that transcend distance.

The final aim of the evening was to celebrate the spirit of Eid through social engagement. Alif Munim, a youth volunteer and leader at the mosque, shared future plans for the Imdadul Youth Council, including the formation of a basketball team. A fellow volunteer, Ismail, was introduced as the leader of this initiative, which will represent Imdadul in upcoming youth sports events.

Cultural and spiritual enrichment also formed part of the celebration. Long-time friends of the mosque, Nazeera Baksh and Khalid Javid, performed nasheeds celebrating the themes of Eid and the arrival of spring. Guests were then treated to a sumptuous dinner prepared by Executive Chef Brother Zaman Khan; a delectable dessert then followed.

The evening concluded with a heartfelt supplication by Haji Zafarullah Khan, who prayed for the global Muslim ummah, with particular remembrance for those enduring hardship and sacrifice.

Looking ahead, Imdadul continues to serve as a hub for ongoing communal activity. The dynamic and charismatic Brother Osman Khan, Secretary of the Imdadul Islamic Centre, extended an open invitation to the upcoming International Food Fair, which is scheduled to take place on April 18.

A long-standing tradition at the mosque, the event is returning for the first time since 2019, following cancellations due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the overlapping of Ramadan and Good Friday in previous years.



Caribbean literary luminaries vie for top 2025 Bocas Lit Fest award

— Three Caribbean literary luminaries, Anthony Vahni Capildeo, Dionne Brand, and Myriam J.A. Chancy, have won top honours in the 2025 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature. Their poetry, nonfiction, and fiction works will now contend for the region's most prestigious literary award at the Bocas Lit Fest to be held in Port-of-Spain next month.

The Bocas Lit Fest has long been a literary light-house for Caribbean voices. Now, as the 2025 OCM Bocas Prize enters its 15th year, the spotlight shines on three celebrated writers whose works stretch across geographies, genres, and generations—Trinidad and Tobago's Anthony Vahni Capildeo, Trinidad-born Canadian Dionne Brand, and Haitian-Canadian-American Myriam J.A. Chancy. Their respective wins in poetry, nonfiction, and fiction not only underscore the evolving power of Caribbean literature but signal a profound reckoning with memory, landscape, and legacy.

The OCM Bocas Prize, sponsored by One Caribbean Media, the parent company of the Trinidad Express, TV6, and OCM radio networks, recognises books of exceptional merit written by authors of Caribbean birth or citizenship.

Since its inception, the prize has become the Caribbean's most distinguished literary accolade. Each year, three genre winners are selected in poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, and one of these is named the overall winner at the annual Bocas Lit Fest in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.

In 2025, the prize enters a milestone year. With finalists whose literary credentials include Windham-Campbell Prizes, Guggenheim Fellowships, and Governor-General's Awards, the field is marked not only by creative distinction, but also by deep intellectual and cultural resonance.

In the poetry category, Trinidadian-Scottish writer Anthony Vahni Capildeo was honoured for *Polkadot Wounds*. Capildeo uses the pronouns they and them, and this is their ninth full-length collection. Written in part during a residency in Cornwall, their poems explore the interplay between natural landscapes, hidden histories, and the enduring ache of "loss and longing".

Judges praised Capildeo's formal dexterity, writing: "Capildeo's facility with form lets them play in language in a way that makes new spaces for our imaginations. These poems make it seem like an easy feat to hold millennia in one image and then another, moving inside of time with grace... It is in fact a miracle only made possible by bringing a depth of precision and an openness of sound together again and again until



Dionne Brand



Vahni Capildeo



Myriam Chancy

resonance and surprise reveal their kinship."

Already the recipient of the 2016 Forward Prize for Poetry, Capildeo has now also been named a 2025 Windham-Campbell Prize winner for Poetry, further affirming their status as one of the Caribbean's most original poetic voices.

In the fiction category, Haitian-Canadian-American writer Myriam J.A. Chancy was awarded the prize for her novel *Village Weavers*. Set against the backdrop of 1940s Haiti and spanning locations from the Caribbean to France and the US, the novel follows the fragile and ultimately ruptured friendship between two girls of vastly different class backgrounds. A devastating family secret severs their bond, with consequences that echo across decades.

"Chancy does not overplay the drama," the judges noted, adding, "She quietly demonstrates how the ramifications of the rupture permeate the girls' lives into their old age."

The novel's movement across time, from 1941 to 2003, and place is matched by a political subtlety that elevates its storytelling strength, with the judges noting, "All these factors make *Village Weavers* a compellingly ambitious and beautifully executed narrative."

Chancy, who has previously won the Guyana Prize in Literature Caribbean Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship, continues to distinguish herself as a master storyteller whose writing is as politically grounded as it is emotionally rich.

The nonfiction category winner, Dionne Brand, is no stranger to the Bocas Prize stage. In 2019, she won the fiction category for her novel *Theory*. This year, she returns with *Salvage: Readings from the Wreck*, a collection of essays blending autobiography and literary criticism. Published by Knopf Canada and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, the work interrogates Western literary canons and exposes their colonial and racial underpinnings.

Described by the judges as "profoundly, beautifully, and deftly" transforming how we read, *Salvage* is a luminous act of intellectual resistance.

"Brand's beautifully crafted work, with its intelligent insights, precise re-readings and brilliant seeing, gives readers another account of the experience of reading the shadows of the celebrated literary works she unpacks," the judges noted.

Brand's accolades include the Windham-Campbell Prize, the Griffin Poetry Prize, and Canada's Governor-General's Award for Poetry. With *Salvage*, she reminds us once again of her unmatched capacity to see through power structures and reconfigure our understanding of literature itself.

Each genre panel brought together regional and international experts to adjudicate the prize. The poetry panel, chaired by Anguillan-American poet and Windham-Campbell Prize laureate Alexis Pauline Gumbs, included Alycia Pirmohamed, a Canadian-British poet, and Adalber Salas Hernández, a Venezuelan poet and translator.

The fiction panel was led by Denise deCaires Narain, a Guyanese-British literary scholar and Emeritus Reader in Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Sussex. She was joined by Celeste Mohammed, a Trinidad and Tobago writer and 2022 OCM Bocas Prize winner, and Fleur Sinclair, a Trinidadian-British literary professional and President of the UK Booksellers Association.

In the nonfiction panel, Rinaldo Walcott, a Barbados-born scholar and Chair in Africana and American Studies at the University of Buffalo, presided alongside Gabrielle Hosein, Senior Lecturer at UWI St Augustine, and Catherine Lord, a Dominica-born writer, curator, and artist.

These chairs now comprise the final jury, joined by Erna Brodber, the distinguished Jamaican author and chief judge. Brodber, herself a Windham-Campbell Prize winner and recipient of the Musgrave Gold Medal and a Prince Claus Award, brings a lifetime of literary insight to the final decision.

What links these three winning works is not merely excellence, but emotional and intellectual daring. Capildeo's meditative poems transform graveyards into sanctuaries and coastlines into crucibles of language. Chancy's quietly devastating novel gives voice to the unsaid ruptures that ripple through history. Brand's luminous essays disrupt dominant readings and recover suppressed intellectual pathways.

All three works speak to the Caribbean's ongoing engagement with the world, not just as witness, but as maker.

Taking place in Port-of-Spain from May 1–4, the overall winner of the OCM Bocas Prize will be announced on May 3, and will receive (US) \$10,000, with each category winner receiving US \$3,000.

In the frigid, misty dawn of a cloud-blanketed gray October Monday, the battlefield was shrouded in an eerie silence, interrupted only by the distant rumble of artillery. The war had turned the once picturesque valley into a landscape of desolation, where the charred remains of trees stood as grim sentinels over the lifeless ground. This was a place where the living envied the dead, and Sergeant Peter Hallow knew he was one of the unlucky ones still breathing.

Peter had seen the horrors of war before, but nothing would prepare him for what he was about to encounter. His squad, the few battered survivors of the once mighty fifth Battalion, had been ordered to hold their position as a rearguard unit near the ruins of an old monastery. The building's ancient stones seemed to resonate with an otherworldly energy, a haunting reminder of humanity's propensity for ruin.

As the day wore on, the battle up ahead moved further away, creating an extended silence that weighed heavy on Peter's mind. With a heavy heart, he stole secret glances at each of his men, whose lives depended on his leadership. Men, whose families he had come to know over the years during their civilian existence as friends and neighbours. Peter fought to suppress a rising fear of isolation and abandonment. He felt a creeping unease as if they were being watched by unseen eyes. He could tell that the other soldiers felt it too, their nervous glances and whispered conversations betraying their fear.

"We shouldn't be here," Private Mark Jensen muttered, his voice trembling. "This place is cursed."

"Everything will be okay," Peter cleared his throat, hoping that his men did not detect the shakiness in his voice. Despite his misgivings, he had to keep their fragile spirits up to counter negative thoughts, even though Jensen threatened to unveil the mask concealing his true inner fear.

The air was thick with dread, and every shadow seemed to pulse with malevolence. As night fell, the soldiers huddled around a small fire. The flickering flames in the five-foot deep hand-dug trench offered little comfort against the cool breezes of the encroaching darkness but a brighter flame could be detected for



The Supernatural The Echoes of the Damned

miles in the dark expanse of the flatlands.

The first scream of pure terror pierced the night, its icy fingers grabbing every heart. The reverberating echoes from deep within the belly of the ruins froze the blood in every vein.

"Oh, my God! Who or what was that?" Corporal Lewis' trembling whisper shattered the sudden stillness that descended upon the unit as they sank deeper into their ditch. A stench wafted from the ruins and crept into their dugout.

"Settle down and stay alert." Due to the proximity of the ruins, Peter doused the fire to keep their location concealed. "We'll get through this together." Sergeant Peter Hallow touched each shoulder to reassure his subordinates. He swallowed hard and stood up to scan the area. His sweaty hands tightened their slippery grip on his rifle.

Each soldier took turns to surveil the ruins. Minutes turned to unbearable hours of exhaustive tension, but edginess fueled preparedness.

Then, just as suddenly as the first, another scream rang out, closer this time. Peter's heart pounded in his chest as he scanned the darkness, his mind racing with possibilities.

"We need to find out what's causing this," his voice firm despite his uneasiness. "Jensen, Lewis, you're with me. The rest of you, hold this position."

The three men ventured into the ruins, their footsteps loosening rocks that fell and echoed off the cold stone walls. A crescent moon appeared out of nowhere and cast an eerie glow over the landscape, illuminating the twisted remnants of the monastery. As they moved deeper into the ruins, the air grew staler. The odour of rotting human flesh burned their sinuses, causing their hesitant footsteps to falter.

"Oh my God!" Jensen covered his nose and pointed.

"What is it?" Peter and Lewis rushed over to Jensen's location.

They reeled back in horror.

Private Thompson's crumpled body leaned against a broken

toilet bowl with his neck twisted at an impossible angle. His wide-open dead eyes stared into theirs with his face contorted in a mask of terror. The dead soldier's mouth was frozen in a silent scream. There were no visible wounds, no signs of a struggle. Private Thompson was simply frightened to death.

"What the hell happened here?" Goosebumps covered Peter's body.

"This isn't right. We need to get out of here." Lewis shook his head, his face pale.

As they turned to beat a hasty retreat, they heard another scream, this time from their camp. They rushed back and froze at the sight of their mates, each one bearing the same expression of abject terror.

"We need to leave," Jensen's voice shook with panic and fear. "Now!"

But Peter knew it was too late. The night was alive with unseen malevolent forces of enemy soldiers that seemed to feed on their fear. The darkness pressed in, suffocating and relentless.

One by one, the soldiers clutched their hearts and collapsed, their unholy screams echoing through the night.

Peter's hands ripped the skin off his chest in their desperate attempts to reach in and grapple with death's invisible icy fingers clutching his heart in a vice-grip that tightened with each pulse.

In his final moments, Peter understood the truth. Historic wars had taken the lives of enemies on both sides who hated war but were forced to follow orders to destroy each other. Conflicted souls in limbo sought refuge in the temple's ruins, but the current battle had reawakened their consciences. Their mission was clear. Humanity's greed would become ineffective if soldiers on both sides died at the hands of a common unseen enemy on the battlefield. A new world order was born.

Peter smiled when a cold hand rested on his shoulder. He felt honoured to be chosen by the noble souls of the monastery brigade.



Kamil Ali

Rhetoric heating up in TT elections

– As Trinidad and Tobago gears up for its April 28 General Election, police authorities have confirmed arrests and investigations into online political threats, while a political analyst is urging restraint and dignity amid rising tensions and inflammatory rhetoric across party lines.

Port-of-Spain – Acting Commissioner of Police Junior Benjamin has confirmed that at least one individual has been arrested for inciting political violence online, with the case now under review by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP).

Additional investigations have also been launched, as the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) reinforces its zero-tolerance approach toward threats and incitement in the lead-up to the general election.

Earlier this week, Benjamin issued a stern warning against the use of social media to promote violence or hostility toward political opponents.

“At least one person for sure was arrested and the matter is with the DPP to give advice as to what will be the next step with that,” Benjamin said.

He expressed alarm at the increasing use of memes, skits, and provocative content to fuel political division, cautioning that while such materials may be disguised as satire, they can have serious consequences.

“We will not stand by and allow persons to incite any sort of violence or even portray that sort of thing. When we see that, we are going to be decisive in our action by speaking to the parties, and if they continue, we will take the necessary action to see to deal with those situations,” he said.

Benjamin acknowledged that freedom of speech is a fundamental right, but stressed that public safety must not be compromised by content that stokes political unrest.

Among the recent incidents prompting police intervention was a claim by Prime Minister Stuart Young that the UNC was paying criminals to intimidate PNM supporters. He also cited a *Trinidad* artiste who issued threats via social media; the individual has since been arrested, police confirmed.

Another case involved a skit where a male individual appeared to confront someone portraying former Prime Minister Dr Keith

Rowley. Benjamin indicated that such portrayals are under active review.

“We are asking all citizens to resist from any form of inciting because once it has been brought to our attention we will address it. We have dealt with persons, we have arrested persons who we believe, based on their language, seem to come across inciting and we dealt with two or three of them thus far and we will continue,” he said.

Meanwhile, political analyst Dr Bishnu Ragoonath has called on all political parties to uphold the dignity of the electoral process.

“Be respectful of each other, maintain the dignity of the election campaign, and do not bring down your party using derogatory language,” Ragoonath said last week.

He noted that he was speaking in a personal capacity, and not on behalf of the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour, which he chairs.

His remarks follow a series of incidents that have heightened concerns about the tone

of political discourse. At a UNC meeting in Rio Claro earlier this month, Tabaquite candidate Sean Sobers made a derogatory remark about Rai Ragbir, the former Cumuto/Manzanilla Member of Parliament.

Then on April 12, UNC Chaguanas East candidate Vandana Mohit accused PNM’s Richie Sookhai of attempting to undermine her campaign efforts.

Ragoonath said the Council for Responsible Political Behaviour received few formal complaints, but acknowledged that the use of derogatory language has become more common across all parties.

“Politicians are using derogatory concepts and terms, which they should not be doing. Those are comments you will hear all the time – it goes across the board, not that it is the right thing to do,” he said.

He added that such language is often directed at mobilising core supporters, but warned it may alienate undecided or independent voters.

“They are talking to their party base. But when it comes to attracting voters outside that base, especially the informed and enlightened voter who is not loyal to either party, they will take those things into consideration,” Ragoonath said.



Bishnu Ragoonath



Kamla Persad-Bissessar on the political campaign trail last week

Put people before privilege - Persad-Bissessar

Port-of-Spain – Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar says a future United National Congress administration will finance its proposals by cutting government waste and placing people before privilege.

Addressing a crowd of supporters in Penal, located in the heart of her Siparia constituency, she set out an ambitious reform agenda aimed at transforming Trinidad and Tobago’s economy and social services.

“We will redirect that PNM ‘eat-a-food’ money to support land for the landless, to repave our roads, to implement a comprehensive traffic alleviation plan and to supply water in your taps,” she said.

Persad-Bissessar argued that many young families remain locked in poverty because they cannot afford land or housing. Responding to Prime Minister Stuart Young’s criticism, who had questioned how the UNC planned to fund its broad slate of initiatives, she pushed back by itemising her party’s way forward.

“There is money to pay workers; the govern-

ment has money for everything else besides paying workers,” she said.

She further accused the PNM government of mismanaging over (TT) \$530 billion, claiming there is little to show for that expenditure.

According to Persad-Bissessar, the UNC’s plan includes reopening the Petrotrin refinery and reducing fuel prices. She blamed the PNM for causing widespread hardship in south Trinidad by shutting down the refinery in 2018, and accused Young of misleading the public about the closure’s rationale and consequences.

On addressing the rising cost of living, she pledged to remove Value Added Tax (VAT) from 7,000 food items, stating that poor families are finding it increasingly difficult to feed their households.

The Opposition Leader also promised to expand the Children’s Life Fund to assist sick children, reduce the cost of foreign-used vehicles, and eliminate what she described as abusive traffic fines to ease the burden on working citizens.

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'Half a cup' - How diaspora movies show us navigating between worlds

— In the humid hush of Trinidad's cane fields, where the scent of fermented sugarcane clings to the wind, a man named Ganesh is exploring how to become. First a writer of unread books, then a mystic with followers, and finally a politician in starched white. So it is his journey unfolds in *The Mystic Masseur*, a film weighted with irony, longing, and the ache of reinvention. In Ganesh's many guises lies a larger truth – it is a story how as a diaspora we are living between worlds, and how we continue to hold our ancestors' traditions in one hand while carrying borrowed manuals on colonial etiquette in the other.

An Ongoing Film Series For Our Caribbean Diaspora A Local Journalism Initiative

Beyond Bollywood's studios, movies made abroad in diasporic spaces tell our story of connected kinship and our constant negotiation for identity and belonging.

These narratives are far removed from the rural fields of 19th century Uttar Pradesh, and instead take place in the 20th century rural hinterlands of Trinidad, where Ganesh Ramsumair, part dreamer, but more with the sparkle of a schemer, attempts to make his way in the world.

Ismail Merchant's film adaptation of V.S. Naipaul's first novel, *The Mystic Masseur*, published in 1957, is not just a portrait of Indo-Caribbean life, but a hard-boiled indictment of mimicry. It is about how the colonised, still trembling from dislocation, attempt to master the very systems that once erased them.

In *The Mystic Masseur*, Ganesh tries to write himself into something legible to empire, among them being a mystic, a man of letters, and then a political figure; however, each transformation only deepens his dissonance.

He is a masseur of not just bodies, but also of belief. His books, unsold and unread, transforms him into a sage. His borrowed eloquence and dharmic posturing catapult him into politics. Yet even in Parliament, seated under colonial portraits, Ganesh is not fully at ease.

He is what cultural theorist Homi Bhabha calls a figure of the "third space" – a zone of cultural in-betweenness, where mimicry becomes a survival tool.

Bhabha is renowned scholar of postcolonial identity. Among other components in his work, he suggests that hybridity, which simply stated is the mixing of coloniser and colonised

cultures, is not a perfect blend, but a contested, often uncomfortable negotiation. Here identity is not fixed, but flickering.

In *The Mystic Masseur*, we see the flicker penetrating past the silver screen. It is notable in Ganesh's eyes, in his faltering steps toward legitimacy, and in the silence that follows his speeches.

Merchant captures this with soft camera work and deliberate pacing. Colonial architecture looms in the background while villagers, garbed in tradition and surrounded by sugarcane, try to remember who they were before they were told who to become.

But *The Mystic Masseur* does not resolve Ganesh's journey. In fact, his ambition, his mimicry, and his mounting discomfort transforms the screen into a mirror where we see as reflections our wider diasporic experience, especially for our Caribbean readers here in Toronto, whose own stories straddle oceans, languages, and layered identities.

We now move away from Ganesh's Trinidad, with the cinematic narrative stretching outward to Mississippi, London, New York, and the GTA.

In *Mississippi Masala* (1991), Mina (Sarita Choudhury), born in Uganda to Indian parents exiled under Idi Amin, now lives in the American South. Her romance with Demetrius Williams (Denzel Washington), a Black man, is met with remarkable resistance in both communities. Her father clings to the memory of a lost homeland, longing for Kampala's mango trees and civil stature. However Mina dares to love differently. She

belongs nowhere and everywhere, a walking contradiction who chooses to write her own script.

The focal length of director Mira Nair's lens is tender but unflinching. Mina is caught between the histories of colonial expulsion, racialised America, and the traditions of her elders. The tension simmers in every scene: in the kitchen, where spices mix with sorrow; in the motel, where business decorum collides with unspoken caste expectations.

Theirs is not just a love story; it is a reckoning with what happens when inherited, traditional values collide with modern choices.

For our diaspora here in the GTA, *Mississippi Masala* echoes like an old song, with the notes of migration resonant and layered with the chords of reinvention.

Then we have *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993). In this movie, a group of British-Indian women embarks on a day trip to Blackpool. But the beach is no escape; instead, it becomes a liminal stage where generational rifts and personal griefs unravel.

Ginder, fleeing domestic abuse, tries to shield her son from inherited violence. Hashida hides her pregnancy, unsure how to break the news to a family that has already decided who she should love.

In this evocative movie, elders clutch to old customs, while younger women challenge the scripts handed to them. The beach, windswept and gray, becomes that very "third space" Bhabha names, making it a site of confrontation, but also of possibility.

These stories may unfold in faraway places, but their emotional truth resonates deeply in our Caribbean communities here Toronto. Many of us know the ache of hyphenation, living lives as Indo-Trinidadians, Indo-Guyanese, Desi-Caribbean-Canadian. The hyphens connecting each word do so with tension, holding together worlds inhabited by ancestral duties and modern dreams, one where reverence and resistance are fraught with collision.

In *The Namesake* (2006), Ashima (Tabu) and Ashoke Ganguli (Irrfan Khan) leave Calcutta for New York, carrying a suitcase of saris and a quiet sadness. Their son, Gogol, inherits their sacrifices but not their certainties. Gogol resents his odd name (after Russian author Nikolai Gogol), his parents' quiet rituals, their longing for a home he has never seen. He tries to fit in by cutting his hair, dating American women, and attempting to shrink his differences with the mainstream. But the more he tries to escape his roots, the more he realises they hold the keys to who he might become.

Also directed by Nair, this film is adapted from Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Namesake*, and paints the diaspora not in black and white, but with soft ambivalences.

These are the kind of ambivalences our GTA's youths understand, such as listening to rap music on the bus on the way to high school, moments after singing *bhajans* with grandparents in the *puja* room, or switching accents while sitting at the kitchen table and doing homework with a classmate on the phone.

Nair does little to tidy up these contradictions in *The Namesake*. Instead, she allows the overlapping of worlds to have breathing room, and in doing so, imbuing them with dignity.

Then we have Jess, the soccer-fanatic young lady in *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), who ties her hair back before a match, and then wraps it up for a visit to the temple. Her Sikh parents want a daughter who cooks *chapatis*, not someone who smartly dribbles past defenders on the soccer field.

But director Gurinder Chadha tells us Jess is capable of both, and allows her to level the playing field, making it into an arena of becoming, a site for reconciling inherited tradition with personal fire and incipient sporting talent.

And there is Javed, the Bruce Springsteen-obsessed teen in *Blinded by the Light* (2019), who writes poems in secret while Margaret Thatcher's England tells him he does not belong. His father, weary from labour and expectation, does not understand. Yet in the spaces between them, between factory and verse, something human, aching, and luminous emerges.

These narratives beyond Bollywood are not simply about rebellion; they are about the translation of cultures, expectations, and the emergence of selves.

These movies made outside India and Bollywood, in diasporic sites, continue to endure today not just because there are well-made. It is also because they script something that is essential as we make our way in the world, namely, that the diaspora is not merely about migration, but much more.

It is about metamorphosis. It is living in translation, a balancing act on a hyphen that connects the caesura between what we left behind, and what we are now building away from India.

Before we close, we turn briefly to *East Is East* (1999), the British comedy-drama film written by Ayub Khan-Din and directed by Damien O'Donnell; in its cast are Om Puri, Linda Bassett, Archie Panjabi, and others.

Though British in production, this film sits squarely within our diasporic conversation for its depiction of hybrid identities that are being forged in blending and conflict.

Set in 1970s Salford, it follows the Khan family, headed by George (Om Puri), a Pakistani immigrant desperate to uphold Muslim values, and Ella (Linda Bassett), his English wife. Their children, British-born and culturally mixed, wrestle with their father's patriarchal authority and the cultural collisions in their home.

In one luminous moment, daughter Meenah (played by Archie Panjabi) parodies the famous Bollywood courtesan scene from *Pakeezah*, energetically dancing to the melancholic *Inhi Logon Ne Le Liya Dupatta Mera* with exaggerated expressions and mock seduction while wielding a long-handled push broom in a mundane English backyard.

The moment is funny, irreverent, and deeply resonant. This moment is not merely comic relief; it is satire that cuts through diasporic performance. Meenah is both participating in and critiquing the nostalgia that anchors her father's expectations. Her dance is a mimicry of mimicry: a second-generation's self-aware performance of a patriarchal, cultural script she never chose.

Bhabha's "third space" lives in the *mis-en-scène* of this backyard as a satirical yet hilarious pastiche, not as abstraction, but as embodied movement, as rebellion, as parody. Meenah is not rejecting heritage outright, but reshaping it with a wink and a flourish, even as her siblings perform mundane tasks nearby.

And now we arrive at *East Is East's* quiet, understated final scene. After a raging storm of conflict and collisions in forced engagements, cultural refusals, and discomfiting physical altercations, George and Ella share a moment of uneasy reconciliation. She offers him a cup of tea, a quintessentially immersive English moment.

However, George declines a full cup of tea, affirming simply with profound understatement: "Half a cup".

His half-cup request overflows with deep implications. Here is Bhabha's hybridity steeped in domestic ritual, in what is neither full assimilation, nor full rejection. It is just enough. The half-cup of tea becomes a metaphor for diasporic survival, making manifest the art of negotiating between belonging and boundaries, of accepting not a full measure, but a compromise without total surrender.

An evocative statement like *East Is East's* final scene reminds us as a thriving diaspora that hybridity is not always heroic or tragic. Sometimes, it is awkward, hilarious, quiet, and perhaps understated; but always, it reminds us, through small, appreciative sips, of our shared humanity.



Tabu and Irrfan Khan in *The Namesake*



Om Puri and Linda Bassett in *East Is East*



Washington and Choudhury in *Mississippi Masala*

Manoj Kumar: True patriot of Indian cinema, he made a nation dream

— As the curtain falls on the life of Manoj Kumar, he is being recalled not just as a film star, but of a man who brought India to the screen with authenticity and passion. In his passing, India has lost a patriot, philosopher, auteur, and a son of the soil. His films gave the common man dignity, the farmer hope, the soldier pride, and the audience a reason to believe in India.

...
Veteran actor, filmmaker, and the enduring face of cinematic patriotism in India, Manoj Kumar, passed away on April 4 in Mumbai at the age of 87, following an ongoing heart condition and other health complications.

Known to generations as Bharat Kumar, a sobriquet earned from his deeply nationalistic films like *Upkar*, *Purab Aur Paschim*, and *Kranti*, Kumar's cinematic legacy will remain stitched into the cultural fabric of post-Independence India.

His son, Kunal Goswami, remarked, "It's the grace of God that he bid *adieu* to this world peacefully... He was happy. Just a little unwell."

With his passing, India mourns the loss of not just a film star, but a living embodiment of patriotism on the silver screen.

Born Harikrishan Goswami on July 24, 1937, in Abbottabad (now in Pakistan), Kumar's early life bore the imprint of a divided subcontinent. His family migrated to Delhi during the Partition, an upheaval that shaped the emotional tenor of many of his films.

The cinematic journey of Manoj Kumar would begin far from the battlegrounds of history, but would eventually return to them with passion, craft, and unflinching sincerity.

Kumar made his Bollywood debut in 1957 with *Fashion*, and rose to fame in *Kanch Ki Gudiya* (1961). But it was his performance in *Shaheed* (1965), where he portrayed Bhagat Singh that firmly established him in the hearts of millions.

With each role, Kumar deepened his narrative of a modern India grappling with its colonial past, its present hopes, and its dreams for the future.

Despite the fame, those who knew him best describe a man of quiet humility. His cousin, Manish R. Goswami, shared: "This is sad news for the entire country. The era of making movies on patriotism has ended today. This is the end of an era of a true Indian and true patriotism."

Kumar was not merely an actor but an *auteur* who took total ownership, wrote, directed, and starred in films that celebrated national values and addressed social inequality.

His *magnum opus* *Upkar* (1967), inspired by Prime Minister



Manoj Kumar (1937–2025)

Lal Bahadur Shastri's slogan *Jai Jawan Jai Kisan*, in its translation showcases both the dual heroism of soldier and farmer. It not only won him the Filmfare Award for Best Story, but also made him a household name.

He followed this with other emblematic works like *Purab Aur Paschim* (1970) and *Kranti* (1981), films that did not just entertain but provoked thought and stirred the national soul.

His film *Roti Kapda Aur Makaan* (1974), which he also directed, addressed poverty and social justice, and won him the Filmfare Award for Best Director in 1975.

Kumar's contribution to Indian cinema was formally recognised with numerous accolades, including the Padma Shri (1992); Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award (1999); and the Dadasaheb Phalke Award (2015), which is Indian cinema's highest honour.

In a gesture reflecting his social commitment beyond the screen, Kumar joined the Bharatiya Janata Party before the 2004 general elections. Though he did not remain politically active, his alignment with nationalist ideals was consistent with the values portrayed throughout his cinematic career.

He was also known in private circles for his philanthropic spirit and deep-rooted belief in unity and integrity. Despite growing health challenges in his final years, he remained an inspiring figure for many aspiring actors and directors.

Ajay Devgn offered a personal remembrance following news of Kumar's passing, saying, "He gave my father, Veeru Devgan, his first break as an action director in *Roti Kapda Aur Makaan*. From there, their collaboration continued through *Kranti*, creat-

ing moments that are now a part of Indian cinema's golden history."

Akshay Kumar reflected on the influence Kumar had on his generation, declaring, "I grew up learning from him that there's no emotion greater than love and pride for our country. And if we actors don't take the lead in expressing this emotion, who will?"

Filmmaker Ashoke Pandit described Kumar as "the lion of the Indian film industry", while actor Aamir Khan called him "a school of thought", adding, "His cinema often revolved around crucial social themes, making him deeply relatable to the common man."

Tributes flowed from every corner of India and beyond. Among them was India's leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who in a heartfelt message, shared on X (formerly Twitter), declared, "He was an icon of Indian cinema, who was particularly remembered for his patriotic zeal, which was also reflected in his films.

Manoj Ji's works ignited a spirit of national pride and will continue to inspire generations. My thoughts are with his family and admirers in this hour of grief. *Om Shanti*."

Union Minister Rajnath Singh also echoed similar sentiments, describing him as "a versatile actor... His unforgettable performances in films like *Upkaar*, *Purab*, and *Paschim* have enriched our culture and endeared him to people across generations."

Actor Farhan Akhtar, in a brief yet poignant tribute, wrote: "*Woh Kaun Thi*, *Gumnaam*, *Shaheed*, *Upkar*, *Purab aur Paschim*, *Kranti*... the list goes on and on. Thank you for the entertainment and for inspiring generations that followed you."

Kareena Kapoor Khan, among many others in the younger generation, took to social media to honour the icon, who was also affectionately known as Bharat, named after India for his deep sense of patriotism and nationalism.

Kumar's contributions are monumental. His cinematic voice, steeped in nationalism, left a permanent mark on Indian culture. His films were more than entertainment: they were sermons on sacrifice, love for the country, family, dignity, and moral strength.

He introduced a unique lexicon of patriotism that deeply resonated with post-Independence India that helped shape the consciousness of future generations. Through over four decades of work, he helped define an era where cinema was not just reflective, but aspirational.

However, his passing does not mark the end of his influence. As actor Aamir Khan noted, "He was an institution."

Kartik Aaryan making his own way in Bollywood on merit, not privilege

— From a quiet rebellion in Gwalior to back-to-back hits in Mumbai, Kartik Aaryan's rise in Bollywood is a narrative of secret auditions, small victories, and self-made stardom in an industry often defined by lineage

...
Kartik Aaryan's stardom was not handed to him by a family member who helped paved the path for him to stardom. Instead, it was stitched together with moments of bold risk, private rebellion, and relentless auditioning.

Long before his name began trending alongside industry heavyweights, Aaryan was quietly slipping away from his engineering lectures in Navi Mumbai to chase roles in an industry that did not know his name. And perhaps even more daring, he did not tell his parents he was not attending classes, but knocking on the doors of movie producers.

"I was secretly auditioning," Aaryan told Filmfare. "My parents thought I was just studying B.Tech in Navi Mumbai."

It is this hidden hustle that shaped the foundation of one of today's most sought-after actors in Hindi cinema.

Born in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, to Dr Manish and Mala Tiwari, Kartik Aaryan grew up far from the arc lights of Bollywood. In 2009, with aspirations for the cinema that he could not share with his parents, he followed their chosen path for him to study engineering in Mumbai. Except what he was really studying were casting calls and the elusive mechanics of the film industry.

With no family background in films, Aaryan hunted for roles through Facebook posts and casting updates. He did not have a professional portfolio, so he cropped himself out of group pictures and sent them to filmmakers. One of those photos caught the eye of the *Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAMA* team. Though initially rejected, later he was called back, and went on to land his first film role in 2011, playing Rajat, opposite Nushratt Bharuccha and Sonnalli Seygall.

Even after his debut, his mother urged him to complete his education. He returned to college, and by the time he earned his degree he was carving a niche in the industry.

Kartik Aaryan's film journey saw a slow burn. His second film, *Akaash Vani* (2013), also directed by Luv Ranjan and co-starring Bharuccha, failed at the box office. He then appeared in *Kaanchi: The Unbreakable* (2014), and on its release day, changed his name from Tiwari to Aaryan.

His breakthrough moment arrived in 2018 with *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety*, a buddy comedy where he reunited with Bharuccha and Sunny Singh Nijjar. This film turned the tide. It was his first big commercial success and earned him both audience recognition and industry attention. It also marked a personal milestone that saw him purchasing a bungalow in Mumbai, and moving his parents in with him.

His filmography soon expanded with *Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAMA 2* (2015), *Guest in London* (2017), *Luka Chuppi* (2019), *Pati Patni Aur Woh* (2019), and *Love Aaj Kal* (2020). Yet, even as box office returns grew, so did the media glare.

In his interview with Filmfare, Aaryan reflected on recent reports that he was charging (R) 50 crore per film. He neither confirmed nor denied it, but expressed with some exasperation, "Am I the only actor who has received such a price? Nobody writes about others. Everyone writes about me..."

He added that he does not have a publicist or a familial web of influence spreading his name.

"I don't have a spokesperson. I don't have my uncle, or my

dad or my sister or my girlfriend spreading positivity about me in the articles or in the industry," he said.

He asserted that his rise was not because of connections and nepotism, but because of consistent effort and audience recognition.

"There are some who get irked by the fact that people make it on their own. And they try to make stories about that person a lot more."

However, his journey has not been without setbacks. After *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety*, it took him seven to eight years to land a proper endorsement deal.

"Success isn't instant. From *Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAMA* to *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2* and *Chandu Champion*, my journey has been built on merit, not privilege," he said.

He also spoke to *Fanfare* about his college years, stating, "Choosing D.Y. Patil college was my way of staying close to Mumbai and pursuing auditions while studying. Coming from Gwalior, I would not have had a reason to move here otherwise."

Auditions during those early years meant cold-calling, cropping photos, and showing up without appointments.

"I came across a post from the *Pyaar Ka PUNCHNAMA* team, sent them a portfolio made from cropped group photos and boldly wrote, 'I'm the guy you're looking for.' That got their attention," he recalled.

Even his breakout in *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2* was preceded by doubt.

"When it was announced, there was scepticism but I believed in the script. It connected with the audience and proved how unpredictable the industry can be," he noted.



Kartik Aaryan

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Cricket to Conquer Cancer takes guard against a global opponent

— More than just a tournament, *Cricket to Conquer Cancer* is bringing into play resilience, endurance, and the fighting spirit, qualities that define both cricket and the battle against cancer. This initiative, launched by the PMCF, is more than a fund-raiser; it is a movement to Carry The Fire, a symbol of relentless hope and determination. It is also a call to action for our community to step up to the crease to bat for a future without cancer.

The thud of bat on ball. The rhythmic chants of players. The tense moments between deliveries. Cricket has always been more than a game for our Caribbean community – it is a shared legacy, a bond passed from generation to generation.

Come May 31 at Mississauga's Celebration Square, cricket will take on a new and urgent purpose: *Cricket to Conquer Cancer*, a tournament where every run scored carries the weight of hope, and every wicket taken brings us closer to a cure.

Organised by The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation (PMCF), this inaugural street cricket fund-raiser will rally over 100 teams in a high-energy T5 format, raising funds to support world-leading cancer research at the PMCF. With a goal of \$1 million, this historic event is calling on cricket lovers, philanthropists, and corporate sponsors to step up to the crease and make a difference.

At the February 4 launch, international cricket star Carlos Brathwaite spoke to the cause, encouraging teams to register and take part in this unique tournament. Also attendees at the event were mindful of an earlier statement made by Miyo Yamashita, the PMCF's President and CEO, when she had said, "Imagine a world free from the fear of cancer. We can. It's why we Carry The Fire".

The format of *Cricket to Conquer Cancer* is as dynamic as the mission it serves. Each team will battle it out in a five-over-per-side format that demands adrenalin-driven reflexes, sharp strategy, and unwavering teamwork. But beyond the boundaries and wickets, the real contest will unfold off the pitch, where every dollar raised will translate into lifesaving breakthroughs for cancer research at the PMCF.

Fund-raising begins the moment teams sign up, with each squad targeting \$6,000. The stakes are high, with top fund-raisers being able to earn the opportunity to recruit celebrity cricket talent, turning an already thrilling event into one that could see the participation of legends in the game.



The tournament is expected to be fast-paced and action-packed, with high-energy matches, community festivities, and the shared goal of making a tangible impact in the fight against cancer.

We all know that cancer remains one of the most formidable opponents humanity has ever faced. Despite ground-breaking advancements in treatment and research, the disease continues its inexorable march worldwide. By 2050, global cancer cases are expected to surge by 77 percent, with younger generations facing the sharpest increases.

More than one million people under 50 die from cancer each year, and this number is projected to rise by 21 percent by 2030.

While survival rates have improved, the burden remains immense. In Canada, the five-year survival rate for all cancers combined has increased from 50 percent in the early 1980s to approximately 63 percent today.

The rise of early-onset cancers among individuals under 50 has climbed by nearly 80 percent since the early 1990s.

With its world-class diagnostics, research, and treatment innovations, the PMCF has been at the forefront of life-saving discoveries from stem cell research to immunotherapy break-

throughs.

Through *Cricket to Conquer Cancer*, every donation, every sponsorship, and every run scored will contribute to early detection, targeted treatments, and comprehensive patient support programs that can save lives.

The *Carry The Fire* initiative, the latest branding thrust by the PMCF, embodies the unyielding fight against cancer and the collective effort to create a future free from its fear. It represents the spirit of resilience, determination, and hope that fuels advancements in cancer research and care.

Through *Cricket to Conquer Cancer*, every player, donor, and supporter will help take *Carry The Fire* forward, ensuring that patients and families affected by cancer continue to receive world-leading treatments and support.

Just as cricket demands patience, precision, and teamwork, so too does the fight against cancer – a battle that requires global collaboration and unwavering commitment.

For our Caribbean diaspora, cricket is more than just a sport; it is a bridge that connects people, cultures, and generations. Whether it is a casual street game played in the back streets of Port-of-Spain, Kingston, or Georgetown, or an international Test match at Kensington Oval, cricket has always embodied resilience, camaraderie, and the spirit of collective effort. These are the very same qualities that define the fight against cancer.

Now, as cricket lovers across Canada and beyond, we have an opportunity to pick up the bat for an even greater cause. This is a game where every shot played, every partnership built, and every wicket taken carries meaningful significance, making it one that extends far beyond the boundary.

The *Cricket to Conquer Cancer* campaign is already gaining momentum, with registration over 50 percent sold out. Whether as a player, donor, or supporter from the sidelines, there is a role for everyone. Corporate sponsors are stepping forward, setting a precedent for others to follow.

This is the moment for our community to be part of something bigger. Whether we form a team, donate, or spread the word, our every action counts. Every dollar raised is a run scored in the fight against cancer.

Join us at the crease. Together, we can bat for a future free from cancer. [Click here for more information, or to register.](#) Now is the time to take guard, face the delivery, and send the ball soaring for a cause that truly matters.

ICC shelves divisive two-tier Test cricket proposal in light of pushback

– ICC shelves divisive two-tier Test cricket proposal amid global pushback, preserving the nine-team World Test Championship through 2027.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has paused its proposed overhaul of Test cricket's structure, shelving a contentious plan to divide nations into two tiers. The World Test Championship (WTC) will continue with its existing nine-team league format for the 2023–2027 cycle, following sustained pushback from several full member nations and cricket legends alike.

Initially backed by Cricket Australia and partially supported by the England and Wales Cricket Board, the restructuring proposal aimed to form two divisions of six teams each. The move would have brought Afghanistan, Ireland, and Zimbabwe into WTC participation but confined them, along with other lower-ranked sides, to a second-tier league.

The rationale was financial: frequent contests between cricket's "big three", namely India, England, and Australia, would purportedly yield stronger commercial returns.

Yet this logic has sparked fierce resistance from stakeholders concerned about growing inequities in the game, and the marginalisation of emerging or historically dominant teams struggling to reclaim form.

As a result of unresolved concerns, the WTC will retain its current league format, allowing each of the nine full member sides to play a set number of bilateral Test series. The new cycle begins shortly after the 2025 WTC Final between Australia and South Africa at Lord's, opening with a high-profile five-Test series between England and India.

One of the most powerful objections over the two-tier proposal came from West Indies legend Clive Lloyd, who captained the dominant Caribbean side of the 1970s and 1980s. Lloyd, now 80, said he was "disturbed" by the idea of relegating teams like the West Indies to a lower tier, a move he warned could prove disastrous.



Clive Lloyd

"I think it will be terrible for all those countries who worked so hard to get the Test status," he said, adding, "Now they'll be playing among themselves in the lower section. How are they going to make it to the top? When you play against better teams."

Lloyd argued that playing against top-tier opponents is vital for growth and exposure, not just for performance but for financial sustainability. He also raised concerns over the unique structure of the West Indies team, which is a regional composite of 15 nations that depends on unified development pathways and international fixtures to remain viable.

"Our islands have got to play together. We've been doing that for years," he noted, underscoring the potential existential threat such a system could pose.

Lloyd further reminded the global cricketing community of the historical role the West Indies played in sustaining and enriching the sport.

"We were the cash cows for a lot of countries over the years ... people must recognise that. But we are at that situation now where we need the help, and we can't get it," he stated.

While Lloyd made an impassioned plea for inclusion and historical recognition, former India head coach Ravi Shastri stood firmly in the other camp, advocating for the two-tier system as a way to ensure quality and competitiveness.

"The top teams play against each other more often, so there is a contest. You want contests," Shastri said, echoing concerns that Test cricket must retain viewer engagement in the face of rising T20 popularity.

Still, the notion of prioritising contests over equity has not found universal favour, especially as smaller cricketing boards face financial hardship and reduced opportunities for growth.

This WTC cycle also looked at player/team performances and format concerns, with renewed scrutiny on how points are allocated, and whether all teams are tested equally. South Africa's qualification for the 2025 final, despite not facing Australia or England, has amplified concerns about disparities. Their progression was built primarily on victories against

lower-ranked teams, raising questions about fairness under the current flat points system.

Meanwhile, England's frustration with over-rate penalties has also entered the conversation. Docked 22 points for slow play, which were enough to knock them from third to sixth, England's director of cricket Rob Key has called for revisions to the rule mandating 15 overs per hour, particularly for innings completed under 80 overs.

Ironically, while the penalties are intended to speed up play, Test matches are now unfolding at their slowest pace since 1975. England's captain Ben Stokes has at times adopted slower tactics to rest pace bowlers, reducing reliance on less effective part-time options.

To address pace of play, the ICC is now considering introducing the stop-clock rule to Tests, which is already implemented in white-ball cricket. The rule mandates that fielding sides resume play within 60 seconds between overs. After two warnings, further violations incur a five-run penalty. The ICC hopes the rule can preserve the game's strategic richness while maintaining tempo.

Additionally, reforms to the WTC's points structure are under active review. Potential changes include scaling points based on opponent strength, rewarding away victories, and offering bonus points for dominant wins, akin to systems used in rugby.

Meanwhile, as India continues to dominate the financial landscape of world cricket, there are mounting concerns that smaller nations are being left behind.

Lloyd's comments reflect a deeper unease over historical erasure and shrinking support for teams that once carried the sport on their shoulders. In the 1970s and 1980s, West Indies players were in high demand across English county cricket, contributing significantly to the global popularity and competitiveness of the Test format.

Today, as Lloyd contends, those same systems that benefitted from the West Indies' excellence are failing to reciprocate support in their hour of need.

For now, the ICC has chosen continuity over disruption. The current nine-team league format will guide the World Test Championship into its third cycle. But with ongoing discussions around over-rate enforcement, points systems, and match scheduling, the broader debate over Test cricket's future is far from settled.

New England Women's head coach Charlotte Edwards aiming to rebuild

— Newly-appointed England women's head coach Charlotte Edwards has vowed to demand greater fitness accountability and spark a rapid turnaround, setting sights on a 50-over World Cup win just six months away.

Charlotte Edwards, the former England captain and one of the most successful figures in women's cricket, has officially taken the reins as head coach of the national women's team. In her first public statements since her appointment, Edwards signaled a decisive shift in direction, emphasising fitness accountability, honest self-assessment, and an unwavering goal: winning the 50-over World Cup in India later this year.

The announcement marks a critical moment in the strategic rebuild of England Women's cricket following a dismal winter. The team endured an early T20 World Cup exit, followed by a 16-0 whitewash in the Ashes, a performance that prompted significant leadership overhaul.

Women's coach Jon Lewis was relieved of his duties in March, and a "very thorough, comprehensive and honest" review led by Clare Connor, Managing Director of England Women, concluded that a "significant reset in terms of leadership and the environment" was required.

Edwards wasted no time, initiating her tenure with player assessments at Loughborough earlier this month. Fitness, she said, will be non-negotiable.

"I'm going to judge for myself where the team are with their fitness," she stated, declaring, "I will make the players more accountable for their fitness, that's something I'm going to do."

Despite recent struggles, Edwards remains optimistic, stat-



Charlotte Edwards

ing, "I wouldn't have taken on this role if I didn't think that in six months' time we could win a World Cup in India. We've got the playing group to do that."

A pivotal task ahead for Edwards is naming a successor to Heather Knight, who stepped down from the captaincy in March after a nine-year tenure.

Edwards confirmed she already has a candidate in mind.

"I'm pretty clear on where I want to take the team and who I want to be involved. I think it's important that we get that person announced sooner rather than later," she said.

Additionally, the England and Wales Cricket Board will begin recruiting a national selector later this month, the first since the women's game became professional. This move is aimed at increasing external insights and sharpening the selection process.

Edwards amassed 309 international caps (220 as captain) before her 2016 retirement. She returns to the England setup after notable coaching successes with the Hampshire women's team, the Mumbai Indians in the WPL, and Sydney Sixers in the WBBL.

The ECB opted to bypass its traditional open hiring process once it became clear that Edwards was willing to accept the role, emphasising the board's confidence in her leadership.

"My job is to win games of cricket and it is how we go and do that now," said Edwards, who made clear that results will be the standard by which she and the team are judged.

"I'm under no illusions – coming into this role, it's about winning," she said.

Connor echoed the need for change, citing a leadership overhaul as essential to moving forward from the team's underwhelming winter.

"There's got to be greater communication between the counties and England. I'm going to be communicating with those county coaches more about the style of play we want to play... I want to make county cricket really competitive, [so] we're picking on performances," Edwards emphasised.

She added, "The players need to be honest with themselves about how they have performed in recent times. I need to be honest with them about where I think they're at. I think that will go a long way, and we've just got to work really, really hard."

Cricket returns to Olympics

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has officially confirmed cricket's return to the Olympic Games at Los Angeles 2028, with a six-team T20 format planned for both men's and women's events. This will mark the sport's first appearance in the Games since Paris 1900, when Great Britain defeated France by 158 runs in the only match played.

Each gender's competition will consist of six teams, with squads permitted to include up to 15 players. This decision follows the IOC's allocation of 90 athlete quotas per gender for cricket at LA 2028. However, several key details, among them team qualification criteria and participating nations are yet to be decided.

While player selection and team participation are yet to be determined, the spotlight is already on India, current T20 World Cup champions and a commercial powerhouse in the sport. India's dominant presence at the 2024 T20 World Cup, co-hosted by the US, drew substantial crowds and global attention, further underscoring the nation's pivotal role in the sport's Olympic reintroduction.

The inclusion of cricket is widely seen as a strategic move by LA 2028 organisers and the IOC to attract greater Indian engagement with the Olympic movement, given the country's cricketing fervour and commercial potential.

Despite cricket's Olympic confirmation, significant logistical questions remain. The qualification process will not be handled by the LA28 Organising Committee, but instead falls under the jurisdiction of the sport's governing body, the International Cricket Council (ICC).

"Organising committees like LA28 aren't responsible for team qualifications in any sport; those are always handled by the [International Federations]," LA28 chairman Casey Wasserman clarified during a media briefing.

With only six slots available per gender, the ICC faces a complex task in finalising the qualification method. Options include basing selections on team rankings, regional representation, or hosting a qualifying tournament, though the latter appears unlikely given the packed international cricket calendar.

Cricket's Olympic reappearance comes more than 125 years after its debut at the 1900 Paris Games. That event saw just a single match played, with both the Netherlands and Belgium having withdrawn. Since then, cricket has remained absent from the Olympic stage, although calls for its return have grown louder in recent years, particularly from nations with large cricket followings.

Prior to her appointment, current IOC president Kirsty Coventry reportedly met with ICC chairman Jay Shah at the Champions Trophy in Dubai, where the possibility of cricket's inclusion at LA 2028 was among the topics discussed.

Speaking on the qualification uncertainty, a Cricket West Indies (CWI) official stated last week that it was "still undecided what process will be used to determine the qualifiers". The official also acknowledged ambiguity around whether a single Caribbean nation or a combined West Indies team will participate.

Similarly, the question of whether England will compete as an individual entity or as part of a unified Great Britain team remains unresolved.



Nat Scriver-Brunt

Scriver-Brunt at head of women's captaincy lineup

— All-rounder Nat Scriver-Brunt has emerged as the "obvious choice" to captain England following Heather Knight's departure, though former teammate Lauren Winfield-Hill believes strong vice-captaincy support will be crucial.

With Heather Knight stepping down as England's women's captain after a disastrous 16-0 Ashes campaign, momentum is building behind Nat Scriver-Brunt as her likely successor. While Scriver-Brunt is widely regarded as England's standout performer, former teammate Lauren Winfield-Hill emphasised that appointing a strong vice-captain will be essential to easing her leadership burden.

Although England have yet to officially name a new captain, Scriver-Brunt is the clear frontrunner. Newly-appointed head coach Charlotte Edwards, who took over this month, has stated her intent to finalise the decision "pretty quickly" as the team prepares for a white-ball series against the West Indies.

Scriver-Brunt, who boasts an illustrious career across formats, has made 259 appearances for England. Her batting averages of 46.47 in Tests, 45.91 in ODIs, and 28.45 in T20s underscore her consistency, and she has claimed 181 international wickets. A pivotal member of the 2017 World Cup-winning squad, Scriver-Brunt has proven herself indispensable with both bat and ball.

"She's the best player in the world at the minute," said Winfield-Hill, who featured alongside Scriver-Brunt in 98 internationals, including the 2017 World Cup triumph.

"There are probably only a handful of other players in her category," she added.

While Scriver-Brunt's on-field leadership experience includes stints as vice-captain, her record in charge has been mixed. She

captained England during their early exit from the 2023 T20 World Cup, following a chaotic defeat to the West Indies after Knight was injured.

She also led the side at the 2022 Commonwealth Games, where England missed out on a medal. Later that year, Scriver-Brunt took a mental health break and declined to resume the vice-captaincy immediately upon her return.

Despite these setbacks, Winfield-Hill believes Scriver-Brunt deserves a sustained opportunity to shape the team.

"She's taken over intermittently when Heather hasn't been there... it probably hasn't gone how she would have liked at times, so give her a good run and see if she can put her stamp on it," Winfield-Hill stated.

Knight's resignation brings an end to her nine-year captaincy tenure, creating a significant leadership void. Edwards has made it clear that her new captain must "lead from the front in everything they do" and have "the respect of the current playing group", criteria Scriver-Brunt appears to meet.

"[Scriver-Brunt is] very calculated, just goes about her business quite consistently and calmly," said Winfield-Hill.

She added, "So, that's where you want your vice to be revving the girls up... being more forward and a bit more energetic, a bit more ruthless. Around that, Nat is the calm head you need."

Winfield-Hill also stressed the importance of shared leadership, noting, "She has got a massive workload so the vice-captain is so important to take some of that load off her. You want them to be your blind spots in a way."

One other player has expressed interest in the lead role, with Charlie Dean indicating she would not turn down the opportunity if approached.

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