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A young devotee performs Abhishek, the pouring of milk, during Maha Shivaratri celebrations at Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir. More on Page 18. Photo by Hinano Beekhoo



Each star-girl dancer in this picture of coordination appears headed for stardom, their performance winning hearts at the TCCF's Be My Valentine fundraiser last Saturday. More on Page 19. Photo: Dwayne's Photography

Mottley sweeps into power with third mandate

— Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley has secured an historic third consecutive clean sweep of all 30 seats in Parliament, becoming only the second Caribbean leader to achieve the feat. Her decisive mandate has drawn warm congratulations from across Caricom, with regional leaders hailing her leadership and renewed commitment to regional cooperation.

Bridgetown – Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley made regional political history on February 11, leading the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) to a third consecutive clean sweep of all 30 seats in the House of Assembly, cementing her dominance in national politics and extending an extraordinary electoral streak unmatched in most of the modern Caribbean.

With the victory, Mottley, 60, becomes only the second Caribbean leader to secure three separate parliamentary sweeps, joining former Grenada Prime Minister Keith Mitchell, who previously achieved multiple clean sweeps in his country.

Mottley initially captured all 30 seats in the May 24, 2018 general election, when she became Barbados' first female prime minister; she then repeated the feat in 2022, before yet again accomplishing last week's emphatic result.

"We are humbled by your confidence and trust. Thank you. Let us now come together as one people to continue building our nation," the BLP said in a statement posted on its Facebook page shortly after the results were confirmed.

Mottley comfortably retained her St Michael North East constituency. She told supporters gathered at the party's headquarters in Bridgetown, "Something special happen in the country today".

Looking back to her first electoral victory in 2018, she noted that her administration had pledged to stabilise Barbados' economy.

"We thought we would move to a growth path," she said, recounting how the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted early ambitions before her government embarked on what she described as a transformative mission over the last two and a half years.

"We did not come to hold office, we come to make Barbados better and your lives better," she declared, adding that next month the BLP will mark its 88th anniversary as a political organisation.

Mottley warned that safeguarding Barbados' democracy remains critical

as the country approaches its 60th year of political independence, and its fifth year as a Republic. She urged nationals



Just before last week's elections, PM Mottley (centre) visited the Jama Mosque in Bridgetown. Facebook photo

See Page 12: Mottley secures

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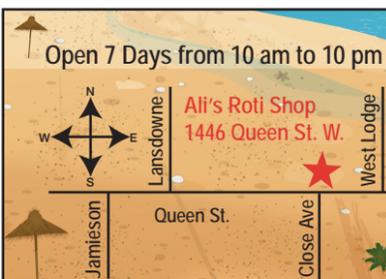
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Presenters and organisers at The Walnut Foundation's Black History Month symposium on February 7
TWF spotlights brain health at 2026 BHM symposium

— The Walnut Foundation marked Black History Month with a community-centred symposium in Brampton on February 7, focusing on brain health as a critical pillar of aging, wellbeing, and health equity, and bringing together medical experts, community leaders, and individuals with lived experience for a day of dialogue, learning, and collective reflection.

By Romeo Kaseram
 An LJI Community Report

Brampton – The Walnut Foundation hosted its annual Black History Month Symposium on February 7 at the William G. Davis Centre for Families, bringing together medical experts, community leaders, and individuals with lived experience to focus on conditions that impact brain health.

“The Walnut Foundation proudly presented its annual Black History Month Symposium,” the organisation said, noting that this year’s gathering “centred on conditions that impact brain health”, while creating a space for participants “to explore how brain health shapes our quality of life, aging, and community wellbeing”.

Speakers at the symposium included Dr Olumide Adeguna, Dr Joyce Orokafor, Ngozi Iroanyah, Asma Musa, Olu Muili, Jean Adeyemo, and Loretta Karikari. TWF said it extended “our deepest gratitude to our extraordinary presenters and speakers”, who shared “their expertise, research, and lived experience with passion, generosity, and thoughtfulness”.

According to the organisation, the insights offered throughout the day “challenged us to view brain health not only as a medical concern, but as a vital component of living well, aging with dignity, and supporting one another as communities”.

Moderated discussions were led by Akua Yirenyi, Jahaan Thawer, and Shawn Gilpin. The Foundation thanked the



Loretta Karikari



Olu Muili

“Conversations like these are catalysts,” the statement said, expressing hope that participants would be inspired “to take just one action – whether continuing the conversation, prioritising personal wellness, or sharing these insights within their networks.”

TWF is a community-based organisation committed to improving health outcomes through education, support, advocacy, and culturally grounded engagement, with a particular focus on conditions impacting Black communities.

moderators for “skillfully guiding the discussion and engaging presenters and audience members in thoughtful, accessible dialogue”, helping to ensure conversations were inclusive and grounded in community realities.

Audience engagement was a defining feature of the symposium. “To everyone who joined us, your presence, questions, and active participation helped create a space for meaningful learning and connection,” TWF stated. It added that participants collectively explored “the intersections of science, culture, lived experience, and community”, reinforcing the message that “brain health is a shared responsibility”.

Meanwhile, with the event forming part of Black History Month programming, TWF also emphasised that the work must extend beyond February.

“While Black History Month provides an important opportunity to elevate these conversations, advancing brain health and addressing health equity requires sustained commitment, collaboration, and action throughout the year,” the organisation said. It described itself as “proud to serve as a convener – bringing together experts, community voices, and lived experience to deepen understanding and move conversations forward in meaningful ways”.

The symposium was also framed as a call to action.

VCC to stage Holi musical showcase on March 14

Toronto Arya Samaj/Vedic Cultural Centre will stage its Holi Concert on March 14 at its premises at 4345 14th Avenue, Markham, featuring a wide range of performers from across Ontario.

The musical showcase will include popular Bollywood songs and festive Holi selections, with performances by Bash Nandalall, Seema Maraj, Neetu Rambharack, Deveka Yassen, Deven Latchmana, Sudesh Naraine, and Kevin Dhar, among others. Organisers say the concert is intended both as a cultural celebration and as a platform to highlight and support local talent within the community.

In a release, the VCC noted that public response to the event “has been great so far” and encouraged community members to purchase tickets online (email: tas@torontoaryasamaj.org) in advance to secure seating. Tickets purchased online will be reserved and made available for collection at the reception desk on arrival, the release stated.

Alongside the concert, the VCC has issued an appeal for donations in support of the mandir, which marks its 30th anniversary this year and is undergoing ongoing maintenance and repair needs. The organisation said community contributions would assist in the upkeep of what it described as an iconic building that has served the Hindu community for three decades.

Donations can be emailed at tas@torontoaryasamaj.org, or online, with tax-deductible receipts issued for contributions above \$20. Donors are asked to provide the name and address to be used for receipt issuance.

The VCC will also observe Holi on March 4, beginning at 10 a.m., with a programme that includes prayers, a spiritual message, chowtal singing, and traditional Holi songs.

For further information, community members may contact Adit Kumar at 647-866-1926, consult the display on Page 14 for additional contacts, or email tas@torontoaryasamaj.org.

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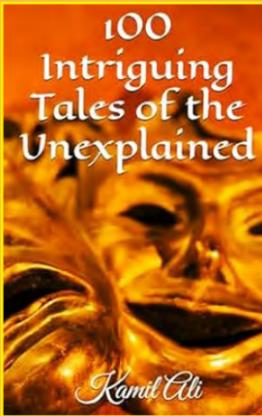
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Faith leaders and guests at the City of Brampton's 2026 Annual Faith Leaders Meeting; in photo, second from left at front, is Pandit Yudhisthir Dhanrajh, leader of Brampton Triveni Mandir. *City of Brampton photo*

City of Brampton builds trust across faiths

– The City of Brampton convened its 2026 Annual Faith Leaders Meeting, bringing together leaders from diverse faith communities to strengthen dialogue, partnerships, and neighbourhood resilience, reinforcing the city's commitment to inclusion and community well-being.

Brampton – Faith leaders from across Brampton gathered last week for the City's 2026 Annual Faith Leaders Meeting, entering a shared space designed for meaningful conversation, learning, trust, and connection.

The annual gathering created an opportunity for faith leaders to engage in dialogue while exploring resources available through the City of Brampton and local organisations. Discussions were grounded in community needs, and focused on how partnerships can strengthen neighbourhood-level trust, cohesion, and support.

According to the City of Brampton's social media posts, the event was both a celebration and a reaffirmation of civic partnership.

As the City of Brampton notes, "We celebrate the diverse communities shaping our city and the vital role faith leaders play in building trust, strengthening connections, and fostering resilience at the neighbourhood level. This gathering reflects the collective commitment to supporting residents and creating spaces where communities can thrive."

The message underscores its recognition of Brampton's multicultural and multi-faith identity, and the essential role faith-based organisations play in community life.

The City of Brampton further emphasised its forward-looking commitment to partnership and inclusion, stating, "We remain

focused on strengthening partnerships and building capacity to create more welcoming and inclusive opportunities for all residents."

Brampton is one of Canada's most diverse cities, and is home to residents representing a wide spectrum of cultures and faith traditions. Its Community Safety & Well-Being Office has been working closely with the interfaith community to enhance relationships and deepen connectedness and belonging among faith-based places across the city.

As outlined in its message, faith-based institutions remain an important pillar of civic engagement and social support.

As it notes, "Faith-based places offer spiritual care and connection for residents in our community. This is an important segment of community which we highly value and respect, both for their contributions in shaping the City of Brampton, and for their continued input as we build our City. Engaging faith-based communities has been an integral way to engage Brampton residents in civic community building."

City officials have consistently highlighted that strengthening relationships with faith leaders is central to fostering trust and building resilient neighbourhoods.

The annual meeting of faith leaders serves as a platform not only for consultation, but also for collaboration in aligning municipal resources with the lived realities and concerns of congregations across Brampton.

By bringing faith leaders together in dialogue, the City of Brampton continues to reinforce a shared vision: that inclusive partnerships, rooted in respect and mutual understanding, remain foundational to Brampton's growth and well-being.



At Brampton's Black History Month launch last week marking 30 years of celebrating Black excellence, leadership and culture, Member of Parliament Ruby Sahota (Brampton North-Caledon) joined residents in an evening of inspiring performances, heartfelt conversations, and community recognition. The gathering honoured the contributions of Black Canadians who continue to shape Brampton and the country at large. MP Sahota congratulated Annie Bynoe, Executive Director of Knights Table, on receiving the City of Brampton's Key to the City, a tribute to her decades of leadership and service. In photo, Bynoe (left) and MP Sahota. *Facebook photo*



MP Juanita Nathan, Member of Parliament for Pickering-Brooklin, joined community leaders and families at the Government of Canada's 2026 Black History Month Celebration for an event that honoured legacy, resilience, and the vibrant diversity of Black communities. Connecting with attendees, MP Nathan listened to their stories, and shared in a program that featured remarks from Prime Minister Mark Carney, who underscored the importance of recognising Black history in Canada while continuing the work to dismantle persistent barriers. The celebration was further elevated by the presence of trailblazer Jean Augustine, Canada's first Black woman to serve as a federal Minister and Member of Parliament, whose enduring legacy continues to inspire new generations of leadership and change. *FB photos*



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Editorial

Tumbler Ridge

Canada is in mourning. In the quiet northern community of Tumbler Ridge, BC, families now wake to an absence that cannot be repaired. Nine lives, including the shooter, were lost in one of the most devastating acts of violence our country has ever known.

As Prime Minister Mark Carney said following the tragedy, "What happened has left our nation in shock, and all of us in mourning." His words captured not only the grief of a town of roughly 2,400 people, but the sorrow of a country struggling to comprehend the incomprehensible.

The pain reverberates from BC to Ottawa to our eastern provinces, and here in the GTA in our Caribbean diaspora. We are certain parents in our community now hold their children differently. A community smaller than many of our neighbourhoods has been thrust into the harshest of spotlights, yet it does not stand alone. Canada stands with Tumbler Ridge; and as Canadians, we stand with them.

February 10 brought more than devastation to families; it paused the rhythms of public life. PM Carney cancelled his trip to Munich; and Parliament set aside its cut-and-thrust tempo. In the House of Commons, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre reminded the country that "no parent should ever have to bury their own child"; later, at the vigil, he added, "There is no partisanship on this day."

Governor-General Mary Simon urged Canadians to "stay united in our compassion and reach out to one another with love and tenderness". Moments of unity like these do not erase grief; but they matter when we unite.

When PM Carney stood in Tumbler Ridge on February 12 alongside Poilievre and other senior federal leaders, that moment spoke quietly but powerfully.

"Standing here together in your home, we wanted you to hear that Canadians are with you, and we will always be with you," PM Carney stated, adding, "Whatever portion of your sadness that Canadians can bear to help you ease your heavy load, we will gladly do so." He described Canada as "a community that relies on each others' grace".

Poilievre, in turn, praised the decision to bring leaders together, saying that while they lead different parties, "today, there are no Conservatives. There are no Liberals, New Democrats, Greens, or Bloc Quebecois. We are all... mothers and fathers". In those words was a reminder that beneath political banners are families who send their children to school expecting them to safely return home.

For us in the diaspora, our compassion closes the distance between Tumbler Ridge and the GTA. The town's population is smaller than many of our community's summer gatherings; yet its sorrow feels close to home.

Together, we are all grandparents, parents, sons, and daughters. We understand the simple, sacred expectation that a child leaving for school in the morning should return home in the afternoon. When that covenant is broken, the wound is national; it is a pain we bear together.

What occurred in Tumbler Ridge was a tragedy of an intensity Canada rarely faces. Families have been shattered, and futures interrupted. The path ahead for that small community will require fortitude, support, and time. There will be moments of quiet remembrance, and difficult days when grief resurfaces without warning.

But in the midst of anguish, something else has been revealed. Our ability to come together in crisis, to lower our national and provincial flags, to pause politics, to stand side by side; it is a reflection of a deeper, civic bond. As we see otherwise daily elsewhere, leadership, at its best, does not inflame division; instead, it steadies a nation. It shows up in person, closes ranks, listens, and bears witness.

"This morning, parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers in Tumbler Ridge will wake up without someone they love," an emotional PM Carney said last week in Ottawa. "The nation mourns with you. Canada stands by you."

As a diaspora community rooted in shared histories and strengthened by shared struggles, we echo that commitment. We offer our sorrow, our prayers, and our solidarity. Grief binds us; grace sustains us. And in standing together, quietly, steadfastly, we honour the lives that have been so untimely lost, even while holding hands and affirming the kind of country we are striving to become.

Family Day: Celebrating our courage across generations

It has been a harsh, cold winter. For those of us in the GTA, we've seen heavy snowfall, icy winds, and mornings where stepping outside feels like stepping into a freezer. In times like these, many of us can't help but ask the same question: Why did our parents and grandparents leave warm, tropical homelands for a place where winter feels endless?

The answer lives in their courage. Our parents and ancestors took a chance, demonstrated remarkable bravery, and held tightly to hope in pursuit of a better life – for themselves, and for the generations that would follow.



Ryan Singh

Migration was never simply about geography; it was about possibility. They arrived in a country that was unfamiliar, often unwelcoming, and certainly unforgiving in climate, yet they persevered. They worked long hours, took on difficult jobs, learned new systems, and sacrificed comforts so their children could have access to opportunity, education, and stability.

Each day, we continue that legacy. We strive to make a living, seize opportunities, and build pathways toward brighter futures. Whether through careers, entrepreneurship, community work, or education, we are living proof that their risks were not taken in vain. Their determination laid the groundwork for the thriving community we now enjoy. Because of them, we live with freedoms and possibilities that might once have seemed unimaginable.

Our story is also part of a longer historical journey. The strength we carry today echoes the resilience of those who crossed the *kali pani*, the 'black waters', generations ago. That earlier migration marked by hardship, uncertainty, and endurance set in motion a legacy of movement tied not just to survival, but to liberation and reinvention. Each generation since has built upon that foundation, transforming struggle into progress and displacement into belonging.

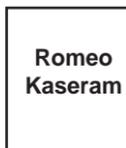
With Family Day observed this week in many Canadian provinces, it offered a meaningful opportunity to pause and remember the determination of our parents, grandparents, and ancestors. These are the people who worked tirelessly, often quietly and without recognition, to ensure that we could live comfortable, stable, and hopeful lives. Their sacrifices are woven into our everyday experiences, from the homes we live in to the opportunities we pursue.

Yet Family Day itself is an unusual holiday. Unlike Canada Day, Christmas, or Thanksgiving, it doesn't come with firmly defined traditions or expectations. There are no universally agreed-upon rituals or customs that dictate how it must be celebrated. But perhaps that is its greatest strength. Its openness allows us to shape it in ways that feel personal and meaningful.

A gatherer of knowledge meets the preserver of our script

I do not recall how my peripatetic footsteps took me to the cluttered bookstore in the capital city in the homeland; only that it happened in my early teenage years when the world began widening beyond the cane fields and its geometric shadows cast across the rugged roads as we left the village behind.

The widening of that window in my youth came by way of a government-issued school bus pass, sternly accompanied by a warning in the fine print that it be used to and from classes, or for events related to school activity.



Romeo Kaseram

But by then, I already understood the inherent elasticity in language. With a stiff face and a straight voice, I told the enquiring bus driver I was headed to the capital city on a school project. The driver shifted into gear, and the front door closed, stuttering with half-believing my veracity and an accompanying hydraulic sigh; meanwhile, the bus conductor's eyes lingered on the photo on the pass with a spark of suspicion.

Soon the crunching of the wheels on gravel had given way to the hum of rubber on asphalt, the bus gliding along on what felt like a river of oil. The undulating, regimented fields of sugar canes merged into flat fields where distant figures perched on carts were urging along reluctant cattle with a driver's whip.

Already tall buildings were appearing ahead, their tops grazing the clouds. Sitting at the front of the bus, I watched hypnotised as the white lines unspooled, unending pieces of broken threads pulling me to the centre that was our capital city.

Soon I discovered the buildings were not crowned with clouds; instead, what seemed like clouds was smog from a perpetually burning dumpsite. I had mistaken residue for altitude; that the skyline inspiring me from the distance was not a magical, heavenly one; instead, I was journeying into a landscape where each breath meant the city was inhaling its own waste.

Already, my journey had become a passage that moved from wonder to recognition; and it did not end there that day.

It was here in a city suffused with smog mistaken for loftier clouds where I discovered the store and its avalanche of books. By then I was already feeling the gravitational pull of books; even today, I find myself caught in event horizons that are discount tables with hundreds of books, ensnared in that space of timelessness where I no longer age, even as the world outside continues to run at its breakneck pace.

Lunch in the city was always frugal, a bun packed with pep-ery, curried chickpeas, chased with a bottle of a fiercely sweet

orange drink, the sticky rim of its sugared lip summoning waves of highly-focused, tiny, iridescent flies. Hunger was physical, spicy, and fulfilling; but books were another hunger, quiet, insistent, and insatiable.

And so, espying a tumble of books within, I entered the cluttered store. The bell above the door announced me with dust-coated thuds. Even by the doorway, the air was already stale with sandalwood incense; and there was something older – dust, memory, the passage of time.

Galvanised buckets hung overhead, freckled with rust; brooms with their bristles now skeletal leaned lazily with learned purposelessness. Here was a world paused, not abandoned; certainly not thriving, but suspended like the buckets overhead, and of course, similarly freckled with specks of rust.

In a corner was the moraine of books I had espied earlier, disgorged from a shelving unit, its warped shelves appearing to have finally yielded to the inevitability of gravity. And there by the counter, presiding over this empire of decay, sat its proprietor.

His forehead bore white Brahminical markings; his eyes, enlarged behind thick lenses, travelled across an open Hindi text. A crooked forefinger moved beneath the script as he murmured, syllable by syllable, line by line. The book lay open like a desiccated bird, its wings pinned gently to an aged, cedar frame.

The old man was reading script that I could not decipher. My curiosity flickered, then withdrew. Instead, my feet drifted toward the English paperbacks, an avalanche tumbled on the floor. I stepped carefully, my diffidence and the top of my head unsettling the overhead buckets into a concatenation of mild percussion. His gaze lifted once at the soft cacophony, eyes other-worldly with magnified scrutiny, measuring my advance into the dust and time that he had left behind.

Today, I read from my memory of this event two readers set adrift in that narrative. The old man, immersed in one archive; myself, a scavenger in another. He was the keeper of the script, while I was a gatherer of knowledge. In his interrupted murmur was a lineage, while I haggled over a price for my chosen books.

That in the embrace of books made with my exit, despite itching from the dust and with anticipation, I was leaving something tangible behind. Hurrying to catch the return bus, here was wonder that would later become recognition. Today, I still see that old man, a scholar preserving our script in a desuetude of decay; meanwhile, I had embraced the knowledge of empire.

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

WIN win? How Mohamed's rise led to a realignment of Guyana's Opposition

Dear Editor,

After a delay of more than three months since the election of the Parliamentary Speaker and the swearing in of Members of Parliament in Guyana, the Speaker finally convened the required meeting of Opposition members that elected, as expected, Azruddin Mohamed, Leader of the WIN party, as Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mohamed's meteoric rise from political novice to Opposition leader in about a year was a political tsunami, which (a), devastated the PNC (in Parliament as APNU), one of the two behemoths of Guyana's politics and the party founded by L.F.S. Burnham, the first Prime Minister and the first Executive President of the country.

And (b), it sent shock waves through the governing PPP/Civic hierarchy, despite the fact that this party emerged with a seven seat parliamentary majority in the elections. In this piece, I share my thoughts on the reasons for the spectacular rise of Mohamed and the WIN party.

Mohamed was a close friend of the PPP/Civic's leadership, but, until he was sanctioned by the US authorities for violating US laws and facing likely extradition, he had demonstrated no interest in active party politics.

However, after being sanctioned by the US and abandoned by his former friends in the PPP/Civic, in particular Guyana's President Dr Irfaan Ali, he saw politics as his avenue to possibly avoid extradition, and at the same time contribute to the downfall of the PPP/Civic in the elections that were due within a year.

In my view, his foremost motivation to enter politics was personal, that is, to save himself from extradition, and that caused him to devote all his time, energy, and huge financial resource to his political battle.

I do not accept the view expressed by the leaders of the PPP/Civic and the PNC/APNU that Mohamed paid individuals to vote for his party in the 2025 general elections. That claim made no sense, as no one can guarantee how an individual will vote in the privacy of the voting booth.

Mohamed's financial resource benefited him by enabling his frequent and extensive travel to all, even some of the remotest parts of Guyana. He was, therefore, able to listen and bring to light concerns over neglect in these communities. As well, he was able to fund WIN organisers in these communities,



WIN supporters before the September, 2025 general elections

who kept his message alive, and who constantly apprised him of issues to be raised to embarrass the government and the Opposition PNC/APNU.

Unlike the PPP, the PNC/APNU and the former UF, all of which had a philosophical grounding at their formation and a view for the future development of the country, WIN has not expressed any such ideology or plan. Leading up to the elections, WIN was Azruddin and Azruddin was WIN, and his handlers maintained a tight control on his communication and his media exposure.

Social media with well-scripted statements read by him were the major means of communication, and he was shielded from holding press conferences with journalists from the major national media houses.

Consistently, his political message was simple: I am being persecuted by this PPP/Civic government, and I am running to help you the people to fight this uncaring and corrupt government. This latter message found resonance in parts of the country that felt neglected by the government, and the WIN party made substantial gains in these areas.

WIN's votes came mainly from former traditional supporters of the PNC/APNU, who transferred allegiance to WIN causing the PNC/APNU, for the first time in its nearly 68 years' history, to fall to third party status in Parliament. Region 10, which includes the town of Linden (named after PNC founder Linden Forbes

Sampson Burnham), is a good example of this swing.

The decline in the traditional support of the PNC/APNU commenced with its leaders' attempt to hold on to power based on an attempted fraudulent declaration of election results in 2020, an event that was publicly observed and condemned by local and international election observers, and which alienated many fair-minded PNC/APNU supporters.

This was followed by internal dissension over the position of the Opposition leader in the ensuing Parliament, a position the party earned after gaining the second highest number of parliamentary seats in 2020.

After that was resolved, the party continued its downward spiral under the new Opposition. By the time the 2025 elections came around, the party was seriously fractured with the sidelining of and/or departure of a number of popular party stalwarts who disagreed with the Opposition leader's management and direction of the party.

Although PPP/Civic leaders, and in particular, President Ali, had made great efforts to win over disenchanted PNC/APNU supporters, the majority chose to join the WIN team. This is not surprising. Much to their later regret, both the leader of the

See Page 8: Uncertain future

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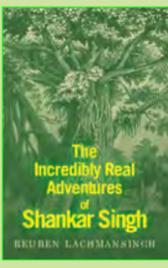
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Uncertain future ahead for Mohamed

From Page 7

PNC/APNU, Aubrey Norton, and the leader of now sidelined AFC, Nigel Hughes, had given tacit support to Mohamed as he contemplated launching his political career.

In fact, their supporters had flocked to the protection of Mohamed and his property, to prevent the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) from seizing his Lamborghini when he failed to comply with a GRA's request.

Mohamed further enhanced his standing with traditional PNC/APNU and AFC supporters when he joined forces in condemning the police and government handling of the Adrianna Young's drowning.

In Guyana, which has a history of voting along racial lines, and where race could be a lightning rod for communal violence, as happened in this case, he joined conspiracy proponents in alleging the drowning of this Afro-Guyanese child in the swimming pool of a hotel owned by an Indo-Guyanese businessman, was a murder.

He is quoted in *Demerara Waves* of July 13, 2025, as saying in Linden, a town of predominantly Afro-Guyanese residents, "Come the second of September, I'll get the FBI to investigate that murder"; this was said "to applause".

Although minimal, WIN also made inroads in traditional PPP/Civic areas. As the party in government, it is expected that there will be some disenchantment with its policies. However, in my view the government's performance in a number of areas, especially in relation to some of the major infrastructure projects, has been less than stellar, with some projects awarded to contractors with no relevant expertise or experience.

Moreover, the government has not demonstrated a serious commitment to hold indi-

viduals and contractors accountable for shoddy work, failure to meet project deadlines that kept on being extended, and in some cases, payment for work not started or completed.

As a result, the WIN party has been able to highlight these actions, bring attention to unresolved problems in PPP/Civic strongholds, and gain support.

Also, some fair-minded PPP/Civic supporters across the country abhorred the apparent encouragement by party brass of the harassment meted out to the WIN leader when he attempted to address his supporters in PPP/Civic dominated areas.

Thus, the PPP leaders may have inadvertently created blocks of sympathy voters for the WIN party among their traditional supporters.

Other factors also played a role in Mohamed's amazing electoral success. These include voters' fatigue and apathy with the two established major parties, considered by some as *Tweedle Dee* and *Tweedle Dum*, and hence a preference for a new face.

Also, there were Mohamed's well-publicised benevolence to a number of needy families, including a motor car for one, and a home for another; and although being released at the last moment, an Election Manifesto that promised significantly increased financial benefits to several segments of the electorate, for example, civil servants, pensioners, and the disabled.

Now in Parliament, Mohamed will have to prove his mettle and justify the trust placed in him and his party by a major segment of the Guyanese electorate. And, equally important, he should without delay proceed to have a succession plan in place as a contingency in the event of a 50-50 chance that he is extradited to the US.

Harry Hergash, Toronto, via email.



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Guyana govt's optimism for revival of sugar real or imaginary?

In spite of a sharp decline in production and continuously missing its targets over the past decade, the government of Guyana remains optimistic that the sugar industry will return to profitability. So much so that it keeps pumping billions of dollars into the beleaguered industry to revitalise it.

In its 2026 budget, the government allocated G \$13.4 billion to sugar, up marginally from \$13.3 billion in 2025, raising concerns among Opposition members about the feasibility of continuing to finance an industry that has been consistently underperforming.

It is expected that sugar production would reach 100,000 tonnes in 2026, up from 59,000 tonnes last year, versus a target of 70,000 tonnes. According to Opposition members, this target is unattainable given current cane output and operating factory capacity.

According to the 2026 budget, restoring Guysuco to financial viability and long-term sustainability remains a priority for the Government. The budget highlighted achievements over the last five years, among them reopening of the Rose Hall Estate, and upgrading the field and factory infrastructure at Albion, Blairmont, Rose Hall, and Uitvlugt, which together, it stated, reenergised the previously devastated local rural economy.

The government also claimed that it remodeled the marketing and sales mix from bulk sugar to higher value products, and provided direct economic support to over 5,200 displaced workers.

As well, last year the Albion packaging plant commenced operations, and essential machinery and equipment were procured to improve factory operations across estates, including two mechanical harvesters.

In addition, the budget stated that Guysuco rehabilitated over 100 cane punts, the Blairmont wharf, rotary sugar dryer drums, and billet cane yards, and over five kilometres of access roads. Furthermore, works progressed on the conversion of lands at Albion, Blairmont, Rosehall and Uitvlugt for mechanised planting and harvesting.

Looking ahead, over the next five years, the objective of the government is to continue mechanisation of field operations through land conversion; improve mechanical planting and harvesting; modernise factories and improve factory operations; promote high-yielding and high-value cane varieties; invest in value-added production with private sector participation; improve worker, union, and management relations and transition workers to higher skilled roles.

The budget stated that in 2026, over 3,000 hectares are targeted to be converted for mechanised harvesting, three sugar boilers will be replaced; five cane harvesters will be procured; a conveyor system for billet canes at Albion will be constructed; additional sugar dryers for Rose Hall and Uitvlugt will be acquired; billet cane feeder tables will be installed; value-added production will be expanded; and all-weather road access to facilitate movement of billet canes will be improved.

The government's ultimate goal is to effectively transform and diversify Guysuco into an agro-industrial hub for rural economic development.

In countering whether it was possible to produce 100,000 tonnes of sugar this year, Agriculture Minister Zulfikar Mustapha said that he is hopeful that the mechanisation of the corporation would move between 50 to 60 percent in the field to drive up production. He also pointed to the recapitalisation of sugar factories, including the replacement of rollers, turbines, and conveyor systems, as well as improvements in juice extraction.

"All these things will contribute to better sugar production, and I am very optimistic," he stated during the 2026 Budget debate.

While Guyana has the potential to ramp up sugar production, output has fallen steadily since 2017 when the government commenced closing estates. (See Chart: Dramatic Decline in Sugar Production.)

The truth is, sugar still has potential. An examination of historical production patterns shows that annual sugar production is at its lowest level ever. For instance, during the 1960s sugar output averaged almost 300,000 tonnes per year. During the 1970-1980 period, production averaged over 306,000 tonnes per year, with a peak of 369,000 tonnes in 1971.

However, during the 1990-2000 period, average sugar production fell to about 245,000 tons, with 1999 output of 365,000 tons being the highest.

Over the next decade, 2001-2010, average production increased to almost 270,000 tonnes annually, supported by three years, 2002-2004, of production averaging 320,000 tones. The noticeable decline in production started in 2008 and production has largely trended downwards, or fluctuated up until 2017.

What is important to note is that production fell further after the implementation of Guysuco's modernisation initiatives. It was also during this period that expectations were at its peak for the revival of the industry.

At the crux of the matter is the fact that the government was wildly optimistic that its US \$200 million modernisation efforts launched way back in 1998 as part of a ten-year plan would lead to a dramatic increase in production. But when the ten-year plan finally materialised 12 years later with the commissioning of the modernised Skeldon factory in September 2009, sugar was still in trouble.

Once the mainstay of the economy, the struggling industry was virtually shutdown under the previous APNU+AFC administration. The closure of the Wales, Enmore-East Demerara, Rose Hall-Canje and Skeldon Estates, led to the termination of almost 6,000 workers. Three estates and factories: Albion, Blairmont, and Uitvlugt, remained open.

Incidentally, prior to the closure of estates by the previous administration, sugar was already in trouble. Guysuco was bankrupt. The decision to downsize the industry came on the back of a Commission of Inquiry (COI), which stopped short of putting the final nail in its coffin.

The COI saw the sugar industry as more than a business. It then directly employed some 16,000 people, a number that is about 20 percent higher when all the associated industries are taken into consideration; and more important, it supported a network of communities across the coastal sugar producing belt, whose disruption could have dire economic and social consequences. Yet, the COI noted that Guysuco was at a point of no return, and that privatisation should be pursued.

The industry was then plagued by a plethora of problems, key among them incompetent management, declining production, high operational costs, and a huge debt burden. As a result, Guysuco has depended on government funding to keep it afloat. In addition, volatile labour conditions and variable weather conditions also had a significant impact on production.

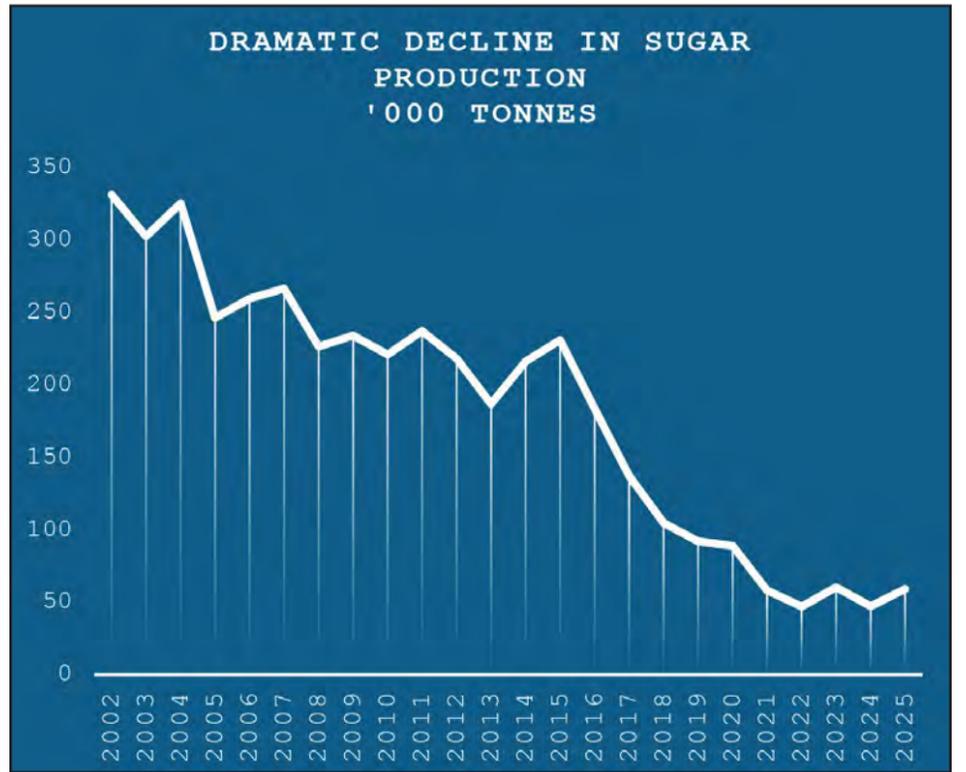
The corporation's financial troubles came to a height May 2015, when it ran out of funds to pay workers' wages, resulting in the then APNU+AFC government finding reason to fire its entire Board of Directors, as well as its CEO, in a move that was not surprising.



Dwarka Lakhan



Zulfikar Mustapha



As a result of its financial state, Guysuco has been continuously bailed out by the government to the tune of more than \$70 billion.

The bitter-sweet reality of sugar is that it never recovered from the withdrawal of preferential pricing by the European Union (EU) in 2006, which resulted in a price cut of some 36 percent. Prior to the cut in EU subsidies, Guyana's sugar was shipped to the EU, its largest buyer, enjoying higher than world market prices under the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) Convention.

Upon assuming office in 2020, the PPP/Civic government announced its commitment to breathing new life into the dying sugar

industry. Since then, investing in the sugar sector has been a keen focus of the government.

With sugar still struggling, expectations of substantially increasing production and restoring the industry to profitability is overly optimistic.

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

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From rupture to renewal: Canada's economy in hinge moment with India

By Tim Hodgson

Member of Parliament, Markham-Thornhill

We are living through a hinge moment for Canada's economy and our place in the world. As Prime Minister Mark Carney said recently in Davos, this is a rupture, not a transition. Long-standing assumptions about global trade, multilateralism, energy security, and economic partnerships no longer hold.

The old order is not coming back, and nostalgia is not a strategy. So the question facing Canada is straightforward: how do we respond?

My recent trip to India was part of our answer.

Earlier this month, I represented Canada at India Energy Week in Goa, and met with Indian ministers, industry leaders, and global energy partners in New Delhi to discuss trade opportunities that will play a key role in the reset and strengthening of Canada-India relations.

This was the first time a Canadian federal minister has attended India Energy Week – and that matters. It signals a clear shift in how Canada is engaging with one of the most consequential economies of this century.

For Canadians, and especially for the many families in Markham-Thornhill with deep ties to India, this visit was critical. It reflects Canada's commitment to diversification, to resilience, and to building long-term prosperity in a changing world.

India is already the fastest-growing major economy on the planet. It is also the country with the fastest-growing energy demand, roughly equal to China and Southeast Asia combined. By 2040, India's energy consumption is expected to more than double. It is pretty clear: if Canada is serious about being an energy superpower, we have to be serious about India.

Today, Canada and India's two-way trade exceeds \$23 billion annually and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs in both countries. It is supported by the close people-to-people ties between our two nations. But we are nowhere near the ceiling of what is possible. That is why under PM Carney, we have restarted negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, or CEPA, which is expected to more than double bilateral trade to \$70 billion by 2030. Energy, critical minerals, clean technology, agriculture, and advanced manufacturing will all be central to that agreement, and growing Canada-India trade and investment.

My objective during my trip to India was simple: turn



MP Tim Hodgson (right) at India Energy Week

Canada's competitive advantages into future trading opportunities.

In Goa, I met with Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, India's Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, where we officially reinstated the Canada-India Ministerial Energy Dialogue. This renewed dialogue creates a sustained government-to-government platform focused on bringing clean and conventional Canadian energy, areas where Canada has world-class products to sell and India has enormous demand, to India.

Restarting the Ministerial Dialogue may sound like government-speak. But this matters because India's energy sector is largely State-directed. Clear policy alignment, and an endorsement of Canada by Minister Puri, sends a powerful signal to Indian buyers and investors that Canada is open for business and a priority market for them to look to as they scale up to meet national demand.

On LNG alone, India aims to increase the share of natural gas in its energy mix to 15 percent by 2030, up from roughly

six percent today. Beginning this past June, Canada has started shipping LNG from our west coast, so we are well-positioned to help meet that demand with reliable, responsibly-produced LNG, supporting India's energy security while lowering global emissions.

Beyond oil and gas, while in New Delhi, I met with India's Ministers of New and Renewable Energy, Heavy Industries, and Chemicals and Fertilisers. Our discussions covered clean power deployment, industrial decarbonisation, fertiliser supply chains, critical minerals, electric vehicles, and advanced manufacturing. In each case, the message was clear: Canada has what India needs, and India offers a market that provides significant opportunities for Canadian companies.

On critical minerals, we made tangible progress. India recently launched a \$4-billion National Critical Minerals Mission to secure inputs like lithium, copper, and cobalt, minerals Canada produces to some of the highest environmental and labour standards in the world. We agreed to formalise cooperation between our two countries in the coming weeks, and I was pleased to invite India's Minister of Mines to attend the PDAC mining conference in Toronto this March.

Ultimately, this trip reflects Canada's new, pragmatic approach to global engagement: building strength at home while diversifying abroad, so we are never dependent on any single market again.

Canada is a stable democracy, a trusted supplier, and a dependable long-term partner in an increasingly volatile global economy. We have low-cost, low-carbon energy. We have responsibly sourced critical minerals. And with our Pacific gateway now fully open, we are well-positioned to serve growing Asian markets like India.

Strengthening our relationship with India is not optional. It is essential to Canada's economic resilience, our energy leadership, and our future prosperity. This visit helped put the relationships, policy frameworks, and commercial pathways in place to deliver real results – for workers, for businesses, and for communities across Canada.

In a world defined by uncertainty, Canada is choosing its own path, and building a strong, prosperous country for everyone.

Tim Hodgson brings a wealth of experience in finance, public service, and leadership to his role as Member of Parliament for Markham-Thornhill, and as Canada's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

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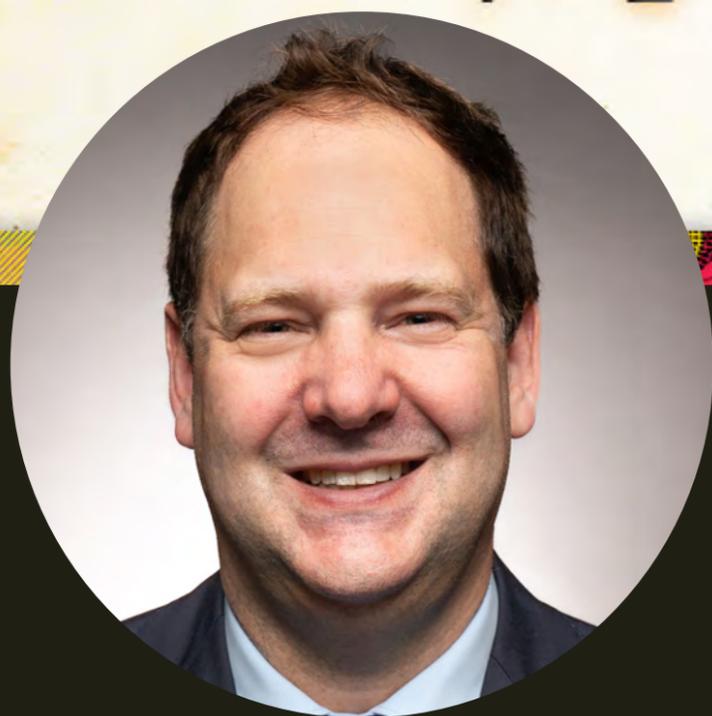
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Mottley (centre) campaigning before last week's elections. Facebook photo

Mottley secures historic third sweep

From Page 1

to share responsibility for national transformation while navigating local and geopolitical challenges.

She also expressed concern about the weakened state of the opposition Democratic Labour Party (DLP), stressing the need for "strong institutions", while recalling her efforts to ensure opposition representation in the Senate following previous BLP clean sweeps.

The scale of the BLP's victory was underscored by the defeat of DLP leader Ralph Thorne in the St John constituency. Thorne secured 1,876 votes compared with 2,327 for BLP candidate Charles Griffith and 236 for Kemar Stuart.

"We acquitted ourselves well, fought a clean campaign. The result is quite disappointing; no explanation for it," Thorne said, conceding defeat.

University lecturer and former DLP president Ronnie Yearwood said the electorate had delivered a clear message to the party.

"You can't lose three times in this way and believe what you are doing," Yearwood said, urging internal reform. He added, "This is not where we want to be...but the public has given the party a third defeat."

Political scientist and pollster Peter Wickham said the outcome reflected more on the Opposition than on the governing party, arguing that while the BLP has "grown and evolved," the DLP has not.

"It has to make hard decisions," Wickham said, describing the DLP's campaign as "horrible" and suggesting that its leader should step aside.

"The party has to start looking for a new leader and identify new talent," he added.

As congratulations flowed from across Caricom, regional leaders described Mottley's renewed mandate as a signal of stability and strengthened regional cooperation in a period marked by geopolitical uncertainty.

In a message from the Office of the Prime Minister of Grenada on February 12, PM Dickon Mitchell extended warm congratulations to Mottley, describing her victory as an "historic achievement" reaffirming her strong leadership and the confidence of the Barbadian people.

The statement said her resounding win highlighted "the enduring trust Barbadians continue to place in her vision for economic resilience, social advancement, and inclusive national development".

It also affirmed, "Her renewed mandate offers the promise of continued progress for Barbados and deeper regional collaboration

toward shared Caribbean prosperity."

The OPM added that Grenada remains committed to working closely with Mottley's administration to advance sustainable development, climate resilience, and enhanced regional integration.

Saint Lucia's Prime Minister Philip J. Pierre said he looked forward to strengthening collaboration between both nations as they advance shared goals of growth and resilience.

"Join me in congratulating Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley and the Barbados Labour Party on their victory. The people of Barbados, for a third consecutive time have placed their confidence in your leadership and vision," Pierre said.

Jamaica's Prime Minister Andrew Holness added, "Jamaica remains committed to strengthening our partnership as we continue to work together in advancing our shared regional priorities. I look forward to deepening our collaboration and cooperation within Caricom."

Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit extended "warm congratulations", stating, "The people of Barbados have once again placed their trust in your leadership and your ability to guide the country forward during a time that calls for steady hands and bold thinking"

Prime Minister Terrance Drew of St Kitts and Nevis said the result reflected the confidence of Barbadians in Mottley's leadership and reaffirmed commitment to strengthening unity within Caricom.

Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar described the outcome as an "historic third consecutive victory" and "a milestone that reflects the strength of her leadership and the confidence of the Barbadian people".

She noted that securing "a third consecutive landslide mandate is an exceptional accomplishment and a testament to her steadfast commitment to national development, resilience, and progress in a rapidly changing global environment," while highlighting a longstanding professional friendship forged during their early careers as Caribbean attorneys.

Guyana's President Irfaan Ali extended "heartfelt congratulations", stating that a third successive mandate and clean sweep "speak to how much her leadership and that of her party resonated in the homes, hearts, and hopes of the Barbadian people".

He added, "Our shared history and common aspirations form a sturdy bridge across the Caribbean", while expressing optimism about strengthening fraternal ties between the two nations.



St Lucia's PM Philip J. Pierre



Ask Jay...

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SYNDICATED MORTGAGES: THE RISK HIDING BEHIND THE REAL ESTATE BOOM

Once sold as conservative investments, syndicated mortgages are now revealing how trust, leverage, and a slowing Ontario market can collide.

I remembered someone telling me they invested in a syndicated mortgage and felt safer than if they had bought a stock. What they didn't realise is that some of the biggest mortgage fraud cases in this province happened because of how much people trusted it.

Syndicated mortgages gained popularity during Ontario's housing boom. They were marketed as conservative, income-generating investments, often appealing to individuals who did not see themselves as risk-takers. Syndicated mortgages offer high returns, are secured by property, have short durations, and display low volatility. In many cases, investors bought into an opaque structure based on aggressive assumptions, inflated appraisals, and sometimes misleading information.

Most people believe mortgage fraud involves fake buyers or forged documents. However, in syndicated mortgages, fraud tends to be more subtle and sophisticated. In Ontario, regulators have uncovered cases of inflated land values based on unrealistic future development plans; misleading disclosure documents that downplay risks; conflicts of interest where developers, brokers, and promoters benefit while investors incur the losses; and funds raised for projects that were never financially viable from the start. During a rising market, these issues remained hidden. Prices increased, refinancing was easy, and losses went unnoticed.

Today's market exposes all vulnerabilities. Ontario's housing sector has slowed significantly. Condo sales are sluggish, construction costs remain high, and financing options are limited. Many projects experience delays, or are entirely cancelled. Syndicated mortgages rely on steady progress. When that progress halts, the structure collapses.

Investors are now facing harsh realities where they no longer receive interest payments on their investments. The projects they believed were secure are deteriorating, and legal disputes are beginning. Properties are selling at distressed prices. Syndicated investors, often in second or third position, are the last to be paid.

Syndicated mortgages require careful review. If you're considering one in today's market, proceed with caution. Many Ontario investors misunderstand the differences between first, second, and third mortgages until defaults occur. As an investor, inquire about the mortgage's position, understanding that a first mortgage is less risky than a second, and a second is less risky than a third.

Question the appraisal and determine what the property would sell for today. If promoters, brokers, and developers are paid upfront while investors wait, incentives become misaligned. Avoid sales pressure and rushing, as fraud often relies on quick decisions. Never invest all your savings into a single syndicated mortgage, no matter how convincing the pitch is.

Ontario's real estate boom led many to believe that property investments were completely safe. However, cases of mortgage fraud involving syndicated mortgages have shattered that misconception. Real estate should not be seen as a foolproof guarantee. Legal documents are not inherently protections, and high returns associated with complex structures should always arouse suspicion – especially in a declining market.

A few years ago, during the market's boom, many homeowners leveraged their home equity to invest in syndicated mortgages, which financed larger projects. The mortgage is secured against a property, but often that property is one the lender prefers not to finance. Typically, syndications are created to raise funds for a specific project; if that project fails, the syndication collapses.

We live in a changing world where fraud and misleading advertisements are becoming more sophisticated. Yet, a common theme runs through all these schemes. They promise a safe environment where your money is secure and offer high returns. Usually, their call to action is urgent. You must invest now, and if you don't act quickly, you will miss out.

Your home is your shelter, both physically and financially. If you need to access equity for investment, proceed carefully.

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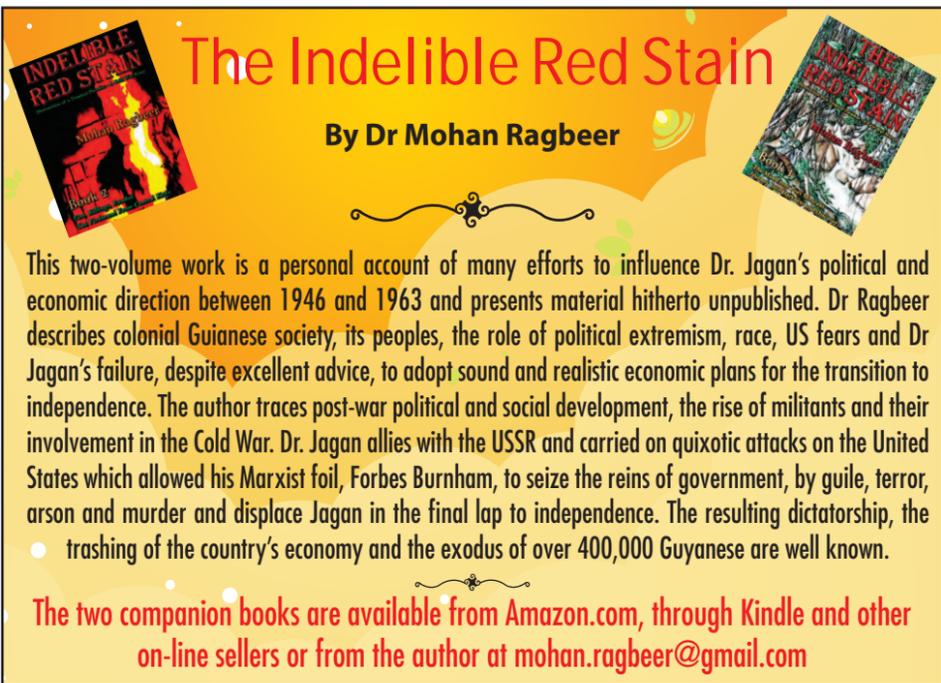


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The Indelible Red Stain

By Dr Mohan Ragbeer

This two-volume work is a personal account of many efforts to influence Dr. Jagan's political and economic direction between 1946 and 1963 and presents material hitherto unpublished. Dr Ragbeer describes colonial Guianese society, its peoples, the role of political extremism, race, US fears and Dr Jagan's failure, despite excellent advice, to adopt sound and realistic economic plans for the transition to independence. The author traces post-war political and social development, the rise of militants and their involvement in the Cold War. Dr. Jagan allies with the USSR and carried on quixotic attacks on the United States which allowed his Marxist foil, Forbes Burnham, to seize the reins of government, by guile, terror, arson and murder and displace Jagan in the final lap to independence. The resulting dictatorship, the trashing of the country's economy and the exodus of over 400,000 Guyanese are well known.

The two companion books are available from Amazon.com, through Kindle and other on-line sellers or from the author at mohan.ragbeer@gmail.com



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Guyanese-born cardiologist adds new beat to iconic Valentine's Day heart

— Toronto cardiologist Dr Vivian Rambihar is encouraging the diaspora in Guyana, the Caribbean, Canada, and globally to reframe Valentine's Day as a reminder to prioritise heart health, the *Guyana Chronicle* reports. His long-running Valentine's Day for Heart Health initiative, launched in 1983, has evolved into a broader 'Global Heart' concept linking prevention, community outreach, and complex social determinants of health.

By Romeo Kaseram
An LJI Health Feature

Toronto – Valentine's Day is widely celebrated in Guyana, the Caribbean, Canada, and globally with the iconic heart symbol reminding us of love, romance, and chocolates.

Now adding a new beat to the rhythm of the Valentine's Day icon, Guyanese-born Toronto cardiologist Dr Vivian Rambihar continues to advocate for giving this special day additional meaning as one for health and heart health, the *Guyana Chronicle* reported last weekend.

Over the years, Rambihar has been encouraging us to use Valentine's Day as a reminder to think about heart health, not only on February 14, but throughout the year.

The symbolism of the heart, so visible during Valentine Day's celebrations, provides what he sees as an ideal opportunity to focus on prevention and awareness.

A 1969 Guyana Scholar, Rambihar attended and taught mathematics at Queen's College before studying medicine at the then newly-established McMaster University Medical School here in Ontario. He graduated 50 years ago, specialised in cardiology at McMaster and the University of Toronto, and among this thousands of patients, he has looked after many Guyanese, Trinidad and Tobago, and Caribbean migrants in the GTA.

In caring for our community, he recognised high rates of heart disease and premature heart disease, especially in our Indo-Caribbean community. He conducted research on these trends and followed this with community outreach for health promotion.

Over time, he came to recognise the complex and changing dynamics that lead to health and heart disease, including factors outside the usual practice of medicine, such as advertising, systems, policy, access to care, culture, and customs.

According to the *Guyana Chronicle*, Rambihar's advocacy moved beyond observation, and into organised action in 1983, when he launched what is now known as Valentine's Day for Heart Health.

As the *Chronicle* reports, "This is why he started Valentine's Day for Heart Health in 1983, as community outreach, with an inspirational interdisciplinary team at the Scarborough General Hospital, running for over 25 years."

The initiative was not a solitary effort. The team included his daughter, Toronto cardiologist Dr Sherryn Rambihar; Toronto pediatric cardiologist Dr Joe Jagdeo, who grew up in Guyana and attended Queen's College; and many other health professionals.

The effort reflected Rambihar's belief that improving heart health required engagement beyond clinical settings.

As the *Chronicle* explains, "Because of this, he went outside his office to the churches, temples, schools and community centres in Canada and the Caribbean to promote health, trying to understand people in their community and environment, and to try to overcome barriers to health at the personal, community, system, and policy levels."

The outreach model recognised that health and disease are shaped by "complex and changing dynamics", including factors "outside the usual practice of medicine that cause heart disease, such as advertising, systems, policy, access to care, culture, and customs".

Over time, the annual Valentine's Day initiative became both symbolic and practical, a



Global Heart Hour Event at the University of Toronto Medical School Valentine's Day Event 2010; at microphone is Haiti Consul General to Toronto Dr E. Pierre, with Global Heart co-founder Dr Vanessa Rambihar and distinguished speakers



Dr Rambihar (right), with daughter, cardiologist Dr Sherryn Rambihar

reminder that prevention begins long before a visit to the hospital.

The initiative did not remain limited to annual outreach events. According to the *Chronicle*, Rambihar and his colleagues later expanded the concept beyond heart disease prevention into what he described as a broader global vision.

"Together with this team, Dr Rambihar extended this concept beyond heart health to a global heart concept, launched at a Valentine's Day for Heart Health event in 2005," the newspaper reports.

The timing was significant. It came "just after the devastating South Asian tsunami of December 2004 that took 250,000 lives, one of the worst natural disasters ever".

The experience of that global tragedy informed what became the framework for his free book, *Tsunami Chaos Global Heart: Using Complexity Science to Rethink and Make a Better World*. As the *Chronicle* notes, this text includes sections on "preventing heart disease, and chaos, complexity, and complex systems in medicine and health".

The global heart concept was also launched at the University of Toronto Medical School by Dr. Vanessa Rambihar, then a medical student and now a Toronto family doctor, who volunteered in Sri Lanka for a month soon after the tsunami. The *Chronicle* further highlights the role of University of Toronto medical school Student Advisor Diana Alli, described as "a community activist and honorary Guyanese who lived and worked in Guyana".

Rambihar's connection to Guyana has remained active. In March 2025, he delivered a talk in Guyana on heart health alongside two of his daughters, cardiologist Dr Sherryn Rambihar, and physiatrist and sports medicine specialist Dr Nadira Rambihar.

The conference was opened by Guyana's Minister of Health Dr Frank Anthony, and featured speakers including Dr Gaitri Satram, Dr Karishma Jeeboo, and Tarlika Persaud, Manager of conference sponsor Chirosyn Inc.

The outreach continued during Christmas 2025, when Rambihar participated in a Zoom presentation for the Indo Caribbean Cultural Center on Health and Wellness During the Holidays, sharing a virtual platform with Dr

Indian diaspora", together with Toronto-trained Guyanese cardiologist and electrophysiologist Dr Mahendra Carpen, Advisor to the President of Guyana Dr Irfaan Ali, as well as cardiologists Dr V. Kapadia (Fiji and Australia), and Dr. P. Narayan (Fiji and New Zealand).

During these discussions, the speakers addressed what the *Chronicle* described as "the global trend of increasing heart disease, diabetes and other illnesses and risks, including mental health, smoking, vaping, alcohol, substance abuse, and increasing premature heart disease, heart attacks and diabetes in Guyanese, especially among Indians, and hypertension and diabetes increasing also in other ethnic groups".

The reasons were outlined as "biological, social, environmental, commercial and other determinants", including "increasing obesity, fast-food restaurants, screen time with reduced physical activity", trends that were noted as being "predicted to become even more challenging with the rapid development in Guyana".

At the same time, the speakers acknowledged "the tremendous efforts being made locally and globally for health", including awareness and prevention programs, vaccinations, community strategies promoting physical activity and healthy eating, school fitness initiatives, hospital expansion, the use of technology and AI, and volunteerism.

It is in such a spirit of transformation in Guyana, across the Caribbean, in Canada and globally, that Rambihar continues to extend the invitation he first issued in 1983. As reported in the *Chronicle*, he continues to invite everyone on each Valentine's Day, in the Caribbean, Canada, and globally, to think heart and think health.

And beyond that, to "think global heart, caring for each other, humanity and the planet, and what that can achieve".



Dr Vanessa Rambihar at the Valentine's Day for Heart and Global Heart event

M. Raizada (US), Dr M. Bahall (Trinidad and Tobago), and Dr Sawan Jagnarain of Guyana.

He followed this with another ICCC presentation at the top of this year, focusing on heart health and diabetes "in general, and across the

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One Love Family Services interfaith Iftar brings together culture, charity, and community

Toronto – A table set for the breaking of the fast at sunset during Ramadan is not just about the food, but the intention behind it – the prayerfulness, the gathering family of friends and family, and the circling of many hearts.

It is into this aura of faith that One Love Table extends its invitation to our community to experience that sacred moment at its Ramadan Interfaith Iftar Dinner, which is being held in support of its Food Bank. The event will take place on March 7 from 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the elegant Emerald Banquet Hall, 55 Guided Court in Etobicoke.

More than an evening meal, the Interfaith Dinner is a celebration of shared humanity during Ramadan, the holy month marked by fasting, reflection, gratitude, and generosity.

As the sun sets and the fast is gently broken, guests of many faiths and backgrounds will gather in fellowship, honouring both tradition and togetherness. One of the most moving aspects of the evening is its embrace of shared traditions. Participants from diverse faith communities will come together not merely as observers, but as companions in reflection. From the moment of breaking the fast to prayers and thoughtful



IMO members at a program last weekend

IMO extends Ramadan welcome

Toronto – The International Muslims' Organisation of Toronto (IMO) is inviting the wider community to participate fully in the spiritual rhythms of Ramadan, the organisation describing the holy month as a time of "forgiveness, reflection, and spiritual growth" and encouraging families to make it a "meaningful and transformative experience".

In its statement at the start of Ramadan 1447 AH (2026 AD), the IMO, which is led by President Brother Omar Farouk, underscored the importance of active participation in congregational worship and community programs throughout the sacred month.

"At the [IMO], your active participation plays a vital role in the spiritual vitality of our community," the mosque stated, adding, "We encourage you to join us for the five daily prayers, Taraweeh, and other Ramadan specific programs."

A warm invitation has also been invited to families to attend its Family Iftar programs on Friday evenings and weekends. These gatherings are designed to "foster connection, learning, and togetherness", reinforcing Ramadan's emphasis on unity and shared devotion.



Brother Omar Farouk

The IMO noted that preparations for Ramadan began well in advance. During the months of Rajab and Sha'ban, the IMO hosted a series of preparatory programs featuring respected scholars from across North America. These included a webinar with Imam Yusuf Badat, an Isra wal Mi'raj program with Imam Yama Niazi, and observances for Laylatul Bara'ah.

The preparatory series culminated in a *Bonds of Faith* long weekend program featuring Imam Dawud Walid, who visited from Detroit, alongside Imam Yasin Dwyer. These initiatives were part of a broader effort to deepen spiritual readiness ahead of Ramadan.

Building on the lessons of previous years, the IMO is also collaborating with the Qibla Foundation to help congregants approach the month with greater intention and purpose.

The IMO Ramadan Calendar (1447 AH/2026 AD), detailing prayer and program times, will be [available on the organisation's website](#). Our community is encouraged to review the schedule early, and organise their daily routines around prayer and programming "to make the most of this blessed month".

Beyond its religious programming, the IMO will also be welcoming civic leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals from diverse sectors throughout Ramadan. These engagements are intended to strengthen ties with the broader community, and reflect IMO's role not only as a place of worship, but as "a centre of learning, service, and meaningful engagement".



Habeb Alli (left) with volunteers and guests at a One Love Family Services' event earlier this month

reflections, the evening is designed to foster understanding and mutual respect.

Guiding the evening will be Emcee Kerry Lee Crawford, alongside Chaplain Juliane Martin and Buddhist Zenji NIO, a trio that reflects the interfaith spirit at the heart of the gathering. Their presence signals that faith, in its many expressions, can sit side by side in harmony.

The keynote speaker and fundraiser for the One Love Table Food Bank is former Markham City Councillor Khalid Usman, whose leadership and advocacy promise to bring both inspiration and urgency to the evening's charitable mission.

Of course, the repast set out on the tables carries its own sacred language. The Iftar meal will feature a feast prepared by the award-winning Wicked Carib restaurant, showcasing the rich culinary heritage of the Caribbean. Guests can expect vibrant flavours and generous portions, dishes that nourish both body and spirit.

In Ramadan, the act of sharing a meal after a day of fasting becomes an expression of gratitude. Each bite is a reminder of provision; each shared plate a reminder of community.

The evening will also celebrate creativity through art and

performance. Guests will enjoy contributions from artists, musicians, and poets, including Dolan AM from India. Whether through soulful Sufi-inspired melodies, calligraphy displays, or spoken word performances, the arts will add texture and tenderness to the gathering.

Such moments remind us that faith is not only spoken; that it is sung, painted, written, and lived.

At its core, Ramadan is a season of compassion. Acts of kindness are not an accessory to the month; they are its heartbeat. In that spirit, the dinner supports One Love Table Food Bank and will include charitable initiatives such as fundraising efforts and a toy drive for Eid to support recently arrived Palestinian families. Giving becomes a shared act of worship, a bridge between comfort and need, abundance, and hope.

The Emerald Banquet Hall's upstairs space, accessible by elevator, will be adorned with colourful backdrops, floral arrangements, and elegant centrepieces. Yet it is not the décor alone that will make the evening radiant. It is the warmth that begins with the welcome at the front door, the clasped hands at the table, and the quiet prayers before the meal, all coming together to fill the hall with light.

Volunteer and sponsor awards will also be presented, honouring those whose service often goes unseen but never unfelt.

In a world often fractured by misunderstanding, One Love Table's Ramadan Interfaith Dinner offers something deeply Canadian: unity without uniformity, diversity without division.

It is a time to celebrate our shared humanity, to appreciate our differences, and to affirm the values of compassion, generosity, and neighbourliness that strengthen our communities.

At sunset on March 7, as the first sip of water is taken, and the first nourishing date is shared across the table, a simple and sacred moment will emerge when strangers become neighbours; when neighbours become friends; and together they will remember that generosity, caring, and selflessness, in any language, in any faith, always find room at the table.

Today MLK would note civil rights gains, but still see economic gaps

By Dhanpaul Narine

February is recognised as Black History Month. This is a time for a well-rehearsed ritual to take place. Teachers go into their cupboards and dust off the textbooks and place them in a prominent place in the classroom. They will spend the rest of the month to teach the wonders of Black History, including the uncomfortable passages that deal with slavery, the Civil War, the Reconstruction, the right to vote, and race relations, among others. The argument is that discrimination against Blacks has not really gone away. The current policies in the US have brought into question the seriousness of the administration to deal with Black mobility. Indeed, many will argue that the effects of inequality and poverty are still there, and that there is precious little that is being done to address them.

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

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

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

King's call for mutual tolerance and respect was passionate. He spoke about the need for equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the pillars on which our doctrine was built. They sounded good on paper, but in practice these values were sadly lacking. King's imprint on the national ethos and character is best summed up in his speech on August 28, 1963, when he said, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

Two decades earlier, another peacemaker said, "All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family." He was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who became an inspiration for Martin Luther King.

In the years since the "I have a dream" speech, there have been fundamental changes in the US. What are these changes, and if King were to visit again what would the children say to him? In short, how is the "content of character" played out in the cities, in the suburbs, and the boardrooms of America?

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

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

A year later, the Federal government was forced to send in the troops to escort Black students to a school in Little Rock, Arkansas. In North Carolina, there was sit-in at Woolworth's led by black students to protest discrimination. The dreaded Ku Klux Klan also made their hooded presence felt by attacking Blacks.

These, and other incidents, catapulted Martin Luther King into the public eye, and his calls for non-violence struck an affirmative chord on the national conscience. While non-violence formed the central philosophy of King's mission, he was keenly aware of the plight of Blacks, and he addressed it publicly.

King wanted a redistribution of wealth in the US. He felt that the system had given Blacks a 'bad check'. But as King said, Blacks



Martin Luther King

have refused to accept the fact that "there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation". He went on to make an economic case for the mobility of Blacks when he said that they lived "in a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity".

King's position is that there can be no achieving of social equality unless there is economic equality. The point is that while we link arms and sing boisterously, "We shall overcome", little progress will be made in real terms if the playing field is not level.

If people live in societies that are fractured by inequality, then all the rhetoric in the world will fail to redress the situation. There is no doubt that King was fighting an entrenched establishment in the same manner that Gandhi did in South Africa and India. But the remedy, as both peacemakers saw it, was to fight hatred with love, and violence with peace.

If King were to revisit America, he would be pleased with many changes that are for the better. The schools are fully integrated, many children have made good use of education, and have moved on to good jobs, even running corporations. College enrolment records show that both Blacks and whites earn about the same for comparable qualifications. Blacks hold dearly the right to vote, and for the most part they take that right seriously. Some of them have become Governors and Mayors, and the Jim Crow laws are a thing of the past.

King would be happy to see a Black President in Barack Obama, something that he could only dream about in 1963, when he was holding "these truths to be self-evident". The election of a Black President has engendered pride among Blacks, and a desire by many children to do well in school. One positive aspect of the Obama campaign is that he was able to cross the racial divide, and to pick up white votes, even more than John Kerry did in 2004.

America has come a long way when voters chose a Black candidate Deval Patrick to be the Governor of Massachusetts. Deval was re-elected as Governor for a second term in 2010. In terms of race relations, there is no more segregation in parks, sports, the armed forces, or in other public places.

But there is a more fundamental analysis to segregation. America has realised that discrimination should be outlawed, both in word and deed. Today, there are several ways of reporting discrimination, and those that are found discriminating can be taken to the courts. A guilty verdict can lead to hefty fines, and a loss of consumer support in the business sector.

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

Montgomery, Alabama.

While these are positive achievements, there is cause for worry, and King would have been the first to make his views known about it. Don Lemon, the then CNN anchor, said that the number one problem affecting Blacks is out-of-wedlock-births. He added that this is destroying the Black community.

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

born out of wedlock and this was seen as a crisis at the time.

One can argue whether the 2013 figure is really 72 percent or slightly lower, but this is irrelevant. The structure of Black families is disintegrating, and it is causing a crisis. The fact is that each family will do well to have responsible parents, and this means being involved in the welfare of the children. King had argued that more needed to be done to address the economic inequities that existed between whites and Blacks. He would be disappointed to learn that in 2009 the median net worth among whites was 20 times more than that of Blacks.

Then there is education. There is more that can be done to improve literacy and to get Black students to pass the standardised tests. In a good many cases funding is lacking in Black school districts when compared to affluent white neighbourhoods. Poverty, drugs, Black-on-Black crimes, drop-outs from school, and a justice system that treats Blacks unfairly at times, have combined to undermine the structure of Black families.

The American Civil Liberties Union states that, "Blacks are more often likely than whites to be arrested for the same crime, and in some places their arrest is over eight times more likely." King would be horrified to see sagging pants, the use of the N-word that seems to be ingrained in the vocabulary, and low self-esteem among young Black adults.

There is the view that the destiny of Blacks lies in their own hands. According to one publication, "Americans who finish high school, work full-time, and wait until they are 21 and married before they have children have only a two percent chance of being poor." If Blacks meet these three conditions, then the dream of Martin Luther King could be realised. There is a strong argument for education to become the great leveler.

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An actuarial sea: Finance, horror, and death aboard the slave ship *Zong*

— As our Caribbean diaspora observes Black History Month, examination of the 1781 *Zong* massacre offers a stark lens into the Atlantic world that shaped our histories. What began as a slave ship voyage entered the British record not as a murder trial, but as an insurance dispute. By examining the ship, the maritime law that governed it, and the artistic and scholarly interpretations that followed, we begin to understand how slavery was embedded within the legal and financial structures of the 18th century, and why that history continues to resonate across our diaspora today.

By Romeo Kaseram

An LJI Community Feature

For our Caribbean diaspora here in Canada and beyond, Black History Month is a time of celebration through music, migration, memory, and survival. Yet the story of our Caribbean homelands is also a maritime story shaped not only on plantations and in villages, but on the open Atlantic, in the holds of ships that link together Europe, West Africa, and the region in a vast and violent commercial network. To understand our diaspora is to better understand the sea that carried its beginnings.

In November 1781, a small British slave ship named the *Zong* crossed that Atlantic on its way to Jamaica. Like hundreds of vessels engaged in the 18th-century slave trade, it carried more than 400 enslaved Africans taken from the West African coast and bound for sale in the Caribbean.

To investors in the slave trade in Liverpool, the *Zong's* voyage represented capital and calculated risk. To the slaves confined below deck, it represented confinement, terror, and an uncertain horizon.

What unfolded aboard the *Zong* would become one of the most chilling and brutal episodes in the history of the Atlantic slave trade. Yet the event did not first enter public record as a criminal prosecution.

Instead, it emerged in 1783 as an insurance dispute; a courtroom argument over whether shipowners could claim compensation for the loss of what maritime law classified as “cargo”. Thus, in the language of the ledger, human beings became units



of financial loss.

The *Zong* was originally a Dutch vessel named *Zorg*, later captured and repurposed into British service. By 1781 it operated within the established triangular trade linking Liverpool, West Africa, and the Caribbean.

Liverpool merchants financed voyages through complex partnerships that distributed risk among investors. Enslaved Africans were insured as cargo; losses were calculated before departure.

The ship was relatively small, yet it departed the African coast carrying more than 400 captives. It was dangerously overcrowded, even by the brutal standards of the trade. Overcrowding reflected speculative logic: greater numbers promised greater profit, assuming enough of the captured human beings survived.

Captain Luke Collingwood, reportedly on his first command, and later said to have fallen ill during the voyage, presided over a troubled journey. The ship missed Jamaica due to a navigational error, and remained at sea longer than intended. Disease spread, supplies diminished. Mortality was already present before the decision was made that would mark the voyage for its singularity out of thousands of brutal trans-Atlantic voyages.

The *Zong* sailed not only under the British flag, but under British insurance contracts. Eighteenth-century maritime commerce depended on insurance. Under the doctrine of “general average”, if part of a ship’s cargo was deliberately sacrificed to save the vessel in an emergency, the loss could be shared among stakeholders and reimbursed.

If enslaved Africans died of illness, then owners bore the loss; but if they were thrown overboard under what was deemed necessity, then compensation could be claimed.

Within this legal framework, human beings were transformed into insurable property. The language of “loss”, “necessity”, and “value” created a vocabulary through which onboard, temporal decisions could be framed as financial, rather than moral acts.

The doctrine of “general average” did not create cruelty; instead, it provided a structure in which cruelty could be rationalised, documented, litigated, and treated as a compensable loss.

According to affidavits presented in the 1783 case *Gregson v Gilbert*, on November 29, 1781, members of the crew began throwing enslaved Africans overboard. Fifty-four women and children were reportedly cast into the sea that day.

In the following days, additional captives, among them 42 men, were thrown overboard. The total number deliberately killed is commonly recorded as approximately 130, though it is suspected that even more live captives were tossed into the sea.

The officers claimed necessity, citing a water shortage, and the need to preserve the vessel from the likelihood of a rebellion by the captives over diminishing water and food ration.

Yet evidence presented later revealed rainfall had restored water reserves, which raised questions about the severity of the shortage. And the surviving record contains no ship’s log detailing the decision-making and its makers. In fact, the ship’s log went missing shortly after arrival in Jamaica, a significant “silence”, if not erasure, in the historical record of the massacre.

What we know is largely made available from the litigation. When the *Zong* reached Jamaica in December 1781, the voyage

See Page 20: How humanity

The loud bangs reverberated against David’s body from the depths of the damp, dark cave. Cold water dripped onto his head from the spikey icicles above. He pressed his hands over his ears with his chin against his chest to protect himself from the assaults to his senses. An ear-splitting screech penetrated his palms and pierced his eardrums.

David sprang up with his heart in his throat. Rain pelted against the windowpane. He stared into the darkness and caught the last echoing gongs of the grandfather clock in the living room. A flash of lightning lit the room, and a clap of thunder made him jump. His head was wet from the rainwater that dripped from the leaky roof of the small one-bedroom ground-level house. Mr Mew stood on his toes at the foot of the bed where he usually slept. His freaky shrieks and hisses at the door with his back arched sent a cold chill down David’s spine when he followed the cat’s line of vision.

The door lock clicked, and David gasped when a flash of lightning revealed a crack in the door for a split second before the room was plunged into darkness once more. The creaking of the door’s hinges rose above the heavy rain beating on the roof. Mr Mew’s loud screech raised the hairs at the back of David’s neck, terrified by whatever his cat was reacting to in the dark. David kicked himself backward until his back jammed against the headboard. Self-preservation made him pull his knees up to his chin.

Another flash of lightning revealed a wide-open door, and Mr Mew’s hisses bordered on growls as the animal moved into a side position. In a typical feline defensive posture, the tabby transferred most of its weight onto its hind legs. Every razor-sharp claw was exposed to the hilt.

After the flash, Mr Mew’s growls intensified in the darkness, indicating to David that an invisible threat was moving closer.

“What do you want from us!” David’s voice trembled. “Get out and leave us alone.” The door slammed shut in defiance of

The Supernatural The Reckoning

David’s challenge.

“Ha...ha...ha!” Loud laughter erupted in the room and combined with Mr Mew’s death-curdling, high-pitched cries that turn David’s blood into ice. He held his breath and turned his body sideways, rolling himself into a ball for physical protection from an imminent attack by an unknown assailant that had already assaulted his senses, pushing him to the edge of insanity.

A split-second flash of lightning revealed a stick drawing on the wall. It portrayed a large hairy man holding a club above his head, ready to strike a helpless sabre-tooth tiger lying on its back on the ground. The animal raised its legs and bared its teeth in desperate rebelliousness against the impending blows from the club.

The room went pitch black. The rain stopped, and David heard his breathing rasp in the dead silence that followed. He felt like he was in a live horror movie setting. He knew that Mr Mew was nearby, but was afraid to touch him for fear that the animal would explode into a terror-filled retaliatory attack on him for self-preservation. He tested his theory with the tentative whispering of the cat’s name. He felt the spray of the cat’s terrified spit of distrust on his face.

Another flash of lightning revealed a room that appeared to be a medical laboratory. He could not move his head, but his eyes glanced all around. Large feline-looking beings moved around him, observing, nodding, and entering data in a computerised system. He gasped when he saw images of himself on several computer screens. He was lying on a gurney with probes drilled into his scalp. Scrawled data in an unrecognisable language on each screen scrolled continuously, each one appearing to carry different data provided by the probes in his brain. David assumed that the

creatures were analysing his mind, picking the memories from his every existence on Earth, and making him relive them as dreams. He seemed to have a love-hate relationship with felines, and now he was at their mercy. They were using scientific analysis to judge him. He felt sick to his stomach. They knew more about him throughout his many lifetimes than he knew about himself. His primitive human brain could barely recall his current life, with no memories of birth to five years old, and patches of memory lapses along the way to his current age of 68.

A sudden realisation hit David in the pit of his stomach. He believed that he had died and that the experimentation was being conducted in the morgue by his own conscience, which created the scenario he was experiencing. He was his own judge and jury, dating back to his caveman days. There was no escape from the scrutiny that transcended lifetimes of his human existence.

When the screens went blank and refreshed to show the image of a cat, the attendants switched from felines to humans. David assumed that his existence as various forms of felines over his many lifetimes had come into focus. Again, the computers clicked and clamoured with flashes in David’s eyes as he walked through dreams of life as a cat of various life forms.

He dreamed of bringing down manageable-sized dinosaurs, chasing antlered prey in jungles, stealing and fighting to the death in alleyways as a combatant stray cat, and preying on humans as a Bengal Tiger, fully aware, according to the revelation by the digital analysis, that human flesh was not on the menu.

The dream in David’s head switched to his other exploits as many different lifetimes, including his existences as insects and plants. His morals and conscientiousness came into question. His every thought and action was under scrutiny. Sensing that his final eternal reckoning had arrived, David dreamt that he got on his knees and begged for mercy, but the laws of the universe were an exact science. David had already determined his eternal existence.



Kamil
Ali



Maha Shivaratri celebrations at Shiv Sewa Sangh. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo

Diaspora observances of Maha Shivaratri

Maha Shivaratri, one of the most sacred observances in Hinduism, is marked not by daytime festivity but by solemn night-time devotion.

Last weekend across the GTA, members of our Indo-Caribbean and the broader Hindu diaspora gathered in temples to honour Lord Shiva through fasting, meditation, prayer, and introspection.

For this festival, the night carries deep symbolic meaning, with devotees holding an all-night vigil, reflecting the belief that this is a moment to overcome darkness and ignorance through spiritual discipline and self-study.

Offerings of fruits, leaves, sweets, and milk were made to Shiva, while the sacred mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* was chanted. The holy

mandir spaces were also filled with the voices of devotees reciting the *Shiva Chalisa*.

For our diaspora in the GTA, the observance of *Maha Shivaratri* has added resonance in our families upholding traditions carried across the *kala pani* by our grandparents and parents, who now have built new lives in Canada while preserving the sacred rhythms of our faith.

Among our temples holding the sacred observances were *Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir & Cultural Center* and *Shiva Mandir and Cultural Center*. At *Shiv Sewa Sangh*, the temple was a sanctuary of quiet reflection as devotees reverently participated with offerings and prayer. At *Shiva Mandir*, elders, families, and youth created an atmosphere filled with meditation, singing, and spiritual connection.

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Vedic Cultural Center
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Shiv Sewa Sangh Mandir & Cultural Center, in collaboration with Pandit Dave Ramoutar, Sangeet Vidyalaya School of Music, and AkashVani Rhythms, warmly invites the community to Sangeet Ki Kahani 4, an enchanting evening of music and dance on April 18 at 5:00 p.m. at the Vedic Cultural Center, 4345 14th Avenue in Markham. Join us for a celebration of melody, rhythm, and cultural storytelling, where voices, instruments, and graceful movement come together in harmony for an unforgettable night of fund-raising and entertainment.



Shiva Mandir celebrates Maha Shivratri. Photos by Hinano Beekhoo



TCCF's Jay Brijpaul. Photos by Dwyane Photography
TCCF celebrates Valentine's Day

Love was in the air and kept immaculate time with the music on the dance floor when the Caribbean Children Foundation (TCCF) hosted its vibrant *Be My Valentine* fundraiser on February 14 at Woodbine Banquet Hall in Etobicoke. Radiating with shades of Valentine's red, the banquet hall was quickly filled with warmth and generosity, the celebratory current happily flowing between heartfelt speeches and high-energy dancing, with friends and families having a good time while enjoying a delicious repast and exquisite desserts.



Founded in 2000, TCCF has long been a lifeline for children across the Caribbean facing life-threatening illnesses for which treatment is unavailable in their home countries. Working alongside partners such as Gift of Life International, TCCF helps ensure that vulnerable children can access critical medical care, whether locally or abroad.

While the evening of February 14 was a celebration of Valentine's Day, at the same time it was a testament to our compassion and humanitarianism in action. Between attentive moments during keynote addresses and joyous scenes on the dance floor, guests demonstrated that philanthropy and festivity can share the same rhythm. Once again, our supportive community turned out in their numbers, proving that when love takes to the dance floor, hope certainly takes the lead.



CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Michael 
Coteau

Member of Parliament
Scarborough—Woburn



TT set to launch online arrival form

Port-of-Spain – The days of filling out paper immigration forms before arriving in Trinidad and Tobago with an international flight are nearing an end, with an electronic system expected to be rolled out shortly.

Speaking at a media conference last week in Port-of-Spain, Homeland Security Minister Roger Alexander confirmed that new systems are currently being tested. He stated that the new system “will be introduced in its entirety in the coming weeks”, although no specific launch date was provided.

The online arrival forms, also referred to as disembarkation forms, will allow travellers to submit flight information and passport or biographical details up to 72 hours before arrival. Immigration authorities will then be able to process the information in advance, reducing wait times and improving efficiency at ports of entry.

In January, the Ministry of Homeland Security listed the launch of an electronic disembarkation card among its strategic priorities for 2026. In a release at the time, the ministry said the initiative would “modernise border entry and expedite processing times”.

However, the move toward eliminating paper arrival forms has been under discussion for several years.

In 2019, then finance minister Colm Imbert proposed removing arrival forms at the country’s two international airports during his 2020 budget presentation. At the time, he said, “In an

effort to keep up with international best practice and the ever-changing world of technology, I propose to eliminate arrival forms at our airports. The new system will rely on advanced passenger information using machine-readable passports and other appropriate technology. This new policy will take effect in 2020.”

That timeline was disrupted months later when the Covid-19 pandemic forced the closure of Trinidad and Tobago’s borders.

The proposal resurfaced in 2024, when Imbert again pledged to introduce a “digital

online disembarkation and embarkation card” during his budget presentation. He indicated that a legal team would begin working in 2025 on the framework for implementation. The team was expected to assess operational requirements, review similar systems in other countries, and identify any legislative changes that might be required.

However, the People’s National Movement lost the subsequent general election before updated legislation could be brought before Parliament.

Across the Caribbean, electronic embarkation and disembarkation systems have gained momentum as governments balance border security with the need for smoother passenger experiences.

Countries including Barbados, Saint Lucia, Dominica, and Guyana have already implemented online forms, reflecting a regional shift toward digital processing and modernised border management.



Roger Alexander



Mayaro Beach in Trinidad

Former MP calls for managed beach zones

Port-of-Spain – Former Mayaro MP Rushton Paray is urging the government to take immediate action to protect beachgoers following the tragic death of teenager Gabriel Nelson, whose body was recovered two days after he went missing while bathing in Mayaro.

Paray condemned “endless talk about committees and studies”, and symbolic gestures like flag-raising on weekends.

Instead, he called for real policy, proper funding, and a clear implementation plan. He suggested starting with one or two safe bathing zones in 2026, and expanding the programme over time, stressing the importance of training lifeguards, evaluating performance, and building public confidence.

He noted that for over a decade, he has advocated for the creation of safe bathing zones, a concept he declared has already been proven internationally.

“I saw the risk with my own eyes,” Paray said, recalling discussions with residents, lifeguards, fishermen, vendors, and families who knew the sea, respected it, and yet feared it.

According to Paray, a safe bathing zone is a designated stretch of beach that is properly managed, supervised, and equipped. It

includes trained lifeguards on duty, clear signage and warning flags, rescue equipment, first aid facilities, shaded areas, washrooms, secure parking, and staff responsible for safety.

“In plain terms, it is a beach you can use and trust,” he said.

Paray warned that too much of Trinidad and Tobago’s coastline is currently unmanaged.

“Families pull up, children run into the water, people lime and relax, and the sea looks calm enough. Then a rip current catches someone and everything changes in seconds. Panic sets in. Somebody rushes in to help. Another person gets pulled out. Before you know it, a normal Sunday turns into a nightmare,” he said.

He highlighted that the eastern seaboard, including Mayaro, Manzanilla, and Grand Lagoon, for being particularly beautiful. However, dangerous rip currents, undertows, offshore troughs, and shifting sandbars pose risks even to strong swimmers, and many drownings occur when the water appears calm.

Paray criticised relying solely on public education to prevent drownings, stating, “Yes, people must respect the sea. Yes, parents must supervise children. Yes, swimmers must be cautious. But the State has a responsibility too.”

How humanity sank on the Zong

From Page 17

had ended, setting into motion a legal dispute that was just the beginning.

In 1783, the case came before Lord Mansfield in *Gregson v Gilbert*. The legal question was not whether over 130 murders had occurred, but whether the insurers were liable.

The law report records Lord Mansfield observing that “the case of slaves was the same as if horses had been thrown overboard”. It was a comparison that reflected the legal classification of enslaved Africans as property within British insurance law.

So, the courtroom debated liability, and no criminal prosecution followed. In the language of pen strokes etched onto a ledger, the Atlantic became an accounting surface for this etching.

In 1840, British painter J.M.W. Turner exhibited *The Slave Ship*, a storm-lashed canvas depicting shackled limbs floating on severely turbulent waters. Though not a literal depiction of the *Zong* massacre, the painting evokes the violence of metonymy, in an enslaved people who are cast into the sea.

Our own Guyanese-born writer David Dabydeen, in his collection *Turner: New and Selected Poems* (1994), imaginatively gives voice to a figure within that painting, restoring interiority where the archive is silent.

In the collection, Dabydeen responds to Turner’s painting by imaginatively giving voice to an enslaved African figure within the canvas. Where the historical archive is mute and the courtroom abstract, Dabydeen’s poetry restores interiority from memory, fear, and sensation to those who have been submerged in history’s margins.

Meanwhile, Trinidadian-Canadian poet M. NourbeSe Philip published *Zong!* in 2008, a long-form poetic work constructed entirely from the words of the 1783 legal decision in

Gregson v Gilbert.

Refusing to add language of her own, she fractures and rearranges the court’s vocabulary, the very language that reduced human beings to “cargo”, into fragmented lines that evoke drowning, rupture, and silence.

In doing so, she exposes what the legal archive could not contain: grief without record, lives without names, and a history drowned.

Then we have scholarly, academic work such as Ian Baucom’s *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*, which situates our disturbing narrative within the rise of modern finance, arguing that the massacre reveals how slavery and emerging capitalism were structurally intertwined.

This scholarly history and theory text examines how the inhumane 1781 massacre became a pivotal moment in the invention of modern finance, and ways we think today about history and value.

It means the *Zong* was not an aberration; it was not an individualised, isolated moment of inhumanity on board one ship; instead, a convergence point for law, commerce, empire, and a fathomless ocean that was fed human beings.

For our Caribbean diaspora, the event forms part of the Atlantic architecture that shaped our homelands. And so, today, while Black History Month invites celebration, at the same time, it also welcomes clarity. To understand the *Zong* is to unpack how systems converted the human lives of our ancestors into risk, and risk into monetised, recoverable value.

Remembering the *Zong* is not about dwelling in horror; instead, it is about understanding the architecture rising up from the foundations to construct our world that has been forged out of suffering, resilience, and survival.

And especially knowledge, which during Black History Month, is a form of reckoning.



David Dabydeen

Hon.
TIM HODGSON
Member of Parliament
Markham-Thornhill

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Neena Gupta reflects on personal choice, motherhood, and independence

Bollywood – Veteran actress Neena Gupta recently revisited one of the most defining chapters of her life, speaking candidly about her decision to become a mother and raise her daughter independently. In a recent conversation, Gupta shared that having a child was entirely her choice, and that former West Indies cricketer Vivian Richards supported her decision from the outset.

Gupta revealed that she had directly asked Richards whether he was comfortable with her giving birth to their child.

“It was my decision to have a child. Then I asked him if he was okay with me giving birth to his child, and he said yes,” she said in an interview with Shubhankar Mishra. She added that Richards had no hesitation in publicly acknowledging that their daughter, Masaba Gupta, was his child.

While she describes that period as one marked by romance, Gupta has consistently maintained that motherhood was a conscious and independent decision. In her autobiography, *Sach Kahun Toh*, she recounted feeling “giddy with joy” when she first learned she was pregnant. At the same time, she recognised that the child’s father had “an equal right” to know and have a say in the matter.

She wrote that after returning home, she asked herself what she truly wanted. The answer was clear: she wanted the child.

She then called Richards to inform him of the pregnancy and ask whether he would have a problem if she chose to have the baby. According to Gupta, he sounded happy and encouraged her to go ahead. His response reassured her that she was making the right decision.

Despite his support, Gupta said she never sought financial assistance from Richards while raising Masaba.

“I didn’t feel like it. I had so much pride,” she said. She explained that financial independence had always been important to her. She also noted that she had never asked her parents for money, taking only what they voluntarily offered.

Her relationship with her parents during that time was complicated by their reservations about her career. Gupta has said that they were unhappy with her decision to pursue acting, and did not consider it a respectable profession. Having moved to Mumbai against their wishes, she felt she could not turn to them for financial help.

Gupta has acknowledged that raising a child alone was not easy. While she cherishes the time she spent with Richards, and has described their relationship as one that included “beautiful



Neena Gupta (left) and daughter Masaba

moments” as well as “ugly ones”, she has also been frank about the emotional and practical difficulties of single parenthood.

Also, in her interview, she advised against taking such a path lightly, stating that it is “not good for the child either”.

When asked whether she and Richards were in love, Gupta said she believes there was romance between them, and did not consider the relationship “wrong”.

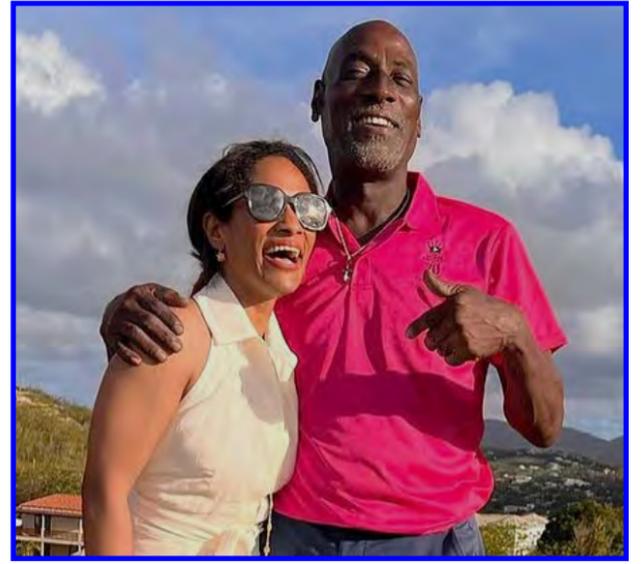
However, she explained that the realities of their circumstances made a long-term partnership impractical. Either she would have had to leave her career in India and move to the Caribbean, or Richards would have had to give up his cricketing commitments and relocate to India.

“Neither of which was possible,” she said.

Gupta first met Richards at a dinner hosted by the Maharani of Jaipur after watching him play. Although they connected quickly, they initially lost touch after he returned home. They later met again at Delhi airport, and soon began a relationship. At the time, Richards was already married, and their long-distance relationship went through different phases over several years.

After Masaba’s birth, Gupta wrote that Richards was “as involved as possible”, and their relationship continued on and off for some time. Ultimately, Gupta raised Masaba as a single mother.

Years later, Gupta married chartered accountant Vivek Mehra at the age of 59. Today, Masaba Gupta has established herself as a successful designer and entrepreneur, and has often spoken about her mother’s strength and resilience in raising her independently.



Neena Gupta (left) with Vivian Richards



Masaba with dad Vivian Richards

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Bangladesh relieved as ICC confirms no penalty threat

Officials of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) have expressed relief after the International Cricket Council (ICC) confirmed that no financial, sporting or administrative penalty will be imposed on Bangladesh for boycotting the ongoing Twenty20 World Cup.

According to cricket website *Cricbuzz*, concerns had mounted within Bangladesh's cricketing circles over the possibility of sanctions, particularly given the anticipated financial losses resulting from the team's absence from the global showpiece event.

However, on February 9, the ICC announced that it would take a lenient view of Bangladesh's decision not to travel to India for the tournament. Bangladesh were subsequently replaced in the marquee event by Scotland.

In a formal statement, ICC Chief Executive Sanjog Gupta underscored the governing body's long-term perspective.

"Bangladesh remains a priority cricket ecosystem deserving of long-term investment in its development, competitiveness, and global integration, and is not defined by short-term disruptions," Gupta said.

The ICC further stated that Bangladesh's non-participation would have no lasting impact on cricket in the country, which is supported by a fan base estimated at more than 200 million.

As part of an understanding between the ICC and the BCB, it has been agreed that Bangladesh will host an ICC event prior to the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, which is scheduled to be co-hosted by India and Bangladesh. The arrangement remains subject to standard ICC hosting procedures, timelines and operational requirements.

Matthews back as Windies host Sri Lanka

Cricket West Indies has announced a 15-player West Indies Women's squad for the upcoming three-match One Day International series against Sri Lanka, set to bowl off on February 20 at the National Cricket Stadium in Trinidad.

CWI described the home series as more than a routine bilateral contest, positioning it as a crucial phase in the Windies Women's drive to improve their standing in the ICC Women's Championship rankings.

With ODI fixtures against Australia later this year, along with scheduled series against Ireland, Zimbabwe and Pakistan, building momentum on home soil has been identified as a priority.

The squad is strengthened by the return of captain Hayley Matthews, who has fully recovered from the shoulder injury that sidelined her since June. Matthews' comeback is viewed as a major boost to the team's balance and leadership.

Supporting her in a restructured leadership group is Chinelle Henry, who has been appointed vice-captain, replacing veteran wicketkeeper Shemaine Campbelle. The move signals a deliberate shift toward a refreshed leadership core.

All-rounder Deandra Dottin also returns to the squad after injury ruled her out of several

BCB vice-president Faruque Ahmed welcomed the development, acknowledging the uncertainty that had surrounded the issue.

"I think we are relieved [as no financial penalty was sanctioned] considering there were lots of things floating in the air after we refused to travel to India to take part in the World Cup," Ahmed said.

He added that while financial losses from missing the tournament may not be directly recoverable, Bangladesh could benefit from hosting future ICC events.

"There were several sanctions and penalties that could have come our way, and those have been stopped. Additionally, since we couldn't play in the World Cup, there is a possibility of financial loss. [We] might not recover that directly in a financial sense, but perhaps

we can host some events here – for example, the Women's World Cup," he said.

Ahmed also noted that Bangladesh will host the Women's Under-19 World Cup next year, and will jointly stage the 50-over World Cup with India in 2031.

"We are hosting the Women's Under-19 World Cup next year. In 2031, we are jointly hosting the 50-over World Cup with India; we are looking at how we can get more matches there," he said.

Another BCB vice-president, Shakhawat Hossain, echoed the sentiment, pointing to improving relations with the ICC following recent discussions in Lahore.

"Not just penalties, there could have been other troubles too but now lots of decisions have been taken following the meeting in Lahore which implies that our relation with the governing body of cricket is improving," Hossain said.

major assignments in 2025, including the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifiers and subsequent tours.

Trinidad and Tobago spinner Karishma Ramharack has been included, alongside Shunelle Sawh, an opening batter and wicket-keeper.

CWI Director of Cricket Miles Bascombe emphasised the broader significance of the series, describing it as an investment in the development of women's cricket across the Caribbean.

"This home series is a cornerstone event, not just for team preparation but for the continued elevation of women's cricket across the Caribbean," Bascombe stated.

"Every match played here is an investment in our future. It is about providing a visible, high-performance pathway that shows every young woman in the region what is possible."

Head Coach Shane Deitz acknowledged the competitive test Sri Lanka will present. The visitors are currently ranked sixth in the ICC standings, compared to the West Indies' ninth position.

"We're excited to have this series against Sri Lanka, who are a really good team. They beat us in the ODI series in Sri Lanka back in 2024, so we owe them one, and now we get them on our home turf," Deitz said.



Sanjog Gupta



Suryakumar Yadav (right) and Salman Ali Agha are worlds apart after the toss
Diplomatic chill shadows World Cup showdown

The chill that settled between India and Pakistan during last September's Asia Cup showed little sign of thawing when the two sides met again at the T20 World Cup in Colombo last week.

India captain Suryakumar Yadav approached the toss with visible seriousness, exchanging brief words with officials around the pitch before handing over the team sheet. He appeared largely indifferent to his counterpart, Salman Ali Agha, as Pakistan won the toss and chose to chase.

As Agha had suggested on the eve of the match, the decision regarding pre-match courtesies rested with the Indian camp. Yadav did not articulate any formal position, but he declined to proceed with a handshake after the toss. It was widely viewed as a collective decision rather than an individual call.

Last week sources suggested the directive may have come from higher up the administrative ladder, likely beyond the team management, though no official confirmation has been offered.

The line appears clearly drawn: India will compete against Pakistan on multilateral and

global platforms, strictly within the confines of the contest, and without accompanying pleasantries.

The handshake issue was reportedly among the key sticking points during the February 10 discussions involving the International Cricket Council, the Pakistan Cricket Board, and the Bangladesh Cricket Board, when Pakistan's threat to boycott the fixture was deliberated.

The frost appeared to have spread beyond the boundary, with at least five former captains from the two nations present for on-field interactions, yet there was little visible mingling. Conversations remained contained within respective groups before they dispersed.

The stance has drawn criticism from sections of the cricketing fraternity in both countries. Former India captain Sanjay Manjrekar described the "no shaking hands" approach as unnecessary.

"This 'No shaking hands' is such a silly thing that India has started. It's unbecoming of a nation like ours. Either play properly within the spirit of the game or don't play at all," Manjrekar said.



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