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Now a 'ghost town', in May 2021 NY's diaspora was energised with the co-naming of Liberty Avenue

Liberty curbed with cold and ICE

— *New York is a city that bounds with immigrant energy, but now it feels like the diaspora is holding its breath. Fear is coiling its way through the immigrant enclaves of Queens, with the hum of activity in Little Guyana Avenue growing softer, and businesses complaining that line-ups are shorter. As the spectre of mass deportation looms, and families retreat into the shadows, it seems that anxiety is turning into paralysis.*

By Dhanpaul Narine

Special to Indo-Caribbean World

New York – Fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and misinformation. These abound in the immigrant communities in Queens, New York, and other places. The fear was perceptible even before Donald Trump won the elections.

Former President Joe Biden deported more than 271,000 persons during the fiscal year 2023 to 2024. This is a record that President Trump wants to surpass. He ran on a campaign of “mass deportations, the like of which you have never seen before”. The Immigration and

Customs Enforcement (ICE) stated that the Biden administration deported 311 undocumented persons daily.

The Trump administration, in its first three weeks, doubled this number, but the White House is saying that ICE can do better. It wants the raids to be stepped up and more people deported.

There have been raids in Chicago, Newark, and Miami. Mayor Ras Baraka said that in Newark, undocumented persons and citizens were arrested without warrants. According to reports, ICE bulldozed their way into business places and made those arrests.

New York braced itself for a raid, and this came toward the end of January when persons were picked up in the Bronx. Tom Homan, the deportation czar, has stated that the undocumented, even without criminal records, are also subject to be deported. He calls them “collaterals”.

By mid-February 2025, the numbers of

See Page 14: Cold weather

IMO's Omar Farouk receives prestigious medal

— *Honouring leaders like Omar Farouk with the King Charles III Coronation Medal highlights not only their individual achievements but the broader impact of their service. Farouk's work is inspirational, demonstrating through action community leadership, interfaith collaboration, and the ongoing journey toward a more inclusive and just Canada. Through his efforts, he strengthens the fabric of our Canadian and diaspora communities, making this recognition a meaningful tribute to his ongoing humanitarian work.*

By Romeo Kaseram

LJI Reporter

Toronto – Omar Farouk, President of the International Muslim Organisation (IMO), was honoured with the King Charles III Coronation Medal on February 26. Recognised for his long-standing leadership in fostering interfaith dialogue and community engagement, Farouk's work exemplifies the spirit of service and commitment that the medal celebrates.

The King Charles III Coronation Medal is a distinguished award marking the May 6, 2023 coronation of King Charles III as King of Canada. The medal honours Canadians who have made significant contributions to their communities or the nation, reflecting a long-standing tradition of recognising exceptional leadership and service.

This year, 30,000 medals are being distributed across Canada. Medals have been awarded to individuals nominated by provincial and territorial governments, Members of Parliament, senators, and community organisations. The medal is administered by the Chancellery of Honours at Rideau Hall in Ottawa.

Farouk received this prestigious honour from Kirsty
See Page 5: Farouk receives



President of the IMO Omar Farouk displays the King Charles III Coronation Medal and its accompanying certificate which he received on February 26

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Celebrating BHM and recognising trailblazers at the Consulate General of Trinidad and Tobago, Toronto, are (back row) PC Curtis Celestine, Black Liaison Officer, Community Partnership Engagement Unit; Chief Information Officer Colin Stairs; and Superintendent Anthony Paoletta. In front are (left to right) Deputy Chief of Police Lauren Pogue; Program Director Pilar Martin from Dr Roz's Healing Place; retired Toronto Police Service Sergeant Terry James; and Toronto Police Services Board, Vice-Chair Chris Brillinger

Dr Roz Roach receives Terry James Trailblazer award

— Recognition and gratitude unfolded during Black History Month celebrations at the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate in Toronto when Dr Roz Roach was honoured as a trailblazer, and for her lifelong advocacy that has transformed lives, uplifted communities, and illuminated pathways to opportunity.

Toronto – In a heartfelt address at the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate on February 20, Acting Consul General Tracey Ramsubagh-Mannette lauded Dr Roz Roach for her lifelong commitment to education, equity, and community advocacy as she received the Terry James Trailblazer Award.

The award, presented by the Toronto Police Service (TPS) as part of its Black History Month commemorations, recognises women of excellence who have made a lasting impact through their leadership and service.

Program Director at Dr Roz Healing Place, Pilar Martin, accepted the award on behalf of Roach who was out of the country.

Speaking before an audience gathered to celebrate Roach's achievements, Ramsubagh-Mannette praised the honoree as "a trailblazer, a mentor, and a true embodiment of excellence". She highlighted Roach's unwavering dedication to uplifting marginalised communities, particularly in providing safe spaces for women and children fleeing violence and abuse.

Roach is a dual citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and Canada, and has long championed inclusivity and social justice, using education as a tool for empowerment. Her work has made profound impacts both in Canadian society and in Trinidad and Tobago, where she has tirelessly advanced opportunities for under-represented groups.

The award ceremony, held at the Trinidad and Tobago Consulate in Toronto, was infused with the warmth of the twin-island nation despite the wintry February weather outside. It offered guests a taste of warm Trinidad and Tobago culture through traditional cuisine, the rhythms of the national instrument the steelpan, and the spirit of hospitality reflective of our dynamic nationals.



Dr Roz Roach

"As we celebrate Black History Month, we also celebrate individuals like Dr Roach who have worked tirelessly to promote cultural awareness, advocate for social justice, and pave the way for future generations," Ramsubagh-Mannette stated, adding, "Her recognition... is a testament to her unwavering commitment to making a difference in the lives of so many."

Ramsubagh-Mannette underscored how Roach's leadership, mentorship, and advocacy embody the resilience, determination, and service that define our entire Caribbean diaspora.

"As a daughter of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Roach carries the vibrant spirit of our twin-island nation, infusing it into her mission and work," she said.

Additionally, "Her achievements remind us that no matter where we are in the world, our roots, culture, and identity remain sources of strength and pride."

The event also recognised Staff Superintendent Kelly Skinner and other distinguished recipients of the Terry James Trailblazer Award, applauding their contributions to fostering change and progress.

Ramsubagh-Mannette also commended the TPS for creating the award, and for honouring women whose leadership continues to inspire.

"Thank you to the TPS for recognising women of excellence like Dr Roach and Staff Superintendent Kelly Skinner," she said.

She added, "It means the world – not just to the awardees, but to all of us, and to those they inspire every day as they blaze the trail and keep it clear and illuminated for others to follow."

The Terry James Trailblazer Award is an annual honour established by the TPS to recognise individuals who have made significant contributions to fostering inclusivity and advancing community well-being.

Celebrating those who embody leadership and dedication to community service, the award is named after retired Sergeant Terry James, a pioneering figure who joined TPS in 1980, and who was instrumental in initiating BHM celebrations at police headquarters in 1994.

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Splash Celebration showcasing its decor items

Imdadul holds its community market

By Sayem Khan

Special to Indo-Caribbean World

Toronto – The act of earning halal living through entrepreneurship is one of the most encouraged exercises in the religion of Islam.

As the month of Ramadan approached late last month, in order to provide the community members an opportunity to do Ramadan shopping and celebrate the successes of local entrepreneurs, especially young entrepreneurs, members of the Imdadul Jamaat and community at large gathered at Imdadul Centre on February 21 for its *Ramadan Souk* (an Arabic word meaning market) event.

The event started at 2:00 p.m. after the conclusion of Juma prayer. Guests were welcomed with Arabic coffee and Medjool dates. About 15 local vendors had an opportunity to showcase their diverse product offerings to the guests in attendance, and there was a significant representation of young female entrepreneurs.

Each booth had an inspiring story to share and its entrepreneurs all have plans to expand their ventures. Although it is true that they have the virtual space to support their endeavours, the impact of in person showcase events such as the *Ramadan Souk* event was unparalleled, and the event provided them with another outlet to reach their professional goals.

For some of the vendors, it is a passion project, such as Sister Zulaika's calligraphy venture; for others, it was a way to earn extra income to support their post secondary education efforts.

There were also vendors who attended this event for the first time, such as the fragrance and perfume venture, *Trends and You*. There were also returning vendors such as the home décor and gift store *Splash Celebration*.

There was a time when the product offer-

Farouk receives King Charles III coronation medal

From Page 1

Duncan, former Minister of Science and Member of Parliament for Etobicoke North. In her speech, MP Duncan congratulated all recipients, emphasising the significance of this achievement for both the winners and their communities.

Earlier this week, Farouk told *Indo-Caribbean World*, "Receiving this award is an incredible honour, and it humbles me deeply. It reflects not just my individual journey, but the collective efforts of our community. Above all, this recognition speaks to our diaspora, our shared experiences, and the journey that we are on together."

Farouk has been a pivotal figure in advocating for the involvement of religious leaders in Canadian civic discussions. His leadership extends beyond the IMO, where he has worked to promote democratic dialogue and build bridges with local officials and community leaders.

In 2023, the IMO hosted the *Day of Action Against Islamophobia*, bringing together government representatives and community members to address Islamophobia and create actionable solutions for its eradication.

Over his three-decade tenure, Farouk has fostered strong, lasting relationships with civic institutions, including the Toronto Police

ings in the halal business streams were limited to only a few products. However, as more and more young entrepreneurs start to make inroads to this industry, the range of products being offered is gradually increasing.

Entrepreneurs like *FYN Design*, who attended the *Ramadan Souk*, are using their products to send constructive messages and motivational quotes. Environmentally sustainable and low waste design items are also being developed.

The event was attended by spiritual leaders, among whom were Dr Shabir Ally, local civic leaders, and elected officials.

The concept of entrepreneurship is strongly encouraged in Islam. In the *Holy Qu'ran* there are a number of verses encouraging the believers to practice honest and ethical entrepreneurship. The Prophet always encouraged entrepreneurship.

The idea behind the wonderful communal initiative of *Ramadan Souk* was envisioned by Sister Nadia Nafeeza Khan, who is currently pursuing a professional commitment overseas. Meanwhile, the enactment of her vision in this initiative is now paying dividends for the community. It reminds one of the famous saying, "If you build it they will come".

As the famous Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime". The power of entrepreneurship is extremely far-reaching. It creates jobs, and it changes lives.

According to Statistics Canada, the 2021 census revealed the Muslim population is growing. Muslim Canadians are excelling in every single professional field, and need platforms as *Ramadan Souk* to continue improving themselves in their professions.

Service. He has served as Co-chair and member of the Toronto Police Chief's Muslim Consultative Committee, a role that has contributed to a more inclusive approach to law enforcement in Toronto.

Farouk's leadership in interfaith collaboration has been widely recognised, including receiving the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Award in 2012 for exemplary citizenship. His efforts have extended to projects like *Muslim Friends of Humber*, which unites the Muslim community in support of interfaith causes.

He has also been instrumental in fundraising for humanitarian causes. In 2012, the IMO was among 11 organisations that pledged to raise \$250,000 over five years for North America's first fully digital hospital, the Humber River Regional Hospital.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Farouk played an essential role in addressing vaccine hesitancy within marginalised communities, particularly in Rexdale, where the IMO is located.

He organised vaccine clinics at the mosque and invited health experts to engage with the community, fostering trust and helping increase vaccine uptake. His efforts were crucial in addressing health inequities and ensuring that the most vulnerable members of the community were informed and supported.



Hafiz Javid Khan with Arabic coffee



Welcome to Imdadul's Ramadan Souk



MP Ya'ara Saks chats with the owners of pastry shop Aysel's Baklava



FYN Design's products on display

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Editorial

Unity and boldness

In the annals of our Caribbean's history, moments arise that demand not only reflection but decisive action. Caricom's 48th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government in Bridgetown, Barbados last month stands as one such pivotal juncture.

Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley's impassioned keynote address serves as both a clarion call and a blueprint for our homelands' future, in her urging for unity and boldness in the face of multifaceted and global challenges.

Our Caribbean, with its mosaic of cultures and histories, has long been a testament to resilience. Yet, as Mottley articulated, the contemporary landscape presents unprecedented trials. From the relentless onslaught of climate change to the pervasive threats of crime and economic instability, the region stands at a crossroads.

Mottley's assertion that "it cannot be business as usual" resonates deeply, both back home, and in the diaspora, in its emphasis on the urgency for transformative strategies.

Our homelands' vulnerability to climate change is palpable as it is existential. Annual hurricanes, rising sea levels, and unpredictable weather patterns jeopardise livelihoods and economies. Mottley's poignant reflection captures our shared anxiety: "Each summer, we hold our breath, hoping that it won't be our turn".

The sentiment within this precarity underscores the necessity for proactive measures, both regionally and globally, to mitigate environmental degradation and to bolster resilience.

Economic fragility, exacerbated by global disruptions, has spotlighted the Caribbean's dependence on external resources. Mottley's declaration that "food and water are the new oil of the 21st century" serves as a stark reminder of the imperative for self-sufficiency.

Thus it follows that prioritising local agriculture, investing in sustainable practices, and fostering intra-regional trade are critical steps in ensuring food security and economic autonomy.

Then there is education, which remains the cornerstone for societal advancement. However, as Mottley lamented, some educational frameworks in our homelands retain remnants of colonial legacies that are ill-suited for the contemporary challenges facing the next generation.

Her call for the "reform that is necessary" emphasises the need for curricula that reflect Caribbean realities, promote critical thinking, and equip our youth with skills that interface with the modern, developed world.

Then there is the spectre of crime, particularly gun violence, which continues to cast a long shadow over our beautiful Caribbean homelands. The George-Bridge Declaration, formulated in Georgetown last year, represents a unified commitment to address this menace. By treating crime as a "public health disease", it advocates for comprehensive strategies encompassing law enforcement reform, community engagement, and creation of opportunities that deter youth from criminal pathways.

Her critique of external influences, notably the proliferation of firearms arriving from the north, highlights the complex interplay between local and international factors in the region's security landscape.

Also of significance in her discourse was the theme of unity. Drawing inspiration from Trinidad and Tobago's Dr Eric Williams, she declared that collective action is the linchpin of progress. Recalling Williams' Caribbean Federation subtractive arithmetic, she noted the vision for a cohesive Caricom was one where collaboration amplifies individual strengths, enabling the region to navigate global challenges on a fortified, united front.

We understand from Mottley's delivery that the path forward requires actionable commitments, not rhetoric. That her impassioned address was delivered as a catalyst, urging leaders, nationals, and the diaspora to think beyond traditional paradigms. By embracing innovative solutions, fostering regional solidarity, and engaging with global partners on equitable terms, we can chart a course toward sustainable development and societal well-being.

The onus now lies on our regional leaders to heed the call from this visionary leader, and to begin transforming her articulated aspirations into collective, tangible realities.

Snap elections end with window into future trends

In a heartbeat the 2025 Ontario general election is over... well actually only after four weeks of campaigning. The year and a half of speculation on whether Premier Doug Ford would have called an early snap election lasted much longer.

After the minimum mandatory 28-day campaign period, the results were delivered within minutes after polls closed on February 27, which was Election Day.

As predicted, and without doubt, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, under Premier Ford's leadership, easily secured a renewed mandate with a resounding majority government.

On the morning of February 28, Premier Ford's PC party appeared on track to capture 80 seats, which was an improvement on the 79 they held going into the campaign. However, it was not the strong mandate that Premier Ford was hoping to achieve.

When the election was called, Premier Ford made it clear that he intended to ensure his party had a strong mandate from the people of Ontario.

With the ongoing tariff threats from the US defining the political landscape, Ford claimed that he needed a healthy endorsement from voters to bring in measures that might be required to sustain the province's economy.

Only by improving their standing in the Ontario Legislative Assembly by one seat, many could argue that it was a pointless election.

The PC's were tracking to win over 90 seats, but with victories in 80 electoral districts across the province, it was clear that Premier Ford's determination for an early election paid off.

He has locked his premiership until 2029, which will outlive the Trump presidency.

It is debatable if this *status quo* result was a win overall for the Tories. However, the results of the election did significantly benefit one other political party.

The Ontario Liberal Party placed third in the seat count with 14 candidates elected to serve as Members of Provincial Parliament. This was a significant milestone for the party.

At the call of the election, OLP had nine seats. Since a massive defeat in the 2018 general election after being in power for 15 years, OLP has been in a dire state.

The five additional seats ensured OLP's parliamentary caucus was just enough to restore "party status" at Queen's Park. Any political party with 12 or more seats can be officially recognised

as a party in the Assembly.

With party status comes additional funding to hire more staff and operate a "research bureau". This additional resource is something that OLP has been lacking since 2015, and was dramatically impacted to function in a truly competitive state.

Despite a third-place result in seat count, OLP's overall vote count province-wide was 1.5 million. This was 572,892 more votes than the Ontario New Democratic Party, which secured 27 seats, almost double that of OLP.

The NDP's vote efficiency was successful at keeping them in official opposition status, but the results should be worrisome to the party.

Under the leadership of Marit Stiles, a first-time party leader, the NDP returned to Queen's Park with one less seat, and a reduction of 5.19 percent votes overall from the previous election.

As it is being described, this "purposeless" snap election, like any election, is a signal of the sentiment of voters, and it may predict future trends.

Premier Ford's PC's were unable to increase the majority, and despite their popularity, it was a signal that the party tested the sentiment of voters who held them in place.

The second winner of the evening was the rebuilding of the Ontario Liberal Party.

As mentioned, OLP now has party status, but the vote spread across the province demonstrates the strength of the brand.

It now appears that with time OLP could continue to recover from their 2018 blowout, and it seems they have put themselves in a position to be competitive with the Tories in the 2029 general election.

A lot can help until then to help or hinder OLP's potential.

Their leader, Bonnie Crombie, failed to win her seat, and as the immediate former Mayor of Mississauga, OLP under her leadership failed to win any seats in the city. There have already been calls for Crombie to resign, and OLP might have a new leader by the next election.

Premier Ford, one of most successful electoral premiers in Ontario's history, will then face his third mandate to serve Ontarians; however this will be the most difficult. Looming issues and a potential economic crisis will test him and his government.

So despite the election being deemed useless or *status quo* by many, some critical outcomes may define changes in Ontario's political future.



Ryan Singh

Sugar cane is bitter when shipped to a Big-Box store

The produce section inside the Big-Box store was an enclave of manufactured warmth, a make-believe oasis against the wintry grey outside. Inside, its tall walls were covered from floor to ceiling with ten-foot photographs: sun-drenched wind-shredded leaves of banana plantations, a grove of coconut trees with trunks bowed in deference.

It was an illusion of the tropics, repackaged and one dimensional, collated and made thematic with the store's fruit section.

On the window outside, a snowfall was accumulating, thickening visibility through the glass. But here, inside the grocery, warmed with an artificial glow, summer was being curated, boxed, labeled with price tags, and stacked in pyramids with fulsome abundance.

And there, in a corner stall tossed down in disarray were stalks of sugar canes.

The stalk was lighter than I remembered as a young boy; the elasticity in its easy bend told me it was desiccated, the drying out rendering deep cracks in its peel, the nodes at the joints where its leaves and roots exited hardened with mould.

And just like that, a memory began unspooling of my boyhood in the homeland. It arrived on a current that washed up memories of liquid sugar surging in my mouth; it reminded me of the air of my childhood heavy with a mix of burnt ash and molasses. And Ma's field-callused hands roughly wiping the sides of my face made sticky with sugar cane juice.

I was a boy again, crouched in the grass behind our hut, watching Ma peel sugar cane with her *gilpin*. The cane was a stolen treat, secreted from the fields where she laboured. It came home innocuously wrapped in the soot-blackened cloth that tied down her flowing black hair as she laboured in the fields.

Today I could imagine how she did it. A sharp swipe of her *gilpin* after a quick glance over her shoulder, in the moment when the overseer's eyes were elsewhere. A stalk of sugar cane, heavy with juice, falling with a swish of its lengthy leaves, secreted away from hundreds of thousands being cut and carted to the sugar factory grinding in the distance.

I imagined Ma's thickly-veined hands: swift, precise, the blade rising and falling, *chop, chop, chop*. Her eyes, wary like the hunted, even now, as she peeled away the rind from each purloined piece behind our adobe hut, continuously casting glances

into the blind spot to the roadway, the factory's distant roar like a hungry predator out on the hunt.

It was as if Ma were being constantly watched. Even here the ghost of surveillance clung, in this quiet moment between grandmother and grandson, in the silent efficiency of the *gilpin's* razored silver edge smoothly slicing away the sugar cane's rind.

As she peeled, Ma passed me pieces. I tore away chunks with my milk teeth, biting down hard to release the flow of sugar. Juice ran down the sides of my mouth; it made my cheeks and fingers sticky.

When we were done, gathering the peels and fibre, Ma waded into the tall grass, where she buried the evidence deep in the underbrush.

I understand now that in this act was Ma's resistance. And decades later, in that Big-Box store, I came to understand that in the stolen sweetness, in this ritual of her resisting hands, she was nourishing me, preparing me to make my way in the world.

Fast-forward a few decades. Now I was a young journalist, and had volunteered to help a colleague transcribe the recording of a media scrum with the author V.S. Naipaul.

In the unwinding of the tape recorder with the words of a diffident, insecure man uncomfortable with the glare of camera lights and a wolf-pack of reporters, he had made an observation that leapt out and remained with me.

Naipaul noted during his visit that more of the homeland, its topography of undulating hills and flatlands of greenery, had emerged since the sugar canes had retreated.

It had happened slowly, quietly, during my absence across the decades as I lived abroad. First, the sugar factories were abandoned; one by one its chimneys fell, now lying broken like giant, wet cigarettes. Cane fields thinned out and were intersected by asphalt roads; houses sturdier than adobe, and towering apartments, were built with brick, concrete, and iron.

Then modern factories and tens of thousands of vehicles arrived. As quickly as the land had returned, it was swallowed up by new industry. The air was no longer filled with the scent of burnt sugar; monoxide replaced molasses. The grass gone, no children played hide-and-seek; instead, playing cricket on asphalt roadways, their laughter ricocheted off concrete walls.

The stalk at the Big-Box store was labeled, 'Imported from the Caribbean.' I put it back, holding on to the memory of Ma nourishing me with purloined pieces of sugar cane.



Romeo Kaseram

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

Position taken on Justice Claudette Singh contradictory to earlier statement

Dear Editor,

I write regarding the letter headlined, *Ramkarran's invoked Articles 59 and 159 of the Constitution does not preclude the implementation of biometrics*, written by Lincoln Lewis, and which appeared in Guyana's *Stabroek News* on February 17.

In this letter, he writes "Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) Chairperson, retired Justice Claudette Singh SC, is inappropriately hiding behind legal technicalities to avoid implementing biometrics in the upcoming General and Regional Elections. Singh's position is further bolstered by her legal counterpart, Ralph Ramkarran S.C., yet both are fully aware that laws are not immutable."

I am not aware of the legal qualification of Lewis and his expertise in making his determination on this matter. However, it is well-known that both Justice Claudette Singh (retired) and Ralph Ramkarran are eminently qualified legal minds.

Effective leadership needed with Dragon gas uncertainty

Dear Editor,

With the screaming headlines in Trinidad and Tobago's daily newspapers of February 28 about the likelihood of the Dragon not being able to dance, I would like to emphasise that this letter is neither anti-Trinidad and Tobago, nor is it pro-Trump.

Instead, it is an insight into effective leadership – or the lack thereof in this country – insofar as reading the political implications of a continuing relationship with the regime of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro, which has been on the wrong side of both Trump administrations, then in 2016, and now in 2025.

Such leadership would have been guided by a more-than-generous administration of former US President Joe Biden, like with the licence granted in 2023 to NGC and Shell to develop and export natural gas from the Dragon gas field.

However, the Trump administration is already showing signs that it would have none of it, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio on February 26 announcing that Biden's gas licences involving PDVSA have been cancelled.



Donald Trump

The former is a retired senior member of the judiciary with decades of experience as a judge and the latter, a Senior Counsel, has decades of experience as an attorney.

Justice Singh was appointed Chairperson of GECOM by then President David Granger, who wanted someone fit to be a judge and after rejecting 18 names submitted to him by then Leader of the Opposition, Bharat Jagdeo. Earlier, in 2017 President Granger had appointed her as a Senior Counsel, one of only three women accorded that designation in Guyana up to that time.

I believe Guyanese will find it difficult to reconcile Lewis' view now on Justice Singh with what he wrote in a letter headlined, *Justice Claudette Singh – the most consequential judge in the history of Guyana's elections*, which was published in the *Guyana Chronicle* on May 30, 2020.

In that letter he states, "Justice Singh may not have been

Should Trinidad and Tobago's leadership not have anticipated this development and planned accordingly?

The infrastructure for oil and gas has always been there. But did our over-reliance on the Venezuelan connection cause us to become negligent, not providing the necessary incentives for its development?

The ironic contradiction of all this is that we still continue to see ourselves as an oil and gas economy, hoping the Dragon would breathe fire, while not diversifying the economy to include agriculture, cottage industries, tourism, and the like.

But with the Trump administration so anti-Maduro, what can we say about our future in this respect?

Trump will do what he feels he is obliged to do for his country "to become great again". Can we afford to moan and groan over the fallout from such, or seek to realign ourselves to get into the good graces of his administration for the good

of this country?

That is the true test of effective leadership.

Narine Benjamin, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.

accorded the honour of being appointed Chief Justice of Guyana even though she was due, eminently qualified and experienced to so do. She was denied not because another was better than her. Rather, she was denied because in presiding over the first elections petition ever filed in the history of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, she embraced the full tenets of her profession allowing Lady Justice to rule without fear or favour, breaking historical ground in our judicial system, to vitiate an election declaring Janet Jagan President in 1997".



Claudette Singh



Ralph Ramkarran

Regarding Justice Singh's decision in that case, an article by Attorney Jamela A. Ali in the January-February 2001 issue of *Al-Banyan*, a CIOG newsletter, states, "It was reported that when the judge delivered her judgment in open court, she said that the elections were "vitiating". However, on page 77 of the written judgment the learned judge only made two declarations as follows:

(i) "that Act 22/97 is *ultra vires*, null and void Articles 59 and 159 of the Constitution.

(ii) that the 1997 elections were not conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Representation of the People Act Chapter 1:03 and articles 59 and 159 of the Constitution of Guyana."

It seems to me, a non-legal mind, that the opinions of the GECOM Chairperson, Retired Justice Claudette Singh, and Senior Counsel Ralph Ramkarran are consistent with the decision by then Justice Claudette Singh in the 1997 elections petition case.

So Retired Justice Claudette Singh, as Chairperson of GECOM is being flayed now by Lewis for taking a stand that is consistent with her decision as a judge, a decision that was praised by him in 2020.

Harry Hergash, Toronto, via email.



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Consulate marks Republic anniversary

Toronto – The Guyana Consulate General in Toronto commemorated Guyana’s 55th Republic Anniversary with a series of celebratory events engaging our thriving Canadian diaspora. Guyana achieved this milestone on February 23, 1970, and saw the anniversary honoured here in Toronto with a flag-raising ceremony and a community gathering designed to foster unity and reflection.

In collaboration with the Canadian Guyanese community, the Toronto Consulate hosted a Flag-Raising ceremony on February 21 at Mel Lastman Square at the North York Civic Centre.

Following the hoisting of the Golden Arrowhead, a reception took place in the Members Lounge, where attendees, among them members of the Caribbean Consular Corps, gathered to celebrate Guyana’s historic journey to becoming a Republic.

Further marking the anniversary, a diaspora leaders’ reception was held on February 23 at the Consulate General’s office in Toronto. The event commenced with a Land Acknowledgement recognising Canada’s Indigenous peoples, followed by an Inter-Faith Service that underscored the nation’s religious diversity. Prayers were offered by Imam Jabbar Ally, representing the Muslim community, Pandit Ram Ramgolam of the Hindu community, and Pastor Andrew Eastman on behalf of the Christian faith.

A key moment of the evening came when Honorary Consul Mani Singh extended warm



The Golden Arrowhead flies at Mel Lastman Square on February 21. In photos below, members of the Guyanese diaspora and friends gather to celebrate Guyana’s 55th anniversary as a Republic. Facebook Photos

Republic Anniversary greetings to the attendees before delivering the full message to the global diaspora from Guyana’s President, Dr Irfaan Ali.

The event saw attendance of notable members of the diaspora, including Linden King, Patrick Richmond, Audrey Nichols, Omar Farouk, Liquat Baksh, Victor Moses, Ramesh Ramcaran, Sheikh Faisal, and Malcolm Chokee. Gillian Williams served as the host for the evening’s proceedings, while catering was provided by Sarah Juman-Yassin.



In photo are CGCC members, participants, and guests who attended the information session on March 1

CGCC holds information session

The Canada-Guyana Chamber of Commerce has extended its heartfelt gratitude to the many participants who made its *Challenges & Opportunities in Growing Your Business in Guyana & Canada* session a resounding success.

The information session took place on March 1 at the Woodbine Banquet Hall in Etobicoke, and featured breakfast, the information session, and networking.

Taking point for the CGCC’s latest outreach were Suraj Mattai, Chief Operations Officer of N&S Mattai in Guyana, and Yvana Nganou, Senior Canadian Trade Commissioner in Guyana.

Said the CGCC following the event: “We had an incredible morning filled with insightful presentations from Suraj Mattai and Yvana Nganou, engaging discussions, and serious business-building participants eager to take their ventures to the next level.”

Walnut offers free PSA testing March 15

Scarborough – Free Prostate-Specific Antigen testing will be available at the *Be You Be Well Health and Wellness Fair* on March 15 at the Taibu Community Health Centre, 27 Tapscott Road, Unit 1 in Scarborough.

The free tests have been arranged by The Walnut Foundation. PSA tests are not covered by OHIP, and cost \$40, which TWF will cover.

TWF’s initiative is specifically targeting Black men aged 40 and older who have not had a PSA test in the past year, or those who may be interested in their prostate health status.

The *Be You Be Well Health and Wellness Fair* will also feature a range of free screenings and wellness activities, including blood pres-



Yvana Nganou addresses the CGCC information session on March 1

sure and glucose checks, cancer screenings, chiropody (foot) assessments, body massages, exercise demonstrations, psychotherapy sessions, and even haircuts.

TWF will be working alongside the Scarborough Health Network, the Sickie Cell Awareness Group of Ontario, The Olive Branch of Hope, the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation, Shanique Victoria Psychotherapy and Wellness, and Toronto Community Crisis Service.

Those who are unable to attend are encouraged to speak with their healthcare provider about PSA testing and other preventive health measures. [Click here to register for the event.](#)

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Border tensions between Guyana and Venezuela continue to escalate

Guyana's long-standing territorial dispute with Venezuela over Essequibo has intensified in recent months. This has led to heightened tensions between the two neighbours, triggering international concerns over the potential for escalation of the conflict.

Incidentally, tensions have been building for several months, although the two countries agreed to a peaceful resolution in December 2023. They mounted last year after a Venezuelan referendum in which voters assented to creating a Venezuelan state within the disputed region. Guyana then called the move a step towards annexation and an "existential" threat as the spectre of armed conflict loomed over the region.

However, tensions recently took a dramatic turn following the incursion of a Venezuelan coastguard vessel into Guyanese waters on March 1. Evidently, the vessel approached an offshore oil facility operated by ExxonMobil, and cautioned workers that they are operating in disputed waters.

According to a statement by Guyana's President Irfaan Ali: "The patrol vessel transmitted a radio message declaring that the FPSO (floating production and offloading) facility was operating in what it deemed disputed international waters before continuing its course in a southwesterly direction towards other FPSOs."

Ali condemned this action as a violation of international maritime agreements, stating that Guyana's maritime boundaries are recognised under international law. In response, Guyana summoned the Venezuelan ambassador and deployed military assets, including air and coastguard units, to safeguard its territorial integrity.

Prior to this incident in late February 2025, six Guyanese soldiers were injured, two critically, when armed individuals from Venezuela opened fire on a Guyanese military patrol along the Cuyuni River. The soldiers were on a resupply mission when they were attacked from the Venezuelan side of the river. Guyana's military leadership attributed the assault to gang members, while Venezuela's Foreign Minister accused Guyana of disseminating a false narrative regarding the incident. This confrontation has further strained relations between the two countries.

Last year, satellite images posted by the US Center for Strategic and International Studies showed that Venezuela was extending its military base on Ankoko Island, half of which Venezuela seized from Guyana in the mid-1960s, and nearby Punta Barima, less than 50 miles from the Guyana border. The images, according to the CSIS, showed significant infrastructure improvement of roads and other facilities near the two areas.

The island's airfield was expanded to include a small control tower, stated the CSIS. Satellite imagery showed an area next to the airfield with more than 75 field tents, "enough for a battalion-sized unit of several hundred personnel". At least two Iranian-built Peykaap III (Zolfaghar) fast missile boats were also seen at Venezuela's small coast guard station at Punta Barima.

It was also reported in May 2024 that Venezuela's armed forces have moved "substantial quantities" of personnel and equipment near the disputed region that is controlled by Guyana.

Incidentally, in an effort to prevent escalation of the conflict, Brazil, Caricom, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States arranged a meeting between Ali and Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro on December 14, 2023 in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

The meeting resulted in the signing of the Argyle Declaration, which contemplated a peaceful resolution of the dispute, followed

by Maduro and Ali issuing a joint declaration pledging to "not threaten or use force against one another in any circumstances".

This declaration was reinforced following a January 25, 2024 meeting between the Venezuelan and Guyanese Foreign Ministers Yván Gil and Hugh Hilton Todd, which concluded with a statement indicating that negotiations would continue.

However, tensions escalated following Venezuela's elections in which Maduro declared himself winner.

Then, the arrival of a British warship in Guyana's waters led to an escalation of tensions. On December 28, 2023, Venezuela ordered

its armed forces to hold military drills after the UK sent HMS Trent, a warship, to Guyana. The ship had initially been deployed to search for drug smugglers in the Caribbean, but the UK confirmed that the ship would take part in joint exercises with Guyana amidst the ongoing dispute over the oil-rich Essequibo region of Guyana.

Maduro referred to the exercises being launched "in response to the provocation and threat of the United Kingdom against peace and the sovereignty of our country" in a television address on December 28. He claimed the move was "practically a military threat from London", breaking the "spirit" of recent agreements not to use force.

The Venezuelan Defense Ministry, in response, has accused Guyana of threatening the St Vincent agreement by irresponsible actions and media deception, maintaining that the "Essequibo is ours". Maduro has also accused Guyana's government of subservience to ExxonMobil, which he says is colluding with the Pentagon to foment a "military conflict" with Venezuela.

Venezuela has also claimed that that US oil giant ExxonMobil is collaborating with the government and the US military to exploit oil and gas resources in waters claimed by Venezuela. It accused Guyana of granting illegal oil exploration concessions in territory the two nations are disputing, and said it would reserve the right to take any diplomatic actions necessary.

Amidst the tensions, several top American administration and military officials have visited Guyana in a show of support. The US also supplied military overflights monitoring Venezuelan troops and other activities at the height of tensions in December. In addition, the US agreed to bolster Guyana's defence with new aircraft, helicopters, military drones, and radar technology.

In the meantime, Guyana commenced spending money on its military. It has allocated US\$201 million to update its military equipment, including helicopters, maritime surveillance vessels, and at least one drone. Ali said the government would focus on technology items for the Guyana Defense Force and on cooperation with allied countries, while noting that Guyana was "not in an arms war" with Venezuela.

With the risk of confrontation increasing, several countries and organisations, including the US, the Organisation of American States, Caricom, and the Commonwealth Secretary General, among others, have expressed support for Guyana, condemning Venezuela's actions and emphasising the importance of respecting sovereign borders.

The US Department of State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs took to X (formerly Twitter) on March 1 in support of Guyana. A post said: "Venezuelan naval vessels threatening ExxonMobil's floating production, storage and offloading (FPSO) unit is unacceptable and a clear violation of Guyana's internationally recognised maritime territory."

It added, "Further provocation will result in consequences for the Maduro regime. The



Dwarka Lakhan



An FPSO at work in Guyana's territorial waters

United States reaffirms its support for Guyana's territorial integrity and the 1899 arbitral award." The post was shared by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Apart from the US, Ali said Guyana has informed international partners like the UK, France, Caricom, the UN, the Commonwealth, and the OAS.

A statement from Caricom said such acts of aggression and provocation are contrary to international law and the 2023 Argyle Declaration. The declaration refers to an agreement by leaders of both Venezuela and Guyana not to use nor threaten to use force, directly or indirectly, in any dispute between them, but to rely on international law including the 1966 Geneva Agreement in their dispute over the Essequibo region.

Caricom accused Venezuela of initiating the "provocative incident", which was against the agreed commitment of Caricom and CELAC to ensure that the Caribbean region remains a zone of peace.

The OAS also threw support behind Guyana and condemned the alleged action by the Venezuelans. A media statement said the OAS general secretariat unequivocally condemned the actions of Venezuelan naval vessels.

"Such acts of intimidation constitute a clear violation of international law, undermine regional stability, and threaten the principles of peaceful coexistence between nations. The OAS reiterates its steadfast support for Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity," the statement said.

It added, "The Venezuelan regime must immediately cease all aggressive manoeuvres that could escalate tensions in the region. The general secretariat urges the Venezuelan regime to adhere to respect ongoing international legal processes, including the adjudication of the territorial dispute before the International Court of Justice."

Also, "We call on the international community to remain vigilant and to stand in defence

See Page 19: Leaders express

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TT 50 Plus marks 29th year

The Trinidad and Tobago 50 Plus and Seniors Association marked its 29th anniversary on January 26 with a well-attended gathering in Toronto. More than 100 members participated in the event, including several individuals who have maintained continuous membership for up to 25 years.

Feroza Sultan-Khan, wife of the late founder Rasheed Sultan-Khan, joined the celebration virtually via Zoom.

The organising committee arranged a special anniversary cake to mark the milestone. Long-time members Tony and Vivian Young were given the honour of cutting the cake.

Several attendees shared reflections on the organisation's significance, emphasising its role in fostering community bonds and creating lasting memories for multiple generations.

The Trinidad and Tobago 50 Plus and Seniors Association serves the diaspora through a variety of programs, offering both in-person and virtual engagement via Zoom to ensure ongoing connection and participation among its members.

For additional information, kindly contact current president Shane Suepaul via email: shanesuepaul@gmail.com.



Honorees at the commemoration were (left to right) Melville Mascal, Shirley Russell, Aliceson McLetchie, Yolanda Russell, Kenny Dayal, Stella Pinnock, Frank Taylor, Newton (Tony) Young, and Joan Kalloo. In photos, TT 50 Plus members share reflections during celebration of the group's 29th anniversary



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The Caribbean Children Foundation held its *Be My Valentine* fund-raiser on February 15 at Woodbine Banquet Hall in Etobicoke. Founded in 2000, TCCF assists children in need from the Caribbean who are suffering from life-threatening ailments for which no treatment is available in their homeland. TCCF works with groups such as Gift of Life International to help needy children access treatment at home, or abroad. Its Valentine's fund-raiser event was yet another well-attended event that saw guests having a good time while supporting one of our premiere charitable organisations here in the GTA. *Photos by Dwayne's Photography*



TCCF, GOLI provides life-saving care for kids

A team from *Gift of Life International*, in collaboration with the *TCCF*, was in Georgetown from December 7 to December 17 for its third mission at the Georgetown Public Health Corporation last year. Over ten days, the team worked alongside local medical professionals, treating 15 children and furthering the transfer of knowledge to enhance Guyana's capacity for pediatric cardiac care.

This trip marked the fifth visit since the program was revived in 2023, reinforcing *GOLI's* and the *TCCF's* commitment to building sustainable medical expertise in Guyana.

In December, the *GOLI* team performed seven surgeries and nine catheterisation procedures. In what was a significant step forward, a catheterisation team was included in this mission.

While the mission primarily focused on scheduled cases, unforeseen emergencies underscored the team's critical role in saving lives. As recounted by Dr Rodrigo Soto, the pediatric cardiac surgeon working with *GOLI* in Guyana, one case of severe pulmonary valve stenosis saw a successful emergency catheterisation intervention.

Reflecting on the mission, Soto emphasised the pressing need for continued collaboration to assist children with congenital heart disease in Guyana.

"Many children need our help," he stated, adding that he looked forward to continue working together with "TCCF to provide assistance to these patients".

In photos, Guyanese children who received life-saving care late last year





World and regional leaders attended the 48th Caricom Heads of Government Meeting last month, among them (left to right) UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Secretary-General of Caricom, Dr Carla Barnett, and Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley.

Mottley calls for bold, united action at summit

— Delivering the keynote address at 48th Caricom Heads of Government Meeting last month, Mia Mottley, among other things, spoke to the need for unity, self-reliance, and decisive action, signaling a renewed push for regional transformation in the face of global adversity.

Barbados Prime Minister and current Chair of Caricom, Mia Amor Mottley, delivered a resounding call for regional unity and decisive action as she addressed the opening ceremony of the 48th Caricom Heads of Government Meeting in Bridgetown on the evening of February 19.

Speaking before a gathering that included Dr. Carla Barnett, Secretary-General of Caricom, and representatives from Saudi Arabia, Canada, France, and the United Arab Emirates, Mottley urged Caribbean leaders to embrace a bolder, more unified approach in navigating the global challenges confronting the region.

Mottley's keynote speech underscored the mounting crises facing the Caribbean, with a particular focus on the existential threat of climate change. Highlighting the region's first-hand experiences with increasingly devastating hurricanes, she reflected on the anxiety that looms over Caribbean nations each year.

"We know first-hand how the world has become an awful place since the pandemic," she said, acknowledging the deep scars left by recent global upheavals. She then spoke with empathy about the plight of farmers and fishermen, whose livelihoods are continuously disrupted by natural disasters and erratic weather patterns.

"Each summer, we hold our breath, hoping that it won't be our turn," she added, encapsulating the shared vulnerability of the Caribbean in the march of climate change.

Calling for a fundamental shift in regional governance, Mottley declared that business as usual was no longer an option.

"The only way we will make it through these difficult times is if we are prepared to be more unified and bolder than ever," she asserted, urging leaders to chart a path of collective resilience. She drew upon the historical wisdom of former Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Eric Williams, recalling his famous dictum at the dissolution of the West Indies Federation: "One from ten leaves nought".

Building on this sentiment, Mottley emphasised the power of regional cooperation, stating, "Today, heads of government and heads of state of the Caribbean region must show in a mathematical way that one times 15 is equal to one. If one times 15 is equal to one, then we shall be able to withstand all that is thrown upon us from the world and from within."

Beyond the immediate climate crisis, Mottley turned to the pressing issue of rising living costs, particularly food security. She warned that the Caribbean's traditional food

sources were increasingly at risk due to climate-induced disruptions and shifting global labour policies.

She urged the region to prioritise self-sufficiency, stating, "Food and water are the new oil of the 21st century."

The need for tangible action, rather than continued discussion, was paramount, Mottley said, calling for an urgent boost in regional production.

Education reform was another cornerstone of her address. Mottley criticised the persistence of colonial-era educational structures, which she argued were ill-suited for the needs of modern Caribbean societies.



Mottley addresses the Summit

"We cannot build out this region with the old educational systems of the colonial era," she stated, advocating for a curriculum that fosters both economic opportunities and social development.

On the issue of crime, particularly gun violence, Mottley called for a multi-faceted approach. She pointed to the George Bridge Declaration, reached in Guyana in November 2024, as a framework for strengthening law enforcement and reforming criminal justice systems.

She argued that crime should be treated as a public health crisis, requiring not just enforcement but also economic opportunities to steer young people away from violence.

"We in this region are paying too high a price for the Second Amendment rights of Americans," Mottley said, noting the devastating impact of firearms entering Caribbean territories.

She also emphasised the importance of forging strong international partnerships to bolster regional resilience. She acknowledged growing alliances between Caricom and global bodies, including the African Union, as critical to navigating shared global challenges.

"Partnerships across the world will be important if we are going to survive the many challenges that are not unique to any one region," she stated.

Turning to the ongoing crisis in Haiti, Mottley called for a comprehensive development plan beyond election scheduling and security stabilisation.

"The people of Haiti must be at the centre of all that we reflect upon," she said, emphasising that lasting stability required investment in education, healthcare, and basic human rights. Without such a plan, she warned, Haiti's struggles would persist for decades to come.

With the conference setting out in the days ahead to address the critical issues she raised, Mottley then made a final, impassioned plea for Caribbean leaders to commit to institutional reform, including independent funding mechanisms for Caricom.

"We have a responsibility to reform this institution. The time is upon us for settling the independent funding of this Caribbean Community," she declared.



Ask Jay...

Please send your questions to
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TIPS ON HOW TO FIND, SCREEN AND HIRE A PROPERTY MANAGER

A GOOD PROPERTY MANAGER CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, BUT THERE ARE BAD ONES TOO

Property management is the missing link if you want to streamline and grow your investment portfolio. With property management, you do not have to worry about day-to-day operations, tenant issues, rent collecting, or evicting tenants. Property management companies will also handle the bookkeeping, making your accounting simple. Let's explore the steps to find the right one for your business.

Property managers can help you advertise the rental property and screen prospective tenants. They will also prepare the lease, collect rent, pay all bills, and maintain the property. Being familiar with the rules governing landlords and tenants is essential for staying compliant, and a good property manager can choose the correct steps when dealing with tenants. For example, if there is a late payment or you want to enter the rental property for inspection, you must follow the correct protocol. Property managers will keep track of your income and expenses, which you will need to file taxes.

Property managers may have different ways to manage. Some large companies may have a more sophisticated operation, while others can be one-man and manage only a few properties. You can choose a company based on specific criteria, such as the proximity to the rental property and the number of properties you have. Hire local property managers because they are more effective. If you have scattered rental properties, you may need to hire a property manager for each property. It's best to keep all your rental properties in one area and negotiate a discount to manage the portfolio.

You can find management companies online or through referrals. When interviewing property managers, look at their track record. You need to know how long they have been in the business and what kind of rental properties they manage. Make sure to pay attention to their reviews and ratings. Use social media to your advantage, but remember that this information can be misleading.

Ask the manager to allow you to chat with a few landlords they are currently helping, and, if possible, a few tenants. You want to assess how quickly they deal with problems, and how effectively they resolve tenant's issues. If the properties they manage have long-term tenants, then chances are they are doing a good job.

In Ontario, a property manager does not need a license and cannot trade in real estate. Their activities are restricted to managing as they cannot market, negotiate, and screen tenants without a real estate licence. While some managers are realtors, others may refer you to a local realtor when needed. Ask for a copy of their liability insurance.

Many property managers have a fee structure. For essential management, they may take about ten percent of the rent. They will usually charge one month's rent to find a tenant. Some managers charge extra for repair costs, but their contractors may give a discount because of the volume. If the company handles eviction, that could be an additional charge. Ask the property management company for a copy of their contracts and review it thoroughly. Before signing the contract, ensure you know the company's termination policies.

Once you hire a property manager, monitor their performance by communicating regularly with them. It's also wise to visit the properties periodically and check in with the tenants. Finally, review your financial records regularly and ask questions. In some situations, ruthless property managers ask their contractors to inflate the costs of their services and give the property manager a kickback. To prevent this from happening, allow the property manager to consult with you first for contracts exceeding a certain amount.

Some property managers have a company account used to run their business. With such an arrangement, rental income from all the properties they manage and all the expenses are paid from one account. Using this approach, the property manager can operate effectively once there is proper accountability. If the management is taking care of many properties for you, it's best to open a joint account with your properties where you can monitor the account.

A reputable property manager can save you a lot of time. You can focus on what you know best, delegating stressful responsibilities. The good news is that their fees are tax deductible.

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Caribbean leaders address deportations, shift in US aid priorities

— As Caribbean governments navigate the shifting landscape of US foreign policy priorities, they remain committed to upholding the rights of their nationals while ensuring cooperation on immigration enforcement. Also, Caricom leaders have recognised the need for strategic adaptation in response to USAID's closure.

Caribbean leaders have signaled a pragmatic acceptance of US deportation policies affecting their nationals, but insist that due process and respect for sovereignty must underpin the repatriation process.

At the same time, they are closely monitoring the evolving landscape of US foreign assistance, particularly the dismantling of USAID, which has long been a vehicle for American aid in the region.

Against the backdrop of a shifting US foreign policy under President Donald Trump's administration, regional leaders have expressed measured responses to these developments, balancing acknowledgment of State prerogatives with concerns over socio-economic repercussions.

For many Caribbean governments, the deportation of their nationals from the US is not new. Acknowledging the practice's long history, leaders have emphasised the need for structured reintegration policies to mitigate potential risks associated with returning individuals, particularly those with criminal records.

Late last month Prime Minister Phillip J. Pierre of St Lucia affirmed his country's stance on the issue, saying, "St Lucia's position is, we have citizens in the US who are there illegally. St Lucia will cooperate with the US as far as that is concerned, but you need to be respected," he told the *Caribbean Media Corporation*.

He added, "You need to be treated as a State that obeys the laws and the regulations of every country. We will not encourage anyone to disobey the laws in the US, nor should anyone be encouraged."

Prime Minister Gaston Browne of Antigua and Barbuda



Phillip J. Pierre

echoed this perspective, telling the CMC that deportations occurred under multiple US administrations.

"I'm told, actually, under the [Barack] Obama administration that more Caribbean nationals had been deported than what is actually on the list that we've seen recently under the Trump administration," he stated.

While acknowledging the sovereign right of the US to enforce its immigration laws, Browne emphasised the region's responsibility to accept its nationals.

"I think we have an obligation to accept our citizens who are deported, at the end of the day. We cannot make them stateless," he noted.

However, he cautioned that regional cooperation was essential to ensure that those involved in criminal activities do not exploit free movement within Caricom.

"We just have to make sure that there's collaboration at the regional level to ensure that those involved in criminal activities do not get the opportunity to travel freely within the Caricom space and to create problems for us," he declared.

Alongside immigration policy shifts, the restructuring of US foreign assistance has also raised concerns within the Caribbean. The closure of USAID, a key institution for aid and development since its establishment by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, has prompted discussions on how regional nations will adapt to the new model of US aid distribution.

Antigua and Barbuda receives minimal US grant aid, with Browne indicating that while the impact may be negligible, it could be more significant for other nations.

"We do not get any significant support in terms of grant aid or even concession funding from the US," he said, while acknowledging that the situation might differ for other Caribbean states.

"We're hoping that ultimately, you know, when the dust settles, that these institutions will be re-established, or if they reorganise in some other way [so be it], but that [they] will

continue to deliver benefits to the Caribbean people. So, we're watching this space to see how it develops."

Veteran Caribbean diplomat Sir Ronald Sanders spoke to the region's growing unease over the changes. Writing in his syndicated column, he observed that two executive orders signed by Trump had heightened concerns: one mandating the removal of undocumented migrants, and the other disbanding USAID.

While deportations have sparked fears of an influx of returning nationals, Sir Ronald suggested that the issue may be less severe than perceived. He pointed out that among the nearly 1.5 million individuals identified for deportation, only 42,289 are from Caricom countries, with the vast majority, 32,363, being from Haiti. Jamaica accounts for 5,120 cases, while the remaining 4,856 are distributed across the other 12 Caricom nations.

Furthermore, Sir Ronald noted that logistical constraints within US Immigration and Customs Enforcement make mass deportations unlikely, as each individual must be located, detained, and processed through the legal system before removal.

In discussing the shift in US foreign aid strategy, Sir Ronald noted that while USAID has played a role in the region, its contributions have been relatively limited compared to other global recipients.

In the 2023 fiscal year, USAID disbursed approximately \$44 billion worldwide, with Ukraine receiving the largest share at over \$16 billion. Comparatively, total US assistance to Caricom countries amounted to approximately \$456.2 million, which was just about one percent of USAID's total disbursements.

Haiti received the largest portion, at \$393.8 million, followed by Jamaica with \$26 million, while Belize received \$19.8 million.

Other Caribbean nations received significantly smaller sums, with Dominica getting \$86,000, Suriname \$371,000, St Vincent and the Grenadines \$474,000, and Antigua and Barbuda \$558,000 being among the lowest recipients.

Sir Ronald pointed out that despite the restructuring of USAID, aid from the US will not cease altogether. Instead, its administration will shift to the US State Department, making disbursements more politically influenced than before. He argued that Caribbean nations must now rethink their engagement strategies to ensure continued access to critical resources.

Cold weather and ICE turn Liberty Avenue, NY, into a ghost town

From Page 1

arrests had dropped significantly, much to the chagrin of President Trump. An NBC report quoted him as being "angry" that the numbers are not higher. This message has been passed on to ICE and Tom Homan.

The problem is that to deport "millions and millions" as Trump had promised, ICE needs to deport at least 1,200 persons daily. They are nowhere near this number as the average arrests is around 300 currently.

But the reduction of the numbers has brought little comfort to the immigrant communities in New York. There is an information overload on the activities of ICE and the recent deportations. There are harsh pictures of deportees shackled in a plane bound for India, of beds being prepared in Guantanamo Bay, of migrants crying out for help at a hotel in Panama, and of Secretary of State Marco Rubio making a deal with El Salvador to house prisoners from third countries.

A good many undocumented persons are caught in a limbo. They entered the US illegally over 30 years ago, have committed no crimes since, but now are forced to go into the shadows.

The Mexican cooks moved from the side streets and now makes tortillas at home. This has resulted in a 70 percent reduction in sales, and the same applies to vendors from Guatemala and Senegal. Many live in fear that ICE would remove them from their families and deport them to countries that they could hardly recognise.

In the absence of information from the political mainstream, the immigrant community has had to rely on help from the not-for-profit organisations. People are told to keep doors closed, remain silent if confronted by ICE, to sign documents only if verified by an attorney, and to learn the difference between a judicial and administrative warrant.

A judicial warrant is signed by a judge while an administrative warrant is issued by the Department of Homeland Security, and cannot be used to enter one's premises. These sound well in conference rooms, but ICE has been given sweeping powers to conduct raids and detain people.

In early February 2025, this writer was contacted by Japneeth Singh, a member of the Sikh community, and together organised a public rally to draw attention to the immigration problems facing New Yorkers. It was the first rally of its kind, and since then, other rallies have occurred.

The Queens rally took place in Liberty Avenue and attracted 50 persons from a cross-section of the community. The idea was to ask President Trump, and ICE, to use their discretion in the enforcement of the laws, especially for the undocumented who are in the US for over five years, or more, with no criminal



Once energised and dynamic, today businesses in Little Guyana Avenue are reporting diminished traffic records.

The rally gained national attention when it was broadcast on CBS Channel 2 NEWS, but no perceptible change has occurred to date in the welfare of the undocumented. In the following weeks, New York became the centre of attention that reached the inner sanctum of City Hall.

There were statements that the Department of Justice would suspend its corruption charges against New York's Mayor Eric Adams so that the mayor could "identify and round up migrants living in the US without legal status".

It is estimated that the undocumented population in New York could be between one and four million. The suspension of the charges by the DOJ has placed Mayor Adams in a weak and

compromised position. Is he beholden to the Trump administration, or to the people of New York, and should he be fired?

New York Governor Kathy Hochul said that she would not remove the mayor "for the time being", but that she will limit mayoral authority by giving oversight to a Special Inspector General, the State Comptroller, the Speaker of the City Council, Public Advocate, and City Comptroller to take "possible legal action against the federal government".

How is all of this playing out in migrant communities? There are reports that the three major avenues in South Queens have been less busy than usual. Jamaica Avenue and 101 Avenue have seen a reduction in human traffic and business, but the greatest impact is felt in Liberty Avenue.

Some say that Liberty Avenue is a ghost town, while others argue that the cold weather has driven people indoors. There is little doubt that the fear of ICE, and deportation, have kept people away. Such fears have hit the business community hard. A number of local restaurants and supermarkets report that the long lines are missing, while sales for construction materials have dropped at Home Depot. The van that signs up persons for insurance on Liberty Avenue states that daily applications have dropped from eight persons to zero on some days.

The impact of ICE is felt in other ways too. A good number of the undocumented rent basements, and without jobs it means there would be hardships to pay the rent, and to meet other expenses. It is no wonder then that some undocumented persons are contemplating to return voluntarily to their native countries. By doing so, the feeling is that they may stand the chance to re-enter the US legally sometime in the future.

Governor Hochul recently met with President Trump to discuss congestion pricing. Immigration reform was also on the agenda, but no details were forthcoming. Deporting "millions and millions" is bad public policy. Smart economics suggests that there should be a pathway for the undocumented to regularise their status.

The Trump administration should consider placing the undocumented, who have between five and 40 years of residence in the US on probation. Each person should be required to pay a fine of \$10,000, and permanent residence status without citizenship should be granted after five years with good conduct.

The payment of the fines will boost the US economy in the billions and the housing, automobile, and aviation industries could see unprecedented growth.

Is Liberty Avenue a ghost town? The best answer will come on March 23, 2025 when the annual Phagwah Parade takes place. This parade attracts hundreds on Liberty Avenue and the adjoining streets.

Queen's Book Fair marks BHM as a time of resilience, community

— The Queens Book Fair & Literary Festival has become an essential platform for conversations fostering inter-generational exchange, critical reflection, and community solidarity. Through the voices of leaders, educators, and artists, its recent Black History Month celebration reaffirmed the responsibility of each generation to remember, to uplift, and to carry the torch forward.

...

New York – The air inside the Richmond Hill Queens Library auditorium was charged with reverence and anticipation.

On February 8, under the guidance of Dr Dhanpaul Narine, the seventh installment of the Queens Book Fair & Literary Festival unfolded into an event that not only commemorated Black History Month, but also anchored its significance within the hearts of a diverse, engaged audience.

The gathering was more than a celebration; it was a testament to the indomitable spirit of Black History Month, and its inextricable ties to resilience, justice, and unity.

From the outset, the event was a carefully curated homage to the giants whose sacrifices and struggles have shaped US history. Figures such as Martin Luther King Jr, Shirley Chisholm, and Rosa Parks stood at the forefront of the discourse, their legacies woven into the fabric of a program that seamlessly merged historical reflection with contemporary urgency.

Hosted in partnership with the Office of Adult and Continuing Education NYC and sponsored by the Indian Diaspora Council International, the event welcomed an impressive cross-section of community leaders, educators, and elected officials who are all committed to amplifying the message of progress through remembrance.

New York State Senator Joseph P. Addabbo Jr set the tone with a poignant reminder, stating, “I love Black History Month. We get to move forward together as one and not repeat the crimes and discrimination of the past.”

His words underscored the need for historical consciousness, not merely as an exercise in recollection, but as a blueprint for an equitable future.

“We elected officials have this unique ability and opportunity to help everyone, but we can only do that by learning from the past as well,” he emphasised, echoing the necessity of understanding the struggles of those whose sacrifices paved the way.

Addabbo’s message was complemented by former Guyana Broadcasting Corporation journalist Hugh Hamilton, who delivered a keynote address of remarkable depth and nuance.

Tracing the African American experience through the lens of Caribbean and American intersections, Hamilton explored the parallel arcs of the Black civil rights movement in the US and the decolonisation struggles of the Caribbean and Africa.

Citing scholar Cornel West, he unspooled the profound complexity of Blackness, saying, “Blackness has no meaning outside of a system of race-conscious people and practices after centuries of racist degradation, exploitation, and oppression in America.”

The audience listened raptly as Hamilton contextualised



NY State Senator Joseph P. Addabbo



Principal Elizabeth Mitchell (left to right), Tangerine Clarke, *Caribbean Life* contributor with their awards; Dr Veronica Wiltshire, moderator, and Dr Dhanpaul Narine at the Queens Book Fair celebration of Black History Month in New York last month



Attentive audience during Black History Month celebrations at the Queens Library Richmond Hill Branch in New York last month

Black identity not only as a site of suffering, but as a wellspring of resilience and cultural brilliance.

Dr Ivelaw L. Griffith, author and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana, punctuated the event with a powerful recitation of Claude McKay’s poem *If We Must Die*, a rallying cry that resonates across generations.

Linking past and present, Griffith urged the community to recognise the trials and tribulations of the current political climate, and to stand firm in their commitment to justice.

“As we start Black History Month and have to deal with the trauma, the trials, and tribulations of a new political dispensation, let us continue to celebrate who we are, celebrate what we’ve contributed to this great society and to the world, and continue to fight back,” he declared.

Former Schenectady Mayor Albert Jurczynski, who was 11 years old when Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated, shared a deeply personal reflection on the civil rights leader’s enduring words, “People should not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.”

He also paid homage to the Guyanese community in Schenectady, stating, “I love the Guyanese people; they are wonderful. They saved Schenectady,” noting their pivotal role in revitalising the city’s cultural and economic landscape.

Amidst these tributes, Community Board 9 Chair Sherry Algreto highlighted Narine’s unwavering commitment to education and cultural literacy.

“An educator for 37 years, Narine has fostered a space where youth can thrive,” she remarked, celebrating the continued growth of an initiative that has become a cornerstone of community engagement.

The emotional weight of the event was perhaps most palpable when Deputy Queens Borough President Ebony Young recounted her chilling childhood encounter with racism. At just six years old, growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood, she had her first painful brush with prejudice, an experience, which rather than breaking her, became a catalyst for resilience.

Her story underscored a core truth of Black history: the past

is not simply a repository of suffering, but a terrain from which strength is drawn and futures are forged.

The resonance of these narratives carried through in the poetry and performances that followed. Dr Veronica Wiltshire, a pediatrician and adept moderator, introduced her sister, Vonita Semple, whose stirring and evocative rendition of Maya Angelou’s *Phenomenal Woman* filled the auditorium with palpable energy.

The performance stood as an affirmation of the power of Black women, historic figures and everyday trailblazers alike, whose contributions have indelibly shaped society.

NYC Department of Education’s Arthur Jackson offered another poignant moment, recalling the discrimination and disparity that persist in America, but at the same time noting the contributions Narine continues to make in the community.

Jackson presented Narine with a heart-shaped plaque that read, *A Beautiful Garden is a Work of Heart*. Symbolising the seeds of knowledge sown through his educational endeavours, the plaque served as a fitting tribute to an educator whose mission has been to cultivate literacy, cultural awareness, and communal empowerment.

Consul General at the Consulate General of Guyana in New York, Michael E. Brotherson, captured the essence of the event in a statement read by Akila Huntly-Olius: “Black History Month is a powerful opportunity for us to reflect on our past and draw inspiration for the future. We honour the incredible legacy of those who made the ultimate sacrifice to recognise the remarkable achievement of our community, and acknowledge that Black history is rooted in resilience.”

These words encapsulated the ethos of the gathering, a space where historical remembrance met a call to action for future generations.

The event closed with a cascade of honours and accolades. Proclamations and citations were presented to outstanding community members, among them journalist and *Caribbean Life* contributor Tangerine Clarke, and Principal Elizabeth Mitchell. Plaques from Narine recognised the immense contributions of the honorees, and Hamilton was awarded a Certificate of Achievement for his riveting keynote address.

Gratitude was also extended to other speakers, in addition to the aides of Assembly Member Jenifer Rajkumar, Council Member Lynn Shulman, Senator Leroy Comrie, and Assembly Member David Weprin, Sherry Algreto, who presented citations, proclamations, and certificates to honorees.

As the evening drew to a close, it was evident that this was not just a celebration, but continuation of a long and necessary dialogue. The voices that filled the Richmond Hill Queens Library were part of a larger chorus stretching back through centuries of struggle and triumph.

It was reassurance that Black History Month was not confined to just a month, but a living, breathing narrative that demands engagement, learning, and action every day. More than a commemoration, it was a reminder of why history must be lived, honoured, and wielded as a force for justice.

With files and photos by Tangerine Clarke, *Caribbean Life*.



Vonita Semple recites *Phenomenal Woman*

A time for forgiveness, spiritual growth, and for community service

A Ramadan Message from Omar Farouk, President and CEO, International Muslim Organisation

As we mark the blessed month of Ramadan, we are reminded of its profound significance: a time for forgiveness, spiritual renewal, and drawing closer to Allah. It is a sacred period that calls upon Muslims to reflect, purify their hearts, and strive for personal transformation.

Let us embrace this opportunity to make this Ramadan the most meaningful and impactful one of our lives.



Omar Farouk

Ramadan is a time for deepening our faith, strengthening our connection with Allah, and cultivating virtues such as patience, gratitude, and compassion.

It is a month of self-discipline, where fasting from dawn to sunset teaches us self-control and empathy for those in need. Through increased worship, prayer and acts of kindness, we seek to elevate our spiritual state and develop our character.

Observing Ramadan alongside fellow believers fosters a sense of unity and community. Coming together for prayers, breaking fasts and engaging in acts of worship strengthens the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood.

The collective spirit of Ramadan reminds us of the importance of supporting one another in our spiritual journeys and sharing in the blessings of this holy month.

As we mark Ramadan, let us reflect on how we can make the most of this blessed time. Dedicate yourself to worship, seek forgiveness, and perform acts of charity. Use this month as an opportunity to reset your intentions, purify your soul, and grow closer to Allah.

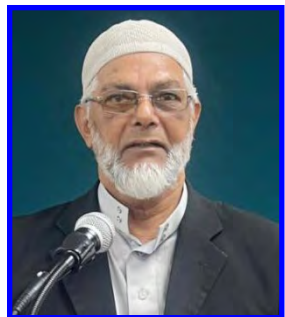
We pray that this Ramadan brings you and your family abundant blessings, peace and spiritual growth.

May it be a time of transformation, renewal and profound connection with Allah and the community. Let us come together to make this a truly special and transformative month.

Fasting a path to piety

With the sighting of the crescent moon, millions of Muslims around the world are now observing the sacred month of Ramadan, a period of fasting, prayer, and reflection. From dawn until sunset, believers abstain from food, drink, and other physical needs, embracing a spiritual journey that fosters discipline, self-restraint, and a deeper connection with Allah.

Last week Trinidad and Tobago's Imam Ahamad Hosein, Acting President of the Anjuman Sunnat-ul Jamaat Association, underscored the religious obligation of fasting in Islam.



Imam Ahamad Hosein

"Allah, the one and only God in Islam, has made fasting obligatory upon the followers of Muhammad just as He made it obligatory upon the preceding nations," he stated, citing the *Holy Qur'an*: "O you who believe, fasting has been made obligatory upon you, just as it was made obligatory upon those who were before you, so that you may learn *taqwa* (piety)."

As he said, Muslims begin their fast with *Suhoor*, the pre-dawn meal, followed by the Fajr (morning) prayer.

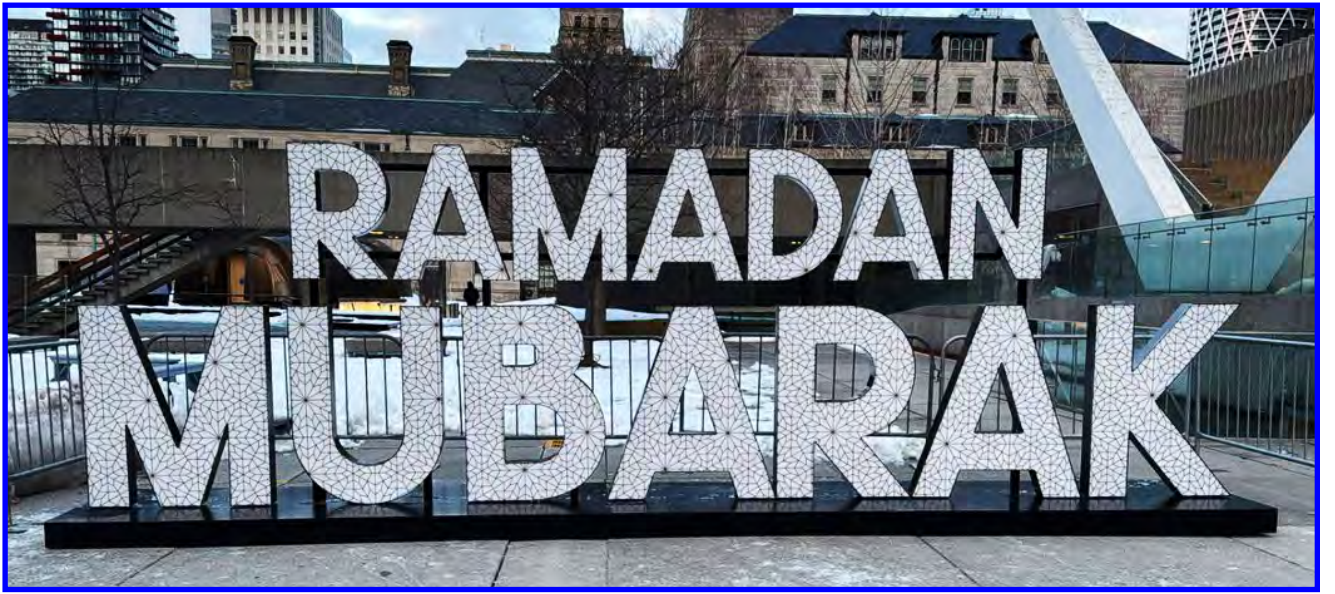
Hosein further explained: "The fast is maintained diligently throughout the day until sunset, when it is traditionally broken with dates and water before the evening meal". The observance follows the prophetic tradition, which he noted: "The Prophet Muhammad instructed: 'Do not fast till you see the new moon and do not break the fast until you see the new moon.'"

Beyond physical abstention, fasting is a practice of spiritual discipline, he observed.

"Fasting has been ordained as a religious duty for Muslims to subdue their lust and keep their appetite well within reasonable bounds. We are advised not to become slaves to lust and appetite, thereby losing control over ourselves," he noted.

Hosein also emphasised that fasting is not a form of punishment, but a means to cultivate self-restraint.

"The *Holy Qur'an* clearly states that a man cannot attain salvation unless he learns to restrain himself from low desires," he declared.



The celebratory sign now standing in Nathan Phillips Square

Ramadan Mubarak sign illuminates iconic Nathan Phillips Square

A moment of celebration and unity unfolded at Nathan Phillips Square late last month when 16-year-old Laila Soliman cut a red ribbon to unveil a striking Ramadan Mubarak sign before a gathering of appreciative spectators.

The sign, a first of its kind at the city's iconic public space, was met with cheers from an audience spanning multiple faiths, a testament to Toronto's diversity and the spirit of inclusivity the project aims to foster.

Soliman is a Grade 11 student at The Bishop Strachan School. As the Toronto media reported, she spearheaded the initiative alongside four fellow high school students from the Toronto Youth Muslim Council: Arqish Minhas, Miraj Siddiqui, Raheem Ebrahim, and Ibrahim Rahman. Together, they envisioned a large-scale tribute to Ramadan, the Islamic holy month now being celebrated with fasting, prayer, and spiritual reflection.

"We wanted something that not only represents our community but also educates others about the essence of Ramadan. It's about peace, unity, and gratitude," Soliman stated.

The installation, glowing against the Toronto skyline, is the culmination of months of effort by the student-led council, which included representatives from 30 schools across the GTA.

Through crowdfunding and community support, the students successfully brought the project to life, ensuring that passersby, whether observing Ramadan or who are simply curious, could engage with its message of faith and togetherness.

For the next month, Ramadan Mubarak will stand in Nathan Phillips Square as a beacon of recognition for Toronto's Muslim community, reinforcing our city's commitment to multicultural representation, and inviting dialogue, understanding, and shared celebration.



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Mohan's *Father Tongue, Motherland* unravels language, migration, power

— What if the language we speak is carrying the fossilised footprints of ancient migrations, colonial hierarchies, and lost civilisations? In *Father Tongue, Motherland*, Peggy Mohan excavates the deep structures of South Asian languages, revealing how words travel, evolve, and encode history. This insightful exploration reshapes how we understand identity, power, and linguistic survival.

A Series for the Caribbean Diaspora Local Journalism Initiative

If you decide to pick up *Father Tongue, Motherland* by Peggy Mohan, you are not just opening a book – you are stepping into an intellectual excavation site, unearthing linguistic fossils embedded in the everyday speech of millions across South Asia.

Mohan's latest text is not just a history of language; it is a story of migration, colonial hierarchies, and the long echo of displacement, one that should resonate with readers in our Caribbean diaspora here in the GTA and elsewhere who have witnessed, and lived, similar transformations of language and identity.

Mohan traces how South Asian languages evolved through the movement of people, particularly male migrants, who contributed vocabulary to local tongues while the deep structures, in her words, the bones of language, remained maternal, embedded in the speech of indigenous communities.

In an interview with Shruti Sontal from *The Times of India*, Mohan explains why she calls these influences “father tongues”, stating, “Words often represent migrations of men. Like sperm donations, they gave vocabulary to a place they temporarily migrated to, creating a layer on top of the languages which were existing.”

However, she argues that these linguistic layers were often ephemeral.

“Words and influences of male migrations often don't pass on to the next generation. When they go back to their real lives and families, they speak their earlier languages. A more stable change occurs when women and children migrate and accommodate themselves in a new environment.”

Mohan's argument is not merely linguistic; it is deeply historical and political. She critiques the dominant narrative that South Asian languages are primarily a product of Indo-Aryan migration, pointing out that this perspective often ignores the voices of those who were already present.

“There's absolutely no thought given to the fact that there were people already existing in this country when they came and there could have been certain kinds of mixture,” she told Sontal.

Mohan's work highlights the deep inequalities embedded in linguistic history, an argument that should resonate with our Caribbean readers.

The imposition of English over Creole and Indigenous languages in the Caribbean mirrors the linguistic erasure she describes in South Asia. Just as Mohan examines the layering of male-dominated linguistic imprints over older maternal linguistic structures, one might draw a parallel to how colonial education policies systematically erased the languages of the enslaved and our indentured ancestors.

For Mohan, language is not just a tool of communication; it is a record of power, conquest, and survival.

In her interview with Sontal, she explains how these linguistic hierarchies played out in her early life growing up in the Caribbean.

“I grew up speaking Jamaican Creole English. In fact, I was discouraged from learn-

ing Hindi. Whenever I tried to tell my great-grandfather to teach me Hindi, he'd tell me to learn French and Spanish instead,” she recalled.

The colonial mindset that associated non-European languages with lower status was deeply ingrained, shaping even the languages that people were encouraged to speak in a post-colonial world.

“There was a perception that being interested in an Indian language would take us back to the kind of people we were in India – bonded to the estates,” she said.

The linguistic suppression Mohan describes is one that generations of our Caribbean readers back in the homeland, and abroad in the diaspora, would recognise in the subtle and overt ways in which colonial rule sought to erase native tongues and replace them with the “respectable” languages of power.

Meanwhile, Mohan's book appears structured like an archaeological dig. Looking at Deccan region, where the Dakkhini language reveals traces of an ancient linguistic past, she then moves to the Kathmandu Valley, where “men coming into the region 500 years ago created a hybrid eerily similar to what we find in the rest of the subcontinent”.

She also builds an X-ray image of a vanished Indus Valley language, reconstructing it through the surviving “bones” that remain embedded in modern South Asian tongues.

Mohan uses grammar, rather than vocabulary, to trace these ancestral languages. As she explains, “Grammar, like bones, stays strong, even if buried deep underneath, while the fleshy vocabulary might rot away with time.”

This focus on structure rather than lexicon allows Mohan to challenge the conventional understanding of linguistic evolution, showing that deep-rooted indigenous structures have endured even as waves of male migrants left their temporary lexical imprints.

However, be forewarned that not every reader would find Mohan's latest text easy to navigate.

As reviewer Kavitha Murali has noted, writing in the online site *Medium*, “I don't find this book easy to read. It is a complex research thesis where I keep referring... to what ergative really means and the difference between pidgin and Creole, and then get drowned in retroflexion, aspiration, reduplication, and postposition.”

Murali describes her reading experience as one that takes a bit of heavy-lifting, and makes for an intellectual workout.

“I do not necessarily not recommend the book. But I don't really recommend it either, unless you are ready to get plunged into an almost PhD thesis of languages, a hardcore textbook of sorts,” she laments.

However, even as she acknowledges Mohan's brilliance, she also warns that *Father Tongue, Motherland* is not a light, conversational history; it is a book that demands patience, engagement, and determination.

However, its unwieldiness aside, Murali's critique touches on the book's central metaphor, “We are all used to ‘Mother Tongue,’ so ‘Father Tongue’ in itself sounds ironical,” she says.

She finds such a gendered nature in Mohan's linguistic framework to be provocative, and while it offers a compelling analytical tool, some readers may find it unsettling, or perhaps unconventional.

However, reading into the text, it appears that Mohan's personal background lends an added dimension to her work. Born in Trinidad, she studied linguistics at the University of the West Indies before completing her PhD at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where her dissertation focused on Trinidad Bhojpur.

She has taught linguistics at Howard University in Washington, DC, Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, and Ashoka University. Additionally, she has contributed to mass communications education at Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi.

Her work also extends beyond academia. She has explored linguistic storytelling through cartoon animation and television production, notably producing a Hindi-language children's television series.

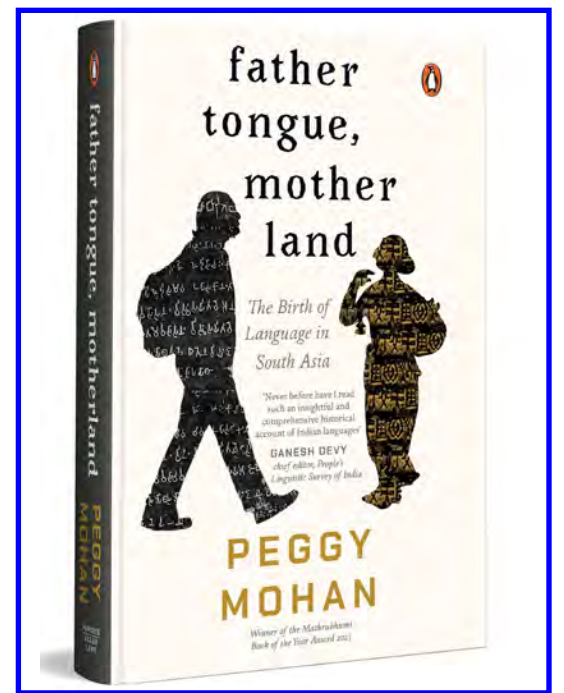
Her previous book, *Wanderers, Kings, Merchants* (2021), won the Mathrubhumi Book of the Year Award for its compelling exploration of migration's impact on South Asian languages.

Her own life reflects the diasporic movements she studies in growing up in the Caribbean, moving to the US for higher education, and finally settling in India. This transnational experience informs her sensitivity to how language evolves in response to displacement, migration, and colonial legacies.

If you are fascinated by historical linguistics, South Asian and Caribbean migration, or post-colonial linguistic hierarchies, then *Father Tongue, Motherland* would be insightful and rewarding.

However, if you are looking for a light introduction to linguistic history, Murali's caution is worth noting, and approaching it will take a bit of fortifying one's determination since it leans towards the academic, so some prior knowledge of linguistic theory will be beneficial.

For our readers in the diaspora, and back home, there is something deeply familiar in Mohan's analysis and in her life's work. The layering of colonial languages over Creole, the suppression of native tongues in favour of European ones, and the ways in which power is embedded in linguistic evolution are narratives



we know only too well.

Mohan's research, though focused on South Asia, speaks across the *kala pani*, the black waters, to our familiar shores of Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, and beyond.

This book is for readers who are willing to dig deep into language as history, language as power, and language as survival. Not an easy book, it is a necessary one. Mohan offers us a lens through which to see language not just as a static set of rules, but as a living, evolving entity that carries more than confluences – there is also the weight of migrations, conquests, and lost civilisations.

Expect to be challenged when reading *Father Tongue, Motherland*; expect to learn with illuminating, epiphanic moments; and expect to come away with a new appreciation for the unseen structures beneath the languages we speak today.

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Bhajan receives a second term as a lay assessor, the document presented by President Christine Kangaloo



Bhajan signs the official document for her second term with the Equal Opportunity Tribunal



Bhajan receives the official document for her first term from then President Paula-Mae Weekes

Appeal Court upholds High Court ruling on Veera Bhajan's EOT appointment

Port-of-Spain – The Court of Appeal last week upheld a High Court ruling in favour of Veera Bhajan, who challenged the refusal of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal (EOT) to recognise her appointment as a lay assessor.

In a ruling on February 26, Justices of Appeal Mira Dean-Armorer, Vasheist Kokaram, and Malcolm Holdip affirmed the High Court's ruling, including an award for damages, but overturned the finding on legitimate expectation.

The judgment's opening line read, "This was a tale of two powerful ladies in public life."

Bhajan was appointed a lay assessor by the President in March 2021. However, the tribunal's chairman, Donna Prowell-Raphael, refused to allow Bhajan to assume her duties, citing a lack of necessary resources to support her position. Prowell-Raphael also raised an issue with Bhajan's qualifications.

After months of waiting and failed negotiations, Bhajan initiated judicial review proceedings, arguing that the chairman acted illegally, in bad faith, and in breach of her legitimate expectations.

In a strongly worded judgment on November 23, 2021, Justice Avason Quinlan-Williams ruled in Bhajan's favour, criticising Prowell-Raphael's actions as an abuse of power.

Quinlan-Williams ordered that Bhajan be recognised in her position and awarded her damages for her humiliation and embarrassment.

Quinlan-Williams wrote, "There are times when one seeks a reason or a motive to explain the inexplicable..."

She admitted it was a difficult judgment to write, not because of the facts, which she said were easy to find and "resoundingly spoke for themselves." However, "At a certain point, as much as I tried to quiet my mind, I kept hearing the words of one sound over and over; they were from General Grant, 'Pure hate and acting normal. Pure hate and acting normal. Tell them pure hate and acting normal.'"

The judge also suggested the EOT's chairman "in a quiet time, reflect on whether she is the best fit for the chair of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal".

Quinlan-Williams continued, "The claimant is entitled to be seated from the time of her appointment by the president as a lay assessor. Yet the first and second defendants continue their pursuit, viciously at times and with different excuses in their efforts to prevent the claimant from assuming office as a lay assessor. Even when pressed during these proceedings, they



Donna Prowell-Raphael

persisted."

She added, "There was no regard to the institution of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal and the impact on the institutionalisation of the Tribunal. No regard to the mandate of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal to prevent discrimination and to promote equal opportunities for persons of unequal status. No regard as to how it will look to the rest of us that a person who was lawfully appointed by Her Excellency cannot get her just dues from the Equal Opportunity Tribunal and the chair of the Equal Opportunity Tribunal."

Prowell-Raphael appealed the ruling on multiple grounds, including allegations of judicial bias and procedural errors. However, the Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal, ruling there was no reasonable basis to conclude Quinlan-Williams was biased in her ruling.

Dean-Armorer, who wrote the unanimous decision, said there was no appearance of bias on the judge's part from the moment Bhajan sought the court's permission to pursue her lawsuit against the EOT and its chairman.

She also noted the public would have been aware of the issues leading up to Bhajan taking legal action, including a plea by

then-President Paula-Mae Weekes to Prowell-Raphael "to avoid opening the tribunal to the accusation of ableism", in response to Bhajan's complaints she was not able to assume duties.

"In my view, the fair-minded and informed observer would not find any possibility that the strong and passionate remarks were based on anything other than the facts played out in the affidavits filed before the judge. The real possibility would be that the judge was outraged by the treatment meted out to the claimant and her outrage was expressed in her language," she wrote.

Adding, "In our view, that would be the conclusion of the fair-minded informed observer."

Although admitting they did not condone "such intemperate language," the Appeal Court said they did not view Quinlan-Williams as biased.

The Appeal Court judges said on the evidence, "There was a strong indication of hostility on the part of the chairman. "The hostility manifested itself in her persistent refusal to speak with or meet with Ms Bhajan. It manifested itself in the letter of May 3, 2021, to her Excellency calling for the removal of Ms Bhajan. The chairman's hostility achieved a climax, however, in her letter of May 19, 2021, to Ms Bhajan."

As the judges noted, "This letter was not only stern but was decidedly hostile and was designed to communicate to Ms Bhajan that there was no room for her on the tribunal."

The judges said they could not fault Quinlan Williams' finding of bad faith. They also dismissed the chairman's contention Bhajan failed to alert the court that her initial instrument of appointment had to be recalled since it said she had been in practice for ten years.

"Indeed, the court's attention was not drawn to the flawed first appointment or the absence of Ms Bhajan's CV," Dean-Armorer said.

However, she said the judge's finding there was no material non-disclosure after assessing the evidence was reasonable.

The Court of Appeal also held that the EoT and its chairman acted outside their authority by refusing to recognise Bhajan's appointment.

"In our view, the Presidential instrument of appointment prevails over any administrative practices. Public offices must give effect to the instrument of appointment without delay unless such delay is envisaged in the legislation," they declared.

Dean-Armorer said, by failing to give effect to Bhajan's presidential appointment, Prowell-Raphael and the tribunal "acted illegally". Also, her actions were also an abuse of process.

"The relevant evidence depicted a chairman who was obstinate in her view that Ms Bhajan should not assume the duties of the office to which she had been appointed. She remained inflexible in the face of persistent requests on the part of Ms Bhajan and in the face of the intervention of Her Excellency the President. It was within the power of the chairman to delay the assumption of duties of Ms Bhajan indefinitely and that is exactly what the chairman did until she was compelled to capitulate by the process of the court," the ruling said.

The tribunal's argument that it lacked resources was also deemed irrelevant, as it had no discretion to override a presidential appointment.

The Attorney General did not challenge any of the court's findings. The Court of Appeal also upheld the court's award of damages, which is yet to be quantified.

In March 2024, Bhajan was re-appointed as a lay assessor of the EOT by President Christine Kangaloo.

Born without arms, Bhajan was enrolled at the Princess Elizabeth School for the differently abled where she excelled at academics before being transferred to the Felicity Hindu Primary school. She secured a place at St Augustine Girls' High School, obtained full CXC passes and distinctions at the Advanced-Level examinations, and graduated with a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of the West Indies in 2012. She was awarded the Hummingbird Silver Medal in 2011.

Questions as TTDF probes missing ammunition

Port-of-Spain – The appointment of an external investigative team to probe the missing ammunition from the Cumuto Barracks highlights a concerning lack of trust in the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force (TTDF), criminologist Darius Figueira said earlier this week.

"If you bring in external people to investigate, you have now gone and politicised it because you are sending the message that you don't really trust them. Remember you have a chain of command there. That is a military organisation, so how could you bring external to come and investigate?" Figueira said.

He added, "What is it? A court martial? The tradition in military law is that when you call in people external to the military structure to investigate, you are looking to court martial. You are saying you have no confidence in them."

Less than two years after TTDF Inspector General Sheldon Ramnanan told a Joint Select Committee (JSC) of National Security that an audit accounted for all ammunition and arms, a team was appointed by the Cabinet just over a week ago to investigate the alleged disappearance of more than 25,000 rounds of ammunition from the Cumuto Barracks.



Darius Figueira

Since 2022, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) investigators have found TTDF-marked shells on several crime scenes, including gang-related killings.

In August 2022, 5.56 mm bullets belonging to the Air Guard, used in high-powered weapons like AR-15s, were recovered on the scene of murders that took place in Aranguez. That month, regiment bullets were also found at the site of a murder in Morvant.

In November 2022, regiment bullets were fired at a Point Fortin home, and in December 2023, the TTPS recovered TTDF bullets at four crime scenes. It was reported last week that crime scene investigators recovered TTDF-marked ammunition at the scene of a Tabaquite murder.

In May 2023, Forensic Science Centre Acting Director Derrick Sankar told another JSC that TTDF shells recovered at crime scenes might be recycled after being used on shooting ranges.

"This issue, the TTPS is fully aware of it. We have been having meetings with the UN for the disposal of arms and ammunition, putting in stricter guidelines for disposal and accounting for expired ammunition as well," he said.



Nicolás Maduro



Irfaan Ali

TT reaffirms support for Guyana over latest Venezuelan incursion

Port-of-Spain – Acting Prime Minister Stuart Young has reaffirmed Trinidad and Tobago’s unwavering support for Guyana’s sovereignty in the ongoing territorial dispute with Venezuela, issuing a call earlier this week for adherence to diplomatic agreements aimed at maintaining regional stability.

“Trinidad and Tobago’s position is that we fully support Guyana’s sovereignty and we advocate for, and encourage the application of, and abiding by, the Argyle accord,” he told the Trinidad and Tobago media earlier this week.

On December 14, 2023 in Argyle, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Guyana President Dr Irfaan Ali and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro signed *The Joint Declaration of Argyle for Dialogue and Peace Between Guyana and Venezuela*.

But the territorial dispute heated up again on March 1, when Ali expressed alarm after a coast guard vessel from Venezuela entered the waters of Guyana on Saturday within its exclusive economic zone.

At a news conference, Ali stated that a Venezuelan coast guard vessel had entered the maritime waters of Guyana, approached lawfully operating assets, and transmitted a radio message declaring that they were in “disputed international waters”, when they were within Guyana’s territory.

The area is home to a huge offshore oil deposit being developed by ExxonMobil.

Ali stated that several aircraft and marine vessels had been deployed to support the large number of drill ships, seismic vessels and support ships operating in the block.

The incident on March 1 followed an attack two weeks earlier by armed men, who were suspected Venezuelan pirates, at the Cuyuni River border. An exchange of gunfire with a Guyanese military patrol injured six soldiers, two of them seriously.

A communiqué on March 1 from Maduro’s office stated, “Venezuela categorically repudiates the baseless remarks of the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Irfaan Ali, who lies brazenly when he claims that units of the Bolivarian Navy of Venezuela are violating the maritime territory of Guyana, hiding the fact that those waters do not form part of Guyanese territory since it is a maritime zone pending delimitation in accordance with international law.”

The statement was titled, *Irfaan Ali pretends to become the Caribbean’s Zelenskyy to generate conflict in our region through dangerous provocations*.

Venezuela added that Ali’s remarks were “full of inaccuracies, falsehoods, and contradictions, in his eagerness to disrupt the peace and tranquillity of our region by sowing the seeds of a dangerous conflict”.

Venezuela’s actions have been condemned by the US State Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere, which said Venezuela was in violation, and called the incident “unacceptable”.

The Organisation of American States said, “Such acts of intimidation constitute a clear violation of international law, undermine regional stability, and threaten the principles of peaceful coexistence between nations”.

Meanwhile, Caricom called on Venezuela to urgently remove the naval vessel in question. The group also reminded both countries of their obligation under international law to avoid unnecessary confrontational actions.

Commonwealth Secretary General Patricia Scotland also echoed Ali’s alarm over the situation. In a statement, she condemned the action and urged the international community and the Commonwealth family to continue to support Guyana.

Scotland also praised Guyana’s response, saying that it exhibited restraint and responsibility by engaging in diplomatic actions to address the crisis.

“This recent action by Venezuela runs counter to the spirit of the Joint Declaration of Argyle for Dialogue and Peace between Guyana and Venezuela, signed on December 14, 2023, where both states agreed to use international law and diplomatic means to address the controversy and to refrain from escalating the conflict,”

she said.

Scotland encouraged Venezuela to respect international law and to adhere to the unanimous Order on Provisional Measures of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of 1 December 2023.

“The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela shall refrain from taking any action which would modify the situation that currently prevails in the territory in dispute, whereby the Co-operative Republic of Guyana administers and exercises control over that area,” she said.

She pointed to the Leaders’ Statement and Samoa Communiqué of the recently held Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Apia, Samoa, last October 2024, where Leaders unanimously “reiterated their continued support for the ICJ, which has accepted jurisdiction over the controversy, to resolve the matter fully and finally by means of its binding legal judgment”.

She also “reaffirmed the Commonwealth’s unswerving support for the preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana.”

Scotland urged the government and people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to abide by the principles of international law and to refrain from actions that threaten the peace and stability of the Caribbean region.



Stuart Young

Leaders express support for Guyana

From Page 9

of the rule of law and regional security.”

Commonwealth Secretary General Patricia Scotland, also reinforced Guyana’s position and condemned Venezuela.

“The Commonwealth Secretary General has condemned this action in the strongest possible terms and urged the international community and the Commonwealth family to continue to support Guyana,” the statement declared.

It also praised Guyana’s response, saying it exhibited restraint and responsibility by engaging in diplomatic actions to address the crisis.

In its own defence, the Venezuelan government issued a statement condemning Ali’s remarks while labeling him “the Caribbean’s Zelenskyy”, referring to Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The government accused Ali of trying to generate conflict in this region through “dangerous provocations”, saying his claims were baseless. The statement justified the Venezuelan presence, saying the waters do not form part of Guyanese territory since it is a maritime zone pending delimitation in accordance with international law.

“The remarks of Irfaan Ali, the Caribbean Zelenskyy, are full of inaccuracies, falsehoods and contradictions, in his eagerness to disrupt the peace and tranquillity of our region by sowing the seeds of a dangerous conflict,” the statement said.

It added, “This new provocation seeks to escalate and disrupt our region as a zone of peace, and responds to the war-mongering interests of ExxonMobil, with the public backing of pathetic figures such as Luis Almagro and Ivan Duque.”

Almagro is a former Secretary General of the OAS, while Duque is the former President

of Colombia.

The statement said it is unacceptable and constitutes a serious violation of international law that Guyana disposes itself of a territory over which there is a dispute.

“Even worse, it disposes a sea that has yet to be delimited, granting illegal concessions for the exploitation of energy resources, while systematically evading its international obligations under the 1966 Geneva Agreement, the sole legal mechanism governing the territorial dispute between the two nations,” the statement said.

Additionally, “Venezuela demands that Guyana stop dodging this agreement and fulfil its commitments to seek a negotiated, peaceful, practical and mutually satisfactory solution, as established by this binding instrument.”

The statement also noted, “Against the threats of conflict launched by the Caribbean Zelenskyy, in complicity with his international war-mongering network from the global north, Venezuela denounces this aggression and ratifies that it will deploy its Bolivarian diplomacy, firmly, in defence of peace, sovereignty and the dignity of its people.”

For now, Guyana retains its rights to the Essequibo. Venezuela, on the other hand, has emphasised that it would continue to defend its historical and legal rights over the Essequibo area.



Patricia Scotland

• • •

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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Bollywood goes with the flow from the silver screen to streaming

The story of Indian cinema has always been one of evolution. From the black-and-white era of Guru Dutt and Satyajit Ray to the dazzling musicals of Yash Chopra and Karan Johar, Bollywood has constantly reinvented itself across the continuum of time and technology.

Today, that evolution finds itself at yet another defining crossroads, one where the boundaries between theatrical cinema and digital streaming are not dissolving into irrelevance, but rather, merging into a hybrid cinematic experience. The rise of OTT (Over-The-Top) platforms has today redefined Bollywood, not as a disruptive force that threatens cinemas, but as a parallel universe expanding the movie industry's reach, narrative possibilities, and its wider, global footprint.

When OTT platforms first gained prominence in India, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, many declared it to be the "death of theatres".

However, like eBooks supplanting the paperback, that 'prophecy' has since proven premature. Movie houses have since rebounded since the pandemic, with films like *Pathaan*, *Jawan*, and *RRR* drawing audiences back in strong numbers.

Yet, while movie houses reclaim their share of the spectacle-driven experience, OTT has carved out its own distinct territory – one that does not diminish Bollywood, but expands it.

Today, film critics such as Himesh Mankad are observing how streaming platforms were first a saviour during the pandemic, allowing producers to unlock funds that were tied up in stalled projects.

"If it was not for OTT, we as an industry would have made a lot of losses as the theatres were not functioning and the burden of interest had piled up on films," he noted. Mankad's observation was reported by the German broadcaster DW.

However, Hindi screenwriter Shokhi Banerjee has gone even further, asserting that OTT releases now rival theatrical premieres in importance, in what is a radical departure from the industry's traditional hierarchies.

"OTT platforms have opened up all kinds of genres, and we as writers and producers are free to tell our stories," she was reported saying in DW.

"Themes that were once rejected for being too niche, like social stigma films or political thrillers, now have multiple takers on OTT," she added.

So it appears what has emerged is not antagonism, but symbiosis. Today, big-ticket blockbusters still command the big screen, while complex, layered storytelling is flourishing on OTT.

For decades, Bollywood's commercial formula hinged on the gravitational pull of its superstars. A Shah Rukh Khan, a Salman Khan, or an Amitabh Bachchan could single-handedly guarantee a film's success. But OTT has now rewritten the script. No longer is a film's fate dictated solely by a marquee name; instead, strong narratives and powerful performances now determine success.

The shift has created new-age stars, actors once relegated to the sidelines, who are now basking in the limelight.

Take Jaideep Ahlawat, who, despite years in the industry, found unprecedented recognition with *Paatal Lok*, where he played a weary yet determined cop investigating a politically charged case.

Or Manoj Bajpayee whose *The Family Man* expanded his already formidable reputation, playing a government agent juggling espionage and domestic life.

Even Divyenndu Sharma, best known for light-hearted roles, found a darker, more menacing persona in *Mirzapur*, as the unpredictable Munna Tripathi.

Pankaj Tripathi, the very embodiment of the character-actor-turned-lead, became the face of powerful, understated performances, commanding OTT with the same ease as he once played small roles in multiplex hits.

Women, too, have found greater narrative agency in the streaming era. Sushmita Sen's *Aarya* brought her back into the public imagination as a formidable protagonist – a widow forced to take over her family's criminal empire.

Madhuri Dixit's *The Fame Game* allowed her to explore complex, nuanced storytelling beyond Bollywood's song-and-dance routine, playing a film star whose disappearance unravels dark secrets.

The rise of Aaditi Pohankar in *She*, Tillotama Shome in *Lust Stories 2*, and Radhika Apte in *Sacred Games*, highlights how OTT is providing substance-driven, non-formulaic roles that were once rare in mainstream Bollywood.

Bollywood's traditional model was built on risk: high-stakes, big-budget productions that needed massive box office returns to justify their existence. OTT has since rewritten those economics. Now, a film can recover costs through direct digital rights sales, eliminating the fear of a theatrical flop.

This latest development has emboldened filmmakers to explore unconventional themes and narratives that might not have found a theatrical audience.



Superstars Ram Charan (right) and Jr NTR dancing in *Naatu Naatu* in the Bollywood blockbuster *RRR*



Jaideep Ahlawat (left to right) Kareena Kapoor, and Vijay Varma in online thriller *Jaane Jaan*

Understanding OTT: The digital streaming revolution

What is OTT?

OTT stands for Over-The-Top, a term used to describe digital streaming platforms that deliver content such as movies, TV shows, web series, and even live events directly to viewers over the Internet. Unlike traditional cable or satellite TV, where content is broadcast at scheduled times, OTT allows users to watch what they want, when they want, and on any Internet-connected device.

Origins of OTT

The idea of streaming entertainment over the Internet has existed since the early 2000s, but it gained mainstream popularity with platforms like *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, and *Hulu*, which started as services for renting or purchasing digital movies.

Over time, these platforms shifted to subscription-based models and began producing original content, leading to the boom in on-demand streaming that we see today.

In India, OTT gained traction in the mid-2010s, with platforms like *Hotstar* (now *Disney+ Hotstar*), *Zee5*, and *SonyLIV*. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated this shift, as movie theatres closed, and audiences turned to digital platforms for entertainment.

How Does OTT Work?

OTT services function through Internet-based streaming, meaning that content is hosted on digital servers and delivered to users through apps or websites. Unlike traditional TV, which requires cable subscriptions and set-top boxes, OTT only needs:

- An Internet connection.

- Device (Smartphone, Smart TV, Tablet, Laptop, or Gaming Console).
- A streaming app or website (like *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, or *Disney+ Hotstar*).

OTT's Delivery Methods

OTT content is distributed using various business models, including:

- Subscription-based (SVOD) – Users pay a monthly or yearly fee for unlimited access (*Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, *Disney+ Hotstar*).
- Ad-supported (AVOD) – Free content funded by advertisements (*YouTube*, *MX Player*);
- Pay-per-view (TVOD) – Users pay for each movie or episode (*Apple TV*, *ZeePlex*).
- Hybrid Models – Platforms mix different revenue models (*Disney+ Hotstar* offers both free and premium content).

Why is OTT So Popular?

- Convenience & Accessibility – Watch anytime, any where, on any device.
- Diverse Content – Access to Bollywood, Hollywood, regional films, international series, and even independent cinema.
- Personalisation – AI-driven recommendations suggest content based on your viewing history.
- Affordability – Lower costs than traditional cable TV, with multiple pricing options.
- No Ads for Paid Subscriptions – A seamless, uninterrupted viewing experience.

Take *The Lunchbox* (2013), an intimate drama about an unexpected epistolary romance, and *Piku* (2015), a father-daughter road trip that blended comedy with deep emotional undertones. Both films found renewed success on digital platforms.

Similarly, *Article 15* (2019), a hard-hitting social drama on caste-based discrimination, gained widespread recognition after its OTT release.

More recently, *Jaane Jaan* (2023), a suspenseful thriller starring Kareena Kapoor, and *Do Patti* (2024), a gripping mystery featuring Kajol and Kriti Sanon, have proven that films made with streaming audiences in mind can garner just as much engagement, if not more, than a traditional theatrical run.

The relationship between OTT and theatrical cinema is not adversarial but complementary. Films like *Radhe* (2021) and *Ponmagal Vandhal* (2020) experimented with hybrid releases, debuting in both theatres and on streaming platforms.

Meanwhile, *The White Tiger* (2021) and *Dhamaka* (2020) showcased how Bollywood stars are increasingly embracing OTT-first projects, blurring the once-rigid boundaries between "big-screen films" and "digital-only content".

Industry experts, including actor Rahul Banerjee, have argued that OTT and theatres must be viewed as two sides of the same coin.

"Many filmmakers now adopt a hybrid release strategy,

maximising reach across multiple platforms. Cinema still offers that immersive experience, but OTT gives films longevity and accessibility," Banerjee has stated.

Streaming platforms have broadened cinema's reach, making films available in multiple languages and expanding regional films' impact across the globe.

Kumbalangi Nights (2019) and *Tumbbad* (2018), both regional films, achieved international acclaim through streaming, demonstrating how OTT is bridging the gap between niche cinema and global audiences.

OTT's meteoric rise is not temporary, and the numbers speak for themselves. As per *Grand View Research*, the global OTT market size surpassed \$120 billion in 2023, and is projected to exceed \$200 billion by 2027.

In India, OTT has grown at an astonishing rate, with a 22 percent compound annual growth rate projected through 2025, fueled by affordable data, smartphone penetration, and regional content expansion. Despite concerns over subscription fatigue, the streaming industry is set to remain a dominant force.

Yet, theatres are far from obsolete. They remain the ultimate stage for big-budget spectacles, while OTT fosters intimate, story-driven experiences. The key takeaway is Bollywood is no longer a single-track industry; instead, it has now grown into a dual ecosystem, where films can thrive both in theatres and in the digital sphere.



Vicky Kaushal in *Chhaava*

Chhaava sparks historical accuracy, creative freedom debate

— The *Chhaava* debate has underscored the fine line between creative liberty and historical accuracy. Experts weighing in on the controversy say that while filmmakers should have the freedom to interpret history, they must also ensure they do not distort it beyond recognition. However, it is the audience that holds the greatest power. By educating themselves on history and engaging with films critically, viewers can distinguish fact from fiction, allowing both historical truth and cinematic artistry to thrive.

Since its February 14 release, the much-anticipated historical drama *Chhaava* has ignited controversy over historical authenticity, creative freedom, and political influences. Directed by Laxman Utekar, the movie is based on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and stars Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna. Utekar is known for his productions of *Rang De Basanti* and *Tezaab*.

In the wake of the intensifying push-back, industry veterans and experts have been weighing in on the challenges of bringing history to the silver screen in India.

Speaking to *ETimes* last month, veteran screenwriter Kamlesh Pandey underscored the weighty responsibility film-makers bear when portraying historical figures.

“Filmmakers and actors must recognise that these personalities hold deep significance in the hearts and minds of people,” he stated. At the same time, he acknowledged that some creative liberties are necessary for storytelling, but warned against exploitation.

“Bollywood often mishandles history, repackaging it with questionable integrity. This is why historical films rarely succeed – except for a few exceptions,” he stated.

Meanwhile, film historian Dilip Thakur argued that historical films are more vulnerable to controversy today due to social media’s growing influence.

As he recalled, earlier Hindi and Marathi films, such as Bhalji Pendharkar’s historical epics and Sohrab Modi’s *Pukar*, faced little backlash.

“The focus was clear – to inform and entertain. But today, with social media amplifying every issue, people seem more inclined to stir controversy for attention,” he stated.

Citing *Bajirao Mastani* as an example of excessive creative liberty, Thakur noted, “Showing Kashi Bai and Mastani dancing together was historically inaccurate. While it served commercial value, audiences may accept it as fact.”

According to Thakur, modern filmmakers must leverage technology and special effects while remaining true to historical authenticity.

Also speaking to *Chhaava*’s controversies, veteran producer Mukesh Bhatt said the uproar came not from concerns over accuracy, but from political motivations.

“The real problem isn’t how much liberty filmmakers take, but how much noise fringe elements create,” Bhatt said.

Instead, he advocated for an independent historical body to validate scripts, insisting that “[once] a government-appointed body clears a film, no political party or individual should have the right to object”.

He also contrasted today’s climate with the past, recalling how films like *Mughal-e-Azam* and *Jodha Akbar* took creative liberties without facing the political interference seen today.

“Filmmakers shouldn’t have to seek approval from political leaders – this is unacceptable,” he declared.

Actor Milind Gunaji, a seasoned performer in historical films, highlighted the delicate balance between artistic expression and public sentiment.

“Creativity is the soul of film-making, but when portraying revered figures, we must ensure factual accuracy and thorough research,” he said.

And looking at the recently deleted *Lezim* dance sequence from *Chhaava*, Gunaji offered a pragmatic view.

“Perhaps the director felt it didn’t contribute to the storytelling, so he removed it. Ultimately, it’s a creative decision,” he said.

ETimes also quoted trade analyst and film strategist Saurabh Varma, who pointed to the evolving digital landscape as a catalyst for increasing controversies.

“Social media gives everyone a platform to express opinions, sometimes even before watching a film,” he explained, citing *Padmaavat* as an example of a film that faced severe protests, but was later accepted by audiences.

Varma warned against the growing bandwagon mentality, remarking, “If *Mughal-e-Azam* were released today, it would face backlash. The digital age has made the world noisier, with trolls often ignoring facts in favour of outrage.”

He said filmmakers must continue telling stories with creative freedom, but acknowledged that fear of backlash is now making them hesitant to explore historical subjects.

Meanwhile, renowned filmmaker Dr Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, known for *Prithviraj* and *Chanakya*, argued that history is inherently complex and open to interpretation.

“Historians work with multiple sources, and filmmakers do the same. But cinema operates within its own framework,” he stated.

Dwivedi highlighted the political influence on historical narratives, saying, “To be politically correct is not to be historically correct.”

He recalled how he was advised to modify a scene in *Chanakya* depicting Krishna and Arjun’s practice of bride kidnapping, replacing it with Varanam (choosing a groom) to align with modern sensibilities.

“We are constantly reshaping history to fit today’s narratives,” he observed.

He also criticised the double standards in scrutinising historical storytelling.

“Television shows distort history all the time, but they escape backlash because they don’t involve big stars. The moment a film generates controversy, social media influencers and news channels interrogate filmmakers,” he noted.

Dwivedi advised filmmakers to anticipate resistance and plan releases strategically. “Filmmakers must prepare for legal challenges in advance. Often, resistance emerges before people have even watched the film,” he said.

Today, industry experts agree that social media have made it easier for people to mobilise against films, sometimes without full knowledge of the content. Political groups often exploit these controversies, creating an environment where filmmakers resort to self-censorship.

Despite these challenges, historical films continue to draw audiences when storytelling remains compelling. The box office successes of *Bajirao Mastani* and *Padmaavat* demonstrate that strong narratives can overcome controversy.

Multiple controversies dog historical movie Chhaava

While Vicky Kaushal’s latest film, *Chhaava*, set new records at the box office, the movie has become embroiled in multiple controversies. Directed by Laxman Utekar, it has also received praise for its storytelling and grand visuals in its chronicling of the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj.

However, *Chhaava* sparked outrage by viewers even before it was released, who claimed the film distorted historical facts. The descendants of Ganoji Shirke and Kanhoji Shirke, two significant historical figures portrayed in the film, accused the filmmakers of misrepresenting their ancestors.

According to Laxmikant Raje Shirke, the 13th descendant of Ganoji and Kanhoji Shirke, the portrayal of these warriors was inaccurate and tarnished their legacy.

Consequently, the Shirke family threatened to file a defamation lawsuit against the makers of *Chhaava*. It was not the first time the film has faced backlash. Earlier, a few dance sequences sparked protests, which led to the filmmakers removing them from the movie to avoid further controversy.



Laxman Utekar

Following the latest accusations, Utekar met with the Shirke family and issued a public apology. As he noted, the film only mentioned the names of Ganoji and Kanhoji Shirke without using surnames or referring to their villages.

“Our intention was never to hurt the Shirke family. If anyone has suffered any pain due to *Chhaava*, I sincerely apologise,” Utekar said.

Earlier, Utekar had deleted the dance sequence from the film in the wake of protests and objections from several Maharashtra ministers.

In a detailed official statement, Utekar stated he imagined the Maratha warrior and king Sambhaji Maharaj as a 20-year-old boy in his film, and therefore, included a sequence showing him celebrating with the *Lezim* dance after winning a battle.

However, the dance sequence did not go down well with many politicians.

Maharashtra Chief Minister, Devendra Fadnavis, told the media in Mumbai that the movie should not diminish the legacy of the revered Maratha king, Sambhaji Maharaj. He also spoke to the distortion of history, saying the movie made about Chhatrapati should be both “creative and sensitive”.

Said Fadnavis: “Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj’s history should be shown correctly. It is not right to distort history. Everyone has a lot of love and respect for Sambhaji Maharaj. This respect and honour should not be hurt. There should be creativity [in filmmaking], but we believe that there should be sensitivity along with it,” he told the media.

His statement came after several ministers, including former Rajya Sabha MP Sambhijiraje Chhatrapati, a descendant of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, suggested that the movie-makers consult historians to avoid “inaccuracies”.

His argument followed the release of the trailer, which featured a glimpse of Vicky and Rashmika Mandanna in the role of Maharani Yesubai, performing the *Lezim* dance.

The glimpse was from a song which was shot to capture the celebratory mood in the kingdom of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj following his successful attack on Burhanpur, a wealthy Mughal city in Madhya Pradesh, in 1681.

Maharashtra Minister Uday Samant also objected to the dance sequence, sharing a note on X (formerly *Twitter*) against release of *Chhaava*.

“It is a matter of joy that a Hindi film based on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the protector of religion and protector of freedom, is being made. Such efforts are necessary to make the world understand the history of Chhatrapati. However, many have expressed their opinions that there are some objectionable scenes in this film.”

Additionally, “Our position is that this film should not be released without first showing it to experts and knowledgeable people. Anything that will harm the honour of the Maharaj will not be tolerated.”

While Utekar agreed on deleting the dance number, he mentioned that the *Lezim* dance in the film was envisioned to feature Marathi culture. In his statement he noted that the song, which was removed from the movie, only glorified the culture and helped the audience to understand it better.

More than a game: How cricket is bowling out cancer

Cricket has always been more than just a game. It's about teamwork, resilience, and passion. And this year, it's about hope. It's about coming together for something bigger than ourselves. It's about creating brighter tomorrows for cancer patients everywhere.

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"The effects from this fundraiser will know no bounds," said Dr Amit Oza, Head of the Division of Medical Oncology & Hematology at The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. "Funds raised by our passionate community of participants help lead to the breakthroughs that will help patients here in Canada and around the world. As a cricket enthusiast myself, I am delighted we can celebrate this amazing sport while creating a global impact on cancer research."

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Cancer is a disease that touches all of us. In Canada, two in five people will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime.

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Cricket is one of Canada's fastest-growing sports, especially within diverse communities. The GTA is home to one of the largest South Asian populations in North America, where cricket is more than just a sport – it's a tradition, a passion, and a way to bring people together.

"Cricket is becoming one of Canada's most popular sports,"



Carlos Brathwaite

said Steve Merker, Vice President of Corporate & Community Partnerships at The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation.

"This inaugural event, a first of its kind in North America, aims to raise substantial funds for the Cancer Centre while inspiring thousands of new supporters to take on our vision to create a world free from the fear of cancer."

How to Join Cricket to Conquer Cancer:

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- Register now online: Register your team at cricket2conquer.ca.
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No matter your skill level, whether you're a seasoned cricketer or just enjoy the spirit of the game, you can take part. Every run scored, every game played, every dollar raised makes a difference in the lives of cancer patients and their loved ones.

Raise your bat. Raise hope.

Carlos Brathwaite, former West Indies captain and T20 World Cup winner, said, "We all have a personal connection to cancer, me included. One thing that kept my mum going through her cancer treatment was her constant smile and positive outlook. I look forward to making this event a celebration for survivors and an inspiration for all those during their journey."

On May 31, let's come together, not just as players, but as supporters of a greater cause – a world free from the fear of cancer.

Your support can help transform this game into a game changer. Visit cricket2conquer.ca to register now.

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The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation is Canada's largest cancer charity. We're dedicated to raising funds for Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, one of the world's leading cancer research and treatment centres, known for its breakthrough discoveries that transform patient outcomes. Together, we Carry The Fire for cancer patients everywhere in our mission to create a world free from the fear of cancer. Through philanthropy, fundraising events, and our world-leading home lottery program, we're changing how the world understands, prevents, diagnoses, and treats cancer, benefiting patients at The Princess Margaret, throughout Canada, and around the world.

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Supporting Cricket to Conquer Cancer accelerates life-saving cancer research.

Scan to find out more



Jos Buttler

Buttler did not do it, steps down

– With England in transition and a new captain set to be named, Buttler's departure marks the end of an era in England's white-ball setup. However, his influence as a senior player is expected to remain pivotal as the team looks to rebuild and reclaim its dominance in the shorter formats.

...
Jos Buttler has resigned as England's white-ball captain following the team's disappointing group-stage exit at the Champions Trophy. The 33-year-old, who took over from Eoin Morgan in 2022 and led England to a T20 World Cup title later that year, has decided to step aside, citing the need for a new direction in the leadership group.

"It's the right decision for me and the right decision for the team," Buttler said. "Hopefully, somebody else who can come in alongside Baz [head coach Brendon McCullum] will take the team to where it needs to be."

England's white-ball fortunes have waned since their 2022 triumph, with the side struggling in three successive ICC tournaments in the 2023 ODI World Cup, the 2024 T20 World Cup, and now the 2025 Champions Trophy.

Buttler's position came under scrutiny following a sustained slump in form, with England winning just three of their nine matches in their World Cup title defense before exiting as the first officially eliminated team.

That downward spiral continued into the Champions Trophy, where England's campaign ended after back-to-back defeats against Australia and Afghanistan. Their ODI struggles have been stark, with 18 losses in their last 25 matches.

Buttler, once England's most destructive

white-ball batter, has also endured a personal dip in form. Over the last 21 innings, he has averaged just 26.40 with a strike rate of 100.03, a significant drop from his career ODI strike rate of 115.97.

In the Champions Trophy, he made starts in both innings with 23 off 21 and 38 off 42, but failed to convert them into match-winning scores.

Despite stepping down, Buttler indicated that he remains committed to playing for England and is determined to rediscover his best form.

"The overriding emotions are still sadness and disappointment," he admitted. "I'm sure, in time, that will pass and I can get back to really enjoying my cricket. But it's been an immense honour to captain my country and experience all the special things that come with it."

Vice-captain Harry Brook is seen as the frontrunner to take over the role, though McCullum stated that England are yet to make a decision. McCullum, who has worked closely with Buttler, expressed his admiration for the outgoing captain.

"We've all seen over the last couple of years how much he's invested in captaining his country and trying to get the very best out of those guys around him," McCullum said. Additionally, "People forget that he literally won a World Cup only a couple of years ago, and that can never be taken away from him."

"It's incredibly unselfish from Jos to step aside and leave the post for someone else. He's still a huge player for us moving forward, and I'm sure we will look at ways that we can get the best out of him in terms of his role, so he can have maximum impact."

Pakistan selectors overhaul T20I squad

Pakistan have made sweeping changes to their T20I squad ahead of their five-match series in New Zealand, dropping captain Mohammad Rizwan and senior batter Babar Azam as they continue their search for a winning combination.

In a major leadership reshuffle, Salman Agha has been named T20I captain, with Shadab Khan returning to the squad as vice-captain. However, Rizwan retains his role as ODI skipper, while pace spearhead Shaheen Afridi has been omitted from the 50-over squad.

The changes come in the wake of Pakistan's disappointing home Champions Trophy campaign, prompting selectors to pivot sharply away from their experienced top-order pairing of Babar and Rizwan.

While the duo have long been relied upon for their consistency, critics have often pointed to their cautious approach in T20Is, arguing it hampers Pakistan's ability to dominate powerplays. Their omission signals a shift towards a more aggressive batting strategy.

The squad features several fresh faces, with wicketkeeper Mohammad Haris returning after a prolonged absence. However, Saim Ayub remains unavailable due to an ankle injury sustained in South Africa.

Hasan Nawaz, a 22-year-old wicketkeeper-batter with just 21 T20s to his name, has been

included, alongside Abdul Samad, a 27-year-old power-hitter who is yet to feature in the Pakistan Super League. Meanwhile, Omaid Yousuf earned a call-up after impressing in domestic T20 cricket.

Pakistan's bowling department has seen fewer changes, with Shaheen Afridi's omission in ODIs being the most notable exclusion. Despite his impressive performances in the ODI series wins against South Africa and Australia, selectors have opted for a different balance, handing a maiden ODI call-up to left-arm quick Akif Javed.

The T20I bowling attack remains largely unchanged from their recent tour of South Africa, with Haris Rauf retaining his spot, while Naseem Shah continues his absence from the shortest format after last featuring against Australia in November. Spinners Sufiyan Muqem and Abrar Ahmed hold their places, while Khushdil Shah makes a return.

Rizwan's removal as T20I captain brings a swift conclusion to his brief tenure in the role. He led Pakistan in just four completed T20Is, losing all of them. During the Zimbabwe series, where he was unavailable, Agha stepped in as captain and guided Pakistan to a 2-1 series win.

Pakistan's tour of New Zealand begins with five T20Is from March 16, followed by three ODIs.

Healy heals as younger players line up

– With Australia preparing for a transitional phase beyond its established stars, the T20 tour of New Zealand offers a glimpse into the next generation's readiness to step up on the international stage.

...
Australia's T20 squad will head into its New Zealand T20 tour this month minus captain Alyssa Healy, with the picks made by the selectors in her absence an indication they are prioritising long-term depth behind the stumps.

With Healy sidelined due to lingering foot and knee injuries, 25-year-old Nicole Faltum has earned her maiden international tour call-up, signaling a shift toward succession planning ahead of the ODI World Cup in October.

While Australia has traditionally relied on Beth Mooney as the back-up wicketkeeper, selectors have opted instead to include Faltum in the 14-player squad, ensuring a second specialist option behind the stumps.

Chief selector Shawn Flegler praised the Victorian's consistent performances, indicating that her selection is not merely for short-term coverage but part of a long-term strategy.

"It's exciting to be able to bring Nicole into the squad, she's been a consistent performer over a long period of time," Flegler said. "[She] will provide a strong back-up option to Beth, who will take the gloves during the series."

Though Mooney excelled behind the stumps in Healy's absence during the Ashes, Flegler stressed the importance of looking ahead.

"While Beth was brilliant during the Ashes in Alyssa's absence, it's important we're continuing to look to the future, and Nicole is certainly someone who we can see wearing the green and gold for a long period of time."

With Healy unavailable, vice-captain Tahlia McGrath will assume leadership duties, supported by Ashleigh Gardner as her deputy. The series, set to begin at Eden Park on March 21, will serve as another test of McGrath's leadership, having previously stepped in during Healy's previous injury setbacks.

The 34-year-old Healy has battled foot issues since last year's T20 World Cup in the UAE, where she missed Australia's semi-final defeat to South Africa.

After making a limited return in domestic

cricket, she suffered a knee injury that ruled her out of the home ODI series against India. Though she featured as a batter-only during the Ashes, Healy has opted out of the lucrative Women's Premier League in India to focus on her rehabilitation.

"Alyssa is unavailable for this series due to the foot injury she sustained during the Ashes," Flegler confirmed. "She's working diligently on her rehab with the aim to have her fit for the One Day World Cup later in the year."

While Faltum's selection signals Australia's vision for the future, it also leaves another rising wicketkeeper-batter on the fringes. Tahlia Wilson, named the WNCL's player of the tournament after amassing 667 runs at 60.63, was narrowly overlooked for the New Zealand tour.

However, Wilson, 25, remains optimistic about her prospects, but acknowledged the frustration of missing out, particularly given her stellar domestic form.

"I haven't actually heard anything around that, but I'm sure over the next few weeks, I will try and get into contact to see what's going on," she said.

The New South Wales keeper remains in selectors' conversations, alongside Western Australia's Maddy Darke, as part of Australia's long-term post-Healy and Mooney planning. While Faltum edged ahead this time, Wilson took Healy's advice to heart.

"I remember talking to Alyssa Healy, probably last year," Wilson recalled. "She said, 'You know what? You're actually the prime age because obviously I'm a little bit older than you.' She said, 'Just keep sticking at it and you'll probably come around at the right time.'"

As Healy and Mooney, 31, continue to lead Australia's wicketkeeping department, Faltum, Wilson, and Darke will remain in contention for future opportunities, ensuring Australia's wicketkeeping stocks remain strong in the years ahead.

Meanwhile, Australian great Ellyse Perry has announced plans to return to New South Wales from Victoria next year. While her national commitments will limit appearances at the state level, Perry is expected to serve as a mentor for NSW's emerging players, further strengthening Australia's depth across all formats.



Alyssa Healy





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