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# INDO CARIBBEAN WORLD

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## CHRISTMAS IS FOR CHILDREN!



UniTnT held its 2nd Annual Kids' Christmas Party for ages 1-9 on December 14. In photo at left, a section of the children at the event; above, baby is in Santa's secure hands. Photos by Russell Lutchman; more on Page 19.



In composite photo, Santa and his helper are the centre of attention as the kids display their toys

## AFEY leaves no doubt – Christmas is for the kids

By Romeo Kaseram  
LJI Reporter

**Toronto** – It was an unforgettable day filled with joy, laughter, and a deep sense of community when Advocates for Etobicoke Youth (AFEY) held its Annual Children's Christmas Party at the Woodbine Banquet Hall on December 7.

Over 400 children attended, their voices and excitement filling the grand hall as they reveled in the festive cheer. Crowning off the event was each child

receiving a gift-wrapped toy after enjoying a full meal, turning the day into a magical celebration of love, generosity, and togetherness.

Behind this heartwarming event lay a symphony of collaborative efforts. AFEY's vision for making a difference was well in tune with invaluable support from the Brampton Flower City Rotary Club, the Canada Guyana Chamber of Commerce (CGCC), and Woodbine Banquet Hall.

The hall's donation of its premier

space and staff set the stage for this expansive gathering, while Rotary volunteers seamlessly managed food stations, distributed toys, and handled behind-the-scenes' logistics, ensuring every child's experience was unforgettable.

Kissoon extended AFEY's gratitude to Woodbine Banquet Hall, saying, "[They have] been instrumental in their support for this event. Woodbine donated the hall and their staff for the event. It is a substantial saving for us,

See Page 11: AFEY's kids

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Participants at the event were (front row, left to right) Anuj Mishra, Avani Jain, Tanishka Sharma, Kashmeena Mangal, and Emilie Sharma; in back row, Devi Mandir's Cecil Ramnauth (second, left) and Mukesh Mishra (third, left); Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education (fifth, left). Also in photo are Sabrina Brijmohan (seventh, right); Adrienne Goundry (fifth, right); Dr Ragini Sharma (second, right), along with DDSB educators, members of Devi Mandir, and representatives from COHHE, DTA, AFAD, HSS, DIVYA, and IDiya.

HAND in hand as Durham unites inclusivity, culture

— A vibrant celebration of culture and unity brought 750 students and families together at Pickering High School, marking the launch of the Hindu Affinity Network of Durham and a milestone in fostering inclusivity within the Durham District School Board

Under the soft glow of auditorium lights and amid the collective warmth of community pride, Pickering High School in Ajax became a site of celebration on November 30, the final day of Hindu Heritage Month. Around 750 students and families gathered to witness the inaugural launch of the Hindu Affinity Network of Durham (HAND), a transformative initiative spearheaded by the Durham District School Board (DDSB). Formed under the Board's anti-oppression strategy, HAND aims to celebrate and amplify the history, heritage, culture, and traditions of Hindu students across the region, marking a significant step in fostering inclusivity. The goals of HAND are focused and deeply rooted in community and education. By formalising inclusive learning experiences, the network aspires to highlight excellence among Hindu students and provide them with a platform to voice their stories. Supported by a collaborative framework of educators and senior leaders within the DDSB, HAND is poised to become a cornerstone for cultural celebration and student empowerment. The event, vibrant and student-led, featured a kaleidoscope of on-stage performances, including a mini-version of the *Ram Leela* play. Attendees reflected the diverse tapestry of Hinduism, with roots spanning Afghanistan, India, Sri Lanka, Guyana, the Caribbean, and other regions, underscoring the cultural richness

ness of the DDSB student body. Adding to the lively atmosphere, the venue was transformed into a bazaar-like setting, where attendees explored interactive stations that showcased traditional fashion, jewelry, henna artistry, and even a rickshaw ride. The aroma of Indian cuisine filled the air, offering participants a taste of India's culinary heritage. Local community leaders and elected officials from all governmental levels added their presence to the occasion, signaling strong support for the initiative. Official presence and participation underscored the broader intersection of collaboration in building inclusive spaces for students of all backgrounds. Each interaction served as a testament to the unifying power of cultural appreciation and education. DDSB Director Camille Williams Taylor addressed the gathering with a message of recognition and optimism. Her remarks emphasised the DDSB's steadfast commitment to creating a learning environment that embraces diversity and fosters a sense of belonging for every student. Her words encapsulated the spirit of the event, which was a celebration of culture that was also a call to action for continued inclusivity. Gratitude flowed as Cecil Ramnauth, co-lead of the event, acknowledged the collective efforts that made the launch possible. He highlighted the contributions of community leaders, sponsors, and partners, singling out Sabrina Bridgmohan, Vice Principal of Vimy Ridge Public School in Ajax, and her dedicated team of educators for their pivotal role in realising HAND's establishment. Ramnauth noted their work was pivotal in bridging the formal establishment of the HAND.



The Canadian Afro-Caricom Business Trade Association celebrated its launch at Metro Hall, Toronto, on December 3, marking a new chapter in fostering economic and cultural connections among Canada, Africa, and Caricom. Dedicated to promoting trade, investment, and integration across markets, while championing economic cooperation and equitable benefit-sharing, the group is non-political and not-for-profit. In photo, members of the Caribbean Consular Corps with executive members of the CACBTA. Facebook photo



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# Imdadul family, friends connect at mosque's annual fund-raiser

**By Sayem Khan**  
**Special to Indo-Caribbean World**  
**Toronto** – In the words of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, “We are all social creatures”. It is our human urge to connect with our beloved friends and family, and we are comfortable with taking on any challenge, such as braving the inclement weather, to meet this goal.

On December 7, Imdadul mosque organised its Annual Holiday Dinner celebrating many achievements this year, and looking forward to an auspicious New Year 2025. This holiday dinner has been a signature event for many years, and members braved the frigid weather to spend an evening of togetherness and celebrate the holiday spirit.

The program started with a welcoming speech by Brother Osman Khan, Secretary of the Imdadul Islamic Centre. The president of the Imdadul Islamic Centre, Haji Mushtaq Rustam made the opening dua. Throughout the evening, the members were entertained by well-known Naat Qaam singer, Khalid Javid, and a distinguished member of the Imdadul community, Sister Nazira Baksh.

The dinner event was attended by more than 500 members of the mosque. The recitation of the Holy Quran in a melodious voice create an uplifting, spiritual ambience. Ustaadh Siddiq Rustam recited a number of salient verses from the Holy Quran and started the main program.

A young Hafiz and Qari of the Imdadul Islamic Centre, Hafiz Javid Khan, also delighted the audience with his heart-touching Quranic recitation. Having completed his Umrah trip recently, Hafiz Javid truly showcases the quality of young talents of the Imdadul community. Another emerging leader of the Imdadul community, Yaseen Khan, also recited some educational verses from the Holy Quran, and provided an extended translation of the verses.

A highlight at the event was the scholarly presentation by finance professional, Asif Khan. His wealth of knowledge in personal finance and prudent financial planning was notable in a presentation that reminded the gathering about the availability of authentic resources, and that we should seek out news from credible sources.

A constructive element of a prosperous society is the element of faith-based and religious institutions. These institutions are not only limited to providing a space for spiritual or religious activities, but also provide a platform to address collective socio-economic issues.

Throughout this year, the Imdadul mosque continued to perform this noble task. During my presentation, I highlighted some of these projects, among them the school supplies giveaway in our Back to School event; the Periodic health clinics; the monthly Feed the Needy program; and religious trips like our recent Umrah trip in November. Superintendent Mandeep Mann, Unit Commander at 31 Division, was in attendance, and addressed the audience. Representatives from various community organisations, including the Black Creek Community Health Care Centre, and business leaders, among them the founders of Amir Quality Meats, were also in attendance.

An unconditional friend of Imdadul mosque, Honorary Consul Mani Singh from the Guyana Consulate General in Toronto, was in attendance, and also addressed the audience.

The representatives of a global charitable organisation, the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana, also attended. CIOG's representatives presented an Award of Achievement to Imdadul's management for the decades-long support of Imdadul Centre in various CIOG-led humanitarian projects.

Brother Osman facilitated the raffle draw and the concluding segments of the event. He invited members to join in upcoming programs at Imdadul Centre during the month of December.

In the vote of thanks, board member of Imdadul Centre, Sister Tanisha Jhuman, fondly highlighted the contributions of donors and volunteers, whose dedication and commitment to the various spiritual and social welfare programs at the Imdad Centre made 2024 a resounding success.

The event also saw enjoyment of a wide selection of homemade, locally-sourced hot food, desserts, and beverages. Members fondly describe this wholesome fare as the “Taste of Imdadul”, and is usually the biggest attraction at any of Imdadul's banquet events.

In photos, Imdadul's family and guests at the annual dinner

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CANADA

'Tis the season to drive sober: Legal consequences of drinking, driving

— As celebrations fill the air, the enchantment comes with a sobering reality: impaired driving does not just ruin the party, it also shatters lives. As Kissoon and Odit note, there are significant legal, financial, and personal consequences to drinking and driving; however, at the same time, there are practical ways to plan ahead for a safe celebration. This season, let us keep Ontario's roads safe, and the holidays a time of joy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The aftermath of impaired driving can often be irrevocable. Penalties can vary depending on several factors, including the driver's age, licence type, the amount of alcohol in their



system, and their history of being convicted, or having their licence suspended.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Jail Time**  
The maximum sentence for a first offence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ONTARIO LEGAL BAC

BAC = Blood Alcohol Concentration

0.08% is equivalent to 80 milligrams of alcohol for every 100 milliliters of blood

0.00%

NOVICE DRIVERS (G1, G2, M1, M2)

COMMERCIAL

YOUNG (AGE 21 & UNDER)

≤ 0.08%

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0.05-0.079%

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Editorial

## Celebrating responsibly

As the festive season fills the air with joy and celebration, a sobering truth persists: impaired driving is not just a legal offense, it is a tragedy that reverberates across lives and communities. For our Caribbean community, the consequences of impaired driving extend beyond personal and financial costs. They strike at the heart of stability, threatening immigration status and the dreams of a future living in Canada.

The 2018 amendment to the *Criminal Code of Canada* underscores this stark reality, making impaired driving convictions punishable by a maximum sentence of more than ten years. Under sections 36 (1) and (2) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, such a conviction could render permanent residents or temporary visa holders inadmissible to Canada, initiating proceedings that could upend our lives.

This legal reality, highlighted in this edition by our community's lawyers Dhaman Kissoon and Ruth Odit, is particularly pertinent to our Caribbean diaspora. A single misstep in the decision to drink and drive can unravel years of hard work and sacrifice.

As a publication committed to the welfare of our community, we urge you to take this warning seriously for its possibly significant, life-changing consequences.

The implications of impaired driving are far-reaching. Beyond immigration consequences, the legal, financial, and personal repercussions are devastating. Impaired driving is a leading cause of death on Ontario's roads, accounting for one in three road fatalities. In 2023, over 10,000 impaired driving charges were laid in Ontario. This holiday season, initiatives like the Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere (RIDE) campaign remind us of the importance of vigilance and responsibility.

The holiday season should be a time for joy in our thriving community; a time for togetherness, celebration, and good food. Yet, every year, families are shattered by preventable accidents caused by impaired driving.

Legal consequences in Ontario are stringent. A Blood Alcohol Concentration of 0.08 percent or higher can result in immediate license suspension, hefty fines, vehicle impoundment, and, in severe cases, imprisonment. Drivers under the zero-tolerance policy: under 21, novice drivers, and commercial drivers, face even stricter penalties.

The financial costs are equally daunting. Fines begin at \$1,000 for a first conviction, and can escalate with higher BAC levels. As Kissoon and Odit note, insurance premiums also skyrocket, often increasing by 150-300 percent, and some drivers may find their policies canceled altogether. These penalties, coupled with potential civil lawsuits, make impaired driving an unaffordable risk.

Impaired driving is not merely a personal failing; it is a communal issue that demands collective action. Our community, law enforcement, and local organisations must collaborate to create awareness and promote responsible behaviour. The RIDE campaign exemplifies this proactive approach, intensifying efforts during the holiday season to deter impaired drivers and protect lives.

As a publication serving our diverse Caribbean community for over four decades, we recognise our role in fostering this culture of responsibility. We also engage with our community to underscore the unique legal risks we face as immigrants. Beyond personal and financial consequences, the potential loss of immigration status is a difficult burden too heavy to bear for family members left behind.

The holiday season is a time for reflection, gratitude, and generosity. It is also a time for making conscious choices that protect not only our own lives, but also the lives of others. The enchantment of the season need not be marred by preventable tragedies. By taking responsibility, we honour the spirit of the holidays for its celebration of life, connection, and hope for the future.

As we prepare our festive foods, gather with loved ones, and turn on our Christmas lights, let us also illuminate the path to safety and responsibility. This season, let us commit to making Ontario's roads safer, and holding our families together with our ancestral ties that bind. Have a safe and Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year to all.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of this publication.  
Letters to be published will be edited where necessary.  
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# Why our Caribbean's Christmas foods are best

The holidays are here. And previously, I have argued that a Caribbean Christmas is the best. Without a doubt, the food in a Caribbean household is top-notch. Some of the most delectable flavours and tasty treats. A deeper dive into Caribbean delicacies during the holiday season reveals a unique representation of the peoples and histories of the region.

Pepperpot is without question the most popular dish in Guyanese (and many Caribbean) households during the holidays. In fact, pepperpot is a national dish of Guyana. Although its popularity across the mainstream Afro- and Indo-Guyanese communities, this dish originated from the Indigenous People of Guyana.

According to the *Guyana Chronicle*, "the [Indigenous] tribes separately discovered the amazing preservative properties of liquid extracts from the poisonous bitter cassava root. The Arawaks discovered the liquid now called cassareep." Cassareep allowed the Indigenous People to preserve meat without access to refrigeration. This is the main ingredient in a successful pepperpot.

Black cake, also known to many as "rum cake", is a staple in Caribbean households during the holidays. The dense, molasses-spiced cake filled with drunken dried fruits, gives a beautiful and rich aroma, and it makes it difficult to refuse. Black cake itself traces its roots to the holiday plum (or "figgy") pudding recipes British colonisers brought to the West Indies in the 18th century.

Over time, and as British control of the Caribbean ended, the recipes evolved, local communities made their own recipes and featured more localised ingredients and liquors.

Christmas in the Caribbean is said to not be complete without Roselle juice, more commonly known as Sorrel (also known as Sorrel Punch or Agua de Jamaica). It is a refreshing, flavourful drink that is commonly consumed around the holidays in many Caribbean households.

The Roselle plant is a part of the Hibiscus genus, as the main ingredient of Sorrel, it is central to the Caribbean, as its origins, and the migration of the plant, traces back to the history of many peoples in Caribbean nations. Roselle hibiscus grows in West and East Africa, as well as Southeast Asia (NE India) and mainland South Asia. The plant was first introduced to the Caribbean by enslaved Africans, and the familiarity with it in the South Asian population established a broad appreciation for the flavours it produces.

Sorrel is associated with the long tradition of punch for Christmas,



Ryan Singh

this itself is likely a relic of the colonial history of the region, given punch's strong association with British customs.

A savoury Trinidadian holiday treat, Pastelles, are traditionally prepared and eaten during the Christmas season. Pastelles are small cornmeal pies stuffed with meat, fish, or vegetables, wrapped and steamed in a banana leaf.

Variations can be found across the Caribbean and Latin America, such as Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean coast of Colombia. Often compared to tamales or empanadas, Pastelles are said to have its roots originating in Latin America.

Pastelles are commonly known in Venezuela as *hallacas* (pronounced hayacas). It is believed that the recipe was introduced to Trinidad by Spanish settlers between the 15th and 18th centuries.

Ponche Crema or Ponche de Crème is a rich cream-based liqueur drink brought over to Trinidad and Tobago from Venezuela, now described as the spiked eggnog of this Caribbean nation.

Historians believe that eggnog and similar drinks have roots in medieval Britain, in a drink called a *posset*. A warm beverage made from curdled milk, with additions like eggs, wine, sherry, spices, brandy, and ale, it was enjoyed primarily by wealthy members of society because of the costliness of the ingredients.

During colonialism in the Caribbean, sugar and slavery anchored the British presence in the region, and the combination of dairy and spirits was enjoyed only by the elite, symbolic of prosperity and good fortune.

In 1904, a Venezuelan chemist, Eliodoro González, was granted a patent for a beverage called ponche crema. He was known to mostly experiment with perfumes; however, tried his hand at mixology, using what was available locally. He developed a unique recipe containing eggs, milk, sugar, alcohol, and unspecified spices, therefore creating the original Venezuelan Ponche Crema.

As I have stated before, modern Caribbean culture is an interpretation of "multiculturalism" decades before the term was even a concept in Canada.

As we enjoy the delectable treats of the holiday season, let us not lose sight of the deep and complex history of the Caribbean. It is a history that has brought people from around the world together in a tropical region, and today, many different food traditions combine to complete a Caribbean Christmas.

## Holding up our golden swirls of jalebi to the light

In the quiet village where I grew up back home, the time of year arrived when the villagers began making preparations for Ramleela. In Felicity in central Trinidad, similar preparations were also being made, which Derek Walcott described in his 1992 Nobel Prize lecture.

As he described, the effigy of the evil god Ravana was assembled "cane by cane, reed by weaving reed, line by plaited line". True to his craft, Walcott recalled the scene of assembly vividly, not just as an act of devotion, but extended it outwards as an allegory for how our beautiful Caribbean, with its fractured histories, assembles itself anew.

The effigy, destined for a final conflagration as a towering pyre, is our own diaspora's story of light over darkness; of good conquering evil; struggle and tenacity overcoming despair; and new beauty emerging out of imperfection.

In our celebration of Ramleela, with its theatre, its aesthetics of performativity, and its transition in Diwali, we today find echoes of our diasporic celebrations. These rituals, brought by our ancestors from India to the Caribbean, now intersect with Christmas, adding shards of stories, lights, and traditions to the new vessel that has emerged to contain our unique identity.

This vessel, much like the Japanese art of *Kintsugi*, has been broken, repaired, and adorned with the golden seams of reclamation and renewal. It is filigreed with filaments of light and faith, and bound by swirls of cultures, like the intricate shapes of *jelabi* – the delicious confection that emerges during cooking from the spontaneity of its maker's frenzied hand.

In his Nobel lecture, Walcott spoke to our Caribbean's art as "the restoration of our shattered histories", likening its archipelagic identity to fragments of a larger, broken continent. His words resonate deeply in our diaspora, where our histories and traditions too have been scattered by time and waves of Indentured migration across the *kala pani*.

Yet, as Walcott's vision suggests, these fragments have not been discarded; instead, we have remade, transformed, and now celebrate a new vessel that defines our emergent identity.

Ramleela, with its story of Lord Rama's victory over evil and darkness, was among the first memories our ancestors brought with them. Its intricate rituals and narratives, performed in open fields where sugar canes souged with the winds, were acts of reclamation veined by our faith, memory, and resilience.

The sugar canes that once symbolised our indentured labour and exploitation, its razor sharp leaves slashing our ancestors' exposed arms, were transformed into raw material that fleshed

the bamboo armature of effigies in acts that offered divinity and upliftment. This transformation in actions turning brokenness into beauty is at the heart of our diaspora's story.

Today, as Ramleela precedes Diwali in villages across the Caribbean, its light and stories intertwine with the warm glow of Diwali *diyas*. And as these *diyas* dim, they are soon joined by the twinkling lights of Christmas, reflecting the joyous intersection of traditions here in our new homes in Toronto, New York, and wherever else our diaspora has settled. Here, the filigreeing of our festivals becomes even more

ornate, shaped by our second migration.

In our homes in Mississauga, Diwali lights segue seamlessly into Christmas lights; similarly, in Brampton, Vaughan, Markham, and in other neighbourhoods, driveways are lit up with the transitioning from one festival to another, welcome motifs signifying our faith, renewal, and joy.

In our homes, families gather over feasts where *dhal puri* and rum cake inhabit the same dining table, with dessert being servings of *jelabi*, its patterned and connected swirls a sweet metaphor for the beauty that emerges when traditions intertwine.

Bollywood songs, imbued with our connectivity to India, play in the background alongside Christmas carols, weaving the sounds of becoming and memory into a tapestry of celebration. Herein is our own remade *Kintsugi* vessel. Its cracks, caused by displacement and migration, are filled-in with golden seams: the effigies of Ramleela, the lights of Diwali, the ornaments of Christmas. Each fragment adds a new seam to the re-shaping, creating a celebration that is wholly ours, yet deeply connected to the rhizomic roots that brought us here.

*Jelabi* has always been among my favourite desserts, so it is easily transformed into a metaphor for our diaspora's sweeter moments. In its making, the swirls are spontaneous, unplanned, and result in a crispy sweetness that is wholesome and unique.

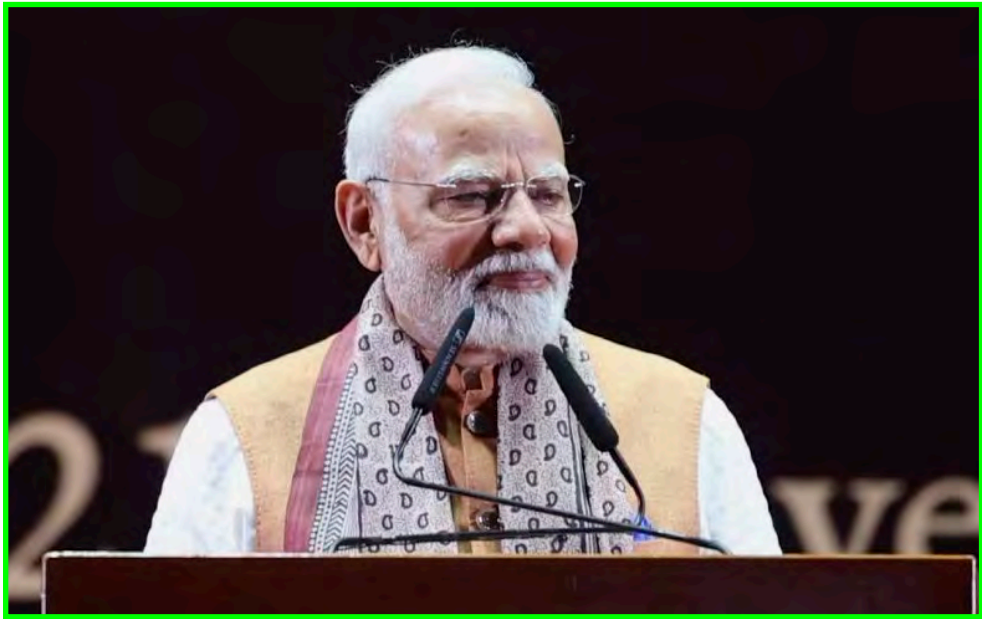
Like *jelabi*, our celebrations converge into wholesomeness from observances of Ramleela, Diwali, and Christmas, which are transformed into something dazzling and reclaimed. This is not a loss of tradition but a creative expansion, where each swirl, each strand of light, each resonant sound, adds to the whole.

This festive season, let us reflect on the golden seams that hold us together. Our new vessel is crafted from the labour and love of our generations. In the narrative that Walcott captured so aesthetically in his vision of the Caribbean, we understand ourselves to be not fragmented, but beautifully repaired, and adorned with filigrees of memory, light, and love.

Romeo Kaseram







PM Modi delivers an address at Guyana’s National Cultural Centre last month

## In praise of Guyanese culture and a nation committed to inclusiveness

Dear Editor,

It was exciting and satisfying for me to see video reports on India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s short visit to Guyana, the welcome he received by Guyanese multi-ethnic leaders, and particularly the welcome programme with Guyanese multi-ethnic dancers of its ‘Six Peoples’.

The camaraderie with our Guyanese cricketers, among them, the legendary Sir Clive Lloyd, former captain of the West Indies Team, Alvin Kalicharan, speaks for the way we Guyanese relate to our fellows of all ethnicities as one family. This is the reality of the Guyanese as a people and as a community – ahead, by far, in our culture as one people regardless of race or religion.

It was nice to see PM Modi addressing what seems like a gathering mainly of Indo-Guyanese, and the expressions of rapport all round.

Speaking about culture, it is pleasing to me, from what I saw, about the evolution of our culture. Culture fascinates me. I think it is the component that enriches our lives, whoever we are in our evolution as human beings.

Here are few, for what it is worth definitions of culture: From the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* – Culture: Improvement by mental and physical training; intellectual development.

From *Google*: Culture has multiple definitions, including the way of life of a group of people...it is the shared beliefs, values, behaviours, and customs of a group of people, such as a nation or religious group. It can also include the language, arts, laws, and institutions of a society. Culture is often associated with a specific region or location.

We each one of us have a culture. Some of us are aware of it, some not, some may be indifferent to it, no problem. It is named after the group or people we belong to, be it African, Amerindian, Chinese, European, Indian, or whatever. It is something we recognise, but often cannot describe, but we feel it, and feel good about it.

In Guyana, over several generations a culture has evolved, which roughly is a good mixture composed of all the cultures of its ‘Six Peoples’. It is unique; it is Guyanese culture.

Guyanese culture, the culture of this microcosm of the multi-ethnic world we inhabit, is a fledgling of the culture of us all of the world-wide human race, a cultural symphony, strengthened and spiced with the rich gems and variety of African, Amerindian, Chinese, European, Indian and other cultures of the world.

Guyanese culture is vibrant, the main feature being openness, welcoming and equality. Whoever you are, regardless of race or religion, you belong; you are not an outsider.

We Guyanese mix happily with anyone and everyone. Indeed, I discovered this over

60 years ago, when I went to India to study. I am nobody, but found myself very popular amongst my fellow foreign students, from Africa, Malaysia, Europe, and so on, simply because socially I mixed easily with everyone – I grew up that way in Guyana.

Of course, in my young days in British Guiana, in the colonial days, social exchanges were very different. The society was hierarchical, with the rulers at the top, and everyone else, lower down depending on how close you were to the race, religion, and values of the rulers.

Naturally, the culture of the rulers gained favour. You were left to live your way, but there was no promoting this or that culture.

We Guyanese, in our land of ‘Six Peoples’ have been meeting and mixing for generations. We are at the confluence, the convergence of cultures. Indeed, we are, in the larger world, together with other countries like, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Mauritius and so on, the cutting edge of the sharp point of cultural integration.

Indeed, cultural evolution coming together, is, and has been, one aspect of human history for millennia, as long as we humans have inhabited the earth. It is natural, and sometimes associated with conflict, and warfare – think of the Crusades, and so on.

However, the civilised grown-up way has been the way in this age, and we in Guyana, and a few other erstwhile colonies, free from the compulsions and dogmas of the colonial ways, are at the forefront, and in the lead of this evolution.

We do not spend all day mulling over thoughts about culture. It is personal, and in the way we think and live our life.

We are living in a time of coming together, togetherness. While political and national interests are prominent, there is greater awareness everywhere, worldwide, of our commonness as humans. In most capitals of the world there are meeting and mixing of peoples of different ethnicities and cultures.

In today’s Guyana you can live openly with the culture of the particular group, whichever you belong to – you were brought up in that culture, which by the way, has evolved over the years with adjustments and adaptations here and there to harmonise with the multicultural environment of Guyana.

You feel like nowhere else that you fully belong to the overall umbrella culture of Guyana. There is equality. No one or part is taken as superior to another. It is unique.

It is saying to the world of different races and cultures that the future culture of the world’s peoples, multi-ethnic and enriched with the variety of the cultures of all peoples is right here in our multi-ethnic, land of ‘Six Peoples’, our blessed Guyana.

Vidur Dindayal, London, England, via email.

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## GUYANA PROPERTY MATTERS

### Does paying the Land Tax guarantee possession of your Property... Perhaps not!

By Maj Khan

It has been generally understood that one of the best ways to protect your property anywhere in the world is to pay the land taxes. The fact is land taxes must be paid, and in Guyana there is an annual filing requirement with a two percent penalty for failure to do so. The government arm responsible for land taxes is the Guyana Regulatory Authority.

The optics are quite straightforward; however there is caveat with far-reaching consequences, of which owners should be aware. Those who are familiar with land disputes strongly advise that taxes must be paid in person. Why? The receipts for paying land taxes are often handwritten on a carbon-copy book.

In fact, property transactions in Guyana including title, valuation, mortgage, and tax compliance receipts are all done on paper. In the age of the Internet, those living abroad are well-versed with the digital world, where access to home ownership is at their fingertips. In Guyana, the government has just implemented an e-service platform that will take time to develop. In the meantime, most land records are written or typed and housed in local offices. It means that remote property owners have to invest a great deal of time and funds to ensure their paperwork is in order.

Currently, most owners living abroad have a ‘trusted’ family member they rely on to ensure the daily upkeep of their property, including paying the land tax. If that receipt is written in the name of anyone else other than the registered owner, it can create conditions that are favourable for that individual whose name is on the receipt. Translation: that individual is in a position to file for possession of that property. This is especially viable if the owner has not visited the property for years.

Unfortunately, today property disputes are common, with siblings pitted against each other, parents against children, and families at war with each other. The stakes are high, and the price paid heavy – often with a bitter experience fraught with a gamut of emotions, with substantial time and monies invested over decades. And the question is always asked, “What could they have done differently to ensure none of this would come to bear in the first place?”

RE/Guyana is a property services company dedicated to making it easier for overseas property owners to administer, divest, acquire, and develop their real estate assets in Guyana. [Click here to visit RE/Guyana’s website.](#)



# GECOM must explore fully whether biometrics workable for Guyana

Dear Editor,

As the debate on the need to implement biometrics for voter identification in Guyana's General Elections continues, it seems that the focus is really on electronic verification of fingerprints and not facial recognition, voice recognition, or iris (eye) scans.

So far, objection to biometrics by GECOM and other opponents is based on the fact that Guyana's Constitution does not allow for this. In my view, even with constitutional amendment, there are other factors that GECOM must consider before making a decision on computer verification of fingerprints.

If we look at the aftermath of the 2020 general elections, Khemraj Ramjattan, then Minister of Public Security, claimed he had to expel from the country two Russians with computer equipment intended to rig the elections in favour of the PPP.

At the time his story was laughable and dismissed, since no computer was used in the voting process. However, had computers been used in any part of the voting process, for example, fingerprint verification, his story could have gained credibility in some quarters with serious consequences to post election peace and stability.

Another matter relating to the last elections that is also relevant is the control over the use of computer equipment. According to press reports, Aneal Giddings, then GECOM's Information Technology Manager, disregarded instructions from the Deputy Chief Elections Officer during the SOP tabulation process to leave the computer server unattended and vacate the Ashmin building when she ordered evacuation following the claim of a bomb threat.

Instead, Giddings took the server with him as he left the building to ensure its safeguard and security. In view of all the shenanigans that transpired with the tabulation, and the use of unofficial documents to announce the results of vote counts, one can only guess what could have been the consequence had he not secured the server in his care.

With biometrics as envisaged by Vincent Alexander, the key promoter of biometrics, on Freddie Kissoon's show of



**Foreign observers during Guyana's 2020 elections**

November 13, 2024, GECOM will have to provide battery-operated, handheld devices for 2,500 polling stations (*source of 2,500 is worldwide elections database on Guyana*) across the country, each requiring an operator. Under such a condition, how can Guyanese be assured that standard procedures may not be violated by at least a few operators, if directed by someone in authority.

Based on my limited knowledge of computer security issues, from my perspective as the manager of a programme that maintained a large computer database that allowed hundreds of computer operators from varying locations to access the database, it seems that security issues for each of these handheld devices, to access either a central database or 2,500 local databases with voters' information and a signature, could be a major concern.

In relation to the existing verification process, the words of the European Union (EU) Ambassador, Fernando Ponz Cantó, who was also an election observer, are pertinent. In his appearance before the elections COI, he explained the process of checking voter identity at polling stations, stating, "It was safeguard after safeguard after safeguard. It was impossible to cheat... I was positively impressed".

And on Kissoon's show of November 20, 2024, Jonathan Yearwood of ANUG provided greater details on the process at

polling stations. He stated that a voter must first present identification to the police officer at the polling station before being allowed to enter. The identity of the individual is next checked by the poll clerk, then by party scrutineers, and finally by the presiding officer. With such immense scrutiny, one has to agree with the EU Ambassador, "It was impossible to cheat".

While fingerprint scanners provide a high accuracy rate, they are not infallible. The best result reported with scan of one finger is 98.6 percent. According to Almas Industries, a company that offers security solutions for businesses, "fingerprint scanners may falter in accurately recognising a user's fingerprint under certain conditions. Dirty, wet, or damaged fingerprints can cause the scanner to fail, leading to frustration and delays in the authentication process".

Also, correct placement or positioning of a finger on the scanner is important for accuracy. Users of cell phones who use their fingerprints to access their phones are well aware of this. In addition, with 2,500 operators of handheld scanners, it is likely that either intentionally or unintentionally, some operators may contribute to the rejection of a fingerprint. As well, initial capture of a fingerprint is critical. A poorly captured fingerprint will result in a false rejection.

In Guyana, where results of general elections are often contentious, GECOM may want to heed the advice in the *Stabroek News* Editorial of August 12, 2024.

As the Editorial noted, "The five month impasse that delayed the transition in governments had nothing at all to do with a bloated list of voters or malpractices at polling stations... it is worth repeating that the vast majority of the hundreds of polling day workers on March 2, 2020, worked industriously and heroically to enable voters to cast their ballots, for these to be counted, results posted up outside polling stations, and the relevant documents transmitted to the district returning officers. That system functioned marvelously, and does not require biometrics or cameras to create grounds for upheaval".

**Harry Hergash, Toronto, via email.**

# TT's govt move to accept salary increases out of touch with suffering by nationals

Dear Editor,

Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley's decision to accept the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission, giving himself and his colleagues a significant salary increase, comes at a time when nationals are suffering, cannot put food on their tables, and face more economic hardship.

Public servants, unions, and the average worker are pleading for wage adjustments that can deal with the rising cost of living. Families are struggling to cope with rising food prices, businesses are shutting down, and the nation is breaking under the weight of economic pressure.

With all this happening, the acceptance of a substantial salary increase by Rowley is not only bad timing but profoundly tone-deaf. It sends a frightening message that the struggles of the average citizen are secondary to the gratification of those in power.

With more compassion in a vast contrast, Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar's decision to refuse the salary increase – realising that now is not the time to flaunt getting big money from the public purse – is more in line with what the average person wants. This genuinely aligns more closely with the frustrations and sacrifices that people are facing daily.

The optics of this decision are a flagrant disregard to what citizens want at this time. The people are well aware that leadership requires difficult choices, but this decision reflects a lack of caring and understanding of the plight of the person on the street.

The government has been asking the people to hold on and keep up austerity measures, to make sacrifices for the greater good. Yet when the time comes for Rowley to do the same, such an action is glaringly unsympathetic to our society.

Rowley and his administration must remember that elections are around the corner, and people will show their displeasure

with their fingers. Accepting a salary increase amidst extensive suffering signals not just crass heartlessness, but also being disconnected from the realities on the part of the Rowley administration and his whole elected Cabinet.

This decision is a flagrant failure to hear the people's voices that hopefully will wake up the voting public to smell the coffee, and realise that Rowley and his administration do not care about you.

We see, on the other hand, that Persad-Bissessar is a much more caring person who can restore some faith in leadership during these trying times.

Failure after failure, selfishness, and being unsympathetic to our citizens' plight are all we see from this government. All the PNM has done is deepen the divide and reinforce the perception of a government that is out of touch with the very people it claims to represent.

**Dr Neil Gosine, Trinidad and Tobago, via email.**




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# Year in review sees Guyana's economy surging, govt cash grants

In 2024, Guyana continued to experience unprecedented economic growth driven by its burgeoning oil sector. With the economy surging ahead, the government rolled out significant social programs, including increases in salaries, pensions, public assistance, student grants, free university education, and tax relief measures.

Yet, a high level of discontent prevails among certain segments of the population, which expect more benefits to trickle down to them.

As Guyana prepares for its general elections in 2025, the political landscape has been marked by a strong focus on ensuring transparency and upholding democratic principles. The government, led by President Dr Irfaan Ali, has actively engaged with international organisations, including the Carter Center, European Union, and UNDP, to strengthen the electoral process. These organisations are providing technical support and conducting pre-assessments to address gaps in electoral management, ensuring smoother and fairer elections compared to past controversies.

In the meantime, Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) announced significant updates to the electoral framework, including a review of voter registration systems and stricter measures to prevent tampering with results. The reforms aim to address the shortcomings revealed during the contentious 2020 general elections.

Reform initiatives were also in the spotlight. GECOM commenced updating operational frameworks, including voter registry improvements and clearer tabulation protocols. These measures aim to build public trust and prevent a recurrence of issues that have historically challenged Guyana's electoral system.

The 2024 budget, the largest in Guyana's history, emphasised infrastructure development, social services, and economic inclusivity. With no new taxes, the budget prioritised health, education, housing, and public assistance programs, funded primarily through oil revenues. Notable allocations include (G) \$129.8 billion for healthcare and education each, \$78 billion for housing, and \$48.3 billion for social services.

On the economic front, the Ministry of Finance forecasted that the overall economy would grow by 42.3 percent in 2024, down from the 49.7 percent reported at mid-year. The non-oil economy is expected to grow by 11.8 percent, slightly lower than the 12.6 percent recorded in

the first half of the year.

The oil sector is expected to generate (US) \$2.645 billion in revenues in 2024, 10.3 percent more than was forecasted in this year's budget. At the end of the third quarter, oil revenues amounted to \$1.9 billion for the year so far. The sector is expected to grow by 56.4 percent for the year.

The non-oil sector remained strong on the back of improving confidence among private investors and continuing government support. Meanwhile, the consumer remained resilient, evidenced by increased borrowing to finance durable goods and housing. Business borrowing also increased appreciably on the back of a wealth of emerging investment opportunities, combined with improving confidence in the economy.

While the 2024 inflation rate is projected at 3.2 percent, food prices, especially for fruits and fruit products, vegetables and vegetable products, and cereals and cereal products outpaced the rate of inflation, putting pressure on the pocketbooks of consumers.

At a sectoral level, the mining and quarrying industry comprising sand, stone, diamonds and manganese, is estimated to grow by almost 25 percent during the year, driven by greater activity in the construction sector, which is forecasted to grow by 27 percent – supported by favourable policies such as the expansion of the housing drive and the lowering of interest rates.

The agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors experienced mixed performance, with rice growing by double digits on the back of investments in drainage and irrigation, farm-to-market roads, and the expansion of cultivated land.

However, the sugar industry continued to struggle in spite of efforts to bring it back to life. Meanwhile, the government still has high expectations for sugar.

As part of its continuing efforts to appease the population – especially in a pre-election year – the government unveiled an ambitious range of measures aimed at improving the standard of living of the population.

Among these initiatives are a one-off cash grant of (G) \$100,000 to every citizen of Guyana 18 years and above, as of January 1, 2024, once they have a national valid identification card and/or a valid passport.

The government also announced plans to raise the minimum monthly wage for public

sector workers to \$100,000 (US \$480) by the end of 2025. The minimum wage for the public sector is currently \$75,000.

In addition, families will benefit from a new (US) \$50 per child income tax allowance, easing the financial burden on parents. These measures aim to increase disposable income while reducing economic disparity across the country.

Currently, all students in Guyana receive a \$40,000 annual Because We Care cash grant plus an additional \$5,000 for school uniforms – which is another initiative that increases the disposable income of households.

One of the most notable announcements was a (G) \$10 billion injection into the National Insurance Scheme. The government also announced new healthcare and education policies aimed at supporting future generations. Beginning in 2025, a universal healthcare voucher of (G) \$10,000 will be issued for all children to cover essential medical tests, particularly for early detection and prevention of non-communicable diseases.

Another major development was the decision to abolish tuition fees at the University of Guyana starting in January 2025, benefiting over 11,000 students. The government also commenced eliminating outstanding loans owed by UG graduates.

In November, the government announced that it will be signing a two-year agreement with the Guyana Public Service Union, which includes a retroactive ten percent salary increase for 2024, as well as an 8 percent increase for 2025. This ten percent increase, retroactive from January 1, 2024, will amount to a 35 percent cumulative salary increase over the last four years.

The government also announced adjustments aimed at reducing salary disparities, based on years of service and qualifications.

At the social level, crime remained a major problem, while corruption and allegations of

corruption continued unabated. Sanctions by the US government against the Mohamed family brought to light allegations of money laundering and corruption irregularities in the gold industry.

The Guyana-Venezuela border issue calmed in the second half of the year after threats of eruption in the first half.

Guyana's political environment in 2024 was defined by the interplay between rapid economic transformation and the demands for inclusive governance. While the government has made strides in leveraging oil revenues for national development, concerns about transparency, equity, and political polarisation continue to shape public discourse.

Ethnic divisions, a long-standing issue in Guyanese politics, remained a challenge. Efforts to promote social cohesion have been met with mixed success, as economic disparities and political partisanship persist. The equitable distribution of oil wealth remains a central concern for fostering national unity.

Key political parties, including the ruling People's Progressive Party/Civic and the Opposition coalition A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change, have begun early campaigning.

Both parties are working to consolidate their bases, drawing lessons from the contentious 2020 elections, which were marred by accusations of fraud and a protracted results process. Legal proceedings against officials implicated in electoral misconduct are ongoing, reflecting efforts to enhance accountability.

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](http://winningways101.com). He can be reached at [dlakhan@rogers.com](mailto:dlakhan@rogers.com).



Dwarka Lakhan

## Christmas greetings from Carpenters' Local 27

From the Desk of Chris Campbell,  
President, Carpenters' Local 27

As we embrace the Christmas season, I extend warm greetings to all members of Carpenters' Union Local 27, their families, and the communities we are privileged to serve. This season of joy and togetherness encourages us to reflect on the values that bind us – family, community, and our collective commitment to building a brighter future.

The year 2024 brought its share of challenges, but it also presented moments of growth and renewal. The easing of interest rates, for instance, has opened doors to new opportunities in housing development and a surge in construction projects across Ontario and beyond. These endeavours not only drive economic revitalisation but also symbolise homes for families and secure futures for our tradespeople.

Our union has remained a pillar of strength throughout these transformative times. Together, we have expanded pathways for women to join our trades through initiatives like Sisters in the Brotherhood and continued to support apprentices in their journeys. These programs underscore our belief that a stronger

workforce is one that reflects the diversity of our province and nation. The skill, dedication, and resilience of every member are the foundation of our collective progress.

As President of Local 27, I am immensely proud of the contributions each of you has made this year. Whether you're an apprentice laying the groundwork for a promising career, or a seasoned tradesperson mentoring the next generation, your efforts are shaping Canada's future. Our work goes beyond constructing buildings – it is about creating opportunities, nurturing communities, and fostering a sense of belonging.

I also extend thanks to Jason Rowe, the Executives, support staff, representatives, and organisers for their unwavering support.

As we look ahead to 2025, let us carry forward the spirit of Christmas – a spirit of unity and collaboration. Together, we will not only meet today's challenges, but also create a legacy of better opportunities for all.

On behalf of Carpenters' Local 27, I wish you and your loved ones a joyous Christmas and a New Year filled with peace, health, and opportunity. Let's continue to build toward even greater achievements in the year ahead.



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Community leaders extend Christmas and New Year greetings to the diaspora

Tracey Ramsubagh-Mannette, Acting Consul General, Trinidad and Tobago Consulate General, Toronto.

There's something uniquely powerful about this time of year that stirs our memories, calling us back to our roots, to the warmth of our traditions, and to the people who make the season bright.

Christmas has a way of weaving together moments from the past with the present. I think we would all agree this is especially true for persons who have the experience, and sometimes it is a bittersweet experience – this experience of having multiple places to call home, multiple nationalities, and multiple traditions and memories that intermingle.

The smell of pine and spices, the twinkle of lights, the melodies of parang and carols we have sung since childhood – all of it brings us back, almost like magic, to those earlier times when the world seemed simpler, and joy was wrapped up in little things.

For many of us who grew up in Trinidad and Tobago, these memories might include the warmth of family gatherings, the rituals of baking bread and black cake, last minute shopping, painting, the changing of curtains, the rearranging of furniture and the cleaning – so, so much cleaning.

Perhaps we remember loved ones who are no longer with us, but whose spirits linger in these cherished traditions. Nostalgia helps us keep them close, even if only in our hearts, reminding us that they are still a part of our celebrations.

We reflect on years gone by, and perhaps recognise how much has changed. Yet, in those reflections, there is comfort – a sense that, even as we grow and evolve, we carry pieces of those earlier moments within us. Every holiday card, every handmade ornament, every recipe handed down through generations reminds us that time does not erase love. Instead, it builds upon each other, giving us layer upon layer of warmth to draw from.

And this year, we are making new memories, ones that in years to come will bring back their own feelings of nostalgia.



Ramsubagh-Mannette

We are adding another page to the book of traditions, passing along stories and customs, and building a legacy of love and togetherness.

So, as we gather here to celebrate, let us cherish not only the memories that nostalgia brings back to us, but also the present moments that will someday be part of our own nostalgic Christmases and those of the younger ones in our circles.

May this season remind us to treasure what we have, to remember those who have shared our journeys, and to keep the magic of Christmas alive for the future.

Merry Christmas. May this season fill your hearts with joy, your minds with cherished memories, and your lives with love that lasts for years to come.

Mani Singh, Honorary Consul, Consulate General for Guyana in Toronto

Season's Greetings to my fellow Guyanese of our Canadian diaspora, and to our wider Caribbean community in Canada, especially across the Greater Toronto Area!

As we celebrate this joyous season, let me take a moment to reflect on the remarkable year we have shared as a thriving and vibrant Guyanese and Caribbean community.

This past year has been one of ongoing outreach, inclusivity, and fellowship, marked by the incredible energy and unity of our Guyanese and Caribbean diaspora.

Our journey together has been quite inspiring. From celebrations of our history and culture, like Arrival Day, Independence Day, Emancipation, Diwali, and Christmas to meaningful discussions on community building, 2024 has showcased the strength and warmth of our diverse heritage.

It was my privilege and honour to represent the government and people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana at many significant events this year. These occasions have highlighted not only our shared roots, history, and culture, but also the strong community-spirit and bonds we continue to build here in Canada.

Among our most recent events, we celebrated the achievements of vibrant diaspora organisations such as the International Muslim Organisation, CIOG-Canada, and the Imdadul Islamic Centre, which recently brought together over 400 supporters at their fund-raising dinner in North York.

Similarly, at the Annual Christmas Dinner hosted by the Guyana Ex-Soldiers Association, over 400 members of our dias-

pora were in attendance, reflecting Guyana's diversity and the noble vision of 'One Guyana.' These gatherings remind us of our enduring commitment to inclusiveness, community-building, and service.

At the Guyana Consulate in Toronto our Christmas Open House & Social brought together 200 members and friends of our Guyanese community to enjoy the spirit of togetherness, enriched by cultural performances blending African drumming, chutney, reggae, Bollywood, and soca music. These moments remind us that our diversity is our greatest strength.

We also recognised the incredible contributions of senior members of our diaspora at the recently held 51st anniversary Dinner and Social organised by the Senior Guyanese Friendship Association honouring founding members and celebrating their legacy with symbolic gestures of appreciation, including bestowing of the Golden Arrowhead and One Guyana Pins.

The year was also marked by opportunities to highlight Guyana on a broader stage. From engaging with Toronto's Mayor Olivia Chow and Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown to participating in the Independence celebrations of Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica, Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and other sister Caribbean nations, our outreach strengthened ties among Guyana, Canada, and the wider Caribbean and Latin America communities. As we enter 2025, let us carry forward this deep spirit of inclusivity, unity, service, and celebration.

May this Christmas bring you joy and renewal, and may the New Year be filled with opportunities to grow, connect, and thrive as a community.

On behalf of His Excellency President Irfaan Ali, the Government and people of Guyana, and the wonderful staff at the Toronto Consulate, I extend warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New and Prosperous New Year to you and your loved ones.



Mani Singh

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In photos, AFEY holds its kids' Christmas event

AFEY's kids have unforgettable day filled with laughter, good food, and toys

**From Page 1**  
and because of the size of the hall, we were able to accommodate so large a group. Our gratitude to Woodbine's management and staff for a job well done!"

Meanwhile, CGCC's generous financial contribution underlined its commitment to community outreach and social corporate responsibility, adding a welcome and foundational weave into the day's tapestry of shared purpose and the connectivity of partnerships.

This year marked a milestone for AFEY, celebrating 20 years of impactful service under the steadfast leadership of co-chairs and co-founders Dhaman Kissoon and Ron Taverner. Reflecting on the journey since AFEY's inception in 2004, Kissoon shared, "We have a deep history, and continue to partner with local businesses and other organisations that assist with financing and logistics."

He recounted the genesis of AFEY's mission, which grew from his shared vision with Taverner. "Ron and I met in 1990 when I was working with a law firm downtown. At the time he was at Police Headquarters, and I was chairing a South Asian Consultative Committee with the Toronto Police Service. We were working with the police chief at the time, and Ron was our contact person between the committee and the chief."

He added, "Later Ron moved into a different portfolio, and finally was posted in Etobicoke. We continued to stay in contact, and then we decided we should do something for the kids. He and I have been co-founders and co-chairs since."

The success of this year's event, borne out of the post-pandemic recovery period, was a testament to AFEY's resilience and the enduring spirit of volunteerism. "Prior to Covid-19, we were taking off. Then the pandemic came and disrupted everything.

However, this year I was happy to see so many kids. We had around 400 children accompanied by parents and guardians. There were close to 900 persons at the Woodbine Banquet Hall," Kissoon remarked.

The event's highlights included appearances by Santa and his helper. Santa's role was seamlessly undertaken by a local pandit, with his daughter as helper, Kissoon revealed. Then there was the Toronto Raptors' mascot, whose exuberant entrance captivated and energised the young audience.

"What was simply fantastic for me was noting how the energy surged with the arrival of Santa and his helper, and then the Raptors' mascot," Kissoon shared. "It was touching to see how much the happiness lifted when they entered the hall."

Integral to the event's success was the support from the network of community organisations. The Brampton Flower City Rotary Club, under the leadership of President Ashni Ramsammy, played a vital role in ensuring the smooth operation of the event. Rotary volunteers managed food stations and distributed toys with care, efficiency, and a whole lot of affection, Kissoon stated.

Said Kissoon, "We are grateful for the support brought in by the Rotary Club's volunteers. They were on hand at the two food stations and were instrumental in handing out the toys to the children, among other things."

Adding further depth to the celebration was the involvement of the CGCC, which made a generous donation to AFEY's efforts.

CGCC Managing Director Fareed Amin later emphasised the organisation's commitment to community outreach and corporate social responsibility.

"As a trade and invest organisation, we are looking at how we

can give back to the community. Our membership is interested in supporting the kids, and in outreach. AFEY requested our support, and we responded," Amin explained.

Also highlighting CGCC's ongoing outreach efforts beyond Canada, Amin shared, "We are also supporting an orphanage for a girls' facility, which was recently destroyed by fire in Georgetown. In addition, we're well into our Holly Jolly Christmas Project, aimed at providing curated care packages to families in need in Georgetown."

CGCC's Facebook page captured the spirit of generosity and the energy of the day, lauding Kissoon's "incredible leadership in bringing this vision to life", while extending thanks to everyone who contributed to the event's success.

As the group noted, "Giving back to our community is what the season is all about! Here's to building a brighter future for Etobicoke's youth – one smile at a time."

For Kissoon, the essence of AFEY's ongoing intervention into young lives lies in its ability to bring joy and hope to children during the festive season.

"In life, you work through challenges to arrive at the station where you're at," he reflected. "When you begin the journey, there are struggles. Such was my journey, and since then I have witnessed other people struggling in the same way. AFEY is a way to give back, to help young people in their journey."

The December 7 event was a resounding success, blending the generosity of community partners with the vision of AFEY's founders to create a day that will linger in the memories of children and families alike, he declared.

And as he summed up, "It was quite touching – the authenticity and care that were shown in what was a genuine community event."

ICGAA celebrates

The Indo-Caribbean Golden Age Association (ICGAA) hosted its 32nd Christmas celebrations on December 15 at the Agincourt Recreational Centre in Scarborough. This year's program was filled with live entertainment as members and volunteers participated in Christmas songs, music, dances, and photo shoots with Santa and his helper. There were also lots of mingling to the festive jingling by new and old members; a delicious meal and dessert followed.

The get-together saw Shaw Jaundoo bidding farewell as President of the ICGCA, and welcoming Lalita Sanicharan to the role; she will assume the presidency come January 1.

This event marked another success for the group's co-founder Leila Daljit, who has been an integral part of the ICGAA for the past 32 years. Her continued passion and dedication in planning, organising, and executing such events, along with the board members and volunteers, to bring together and serve the members of ICGAA, have reflected the mission of the organisation across its three decades.

ICGAA extended its gratitude to sponsors and volunteers for their generosity, hard work, and dedication. Heartfelt thanks were also extended to its members for their participation and continued support. Christmas and New Year greetings were sent out to the community.

**In photos, members at their event**







One Love Family Services held its third annual Pepper Pot festival and fund-raiser on December 6. The charitable group, headed by community leader Habeeb Alli, was well-attended, drawing many participants to the energising and spicy event that saw the enriching scents of festive cooking filling Emerald Banquet Hall in Etobicoke. The fund-raiser was in support of One Love Table's holiday and food drive. The finalists of the competition saw their delicious and savoury Pepper Pot ladled into the plates of appreciative attendees. In a reprise from last year's delectable event, guest judge was once again Bombay Lemonade, who deployed his gourmet palate to adjudicate the excellent and tasty presentations, which is well-regarded across the Caribbean region, and by the diaspora, as Guyana's festive, Christmas-day staple. Also performing, away from the stove, at the event were The Prince of Hearts; poet Peter Jailal; with live music by DJ Vick. Among this year's sponsors were ALIF Canada, Lions Club, Celene Chotai, Tropical TV, Amir Quality Meats, Wicked Carib, and Mountain of Mercy; and One Love's dedicated cohort of friends, followers, and hard-working volunteers.



# Ask Jay...

Please send your questions to  
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## TIPS ON WINTER MAINTENANCE FOR YOUR HOME

It is that time of the year when preparations have to be made for winter maintenance, which is needed around your home now that fall has ended. Use the following recommendations as a guide to remind you what must be done before the snow arrives.

Let's start with the outside. Please put outdoor furniture in a storage shed or in your basement to protect it. If it cannot be moved, cover it with plastic. Empty the soil from your outdoor planters, as the moisture in the soil can freeze, expand, and crack the planters. Mow the lawn and use the cuttings and broken leaves to fertilise the garden. If you have a gas mower, use a turkey baster to remove the remaining gas in the tank, and run the mower until the tank is empty.

The next step is to blow out your sprinkler system to prevent it from freezing. Turn off the water to the outside, detach and drain the hose, and cover the top of your AC unit to prevent snow from entering it. Avoid covering the entire unit, as it can be a shelter and attract rodents during the cold months. Rats will look for any warm place to live, so inspect your foundation, especially near vents such as your furnace and fireplace, and use a suitable sealant to fill the creases.

Turn off the power to the AC unit. If someone accidentally turns it on, they can damage the compressor. Some AC compressors use a crankcase heater to warm the oil, which results in higher electrical bills; it is also a haven for mice.

Clean your eaves troughs to allow the water to drain. If it is clogged, ice will damage it, eventually getting under the shingles and leaking into the attic. Install gutter guards to prevent leaves from clogging them – they are worth the investment. Also, inspect windows and doors for drafts and seal them if required.

Clean the vents in your attic's soffits. Over time, dust and insulation can clog them. Poor ventilation can cause ice damming and mold build-up. You can do this with a leaf blower or compressed air.

Reversible ceiling fans can save you money. During the winter, hot air rises to the top, and when the fan spins clockwise, it pushes hot air down. In the summer, you can change the spin to anti-clockwise, pulling the cool air up.

Consider replacing your thermostat with a smart thermostat. With a smart thermostat, you can adjust the temperature when you sleep, or if you are not at home to save on heating costs.

An HVAC technician can service the furnace, replace the air filter, and clean the humidifier. If you do not have a humidifier, consider installing one or buying a few portable ones. The furnace will absorb moisture from anywhere, including your wooden floors or your skin.

There are homes where some pipes run close to the exterior wall and can freeze and rupture when it is extremely cold. This isn't easy to fix, but a neat idea is to turn on the tap slightly, creating a small drip to keep the water moving through the pipes to prevent freezing.

Installing thermal curtains during winter is a good investment because they save energy by blocking drafts and keeping the heat inside. The newer thermal blinds are stylish and also change the ambiance. Open the blinds on sunny days to let the sunshine in and warm your home and heart.

If you regularly use a wood-burning fireplace, hire a professional to check and clean the chimney. If you use dry wood, it is recommended that you sweep the chimney to remove any built-up creosote after every 70 fires; with wet wood, the recommendation changes to 50. Ask the furnace technician to inspect gas fireplaces, as a faulty fireplace can cause a fire or carbon monoxide buildup.

A back-up generator is a good investment. Climate change or cyber-attacks can turn off utilities such as electricity and gas, and cold weather can damage your home. I prefer one that runs on gasoline, because I can quickly start it and power the house with an extension cord and a few portable heaters. Never run the generator inside the home. It is best to keep it about 20 feet away from the house, with the exhaust facing the opposite direction.

Here is a bonus tip about maintaining your body. We love to take a long, hot bath on a cold winter day, but hot water can dry out our skin, leading to eczema or other irritations. Consider having short, warm winter showers to hydrate your skin and keep your heating costs low.

I compiled this list to remind myself of the most critical issues to address before winter. I forgot one year to turn off the outside water and drain the pipe. The pipe froze, burst, and caused some damage, but luckily, I caught it before it could get worse. Now, I turn off the water supply each time I leave on vacation.

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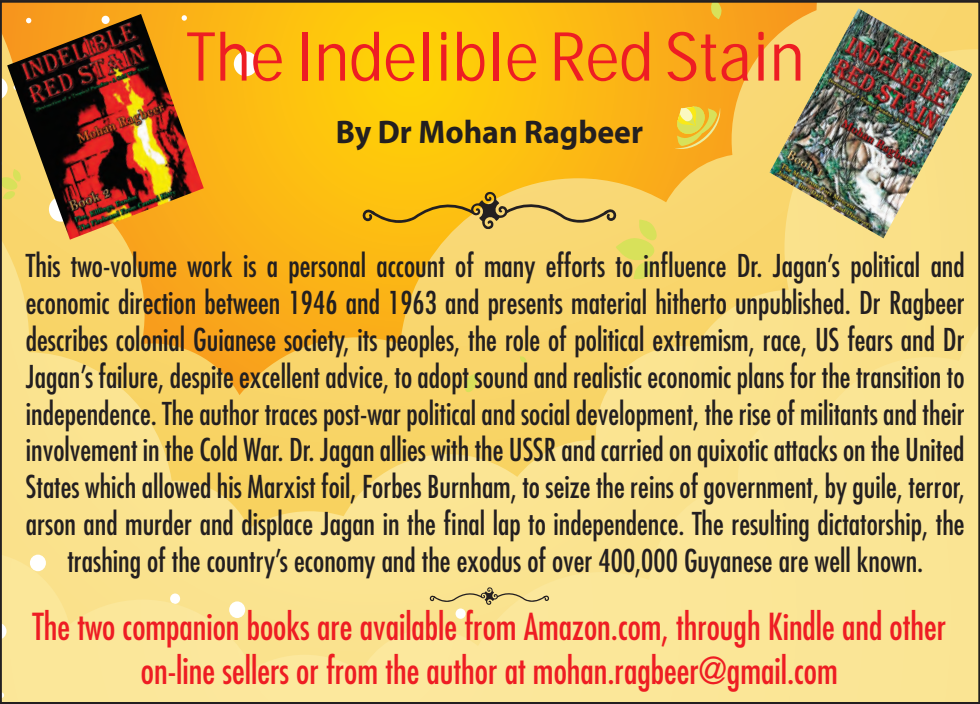
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The two companion books are available from Amazon.com, through Kindle and other on-line sellers or from the author at mohan.ragbeer@gmail.com



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# Challenging layers as step-kids unable to connect with grandparents

By Dhanpaul Narine

India's arrival in the Caribbean began in 1838 when two ships landed in what was then British Guiana (now Guyana) with a cargo of Indentured servants to work on the sugar plantations. The period 1838 to 1917 saw the racial complexion of the Caribbean change as Indians, Chinese, Portuguese, and poor Irish swelled the coffers of the plantocracy. During this time, there were sporadic interventions by India into the welfare of Caribbean Indians, which amounted to little.

India turned a blind eye to cruelty on the plantations in the name of neutrality. The barbaric treatment on the ships and plantations reached a point where Indentureship was stopped in South Africa in 1911, and in the Caribbean in 1917. The Viceroy of India, bowing to public pressure, wrote to the Secretary of State for India in 1917, stating that "recruiting must stop". The recruitment was deceptive, and the working hours were long, brutal, and oppressive. In the period 1838 to 1917, more than 13 million Indians were resettled abroad, as part of the Indentureship system.

But there were powerful interests that wanted Indentureship under another name. A Colonisation Scheme was proposed in London whereby a three-year Indentureship would replace the five-year contract. This idea met with resistance in India, but not in British Guiana, which sent Attorney General J.J. Nunan and a lawyer J.A. Luckhoo to India to work out the details.

In 1922, a delegation from India, led by Bahadur Pillai, arrived in British Guiana to finalise the arrangements. Nothing came from the visits, and the Colonisation Scheme withered. The project was deemed to be too expensive, and there was internal opposition to it.

The following years saw an intense period of creolisation among Indians in Guyana. Meanwhile, life on the sugar estates remained sub-human. The Moyne Commission in 1933 reported that East Indians were living in deplorable conditions, and that they were looking forward to the day when a deliverer would arrive and take them back to India. This did not happen. Nor did India intervene to improve conditions in the sugar estates. The result was that Caribbean Indians conducted a love affair with India, from afar, through songs, and black and white Indian movies – from *Amar Jyoti* to *Zinda Lash*.

Indians in the urban areas realised that India could do little for them. They used education as

the instrument of social and economic mobility, and competed for employment in teaching, the Civil Service, and other places. Many of them had to become Christians to get a job.

The creation of the British Guiana East Indian Association, the election of Dr Jang Bahadur Singh to the Legislative Assembly, and the formation of the People's Progressive Party led by Dr Cheddi Jagan, among others, raised the profile of Indians.

In 1953, the British suspended the Constitution of British Guiana, and Jagan was deposed as Premier. This captured the attention of the international community. British Guiana made direct contact with India. Jagan and Forbes Burnham spent over two months in India. They met with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and toured a number of cities to bring awareness to the Guyanese situation. But the visit made little difference to the Indian condition at home.

India was happy to leave Guyana to Indian missionaries. The Jagan and Burnham split occurred in 1955, the scars of which are felt to this day. The PPP won the 1961 elections, and lost out to the PNC/UF Coalition in 1964. Four years later, the PNC rigged its way to power, leaving Jagan and his party to languish in the Opposition for 28 years.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Guyana before the 1968 elections, but did not stress the need for fair and free elections. She established Indian Cultural Centers in Guyana and Trinidad, and then left.

There was little official interest from India in the Caribbean in the ensuing years. It did not make any comment on the electoral riggings in Guyana in 1973, 1978, 1980, or 1985. Professor Dr Mahin Gosine reported that a group of Guyanese visited India in 1974, with evidence of rigging in the 1973 elections in Guyana,

but PM Indira Gandhi refused to meet with the group. The Caribbean also stayed silent, except for Prime Minister Eugenia Charles from Dominica, who said that a rigged election was better than no election.

The visit to Guyana in 1988 from India's Vice-President Shankar Dyal Sharma to mark

the 150th anniversary of East Indian Indentureship, was mere tokenism. The message was clear: India would praise Indo-Caribbeans for keeping up Indian culture, but would say or do nothing to address discrimination. Caribbean Indians had to fend for themselves.

Political and economic discrimination at home led many Indians to leave Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Suriname for other countries. They settled in parts of the Caribbean, North America, and in the UK, and even in

non-traditional places. Guyanese migration to Venezuela in the 1970s was around 50,000 persons.

Then in 2003, changes started to occur. India created the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman (PBSA) to honour the contributions of Indians abroad; a number of Indo-Caribbeans were honoured. In that same year, two shifting currents moved in the direction of Indo-Caribbeans by the 'mother country'.

In April, the Office of India's Ambassador-at-Large published a report *Enhancing India's Image in the Western World*, and a month later, another report, *Indo-Caribbean Leader's*

*Forum*, was published by the Office of the Ambassador.

The Bharatiya Janata Party had aimed to move western media reporting away from "coup, catastrophe, and corruption" to the positives that were happening in India. Indo-Caribbeans were seen as part of the global Indian family.

Dr Bhisma Agnihotri was tasked with the responsibility, as Ambassador, to involve Indo-Caribbeans. One of the discussion forums was moderated by Ramesh Kalicharran, who was well-known for his 'Bharat Yatra' tours to India. Some of the other members were Pandit Radharaman Upadhyaya, Dr Tara Singh, Ashook Ramsaran, Roopnarine Persaud, Dr Vishnu Bisram, Pandita Dr Indrani Rampersad, Ramdular Singh, Haji Zakir, Deo Gosine, and this writer.

It was suggested that India should help new generations to be more involved with their Indian roots; it should create more opportunities for cultural exchanges; increase business relationships with Indians in the Caribbean; pursue actions that violate the rights of Indians worldwide, and assist scholars to deconstruct the history in Indo-Caribbean communities.

When Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited New York in late 2003, a number of Indo-Caribbeans met with him and put forward these ideas. It was also suggested that he should visit the Caribbean. Vajpayee marveled at the fact that Indo-Caribbeans were so far removed from India, but have managed to keep up Indian culture. Vajpayee's BJP lost the 2004 elections, and many of the recommendations were shelved.

In the 2020 Guyana election, India was again true to form. It refused to condemn electoral malpractices.

In 2024, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was given a red-carpet welcome in Guyana, and received the country's highest award. He said, "You can't take India out of an Indian".

This sounded catchy, but after so many years of neglect, the step children were having a hard time reconnecting with the grandparent.



PM Modi and President Ali

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# Caribbean Christmas reclaimed from the spectacle and exotic

An Ongoing Series on the Caribbean Diaspora  
Local Journalism Initiative

Christmas in the Caribbean is a story of contrasts, told through two very different gazes. For Victorian writers like James Anthony Froude, Anthony Trollope, and Charles Kingsley, the Caribbean was an exotic canvas where the Empire's values could be measured and mirrored – or, as they often implied, imperfectly imitated.

Their observations reflected the imperial mindset, exoticising the region while erasing its agency. In contrast, post-colonial voices like Jamaica Kincaid and V.S. Naipaul reimaged the region's identity, exploring themes of hybridity, resistance, and self-determination. Through their works, Christmas, and by extension, Caribbean culture, became not a borrowed tradition, but a space for reclaiming and re-imagining our identity.

Imagine a Victorian traveler arriving in the Caribbean during the height of Empire, notebook in hand and expectations firmly rooted in the ideals of the British Isles.

For James Anthony Froude, the islands were a stage for British traditions to play out in the tropical sun – but only as faint echoes of their original splendor.

Froude's tone in *The English in the West Indies* (1888) is unmistakably judgmental. He noted local customs with a kind of disapproving curiosity, often framing them as inferior copies of British practices. To Froude, the Caribbean was a place lacking authenticity, its people incapable of truly grasping the values that the Empire so graciously extended.

Anthony Trollope, writing in *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1859), approached the Caribbean with a similar mix of fascination and condescension. While he admired the natural beauty of the islands, his portrayal of their people was steeped in infantilising language.

Traditions that did not conform to British norms were quaint, even charming, but always incomplete in his eyes. Trollope's gaze was not so much disdainful as it was dismissive, reinforcing the idea that the Caribbean existed primarily as an appendage to the Empire.

These writers, each in their way, contributed to the process of *Othering*, where the Caribbean and its people were defined by their difference from Europe. Through exoticism, moralising tones, and a fixation on the civilising mission, they presented a version of the Caribbean that served the Empire's agenda, erasing

the agency and complexity of its cultures.

Charles Kingsley's *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (1871) provides a focused example of how Christmas in the Caribbean was framed through the imperial gaze. His observations of a Christmas church service in Trinidad reveal the layers of exoticism, moral superiority, and erasure of history characteristic of Victorian travel writing.

Kingsley marvels at the decorations of the church, noting the 15-foot "coconut leaves" arching over doorways and the "tropic flowers" adorning the altar. While admiring the aesthetic, his description exoticises these elements, presenting them as deviations from a European norm rather than legitimate expressions of local identity. His reaction, "somewhat startling to find, on Christmas Day", underscores his perception of the Caribbean as a place of novelty and spectacle.

His commentary on the congregation reflects the civilising mission. Kingsley praises the devoutness of the attendees, observing the racial diversity in the pews, but his tone remains paternalistic. By framing their behaviour as a triumph of Christian influence, he diminishes their agency, casting their faith as a product of British moral guidance.

The image of a white woman kneeling beside two Black women, speculated to be former slaves, encapsulates Kingsley's romanticised view of Christian equality. This moment erases the historical violence of slavery, reframing it as a sentimental narrative of reconciliation. By focusing on spiritual unity within the church, Kingsley obscures the material inequalities that persisted outside its walls.

Through these descriptions, Kingsley positions Christmas as a marker of colonial success, reinforcing the imperial narrative of moral and cultural superiority.

Fast-forward a century, and the lens through which the Caribbean is viewed shifts dramatically. For writers like Kincaid, the Caribbean is not a backdrop for imperial narratives, but a living, breathing space where identity, resistance, and hybridity collide.

Kincaid, in works like *Annie John* (1985) and *A Small Place* (1988), captures the psychological and cultural dislocation wrought by colonial traditions. Her writing often bristles with anger and irony, as she dissects the lingering impact of Empire on the Caribbean psyche. The rituals imposed by colonial rule, including holidays like Christmas, become symbols of alienation, their meaning warped by the weight of imposed traditions.

Where Froude and Trollope saw the Caribbean as a place to be judged or admired from afar, Kincaid immerses readers in its contradictions and complexities. Their works push back against the imperial narrative, asserting that Caribbean identity is neither static nor borrowed, but dynamic and deeply rooted in the lived experience of its people.

V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) offers perhaps the most nuanced and focused exploration of the tensions between colonial legacies and post-colonial realities. Christmas in Naipaul's Trinidad is a curious blend of anticipation and disappointment, material aspiration, and familial tension.

At Hanuman House, the Tulsi Store is a hive of activity during the holiday season, brimming with "exciting luxuries" that evoke the allure of colonial materialism. Yet, the celebrations often fall short of expectations, as Naipaul describes Christmas as "a series of anticipations" that rarely deliver satisfaction.

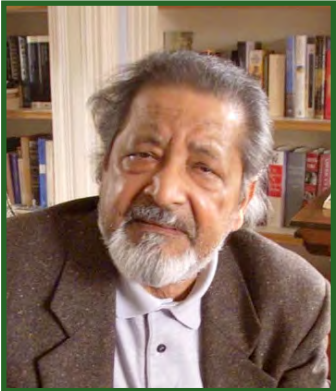
One reading of this gap between expectation and reality captures the dissonance of post-colonial life, where imported traditions struggle to take root in local soil. The doll house Mr Biswas impulsively buys for his daughter Savi becomes a powerful symbol of this dissonance. Its superior furnishings represent the unattainable ideals of colonial domesticity, yet it quickly becomes a source of conflict within the Tulsi family.

Mrs Tulsi's scolding, namely, "When I give, I give to all", reveals the authoritarian dynamics of Hanuman House, where individual acts of generosity are subsumed by the collective. The doll house, meant to bring joy, instead highlights the fractures within the family and the broader societal tensions of colonial legacy.

Through Naipaul's lens, Christmas in the Caribbean becomes a microcosm of post-colonial identity. It is a space of contradiction, where aspiration and alienation coexist, and where the weight of colonial legacies is both felt and resisted.

Christmas in the Caribbean is not just a holiday; it is a narrative battleground. Victorian writers like Froude, Trollope, and Kingsley utilise their imperial gaze to frame the region as a reflection of the Empire's values, while post-colonial writers like Kincaid, Naipaul, and others, reclaim it as a space for resistance, hybridity, and self-determination.

This comparative journey reminds us of the power of narrative to shape our understanding of culture and history. By seeking out at our GTA libraries and reading works like *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) and *Annie John* (1985), we see how Caribbean writers have transformed colonial legacies into celebrations of resilience and creativity. Their voices challenge us to move beyond the earlier exoticised, simplified versions, embracing instead our complexity, contradictions, and enduring spirit.



V.S. Naipaul

Trekking up and down peaks and valleys in dense forests and setting up camps at various locations are both adventurous and dangerous at the same time, especially at night in the middle of nowhere with wild animals on the prowl.

Justin and Trudy decided to dispense with the usual honeymoon travels to exotic locations. They preferred to embark on their favourite activity – their mutual love of hiking in different forests and mountainous regions around the world. Having completed a dozen over-the-edge ventures, each one more challenging than the last, the greatest test of their nerves arrived the day following their marriage, after many months of wedding planning intertwined with trail training preparations for the pinnacle moment of their lives, to traverse and conquer the infamous Devil Peaks of Death Valley.

Only a handful of people who attempted this feat before them survived to tell their tales of conquest. The majority of thrill-seekers either gave up and returned home, dejected and traumatised by the experience, or never returned, their bodies lying in uncharted treacherous areas too dangerous for rescuers or searchers to get to them.

When the helicopter dropped the newlywed couple off in a clearing on a round-topped peak, their hearts flipped with the promise of the greatest thrill of their lives that would symbolise and cement their bond with each other through the ups-and-downs of marital bliss. Justin touched the talisman hanging on a chain around his neck for reassurance. The ancient inscription on the back of the lucky charm translated to, "I will forever preserve life in defiance of death". He had bought the charm on one of his travels to Asia.

With machetes in their hands and backpacks strapped on, they cut paths and climbed rocky terrain on a slow march toward the pickup location 20 miles to the north of the drop-off point. With no cell phone signal in the most isolated region in the world, scenic photos and videos were stored in their high-powered cameras to share with the world on social media after they returned home.

After a few heart-pumping perilous encounters with snakes

## The Supernatural The Talisman

and curious predatory creatures, they braced each other with eyes darting in every direction and ears on high alert for movements behind dense brush on the ground and inside the thick foliage of the tall trees that filtered the sunlight. They took careful steps to circumvent the marshlands that housed man-eating reptiles and fish.

Their first heart-stopping moment came when Justin almost fell off a sheer cliff, hidden by rock-climbing plants and vines.

Trudy used every ounce of courage and effort to grab his flailing hands as he teetered on the edge. In her herculean attempt to save her husband's life, she yanked him onto herself when she fell backward, aided by the extra weight of her heavy backpack.

Justin's body shook from the loud sobs and quaking of Trudy under him. His near-death experience had rattled her to the point of giving up, with wailing calls to abandon the journey.

Justin tried to calm his wife by hugging and kissing her, the tears flowing out of his eyes. They had no means of communication with the outside world. They both knew that they had to keep the pickup schedule at their destination. Returning to their starting point would be useless since, according to the tour operator, no one was booked to explore The Devil Peaks of Death Valley for another couple of years. They had no choice but to keep moving forward if they wished to survive the harsh territory that had already started to bring them to their knees on the first day of the planned seven-day trek of eating out of cans and drinking water from streams.

At the failing light of day, they found an open spot a few hundred yards away to set up camp for the night. Justin gathered dried twigs to light fires in a wide circle around their double sleeping bag, which offered security and comfort through body contact. Instead of creating an atmosphere of romance,

the star-studded night sky brought out marauding night creatures that kept them on high alert, armed with pepper spray and machetes clutched in their hands.

Bright sunlight at the crack of dawn penetrated their eyelids and gave them headaches. At some point during the night, fatigue had overcome them and they had fallen asleep. Justin covered his eyes while Trudy sat up with a start. She glanced around, unsure of their surroundings for a moment before remembering the reason for their presence in the jungle. The dew-coated blades of grass reflected the sunlight. Justin's twigs lay in little heaps of ashes.

With six more days to go, they packed up and used their compasses to navigate the treacherous wilderness, learning from their experiences and getting better adjusted to the natural habitat of wild animals and their surroundings.

On the day before arrival at their destination, the conquest of Devil Peaks of Death Valley eluded them when they inadvertently veered off course. Justin's throat tightened and Trudy felt a hollow in her stomach when the compass needles started spinning out of control, affected by the magnetic fields emanating from within the surrounding rocks.

Faced with no options, they followed a trail that they assumed was used by others before them to write the final chapter of their once-in-a-lifetime quest of the infamous landmark.

About a mile along the trail, disaster struck. This time it was Trudy's misstep that led to tragedy. Loose earth under her feet gave way to a landslide toward the bottom of a deep gorge. Justin grabbed Trudy, but her forward momentum catapulted them headlong into the seemingly bottomless pit. Justin landed on his head and broke his neck. Trudy smashed her ribcage against a jagged rock and started bleeding through her nose. Mangled bones around them showed bite marks from flesh-eating animals. She slipped the talisman off Justin and lay on top of him to stay together for eternity.

Kamil Ali







The Original Drupati's, Kiran and Shivaan



Jas Supermarket in Brampton

Put Dhal & Rice on your front burner

For the third consecutive year, the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association, in collaboration with community organisations, is hosting its Dhal & Rice: Indo-Caribbean Food Drive. The objective is to make a difference by providing culturally appropriate food for families in need across the GTA. Businesses continue to welcome donation boxes. Among the latest is Drupati's at Highway 27 in Etobicoke; meanwhile, Indar's Roti & Doubles in Etobicoke, Persaud's Ethnic Grocery Store in Burford, Jas Supermarket in Brampton, Shereen's Guyanese Bakery in Scarborough, and many others, are reporting that their boxes are filling up.

With approximately 30 donation drop-off locations across the GTA, and one in Southwest Ontario, the initiative is a testament to the power of community. Each food item ensures that families will enjoy our delicious cooking from back home.

Here are some of the foods that can be dropped off at the locations in the map below: chow mein, turmeric, geera, masala, cassareep, Milo or Ovaltine, dhal, peas, beans, channa.

Visit your local Caribbean grocery store and pick up a few extras for the box; also encourage family, friends, and neighbors to join in and give their support to this worthy cause.



Narin Rampersad, Indar's Roti & Doubles in Etobicoke



Shereen's Guyanese Bakery in Scarborough



Persaud's Ethnic Grocery Store, Burford

**FOOD ITEMS YOU CAN DONATE**

**CHOWMEIN NOODLES**  
**SMALL BAGS/BOXES OF RICE**  
**CHANA/CHICKPEAS (CANNED OR DRY)**  
**BLACK EYE PEAS (CANNED OR DRY)**  
**RED KIDNEY BEANS**  
**DAHL/YELLOW SPLIT PEAS**  
**BROWN LENTILS**  
**ALL PURPOSE FLOUR**  
**PREMIXED BARA AND POLOURIE**  
**SPLIT PEA FLOUR**  
**SEASONING (PAPRIKA, TURMERIC, SALT, BLACK PEPPER, CAYENNE PEPPER, CHOW MEIN AND FRIED RICE SEASONING, NUTMEG, CLOVE, CINNAMON, CARDAMOM)**  
**GREEN SEASONING**  
**JERK SEASONING (WET AND DRY)**  
**CASSAREEP /BROWNING SAUCE**  
**CURRY POWDER (I.E. CHIEF AND GUYANESE PRIDE)**  
**MASSALA AND GEERA (I.E. CHIEF)**  
**PEPPER SAUCE BOTTLES**  
**MILO**  
**OVALTINE**  
**CARNATION EVAPORATED MILK**  
**CONDENSED MILK**  
**POWDER MILK**  
**COCONUT MILK & CREAM**  
**SUGAR (BROWN AND WHITE)**  
**CANNED SARDINE OR MACKEREL**  
**CORNER BEEF/MUTTON**

**DROP OFF LOCATIONS AROUND THE GREATER TORONTO AREA**

**YORK REGION**

**The Health Spot Woodbridge**  
7A - 7600 York Regional Rd  
Woodbridge  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-F: 9 AM to 5 PM

**GTA Soccer Club**  
30 Corstae Ave.  
Woodbridge  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-F: 12 PM - 1 AM  
S/S: 7 AM - 2 AM

**Caribbean Cabana**  
7380 McCowan Rd.  
Markham  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-S: 10 AM to 8 PM

**CITY OF TORONTO**

**The Original Drupati's**  
35 Woodbine Downs Blvd #3A  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
S-T: 10 AM to 9 PM  
F-S: 10 AM to 12 AM

**Shri Krishna Sudama Mandir**  
2701 Codlin Cres.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
Sun: 10 AM to 1 PM

**Island Junction**  
3300 McNicoll Ave  
Unit 5B  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
T-T: 11 AM-9 PM  
F/S: 11 AM -12 AM  
Sun: 11 AM -9 PM

**Tropical Nights**  
1154 Morningside Ave.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-S: 11 AM to 10 PM

**Indar's Roti & Doubles**  
1152 Albion Rd.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
T-F: 9 AM to 6 PM  
S-S: 8 AM to 6 PM

**Building Togetherness**  
43 Manchester St.  
**CONTACT TO DROP OFF**  
buildingtogetherness@gmail.com

**Shereen's Bakery**  
1063 Midland Ave  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
W-F: 11 AM to 6 PM  
S-S: 11 AM to 4 PM

**Starlite Restaurant**  
1157 Ellesmere Rd.  
Scarborough  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-S: 11 AM to 10 PM

**Vikash's Canadian Superstore**  
1147 Bellamy Rd N  
Unit 1  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-S: 11 AM to 10 PM

**DURHAM REGION**

**Crys-Lee West Indian Market**  
20 Harwood Ave S,  
Ajax  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-S: 10 AM to 6 PM

**Al's West Indian Food Mart**  
1660 Kingston Rd,  
Pickering  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-W: 10 AM to 7 PM  
T-F: 10 AM to 8 PM  
Sat: 9 AM to 7 PM  
Sun: 10 AM to 5 PM

**District Lounge**  
1211 Kingston Rd  
Pickering  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
F: 7 PM - 2 AM  
Sat: 10 PM - 2 AM

**Dam Foods**  
154 Hardwood Ave. South  
Ajax  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-F: 10 AM to 7 PM  
S-S: 10 AM to 6 PM

**Ajax Crematorium & Visitation Centre**  
384 Finley Ave  
Ajax  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-F: 10 AM to 8 PM  
S-S: 12 PM to 8 PM

**PEEL REGION**

**Acceway**  
24 Eastway Dr.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
S-S: 11 AM to 8 PM

**Divine Designs by Natasha**  
16 Newgreen Cres  
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**Maha Lakshmi Narayan Mandir**  
6515 Kitimat Rd.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
Sun: 10 AM to 12 PM  
Mon: 7 PM to 9 PM

**Leela's Roti & Doubles**  
900 Rathburn Rd W.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
T-F: 10 AM to 8 PM  
S-S: 9 AM to 6 PM

**Bara's Hut Roti & Doubles**  
127 Dundas St E.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-F: 11 AM to 8 PM  
S-S: 10 AM to 8 PM

**FH Multi Foods Grocery**  
3061 Hurontario St  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-F 9 PM - 7 PM  
S-S 9 PM - 5 PM

**Jas Supermarket**  
9025 Torbram Rd.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
S-S: 10 AM to 6 PM

**Lena's Roti & Doubles**  
100 Maritime Ontario Blvd  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
W-S: 11 AM to 11 PM

**Naija Versatile Fashion (Westwood mall)**  
7205 Goreway Dr.  
**DROP-OFF HOURS**  
M-F: 10 AM to 9 PM  
S-S: 11 AM to 5 PM

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UniTnT held its 2nd annual Kids' Christmas party at Tropical Nights Restaurant in Scarborough. The December 14 event saw Santa in attendance, the serving of snacks, and music by Don San Juan. *Photos by Russell Lutchman.*



Highlife Promo held its 5th annual Toy Drive and Parang Lime on December 14. Attendees were serenaded to pulsating parang by Toronto's Los Ketchos, with music by DJ Star Force, DJ Tricky, and others. *Photos by Russell Lutchman.*





# Merry Christmas & Happy Kwanzaa



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Working For You



# Stars Salma Khan and Sharmila Tagore light up December with birthdays

Bollywood's December diary glowed with double delight as two iconic matriarchs, Salma Khan and Sharmila Tagore, celebrated milestone birthdays surrounded by family, joy, and heartfelt tributes.

Salma Khan, fondly called "Mother India" by son Salman Khan, turned 83 on December 10, while Sharmila Tagore, a timeless symbol of grace and cinematic brilliance, rang in her 80th birthday on December 8.

Both celebrations offered a warm glimpse into lives marked by love, family bonds, and decades of unparalleled contributions to Indian cinema.

Salma Khan, born Sushila Charak, was celebrated with a grand gathering of family and close friends at her daughter Arpita Khan's newly launched restaurant in Mumbai. The event radiated love, laughter, and an infectious spirit of togetherness.

Salman Khan shared a heartwarming video on *Instagram*, capturing his beloved mother dancing with her son Sohail Khan. It was a moment of pure happiness that resonated deeply with fans.

Veteran actress Helen, Salim Khan's second wife, also joined the celebration, creating an endearing picture of familial harmony as she and Salma shared the dance floor in a moment that quickly went viral on social media.

Salman Khan's tribute to his mother, lovingly calling her "Mother India", was met with an outpouring of affection from friends and fans. Birthday wishes poured in from industry colleagues, including Sangeeta Bijlani, Bobby Deol, Prateik Babbar, Varun Dhawan, and Gauahar Khan, who all joined the chorus of celebration with warm online comments.

The celebration also featured a towering cake, which Salma cut surrounded by her children and grandchildren, with Sohail Khan sharing additional glimpses of the joyous occasion online.



In photos, Salma Khan (right) with Deanne Panday. *Instagram photos*



Sharmila Tagore (left) with Sara Ali Khan. *Instagram photos*



Salma Khan's life, as the first wife of legendary screenwriter Salim Khan, has been a testament to resilience, love, and the quiet strength of a mother who nurtured one of Bollywood's most influential families.

The birthday celebration was also a notable one for Salman Khan, who is now returning to the spotlight following his performance at the *Dabangg Reloaded Tour* in Dubai, his first global appearance after receiving threats from

gangster Lawrence Bishnoi.

Meanwhile, in the other December celebration, the epitome of grace and a legendary figure in Indian cinema Sharmila Tagore marked her 80th birthday on December 8 with a heartwarming family affair in Goa.

The celebration was intimate yet radiant, with her family gathering around a large table to honour the beloved matriarch.

Sara Ali Khan, Sharmila's granddaughter,

gave fans a peek into the joyous occasion, sharing photographs of the family relishing the moment together.

"Happy Birthday Dadi Jaan. Humari family ki Aan Aur Shaan", Sara captioned her tribute, encapsulating the family's love and admiration for the veteran actress.

The celebration was made sweeter with multiple cakes, with each appearing to be more delicious than the last. There was a decadent chocolate cake topped with fresh blueberries, strawberries, and cashews, which took centre stage as Sharmila cut it to the joyful chorus of the birthday song.

Soha Ali Khan, Sharmila's daughter, captured another precious moment, which was a whipped cream-covered cake adorned with choco chips and berries. This cake she playfully captioned with the following statement, "The cake that mattered!!"

Sharmila Tagore also posed for an adorable photograph on a cozy couch, surrounded by her grandchildren Taimur Ali Khan, Jehangir Ali Khan, and Inaaya Naumi Kemmu. It was a picture of familial warmth and love that delighted fans across the generations.

While their celebrations were distinct, both Salma Khan and Sharmila Tagore share a common legacy, which is one of grace, resilience, and remarkable contributions to Bollywood.

Salma Khan's unwavering presence as the matriarch of one of the industry's most influential families reflects strength and quiet resolve. Sharmila Tagore, an icon of the silver screen, continues to be celebrated for her luminous performances and timeless beauty that have left an indelible mark on Indian cinema.

In honouring these extraordinary women, December started off as a month of celebration, gratitude, and reflection with tributes paid to the roles both icons have played on screen and in life, inspiring generations with their grace, love, and enduring legacy.

Wishing You a

# MERRY CHRISTMAS

and a

# HAPPY NEW YEAR

RubySahotaLib  
Ruby.Sahota@parl.gc.ca  
905-840-0505



# Zakir Hussain a virtuoso whose tabla music will resonate across the ages

**Z**akir Hussain, the legendary Indian tabla virtuoso who bridged cultures through music and shaped the modern world music genre, passed away on December 15 at the age of 73. His family confirmed the cause of death as idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, the international media reported earlier this week.

Hussain's extraordinary career, which spanned over five decades, earned him recognition as a national treasure in India and a global ambassador for Indian classical music. His groundbreaking work in fusing Indian rhythms with diverse musical traditions cemented his status as one of the greatest musicians of all time.

In a statement, his family described his impact, noting, "His prolific work as a teacher, mentor, and educator has left an indelible mark on countless musicians. He hoped to inspire the next generation to go further. He leaves behind an unparalleled legacy as a cultural ambassador and one of the greatest musicians of all time."

Reactions to his passing were swift and heartfelt. Among the prominent tributes was from India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who posted on X, formerly *Twitter*: "Deeply saddened by the passing of the legendary tabla maestro, Ustad Zakir Hussain Ji. He will be remembered as a true genius who revolutionised the world of Indian classical music. He also brought the tabla to the global stage, captivating millions with his unparalleled rhythm. Through this, he seamlessly blended Indian classical traditions with global music, thus becoming an icon of cultural unity."

Modi added: "His iconic performances and soulful compositions will contribute to inspire generations of musicians and music lovers alike. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and the global music community."

Hussain's collaborations with world-renowned artists defined his versatility and ability to transcend genres. From performing with jazz saxophonist Charles Lloyd to collaborating with bluegrass legends Edgar Meyer and Béla Fleck, and even working with rock icons like George Harrison and Van Morrison, Hussain's artistry knew no boundaries.

His two appearances on NPR's *Tiny Desk Concert* series, the first one in 2010 and then again in 2023, were testaments to his enduring appeal across generations.

Reflecting on his journey in a 2015 NPR interview, Hussain remarked: "You know, you come from India and you say, 'Okay,



Zakir Hussain

I'm representing a 3,000-year-old history', so you think you're gonna teach the world about rhythms and drums and so on. And then you arrive here. You suddenly realise that you know nothing. You're just one little dot in the painting that is the music of the universe."

Born in Bombay, Hussain's musical journey began at birth when his father, the legendary tabla maestro Alla Rakha,

whispered rhythms into his ear instead of traditional, motivational prayers.

Recalling this anomalous intervention by his father, Hussain revealed, "My mother was very upset and said, 'Why are you doing this?', and he said, 'Because this is my prayer.'"

Under Alla Rakha's guidance, Hussain began playing the tabla at the age of seven. While rooted in Indian classical traditions, his father also exposed him to global music, sparking a lifelong love for diverse genres.

"I was the only kid on the block who was walking down the street with a boombox on my shoulder, playing as loud as I could [*The Doors*] 'Light My Fire,'" he once said, reflecting on his love for rock music.

In 1970, at just 19, Hussain moved to the US, where he collaborated with artists like George Harrison, Van Morrison, and drummer Mickey Hart of *The Grateful Dead*. In 1973, he co-founded the ground-breaking Indian jazz fusion band *Shakti* with guitarist John McLaughlin, introducing Western audiences to the richness of Indian music.

Hussain's contributions to music were recognised with numerous accolades, including India's *Padma Shri* (1988), *Padma Bhushan* (2002), and *Padma Vibhushan* (2023).

In 2024, he made history as the first Indian musician to win three Grammy Awards in a single year, earning honours for Best Global Music Album, Best Global Music Performance, and Best Contemporary Instrumental Album.

Throughout his career, Hussain emphasised the universal language of rhythm. As he stated, "We were all on the same wavelength, the same quest, looking for perfection, which we will never find. But that didn't matter because it's all about the journey – not the goal."

Beyond his performances, Hussain was deeply committed to teaching and spreading appreciation for Indian classical music. His passion for mentorship inspired countless musicians to explore the art form, ensuring its continuity for generations to come.

Hussain is survived by wife, Antonia Minnecola, daughters Anisa and Isabella Qureshi, brothers Taufiq and Fazal Qureshi, and sister Khursheed Aulia.

His life was a symphony of rhythm and connection, uniting cultures and inspiring a world of music lovers. His unparalleled legacy will continue to resonate, a timeless tribute to the maestro who made the rhythms of the tabla resonate across continents.



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Photos courtesy PMCF

# Cricket for a good cause – Time to team up to beat cancer

For our Caribbean community, cricket has always been a force that transcends boundaries as a shared legacy of skill, patience, and camaraderie that is passed from generation to generation. Now, our beloved game is taking on a new purpose in a drive to deliver hope and progress.

Come May 31, 2025, the inaugural **Cricket to Conquer Cancer** will assemble Canada's largest street cricket fundraiser, rallying teams across Canada to support world-class cancer research at The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. The target is to raise one million dollars, making it a cause that is asking us to take the run-up and to deliver.

The May 31 format is as sharp and engaging as the game itself. Played in the dynamic T5 style of five overs per side, the tournament demands disciplined strike rates and quick-fire decisions.

Teams of six to eight players will bowl, bat, and field, not just for the thrill of competition, but for something far greater: every dollar raised is a run scored for the fight against cancer. The fund-raising campaign begins at sign-up, where each team sets its sights on a target of \$6,000, ensuring both steady momentum and a powerful finish.

On the day itself, over 100 teams will vie for honours in an unforgettable celebration of the game, while top fundraisers earn a unique opportunity to recruit celebrity talent and cricket luminaries to strengthen their line-up. The action will be non-stop, with bowlers delivering at a good length, fielders patrolling every position, and batters driving the cause forward.

Yet the true contest will unfold beyond the pitch, where donations translate into life-saving breakthroughs and hope for patients and families affected by cancer.

At its core, **Cricket to Conquer Cancer** reminds us of

cricket's greatest lesson, which is in the power of collective effort. Like a strong team building pressure through tight spells, our community has always shown resilience, discipline, and heart in rising to challenges. The Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation, Canada's leading cancer charity, has long embodied these qualities, accelerating advancements that ripple across the globe.

Now is the moment to show up with purpose, with the same reverence we give to our cricket heroes, the same patience we

show in a tight chase, and the same pride we feel when a good innings is played for a worthy cause. Whether as players, donors, or supporters from the boundary, every role is vital, and every contribution counts.

To step up, form your team, and join this thrilling match to conquer cancer, visit [cricket2conquer.ca](http://cricket2conquer.ca). Let us stand up and bat together as a cricketing community, turning every over, every run, and every partnership into a victory that echoes far beyond the pitch.



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**CRICKET**  
TO CONQUER CANCER

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First-Ever  
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May 31, 2025

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# Calls for DRS after questionable umpiring decisions

— Confusion, frustration, and a series of questionable calls follow the absence of DRS in the England-South Africa Test, and which has reignited debate about fairness and the role of technology.

The lack of a Decision Review System (DRS) in the recent one-off Test match between England and South Africa has sparked controversy, with key decisions raising questions about fairness and the need for technology moving forward, the *British Broadcasting Corporation*, and other international sports media reported earlier this month.

Despite England's dominant 286-run victory, the match was marred by confusion and frustration, particularly from South Africa's camp, over the absence of DRS.

Former England bowler Alex Hartley described Annerie Dercksen's dismissal in South Africa's second innings as "the right decision but the wrong process", encapsulating the broader debate.

Hartley emphasised the importance of DRS, stating, "What it has shown is that DRS needs to be in place for every international match and then we wouldn't be talking about it. It should be a wake-up call for Cricket South Africa."

The controversy began early into the match. From just the second ball, South Africa's Marizanne Kapp appeared to have England's Tammy Beaumont trapped lbw with a convincing appeal. However, with no DRS available, the decision remained not out, and England's openers went on to build a 53-run partnership.

Later in South Africa's first innings, Captain Laura Wolvaardt, who was batting fluently on 65, was given out lbw to Sophie Ecclestone. Wolvaardt was visibly furious, knocking her bat

against her helmet while muttering that she had hit the ball. The reaction earned her a fine from the International Cricket Council, but the incident further highlighted the need for review technology.

However, the most contentious moment came during South Africa's second innings when Annerie Dercksen was given out following a catch appeal at short leg. Although no DRS was in play, the on-field umpires referred the decision to the

third umpire to check for a clean catch, which is typically permissible only for doubtful catches or bump balls. The catch, taken at chest height, led to Dercksen's dismissal, but the process left players and commentators confused.

Hartley later told *BBC Test Match Special*, "The right decision was made in the end, because it did look like there was an edge, but I just think it was the wrong process. There was never any doubt around whether it was a clean catch or not. It's the fact that nobody knows what the decision-making was."

The absence of DRS in this high-stakes match was a financial decision made by Cricket South Africa, despite the organisation reporting profits of £35.9 million last year.

Proteas head coach Mandla Mashimbyi expressed frustration at the lack of clarity, saying the decision not to use DRS was beyond his authority.

"There was no communication – I didn't understand why [it was out]," Mashimbyi said.

He added, "If it's out it's out, and if the umpire isn't sure, the benefit of doubt goes to the batter. It was quite bizarre, I guess the umpires felt they made the right decision so we can't go against that."



Laura Wolvaardt



Jason Gillespie

# Gillespie quits Pakistan

Jason Gillespie's tenure as Pakistan's Test coach has come to an abrupt and unexpected end, with the former Australia fast bowler stepping down earlier this month amid frustrations over a lack of communication from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

Gillespie, who was appointed in April on a two-year deal, cited the sacking of high-performance coach Tim Nielsen as the tipping point for his decision. Speaking to *ABC Sport*, Gillespie said he received "absolutely zero communication" from the PCB regarding Nielsen's dismissal, describing it as "the straw that broke the camel's back."

"I was completely and utterly blindsided by a decision to not have a high-performance coach. After a number of other things that had gone on in the previous few months, that was probably the moment where I thought, 'Well, I'm not really sure if they actually really want me to do this job or not.'"

The PCB's lack of transparency and frequent reshuffling within the coaching setup appeared to erode Gillespie's role further. During Pakistan's recent Test series victory over England, the board announced a new selection panel – a move that excluded Gillespie entirely from the selection process.



# Gujarat Giants bold WPL bid wins Deandra Dottin

— Deandra Dottin’s explosive power and all-round brilliance promise to reignite the Gujarat Giants, as the team makes a bold move to challenge WPL’s frontrunners.

In a well-timed opening shot to the 2025 WPL auction, the Gujarat Giants made a confident and bold statement in securing West Indian all-rounder Deandra Dottin for a stunning INR 1.7 crore (about US \$200,000), marking her as the first player under the hammer.

This acquisition not only underscored Dottin’s immense value, but also set a tone of optimism for a franchise eager to turn their fortunes around after two disappointing seasons.

The 33-year-old Dottin, known for her explosive batting, versatile bowling, and athletic fielding, emerged as one of the marquee names at the auction, drawing fierce competition between the Giants and UP Warriorz.

Gujarat, armed with the largest purse of INR 4.4 crore, ultimately won the bidding war to reunite with the T20 trailblazer after an earlier, controversial split in 2023.

“Well, to be honest, I knew that I was one of the big ones in the mini-auction, but to be picked first, I never expected that,” Dottin told *ESPNCricinfo* after the auction.

Reflecting on her journey, she added, “For my calibre and how I go about my batting, I guess that being a part of WPL is a chance to explore and showcase my talents and learn a lot from other players as well, even the younger players, and also just to give feedback and share my knowledge. So, I really appreciate being a part of the WPL and for being selected by Gujarat Giants.”

Dottin’s signing not only bolsters the Giants’ batting lineup, but provides crucial depth to their bowling attack. After finishing last in consecutive WPL editions with just four wins from 16 games, Gujarat’s decision to invest in



Deandra Dottin

one of cricket’s most explosive all-rounders signals a fresh start for a team desperately in need of firepower.

Dottin’s name is synonymous with boundary-clearing brilliance and competitive grit. She remains the first woman to score a century in T20 Internationals, a record she set with her iconic 38-ball hundred against South Africa at the 2010 T20 World Cup. This performance remains the fastest century in women’s T20 cricket.

Her career statistics also speak volumes. Dottin’s ability to deliver under pressure was on display at the 2023 Women’s T20 World Cup, where she reversed her earlier international retirement to guide the West Indies into their first semi-final since 2018. Across five innings, she smashed 120 runs at a blistering strike rate

of 162.16, while also taking five wickets. Her form remained red-hot in the Women’s Big Bash League (WBBL) that followed. Representing Melbourne Renegades, she struck 148 runs at a strike rate of 151.02, often playing match-defining cameos, while also claiming ten wickets to highlight her all-round prowess.

Yet, the veteran all-rounder believes her best is still to come.

“I feel really good, and I think my current form is... I don’t think it’s actually 100 percent. I still have a lot more room for improvement,” Dottin shared.

She added, “Every day won’t go as planned, but it’s how you actually move forward when you have bad days [which is important]. The determination and the passion and the fight I have with me, [but] I think I still have a lot more room for improvement.”

The reunion with Gujarat Giants adds another compelling chapter to Dottin’s WPL journey. Initially signed for INR 60 lakh ahead of the inaugural 2023 season, Dottin was controversially released just days before the tournament began, with the franchise citing an “injury” that she publicly disputed.

The incident, which Dottin later described as “unfortunate,” did not deter Gujarat from going all-in this time, recognising the game-changing talent she brings to the pitch.

For Dottin, the return is both vindication and opportunity.

“I’ll be honest, it felt really good to know [that multiple teams were tussling for me],” she said.

Gujarat’s strategy in this auction was clear: invest in proven performers to rebuild the team’s core. Alongside Dottin, the Giants made another headline-grabbing purchase, picking uncapped batter Simran Shaikh for INR 1.9 crore, while India’s U-19 wicketkeeper G. Kamalini was sold to Mumbai Indians for INR 1.6 crore.



Mahika Gaur

## Contracts for Gaur, Filer

Fast bowlers Mahika Gaur and Lauren Filer have been rewarded for their impressive performances with their first England central contracts for the 2024-2025 season. Both players, who were on development contracts last year, join 17 others in the central setup as England gear up for a crucial season.

The announcement, made by the England and Wales Cricket Board earlier this month, also revealed that seven senior players, including captain Heather Knight, all-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunt, and world No 1-ranked bowler Sophie Ecclestone, have been handed two-year deals. The remaining players have been awarded one-year contracts.

Surrey’s promising all-rounder Ryana MacDonald-Gay also earned her first development contract, a nod to her outstanding performances over the past year. Meanwhile, all-rounder Emma Lamb and seamer Tash Farrant have not been retained.

Clare Connor, managing director of England women’s cricket, praised the young quicks, saying, “We are delighted that Mahika Gaur and Lauren Filer have transitioned on to full contracts, having been part of our group over the past year.”

FROM MY FAMILY TO YOURS

Merry Christmas

AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Hon. Kamal Khara

Member of Parliament

Brampton West

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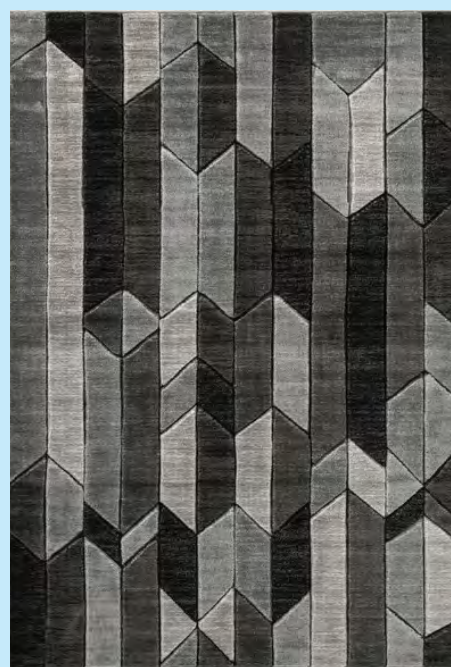
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